

AN EXPLORATION OF EXPERIENCES IN DISABILITY SPORTS AND MAINSTREAM
SPORTS ENVIRONMENTS FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH
PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about the experiences of adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities participating in mainstream sport and disability sport environments. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of individuals with physical disabilities who participated in mainstream and disability sport during their adolescent and young adult years. Further, this study aimed to compare and contrast the experiences gained between these differing sports environments. Participants (N=9, 8 Female, 1 Male, Mean Age: 25.22years) were recruited through email and word of mouth through snowball sampling. All participants completed two semi-structured interview protocol with the second interview including photo voice. Additionally, note taking and observations were made by the interviewer in order to gather an even more rich depth of data. Data analyses was framed through the theories of Symbolic Interactionism (SI) and Social Comparison Theory (SCT). Through coding by two trained qualitative researchers with experience in both sport and disability, seven themes emerged along with several subthemes. These themes included environmental consideration specifically related to mainstream sport, integrated disability sport, and disability sport, competition versus recreation, support of sport participation, socialization in sport, the meaning of sport experience, advocacy through sport, and athlete identity.

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CHAPTER 1 Introduction: Practice, Practice, Practice

We are often physically different from what is considered the norm.... Our bodies generally look and behave differently from most other people's (even if we have an invisible physical disability there is usually something about the way our bodies behave which gives our difference away). It is not normal to have difficulty walking or to be unable to walk; it is not normal to be unable to see, to hear; it is not normal to be continent, to have fits, to experience extreme tiredness, to be in constant pain; it is not normal to have a limb or limbs missing. If we have a learning disability the way we interact with others usually reveals our difference. These are the types of intellectual and physical characteristics that distinguish our experience from that of the majority of the population... We can assert our rights to the things that will enable us to have a good quality of life-the right to a home, to choose our personal relationships, to have children, to be economically independent. But it is important to recognize that our differences are significant both in terms of what we require to make these things possible and also in terms of the non-disabled world's reaction to these requirements. (Morris, 1991, pp. 17-18)

According to the literature, adolescence is a period of time in which youth define and learn about themselves (Erikson, 1980; Erikson, 1968). Adolescence extends from the age of twelve through the late teens and even into the mid-twenties when the brain finishes developing (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Meca, & Ritchiem, 2012). It represents a critical period of time because it is also when the developmental process of recognizing differences begins (Krahe & Altwasser, 2006). Recognition of differences, such as disability, is often accompanied by incorrect and even

negative assumptions (Susman, 1994). Especially within Western society, the physical self is, “a critical component of one’s identity, body influences, social interactions, and perceptions of others” (Taub, Blinde, & Greer, 1999, p. 1469). Thus, a physical disability can significantly impact how individuals view each other and self-identify. Ferriera and Fox (2008) describe disability as a

Multidimensional identity that is specific to culture and history, is socially constructed, and is mediated by time of onset, nature of the impairment, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and the multitude of roles, expectancies, aspirations, and perceptions that each individual incorporates into self (p. 36).

According to Gill (1997), believing that one belongs within society, joining the disability community, coming together with others who have like circumstances, and coming out as disabled, are part of the disability identity process. Linton (1998) claims that for some, the process of identifying oneself as a disabled person is comparable to members of the lesbian or gay community “coming out” (p. 21). Both Gill (1997) and Linton (1998) describe a raised consciousness that occurs when noticing differences and similarities, and this serves as a catalyst for coming together with people who have shared experiences, which results in acceptance and identification with disability as an identity. Understanding disability as a socially constructed identity means acknowledging that there is a rich disability community with its own culture in which one can choose to be a member.

Goodwin, Thurmeier, and Gustafson (2004) state that, “not only must children with disabilities take a critical step back from their parents’ belief system as they gain their sense of self, they must make personal judgments about social and political agendas that influence their developing identity” (p. 381). Thus, having a disabled body creates a different lived experience

than for those without impairment. For example, an individual who uses a wheelchair for mobility due to a physical impairment will have different experiences than an individual who has no physical impairment and walks. Thus, individuals with one or more disabilities construct different meanings about the world and oneself than those without disabilities.

Sport and Disability

The literature overwhelmingly supports that participation in sports for those with disabilities has numerous benefits. In general, sport has proven to be an environment that is beneficial for promoting increased quality of life and health benefits (Zabriskie, Lundberg, & Groff, 2005). Sport participation for adolescents with disabilities has been linked to an increased mind/body connection. In addition, according to the National Center on Health, Physical Activity, and Disability (NCPAD), “Sports and physical activity can not only increase the longevity of youth with disabilities, they can also improve their overall quality of life. And the best part is they have fun in the process!” (NCPAD, 2015, The Rationale and Benefits of Sport Participation for Youth of All Abilities, para. 1). Specifically, NCPAD lists the benefits of adolescents participating in sport as including physical fitness improvements, increased positive self-image, being successful, learning how to deal with failure, and practicing skills such as working effectively with others (NCPAD, 2015). Due to these well-supported benefits, sport is a positive environment to explore for adolescents with physical disabilities.

Individuals, particularly adolescents with disabilities, have fewer opportunities to participate in leisure, recreation, and sport than those without disabilities (Block, Taliaferro, & Moran, 2013). This is unfortunate because empirical evidence supports the many positive benefits

of participation in sport and physical activity for adolescents with disabilities (Anderson, 2009; Martin, 2013). Individuals with disabilities have demonstrated physical benefits of participation through improved bone density, weight management, decreased blood pressure, and development of more lean muscle tissue (Rimmer & Rowland, 2008). Psychosocial benefits of sport participation include acquiring positive social support, participating in activities with those who have similar experiences, and working together with others towards a common goal (Stephens, Neil, & Smith, 2012). Further, physical activity, for individuals with disabilities, offers emotional, psychological, and social benefits (Martin, 2013).

There are two primary environments for participation in sports for individuals with disabilities. Mainstream sport programs offer local opportunities to participate in a variety of sports programs (Nixon, 2007). These programs are open to participants with and without disabilities. If an individual with a disability participates in a mainstream sport program, adaptations may be necessary to encourage inclusion. An example of a necessary sports adaptation or accommodation would be using a bowling ramp if an individual with a disability is unable to independently lift and throw a bowling ball down the lane. Trained specialists, referred to as inclusion companions, may also be hired to make necessary accommodations and promote inclusion for a participant with a disability.

The second type of sports environment for individuals with disabilities is disability sport, which, “refers to sport designated for or specifically practiced by athletes with disabilities” (Depauw & Gavron, 1995, as cited in Hums, Moorman, & Wolff, 2003, p. 262). Additionally, disability sport may be defined as, “any form of organized physical competition intended specifically for people with disabilities, and it contrasts with able-bodied or mainstream sport that is organized for people without disabilities” (Nixon, 2007, p. 1171). Examples of this type of

participation include wheelchair basketball and wheelchair track where all participants have some type of physical disability and the entire sport has already been adapted.

Mainstream sport programs and disability sport programs offer different overall environments. In an inclusion-focused or mainstream program, an individual with a disability participates with others with and without disabilities whereas, disability sport is designed primarily for individuals with physical impairments. The specific purpose of this study is to compare participants' experiences in these two environments in order to explore and compare how each environment (disability sport versus inclusion-focused sport) impacts the experiences of participating for adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities. Although sport has been used to promote positive adolescent development, it is unclear how each environment specifically impacts adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities.

Sports Environments

Despite there being a niche of literature on disability sport, there exists an overall lack of studies examining how individuals with disabilities experience sport programming based on the environment in which participation occurs. Thus, there is a need to expand the breadth of research literature on the environment of participation for sporting programs and how different environments influence participants' experiences. In general, inclusion as a concept is deemed a positive goal for marginalized populations. Overcoming segregation stemming from discrimination and gaining full participation within society is an aim for civil rights movements such as disability rights. As Nixon (2007), wrote "the disability rights movement pressured mainstream society to provide reasonable accommodations so that people with disabilities could participate more fully in

the mainstream, and this movement also included a push for more rights and opportunities in sport” (p.418).

Although inclusion is often recommended as a best practice for those with disabilities, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support this recommendation. One argument supporting mainstream sporting opportunities is that, “the primary criterion for joining the program will be presence of a disability, rather than performance” (Grosse, 2008, p. 28). It should be noted, however, that Grosse (2008) also encourages making the decision to participate in a mainstream program independently for each child’s needs and that a, “segregated competition can also provide a more equal playing field, with performance standards varying by age ... Here a child, particularly a child with a newly acquired disability, will find role models” (Grosse, 2008, p. 29)

Interestingly, in recent years, there has been an emphasis on increasing inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities within the education system (DePauw & Doll-Tepprer, 2000; Ferguson, 2008); however, less has been explored on environments within sports programming. Researchers examining individuals with intellectual disabilities have begun to examine concepts such as sport competition and perceived competence in relation to segregated and mainstream sport opportunities (Ninot, Bilard, & Delignieres, 2005). Social inclusion specifically for adults and youth with intellectual disabilities has been found to be beneficial in terms of sport inclusion enabling bonds to be developed between those individuals with intellectual disabilities and surrounding community members (McConkey, Dowling, Hassan, & Menke, 2013). It has been suggested that through mainstream sports, social inclusion on a larger scale is promoting social equality for this population as well (Coalter, 2010). These claims, however, lack supporting evidence to fully endorse the benefits of mainstream sports, especially when taking into account that there may also be benefits to disability sport programming.

Learning more about both mainstream and disability sport environments for youths and adults with physical disabilities is essential to truly understanding what each environment offers. One study, for example, examined sports camp experiences for adults with physical disabilities and determined they were in an environment that encouraged “transformation” and “liberalization” (Ashton-Shaeffer, Gibson, Autry, & Hanson, 2001). There remains, however, a dearth of investigations specific to adolescents with physical disabilities within mainstream or disability sport programs. Both mainstream and disability sport environments have been supported as being largely positive, however, neither environment has been thoroughly examined especially in relation to one another. Thus, without documented evidence, making claims about their benefits as they relate to each specific environment are premature.

Theory

Developed by Blumer in 1969, symbolic interactionism (SI) allows for multiple interpretations of the human experience through meanings that are derived from objects both material and not. The process of SI can be broken into three broad parts. The first describes how humans behave towards objects, the second addresses how objects develop meaning as a product of their interactions with others, and the third focuses on how those meanings change due to new interactions and experiences encountered by the individual (Anderson, 2005).

The process of constructing meanings from objects, material and not, is an internalized dialogue. The internalized dialogue is a reflective narrative between one’s self, which creates an ongoing conversation about how one views an object. These interpretations depend upon how one views the object in relation to other individuals, groups, and experiences. This is a continuous

process because it is part of a negotiation between one's self and how that individual feels about the meaning of the object. The meanings that individuals derive from objects, are affected by experiences of events and environments, how others interact with the object, and how these meanings become modified over time.

According to the theory of SI, the interpretive process is always in flux because the meanings derived from social interactions, including events and environments, are constantly changing (Aksan, Kisac, Mufit, & Demirbuken, 2009). The interpretive process includes an individual recognizing that he/she is drawing meanings from an object (Blumer, 1969). The individual, "...selects, checks, suspends, regroupes, and transforms, the meanings in the light of the situation in which he (sic) is placed and the direction of his (sic) action" (Blumer, 1969, p.5). This specifically makes SI, unique in that the theoretical framework accounts for human meanings within a natural environment (Blumer, 1969). The world can be more holistically and naturally examined and investigated through the theoretical framings of SI to enhance our understandings and meanings of the surrounding world.

The theory of SI addresses social interactions as a pivotal factor in which individuals must adjust and modify meanings due to the actions of others. Stone and Farberman (1982) wrote,

Interpretation is the core process of human interaction. As Blumer so often has noted, we do not respond automatically to stimuli, but rather cogitate, analyze, judge and then react. [Furthermore,] least we imagine... that interpretation is an abstract, detached process, we should remember that it occurs within particular joint acts... moreover, each joint act probably affects the process and outcome of interpretation differently (p.88)

These actions must be understood from the perspective of the actor or individual experiencing the

social interactions (Blumer, 1969). According to Anderson (2009), “social action is the process of a person being confronted with a situation that he or she must interpret or assess to deal with it through communication with himself or herself” (p.433). Assessments are made and meanings constructed based upon how the individual then intends to respond or react.

Social interactions as well as interpreted meanings are significant in relation to this study because different environments offer unique social institutions. Within mainstream sport and disability sport there will be different means of participation for each participant and different types of interactions according to the type of sporting environment. Thus, Blumer’s theory of SI is a logical fit when exploring adolescents with physical disabilities experiences in mainstream and disability sports programs.

Another theoretical framing for the purpose of this research is social comparison theory (SCT). SCT conceptualized in 1954 by Festinger concludes that humans compare themselves to those similar to themselves (Shay, Knapp, & Farmer, 2012). Festinger postulates that humans inherently compare themselves to others while forming opinions about him/herself (Festinger, 1954). This theoretical understanding of the social world is applicable to this research, as adolescents with disabilities will either be participating in sport environments with peers similar to him/herself or different from him/herself. Thus differing sporting environments allows diverse opportunities for each adolescent to form opinions on him/her abilities and sense of self.

Beyond Festinger, SCT has been further developed to include both downward and upward comparisons. Downward comparison occurs when the individual compares him/herself to others who are doing worse than he/she is (Wills, 1981). Conversely, upward comparison is when an individual compares him/herself to others doing better than him/her (Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Thus

in downward comparisons an individual may feel better about him/herself when comparing him/herself to others who are deemed worse off, whereas, in upward comparisons an individual may compare him/herself to others deemed better off and have thoughts towards an improved future. However, it should be noted that Buunk, Taylor, Dakof, Collins, and VanYperen (1990) wrote that depending on how circumstances may be interpreted comparisons may have positive or negative implications on an individual. Thus another way to reflect on downward comparison is that an individual may feel anxious or worse because he/she thinks they may experience those circumstances and in upward comparison an individual may feel worse because they feel they will not achieve that better status.

The outcome of individual social comparisons causes a self-reflective process that is dependent upon environmental and experiential attributes (Brickman & Bulman, 1977). Interestingly, both competition and performance promote such comparisons (Ruble & Frey, 1991). Competition against one's self, teammates, and other participants are a basic tenant of sport and thus directly relate to the type of sporting environment. Competitive behavior has been empirically linked sport, where athlete's expectations, results, and performances impact feelings of approval and failure (Bardel, Fontayne, Colombel, & Schiphof, 2010).

Purpose

Grounded in SI and SCT, this study will specifically examine adults who have participated in sports as adolescents with physical disabilities who participate in mainstream and disability sport programs. The two environments enable comparisons to be made, specifically in relation to similarities and differences in how participants experience each environment. This is an

exploratory study meant to increase the breadth and depth of knowledge about the topic.

Further, the aim of this study is to increase the breadth of knowledge on the experiences gained for adolescents with physical disabilities who participate in mainstream and disability sports environments in order to enhance evidence based practice for the field of recreation therapy. Given that there is a paucity of evidence based practice within the scope of practice for recreation therapy, increasing empirical evidence relative to practice will enhance field legitimacy and practice outcomes. Exploring the specific experiences attached to each sport environment will enable a draft of a guide that can be further standardized, which will improve evidence based practice for certified therapeutic recreation specialists when prescribing sports participation in order to achieve client outcomes.

Research Questions and Aims

Research Question 1: How does participation in mainstream sport or disability sport environments impact the experience of adolescents who have physical disabilities?

Specific Aim 1: To explore participation in mainstream sport environments from perceived experiences and emergent themes.

Specific Aim 2: To explore participation in disability sports environments from perceived experiences and emergent themes

Research Question 2: How do experiences compare and contrast between adolescents with physical disabilities participating in mainstream sports versus disability sports environments?

Secondary Aim 1: To assign specific perceived participation attributes from adolescents with physical disabilities based on emergent themes to mainstream sports environments

Secondary Aim 2: To assign specific perceived participation attributes based on emergent themes to a disability sports environment

Secondary Aim 3: To explore and cultivate a usable guideline protocol to assist therapeutic recreation specialists in utilizing evidence based practice, when working with adolescent clients with physical disabilities to achieve prescribed specific goals through the modality of sport.

CHAPTER 2 Literature Review: The Warm Up

Currently, we face both the challenge of change and the challenge to change...I urge us all to work to change the conditions around us – to become active change agents for the social transformation of sport. (Depauw, 1997, p. 429)

Goodwin and colleagues reported that, “participation in physical activity can positively impact how the body is experienced, develop perceptions of physical attributes, redefine personal capabilities and potential, and enhance independence, and self-actualization” (2004, p. 382). The benefits of sport participation for individuals with disabilities have been documented. Now evidence is needed to effectively understand which perceived benefits are connected to specific sports environments. Research supports the benefit of recreation participation for individuals with disabilities; however, type of sport environment has not been well examined (Groff & Kleiber, 2001). To expand, generating additional knowledge on attributes directly linked to a specific sport environment will enhance evidence based practice. In particular, the field of therapeutic recreation needs to increase breadth of data on evidence based practices in order to better meet client needs. Expanding knowledge on what each environment specifically provides participants with physical disabilities will have impactful applied outcomes. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived outcomes of participation in mainstream and disability sports environments for adolescents with physical disabilities and examine the differences and similarities between the environments. Further, based on these findings, practice guidelines will be constructed focusing on

best fit environment based on the needs of clients with physical disabilities within the scope of practice for certified therapeutic recreation specialists.

Sport Environments

There are several environmental models of sport participation for individuals with disabilities. The seven adaptive models described by Nixon (2007) include Special Olympics, Paralympics, Mixed Paralympics, Reverse Integration, Marathon, Minimally Adapted Mainstream, and Mainstream. As described by Ryan, Katsiyannis, Cadorette, Hodge, and Markham (2014), the differences between the seven models are based on, “(a) disability requirement for participation, (b) level of athletic skill required, (c) level of adaptation or accommodation allowed, (d) degree of interaction between athletes with and without disabilities” (p.33). This review focuses specifically on disability sport, which includes the Special Olympics, Paralympics, and mixed Paralympics. It also addresses minimally adapted and mainstream sports such as sports programming provided by local park districts, recreation and parks management, or schools.

Disability Sport and Adapted Sport

Disability sport, “refers to sport designated for or specifically practiced by athletes with disabilities” (Depauw & Gavron, 1995). More recently, Nixon, (2007), described disability sport as, “any form of organized physical competition intended specifically for people with disabilities, and it contrasts with able-bodied or mainstream sport that is organized for people without disabilities” (p.419). Disability sports include wheelchair basketball, wheelchair track, goalball, and other sporting activities that are specifically meant for participants with disabilities. Disability sport encompasses a wide scope of involvement in sport for the disability community because it

refers to not only participants with physical disabilities but also participants with other disabilities. Organizations such as the American Athletic Association for the Deaf, Disabled Sports USA, National Wheelchair Athletic Association, Special Olympics, and the Committee of Sports for the Disabled have formed to encourage and further develop disability sport programming that has been traditionally been lacking (Promis, Erevelles, & Matthews, 2001).

Special Olympics, for example, is the largest sports organization in the world providing sport programming and competitions for individuals with intellectual disabilities (Holder, 2015). Since 1968 the Special Olympics has grown continuously and has two goals, “(1) to provide athletes with intellectual disabilities opportunities to experience the excitement and job of participation in sports, and (2) to enhance physical and social skills, as well as overall health” (Siperstein & Hardy, 2001). Athletes are categorized for competition based on age, gender, and ability in order to create fair competition (Privett, 1999).

Likewise, Deaf sports organizations offer opportunities for participation in the Deaflympics and Deaf World Games (Ammons & Eickman, 2011). The Deaflympics came to fruition in the 1920’s during a time period when Deaf people were commonly viewed as intellectually inferior and the Deaf culture was not formally recognized as such (Stewart & Ammons, 2001). In contrast to other disability sport participants, Deaf athletes can more readily participate in mainstream sports; however, the community came together to create their own competitive sport organization because the, “social processes found in Deaf sport are designed specifically to satisfy the physical, psychological, and social needs of deaf individuals” (Stewart & Ammons, 2001, p.45).

Historically, individuals with spinal cord injuries have had the most exposure to sport and have been the most visible through media sources as representatives of individuals with disabilities involved in sport (Sherrill, 1997). The Paralympics is the main governing body for sports for

individuals with physical disabilities. The first disability sporting event in Western documentation was hosted by Sir Ludwig Guttmann, a physician in a spinal cord injury section at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital, for veterans returning from World War II (Enos, Busse, Davis, & Megginson, 2012). Injured veterans were physically, emotionally, and mentally rehabilitated and sports were incorporated into the rehabilitation process. Thus, when the Paralympic Movement was in its infancy, rehabilitation or therapeutic leisure was the main objective within the context of sport participation.

What began as a means of purposeful therapeutic recreation for individuals with physical disabilities, has gained momentum and turned into something even more holistically meaningful. Now the Paralympics as a governing organization is on the edge of policies affecting disabled athletes and sporting opportunities for those with disabilities. The Paralympic movement is responsible for the majority of disability sport policies and is the leading governing Disability Sport Organization (DSO) that includes the classification system that all elite and recreational athletes utilize for equitable competition.

The International Organization of Sports for the Disabled (IOSD) regulates the functional impairment scale used by the IPC. Some sports now have more than twenty-three classifications of competitors (Thomas & Smith, 2009). This system was developed in order to promote “equitable competition”. Hargreaves (2000) wrote that the classification system shifted focus from impairment based to functional based and hence frames disability more positively on what the athletes can functionally achieve.

Through having classifications determined by functional abilities the categories decreased drastically, which helped reduce events being cancelled due to low enrollment and groups being combined, which was not equitable competition (Howe, 2007). Additionally, Howe (2007) argues

for the justification to create a more athlete focused classification system that encourages participation with a broad base while still encouraging elite and highly motivated athletes. An example is the current classification for wheelchair track T54, which is, “equivalent activity limitation to person with complete spinal cord injury at level T8-S4 (normal arm strength with a range of trunk strength extending from partial trunk control to normal trunk control)” (Tweedy & Vanlandewijck, 2011, p.263). The system is implemented by official sports classifiers and athletes are assigned to these classifications based upon their status (Sherrill, 1999).

A commonality amongst the multiple disability sport organizations is that they arose out of grass roots movements. Many of the organizations have exceedingly similar core principles and wider sociopolitical aims. Additionally, these sporting movements closely correspond with disability rights movements. The organizations described above gained formal legitimization from respected governing bodies such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and continue to significantly impact sport policies (Legg, Emes, Stewart, & Steadward, 2004).

Aside from political and policy agendas, sport is still commonly utilized purposefully as part of a comprehensive rehabilitation process. Utilizing sport and recreation for rehabilitation gains grew in popularity post World War II in veteran hospitals and state psychiatric hospitals (Austin, 2002). Frequently individuals with disabilities are guided toward sport participation, if it was part of his/her life prior to injury, by occupational therapists, family members, and recreation therapists. (Ruddell & Shiness, 2004). Recreation therapy purposefully uses participation in recreation and sport as a modality to improve quality of life (Zabriskie, Lundberg, & Groff, 2005) and promote community reintegration. For example, it was found that veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) who participated in a therapeutic fly-fishing program felt that they experienced benefits from their outdoor recreational activity participation (Mowatt & Bennett,

2011). Specific to sport, improved social networking and supports have been developed through participation in sport-based programs (Murphy, Carbone, & The Council on Children with Disabilities, 2008). Other commonly reported benefits from therapeutic-based sports programs are increased levels of fitness, self-confidence, and mood (Delaney, Crandell, & Barfield, 2014).

Participation in sport through disability sport organizations or adapted sports programming may be considered in either a, “positive developmental or negative restrictive approach” according to Brasile (1990, p.5). Brasile (1990) goes on to state that participation within a continuum approach including segregated participation during the rehabilitation process in order to promote the relationship between peers with similar disabilities may be positive, but then the individual should be encouraged to participate in integrated or mainstream sport in order to re-enter the community. The driving point made by Brasile (1990) is that freedom of choice must be allowed for the participant to choose how he/she wants to engage on sports whether that is through a mainstream or disability environment. Sorenson, Pensgard, and Kahrs (2000), write that at a group level, it has been reported how bonding with others with a similar disability has developed a positive disability identity, developed the sport activities and special equipment to meet the needs of various disability groups as well as increased the understanding of the achievements and performance of athletes with disabilities. (p.35)

These attributes described above pertaining to participating in sport within a segregated environment speak to the benefits that this unique environment may facilitate.

Segregated participation, as termed by Brasile (1990), may be considered negative in that it, “promotes group beliefs”, may create “prejudicial superiority”, enables “membership restrictions”, and “demand for conformity” (p. 6). It is questioned if disability sport encourages

deeper societal notions of disability segregation within other sociopolitical domains of life beyond that of the sport environment. On the other hand, in a study focused on youths with intellectual disabilities participating in both an integrated and segregated swimming programming Ninot and colleagues (2005) found that the swimmers in the segregated environment had higher levels of perceived physical ability despite demonstrating a lower level of athletic performance than those swimmers in the integrated environment. Likewise, Ninot, Bilard, Delignieres, and Sokolowski (2000), found that youths with intellectual disabilities participating in segregated schools and sports programming tended to overestimate their perceived competence.

In general, disability sports organizations and adapted sports programming have had a large impact on both sport participation opportunities and policies impacting those with disabilities. There is controversy as to whether a segregated sports participation environment is most beneficial to athletes with disabilities or not. Based on the current status of literature it is difficult to surmise the potential benefits and drawbacks of an adapted sports environment as there are plentiful benefits cited but they are not always specifically geared towards examining the environment of participation.

Reverse Integration

Disability sport organizations such as the Special Olympics at times have been criticized for promoting a segregated from mainstream sports environments (Storey, 2008; Promis et al., 2001); however, the Special Olympics also promotes inclusion between athletes with and without disabilities through a program called Unified Sports. The Unified Sports initiative falls between models of sport environments as it is under the umbrella of a large disability sport program but it integrates individuals without disabilities it, “combines players with IDs of higher sporting abilities

(referred to as athletes) with non-disabled partners of average or lower ability level, in the same sports teams for training and competition” (McConkey et al., 2013). McConkey and colleagues (2013), found that athletes with intellectual disabilities participating in the Unified Sport Initiative experienced personal development of sports skills, personal skills, access, inclusive and equal bonds in relation to teamwork, coaching, and friendships, positive perceptions through attitude changes in Special Olympics events and media, and built alliances with family, schools, and community and sports organizations.

While the Special Olympics has addressed the criticism of segregation other disability sports organizations do not. Disability advocates have discussed that segregated organizations promote images and stereotypes of disability as, “benign, helpless, even heroic, struggling against all odds, and grateful for the kindness of strangers” (Shapiro, 1993 in Promis et al., 2001, p. 41). While still debated reverse integration (RI) has been a heated topic for adapted sports, often with wheelchair basketball at the forefront.

RI discussions for adapted sport began in the early 1990’s from Brasile (1990, 1992), in which he problematized segregated leisure and encouraged an integrated model of disability sport. Interestingly, this article was published two years after the IOC and the IPC officially became sister organizations in 1988 and the year that the ADA was signed. This speaks to the broader sociopolitical climate at the time of RI coming into fruition. Brasile (1990) concludes that continuing to examine RI would be advantageous and, “just as the wheelchair archer should have the opportunity to try out for the Olympic archery team with nondisabled archers, based upon level of archery proficiency, so should the nondisabled individual have the opportunity to compete in an activity such as wheelchair basketball with disabled participants” (p. 10).

In response to the introduction of RI, Thiboutot, a representative of the National Wheelchair basketball Association at the time joined by Smith and Labanowich, vehemently opposed RI (Thiboutot, Smith, & Labanowich, 1992). Thiboutot, Smith, and Labanowich, (1992) wrote that RI violated a fundamental concept in that it would reduce competitive sporting opportunities for those with disabilities as well as promote an antiquated interpretation of wheelchair sports being only meant as a form of rehabilitation. Thiboutot, Smith, and Labanowich (1992) poignantly, note that wheelchair sports are not incomplete because able bodied individuals are excluded. Thus signifying that a framework of assuming that through integration of able-bodied wheelchair athletes, wheelchair sports will be considered more legitimized. Wheelchair sports seek legitimization based on the activity and skill itself, not based on whom plays the sport whether with or without a disability. Accordingly, RI was overwhelming voted down in 1987 by American wheelchair basketball players (Thiboutot, Smith, & Labanowich, 1992).

In contrast, Brasile (1992) responded to this criticism reframing RI relative to rehabilitation, the skill of sport, and athlete's freedom to choose type of participation. Both sides of the diatribe seek to dissociate from a traditionalist rehabilitation model and more medicalized model of understanding disability. However, Brasile (1992) speaks towards a transition period of acquiring a physical disability and thus re-defining one's life style and social identity. In terms of the rehabilitation process, sport participation has the potential to transcend impairment from a potentially "handicapping condition" into something else (Brasile, 1992, p.295). Often, after injury, the goal of social reintegration is sought through the rehabilitation process and RI would enable this process. Through sport participation an individual with a physical disability can be re-introduced to both individuals with and without disabilities through the common interest of sport (Brasile, 1992). Further, Brasile (1992) cites specific accomplished athletes with disabilities who

claim that elite competition is based on skill regardless of disability. Mike Frogley, new to wheelchair basketball but now the Canadian head Paralympic team wheelchair basketball coach said, “I have always searched for the best competition on which to test my skills... What I want is to go against someone who will give me the best game. If that person is able-bodied, then fine” (Brasile, 1992, p.302). Finally, Brasile (1992) concludes that it is, “hypothesized that inclusion will create an atmosphere that will be a positive influence in the development of the sport... Without an avenue for inclusion, many individuals with physical disabilities may never have a chance to participate in this sport on a regular and competitive basis, or participate in a competitive sport with their able-bodied peers” (p. 304).

In terms of practicality, RI was meant to fill a gap when there are not enough athletes with disabilities in order to ensure that sport can still persist (Hutzler et al., 2016). In RI the majority of athletes have disabilities while the minority are without disabilities (Hutzler et al., 2016). Preston (1990) confirmed that by including athletes without disabilities wheelchair basketball teams could be formed even with a shortage of athletes with disabilities; whereas, without the inclusion of athletes without disabilities no team would be possible. As Brasile projected in 1990 and 1992, in Canada RI has gained popularity and is filling this gap to enable wheelchair basketball to flourish (Spencer-Cavaliere & Peers, 2011). RI has been supported and accepted by all Canadian domestic leagues (Spencer-Cavaliere & Peers, 2011). The Canadian domestic leagues utilize a revised classification system in order to include wheelchair basketball players without disabilities alongside those with disabilities. Although not empirically supported, it is theorized that the differences between Canadian and American sporting contexts may be responsible for the lack of or support of an RI sporting environment (Spencer-Cavaliere & Peers, 2011).

Brasile (1990, 1992) also conjectured that RI would positively promote an improved understanding of the abilities of those with disabilities and endorse a platform for equitable socialization (Spencer-Cavaliere & Peters, 2011). Similarly, Depauw (1997) supported that RI has the potential to take focus from disability and emphasize athletic accomplishment. In opposition, Thiboutot et al. (1992) and Lindstrom (1992) felt that RI would reinforce that disabled sports require able bodied athletes to legitimize the activity and further that through including able bodied athletes disabled athletes would lose their unique athletic disability identity (as cited in, Spenser-Cavaliere & Peters, 2011).

These arguments both for and against RI are largely founded in theoretical and anecdotal arguments as opposed to empirical data. However, while sparse there are lines of research being done on the empirical impacts of RI. One such study by Spencer-Cavaliere and Peers (2011) found that the sporting context provided a safe space for discussion and negotiation for the meaning of disabled bodies and what it means to be able bodied for females with disabilities participating in RI wheelchair basketball. Further, Brasile in 1990, initially reported his thoughts on the benefits of RI and Kristen, Patriksson, and Fridlund (2003) empirically supported that parents of RI athletes with disabilities felt improved overall health, sense of belonging to his/her team, and benefits from achieving a new athletic skill. Likewise, Spencer-Cavaliere and Peers (2011) found that when investigating a group of wheelchair athletes with and without disabilities that the athletes without disabilities were fully legitimized as insiders into the wheelchair basketball community. Again, in support of RI, Medland and Ellis-Hill (2008) reported that the majority of their questioned athletes with and without disabilities were in favor of RI and felt that RI provided increased competition, participation, and improved awareness/recognition for wheelchair sports to the public. Additionally, Hutzler, Chacham-Guber, and Reiter (2013) found that after 6 months of

participation in RI basketball activity that individuals with developmental physical disabilities had significantly better outcomes in terms of quality of life and perceived social competence than individuals who did no physical activity and individuals who participated in competitive separated physical activity. Next, Medland and Ellis-Hill (2008) examined why able bodied individuals participated in wheelchair sports and found that they were typically introduced to the sport through a friend or relative. While there is limited research on RI, the majority of the data overwhelmingly supports multiple benefits of RI.

Adapted Physical Education

For the environment of adapted physical education preexisting knowledge of the policies and legislation leading up to its development is necessary. In 1954 *Brown vs. the Board of Education* ruled that separate education facilities were not equal, which promoted the development of programming to reduce discriminatory practices for African Americans and then later for students with disabilities (Promis et al., 2001). This legislation became the precedent for the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975, which included that children with disabilities should be educated in a "least restrictive environment" (Promis et al., 2001). These laws broadly meant to reduce the segregation and discrimination for children with disabilities within the school system.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) students with disabilities are entitled to receive appropriate educational opportunities including physical education (Ryan, et al., 2014). Adaptive physical education has evolved with a variety of terms to describe physical activities with students with disabilities including, "adapted physical education, remedial physical education, corrective physical education, developmental physical education, and special physical

education” (Depauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000, p.136). Adapted physical education as originally defined by the American Association for Health in 1952 as, “a diversified program of developmental activities, games, sports, and rhythms, suited to the interests, capacities and limitation of students with disabilities who may not safely or successfully engage in unrestricted participation in the vigorous activities of the general physical education program” (Depauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000, p. 136). As evident the medical model of understanding disability heavily influenced this older definition of adapted physical education. In contrast, a more contemporary definition of adapted physical education is, “a cross-disciplinary theory and practice that attempts to identify and solve motor problems throughout the lifespan, develop and implement theories that support access to sport and active lifestyle, and develop cooperative home-school-community service delivery and empowerment systems” (Depauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000, p. 136). This more contemporary and broad definition of adapted physical education allows for a more holistic perspective of disability while incorporating important aspects of self-determination and community engagement.

Appropriate participation environment is debated amongst adapted physical education professionals and scholars. Environments promoting concepts of inclusion tend to be popular frameworks through universal mainstreaming within education for all students. Block (1999) wrote that students in special education should be included in general education including physical education. An inclusive education is described by McGregor and Voglesberg (1998) as providing services for students with disabilities through, “education in their neighborhood school and general education classes with supplementary aids and supports to assure the child’s success academically, behaviourally, and socially” (as cited in, An & Meaney, 2015, p.143). Further, it is noted that, “inclusive physical education is a learning environment for students with disabilities to develop

motor skills, fitness, and knowledge of movement and to promote psychosocial well-being for a lifestyle appropriate to their abilities and interests with their age-appropriate peers with supplementary aides and support services as needed” (Goodwin, Watkinson, & Fitzpatrick, 2003; as cited in, An & Meaney, 2015, p. 144).

In response to these problems on the meaning of inclusion and how it can and should be applied Depauw and Doll-Tepper (2000) eloquently write, “...inclusion should be considered a philosophical approach to implementing social justice in our schools and our society so that all persons are valued as unique contributing members of society and included” (p.139). This sentiment summarizes that inclusion is not only a systematic structure to be applied but also a paradigmatic stance. Further inclusion should reflect a means of empowering and encouraging community engagement for those with disabilities.

In contrast, others support that inclusion should not mean merging both special education and general education but that the entire concept of inclusion needs to be re-conceptualized (DePauw, 1999; Sherrill, 1998). To support this frame of thought, Block and Obrusnikova (2007) completed a comprehensive literature review and found that even though there are many cited benefits of inclusion, “there are still problems associated with inclusion in the general physical education framework, such as the inability of teachers to adapt and to provide students with disabilities the inclusive framework required” (as cited in, Hutzler & Bar-Eli, 2013, p.58). Herein lies the problem that inclusion conceptually is deemed positive but application has proven to be problematic. Some of the issues with application of physical education and inclusion are negative attitudes towards inclusion from practitioners (Tripp & Sherill, 1991) and perceived lack of competency and training towards training in and utilizing appropriate adaptations for students (Ammah & Hodge, 2006; Hardin, 2005).

Regardless of the debate on inclusive practices, the environment of physical education is important to examine when considering all types of participation in physical activity, sport, and recreation for individuals with disabilities because 95% of students with disabilities attend public schools in the United States, which means they also participate in physical education in the public school systems (US Department of Education, 2014). Further, half of these students spend 80% or more of their day within a general education classroom (US Department of Education, 2014). Specific to physical education as an environment functioning within a school system, teachers act as agents, “who by means of their practice may facilitate (or hinder) this process” (Hutzler & Bar-Eli, 2013, p.57).

Teachers are at large responsible for adaptations made within the education setting. Adaptations in this sense refers to, “assessing and managing variables (related to the tasks, persons involved, and environment) to meet unique needs and achieve desired outcomes” (Hutzler & Bar-Eli, 2013, p.57). Sherrill (2004) concluded that the purpose of an adaptation is to, “enhance physical activity goal achievement of individuals of all ages with movement limitations and/or societal restrictions” (as cited in, Hutzler & Bar-Eli, 2013, p.57). Hence teachers hold a great deal of power in terms of making decisions on how to adapt and enhance a student’s experience in physical education.

When examining the empirical literature on adapted physical education and physical education for students with disabilities there are a few lines of research that emerge. In accordance with Block and Obrusnikova (2007) research tends to be focused on the experiences of students with disabilities and physical education, attitudes about inclusion from students without disabilities, the impact of inclusion on students without disabilities, and the attitudes of physical education teachers. Another area of emphasis for literature within the scope of adapted physical

education and general physical education for students with disabilities is teacher education and training.

In terms of the experiences of students with disabilities in physical education, an inclusive environment has had mixed results. When students with disabilities have participated in general physical education class data has shown that there may be limited social interaction with peers without disabilities (Place & Hodge, 2001). Inclusive environments are typically meant to encourage social peer interactions with the aim of increasing social learning opportunities and if interaction for students with disabilities does not occur with students without disabilities this aim is not met (Odom, McConnell, & McEvoy, 1992). According to Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) limited peer social interaction leads to isolation. Within this qualitative study with disabilities in general physical education reported both good and bad days (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000). Further, participants within this study described good days to include feelings of belonging and being provided with accommodations, whereas, bad days included feeling socially isolated and reduced participation opportunities (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000). In opposition to Goodwin and Watkinson (2000), Blinde and McCallister, (1998) found that the majority of students with disabilities within their study had negative experiences in general physical education. However, in comparison, the researchers reported similar results when reporting about negative experiences of students with disabilities in general physical education. A lack of accommodations, feelings of exclusion, and being ridiculed were reported to Blinde and McCallister (1998).

The theme of attitude in research is twofold relating to both students without disabilities attitudes towards students with disabilities in their general physical education classes and attitudes of physical education teachers towards students with disabilities. Variables of influence to peers without disabilities attitudes pertained to gender, intensity of contact with students with

disabilities, and type of disability (Tripp, French, & Sherrill, 1995). Tripp and Rizzo (2006) found specifically that females had a more positive attitude than males towards peers with disabilities and that students without disabilities had more positive attitudes towards students with behavioral disabilities than peers with physical disabilities. In contrast, Murata, Hodge, and Little, (2000) reported that students without disabilities had positive attitudes when experiencing an inclusive physical education environment. Specifically Murata et al. (2000) wrote that positive attitudes from students without disabilities towards students with disabilities were attributed to, “(a) ... equal status contacts between and among peers with and without disabilities, (b) social interactions among all students was encouraged by the GPE teacher, (c) contacts were pleasant and rewarding, (d) the contact situations involved common noncompetitive goals, and (e) these individuals had occasion to develop meaningful relationships” (p.63). Based on the literature it would seem that given certain variables, positive attitudes may be prevalent for students without disabilities towards students with disabilities in general physical education environments.

Attitudes of physical education teachers towards students with disabilities have unfortunately proven to be negative (Chandler & Greene, 1995; Hodge, Ammah, Casebolt, LaMaster, & O’Sullivan, 2004; Lienert, Sherrill, & Myers, 2001; Smith & Green, 2004). However, many of these negative attitudes have been attributed to general physical education teachers feeling that they lack the necessary training to work with students with disabilities (Chandler & Greene, 1995; Hodge et al., 2004; Lienert, Sherrill, & Myers, 2001; Smith & Green, 2004). Additionally, general physical education teachers felt challenged in providing modifications in order to enable inclusive practices in the gym (Smith & Green, 2004). Similar to the attitudes of students without disabilities towards students with disabilities, general physical education teachers demonstrated that their attitudes were influenced by disability type and severity (Chandler & Greene, 1995).

Overall, research supports that general physical education teachers have neutral to slightly negative attitudes towards teaching students with mild disabilities such as mild intellectual disabilities versus more negative attitudes towards working with students with more severe or emotional disabilities (Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991; Duchane & French, 1998; Block & Rizzo, 1995). Given that there is limited knowledge of how to engage, manage, and assist students with disabilities it is not surprising that school officials and teachers also feel unprepared to maintain a level of safety and care for each student with a disability. In the physical education environment there is a higher risk of injury or health emergency than in the classroom (Hart & Ritson, 2002 in Hughes, Ramos, & Mwarumba, 2017). Hughes, Ramos, and Mwarumba (2017) reviewed textbooks utilized for the education of physical education teachers and found that very limited information was provided on how to manage risks and maintain safety for children with disabilities. Further, in terms of physical education training, Sato et al. (2015) recommend that physical education teacher candidates should gain hands on experience in special education and adapted physical activity programs.

Overall, evidence supports that inclusive practices is a complex concept that may require re-conceptualization just as Depauw (1999) and Sherrill (1998) surmised. Empirical data demonstrates mixed results of inclusive practices in adapted physical education and general physical education. The emergent themes of the literature demonstrate that peer student attitudes and teacher attitudes, adaptations or modifications, and teacher education/training are potentially areas that need to be addressed in order to encourage a positive experience in physical education environments for students with disabilities.

Mainstream Sport

Even as early as 1982 governing bodies of sport such as the Committee on the Rehabilitation and Resettlement of the Disabled of the council of Europe emphasized the

importance of social integration in sport for those with disabilities (Nixon, 1989). Interestingly, this council believed that while sport integration was important that it would be easier to integrate sports at the recreational level in comparison to the elite more competitive levels of sport (Nixon, 1989). However, in order to reflect on the implications of including individuals with disabilities within mainstream sport it must first be clearly defined.

Mainstream sport is designed and organized for able-bodied athletes but permits participation for individuals with disabilities (Nixon, 2007). Nixon, (2007) defines the mainstream model as having, “(a) no sport classification... (b) low to high selectivity; (c) no adaptations or accommodations for disability, which is the most distinctive characteristics of this model; (d) low-to-high- competitive intensive; and (e) direct competition between participants with and without classified disabilities” (p.430). Within the broad category of mainstream environments is also minimally adapted mainstream. While similar to mainstream this model differentiates itself because minor adaptations and accommodations to allow participation for those with disabilities is permissible (Nixon, 2007). Accommodations have been defined as when, “...modifications or adaptations are made to more easily integrate individuals into the existing structure of sport” (Depauw, 1997, p.427). Accommodations within sport would include modifying rules slightly with the intent to enable an individual with a disability to participate with peers without disabilities.

Both models of participation described above fit within the broader definition of mainstream sport.

Specifically, individuals with intellectual disabilities have been increasingly encouraged to integrate into communities through means such as employment, recreation, and sport especially since the deinstitutionalization movement (Kellow, Frey, & Sandt, 2007). According to Wolfensberger (1972), community-based integration encourages the normalization principle, which states that physically integrating those with disabilities creates a presence that can produce

positive perceptions by society. A variety of factors must be present to promote a positive societal change in perception of those with disabilities but the catalyst of community-based integration is where this process begins. Further, it is thought that because sport focuses on ability and physical performance that when the disabled body performs within this context the opportunity arises to challenge and thus change beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about disability. However, Datillo (2002) wrote that for individuals with intellectual disabilities segregated sports opportunities are more common than integrated ones, which then reduces physical integration opportunities for those with intellectual disabilities.

Several studies have focused on aspects of integration for those with disabilities in sport environments as a modality to positively impact the perceptions or attitudes of those without disabilities towards those with disabilities (Krahe & Altwasser, 2006; Kellow, Frey, & Sandt 2007; Sullivan & Glidden, 2014). Sullivan and Glidden (2014) found significant increases in positive attitudes of college students towards individuals with cognitive disabilities who worked with Special Olympic athletes in a swimming program. The positive attitude change from college participants in the study was largely attributed to the exposure to and increased comfort level from working with the Special Olympic athletes. Further, Oser et al. (2012), found that participants without disabilities experienced more positivity towards individuals with disabilities after being partnered with individuals with intellectual disabilities within a soccer training program. Another study that resulted in a positive change in the attitudes of those without disabilities towards those with physical disabilities utilized Paralympic athletes to educate participants (Krahe & Altwasser, 2006). Research overwhelmingly supports that integrated sport opportunities have the potential to improve attitudes and perceptions of those without disabilities towards those with disabilities.

For children and adolescents who are able to participate in sport and leisure activities it has been found that there is an improvement in well-being and social supports (Kristen, Patriksoon, & Fridlund, 2003). In a three year integrated sports program participants cited the benefits of gaining new friends, increasing and learning new sports related skills, improving physical fitness, enjoying nature, feeling more confident and accepted, and having fun (Kristen, Patriksoon, & Fridlund, 2003). Another focus of integrated sports for those with disabilities is community integration. Community integration is a pivotal focus within the practice of recreation therapy and includes physical, psychological, and social inclusion (Stumbo et al., 2015). For multiple disability populations, community integration is a concern due to the complexity of the process. Stumbo et al. (2015), suggest that environments that are supportive of community recreation, engagement, and social support networks, such as sport, can facilitate this process of community integration. Further, it has been found that activities such as sport, which have both physical and social components, facilitate positive aspects of community integration (Chun, Lee, Lundberg, McCormick, & Heo, 2008; Drum et al., 2009).

Integrating sports environments can be completed at differing levels and is a complex process. Within recreation therapy there is a trend leaning towards inclusive practices for disability sport (Whilhite, Adams Mushett, & Calloway, 1996). Whilhite, Adams Mushett, and Calloway (1996) write that, “this trend includes integrating athletes with disabilities in able-bodied sport, and integrating athletes with all types of disabilities in a single-and multi-sport competitions such as the Paralympic Games” (p.109). This implies that integration may occur not only between athletes participating within sport but also on a larger level of organization integrating. It should be noted that this discussion is controversial with athletes, disability community members, and disability organizations supporting both maintenance of segregation and progressive inclusive practices.

One such example of furthering inclusive practices occurred in 1990, with the first National Integrated Sports Meet (NISM) that occurred in New Delhi, which included both children with and without disabilities (Tuli, 1998). The philosophy of this event stated the purpose of integrated sport as, “to bring those with and without disabilities together, equalizing participation by thoughtful choice of events and proper monitoring by concerned professionals” (Tuli, 1998, p. 10). NISM is described as being beneficial to all who participated in that it offered community-based integration for the athletes with disabilities and exposure to individuals with disabilities to those without and the overall winner was deemed to be “integration” (Tuli, 1998).

Interestingly, Howe (2007) has written about the integration of Paralympic athletes in Canada. While Howe (2007), writes about the idealized concept of “true integration” he also illuminates the lack of success in the integrative process due to athletes with disabilities being deemed less valuable in comparison to their able-bodied athletic peers. Even with obvious drawbacks, an integrated sports environment is strongly supported by Howe and is identified as a goal worth achieving.

On the other hand, Depauw and Doll-Tepper (2000) problematize the broad construction of social inclusion evident within the mainstream process because for many it means athletes with disabilities must conform within an able-bodied sport system. In this case, able-bodied sports are deemed the normal environment and those with disabilities are expected to assimilate to the dominant group’s customs and culture of sport participation. Additionally, Nixon, (1989) concludes that true integration in sports is not solely the prospect of placing individuals with and without disabilities into a sport together. Nixon (1989), further coins the term genuine integration, which requires that sport integration promote

...interaction between them (those with and without disabilities) that is unaffected by disability stigma or the disadvantaged status of disabled people. It implies interaction in which disabled people do not feel pitied, scorned, different, deviant, morally inferior, or even specially favored because they are disabled. Furthermore, it implies interaction in which a person's sensory, physical, mental, or socioemotional impairment is recognized and accepted but does not lead to a social handicap that adversely affects relations between the disabled person and others.

(pp. 17-18)

The interaction described means that the athletes would be able to participate in sports and form relationships based on the sport experience without an emphasis on impairment.

The concept of a genuine integration that is prevalent when evaluating mainstream sport environments parallels the historical debate pertaining to mainstream education. Specific communities, such as the Deaf community, have been outspoken on whether a mainstream education is best or even desirable. Lane (1992) argues that placing Deaf children in mainstream classrooms is continuing established structures of oppression because the educational system is run by hearing individuals and has largely resulted in lower educational achievement for Deaf children. Christiansen (1993) when reviewing Lane's work supports that more research is needed to support the rationale towards mainstream education approaches and segregated education approaches as little has been done to support the differing structured educational environments. These implications within educational environments should be a cautionary note of consideration when determining participation in mainstream or segregated sporting environments as well.

Overall the mainstream sport environment has been criticized by some because of the necessary changes to the actual sport to enable full participation by those with disabilities. To

expand, when minor adaptations and accommodations are introduced within the context of sport, controversy of a loss of integrity to the sport and fairness ensues. Arguments of cost and practicality promote resistance to accommodations enabling inclusion (Nixon, 2007).

In general, sports integration has several positives and negatives cited throughout the literature. However, more breadth of data is needed to genuinely evaluate the implications and long-term impact of participation in mainstream sport for athletes with differing disabilities. While mainstream environments are controversial, it may be concluded that there is no overarching environment that has no negatives and this is evident after reviewing literature focusing on integrated sports participation.

Understanding Disability Through Sport

Disability has been defined through antiquated models, such as the medical model, which problematizes the individual with a disability, as well as creates a disempowering framework of understanding disability by not allowing individuals with disability to have a voice (Brown & Smith, 1989). Stemming from a medical model perspective sport is often prescribed with the primary purpose of achieving therapeutic aims. In contrast to the medical model, the social model of disability follows that disability is constructed through the social relationships and social construction of meaning (Chappell, 1992; Connors, 1985; Depauw, 1997; Dibernard, 1996). The social model was developed in order to identify societal barriers as the contributing factor affecting people with disabilities. The social model of disability addresses attitudes, social support, physical structures, and accommodations for people with disabilities. Sport as a construct is social and thus many aspects of the social model are applicable such as interactions between athletes that include attitudinal barriers or facilitators to participation. Additionally, the meaning of sports in our society

is largely socially constructed in terms of its importance and popularity. Allowing for the voice of the disability experience to be incorporated within a model of understanding disability enables medical definitions to transform (Hahn, 1994). Thus, understanding that sport has a place for individuals with disabilities within both of these models of understanding disability is important.

Another contemporary model utilized for understanding disability is the minority group model that suggests individuals with disabilities are an oppressed group with their own culture and community. This model frames disability as a sociopolitical system by acknowledging that members are an oppressed group with unique features. In relation to the model, it has been stated that, “only those individuals who fall into the class in question may rightly make judgments about the nature and personal meaning of the ‘minority condition’” (O’Brien, 2011, p.350). In other words, only individuals with disabilities have the right to define and interpret their experiences, as they deem most appropriate. Specifically, disability sport environments would fit well within this framework of understanding disability. Within disability sport all of the athletes have a disability and often construct a sense of community and support through lived experiences.

There are multiple interpretations of disability and those meanings have changed over time to match prevalent disability models. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines disability as, “any functional limitation or restriction in the ability to carry out activity resulting from an illness, injury, or birth defect” (Vash & Crewe, 2004, p.26). However, more recently the WHO developed a biopsychosocial model, the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (WHO, 2002). The ICF was constructed in order to have a more holistic understanding of impairment in relation to environmental, contextual, and personal factors (World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). Within the sporting context the classification of athletes parallels the constructs of the ICF. The ICF was developed over several years with the broader aim of

constructing a model to be used by health providers in differing disciplines that would enable the use of a common language and terminology that applies to multiple cultures and communities. The ICF integrates both the medical and social model into a more comprehensive and practical model for understanding disability.

Biopsychosocial Outcomes of Physical Activity, Sport, and Recreation

According to Ryan et al. (2014) participation in sports activities, “not only decreases individual health risks such as obesity, but increases the overall quality of life by promoting friendships and community involvement for those involved in sports...” (p.40). The breadth of research involving benefits to participation in physical activity through sport is continuously growing. Benefits of sport participation for individuals with disabilities are strongly supported through health domains of psychosocial, emotional, physiological benefits.

Psychosocial and Emotional Outcomes

Hull (1990) wrote, “If any agreement concerning the nature of leisure exists, it is the common belief that leisure is a positive experience accompanied by satisfying and pleasurable moods, emotions, or feelings” (p.104). In agreement, Whitehead and Corbin (1997) wrote, “... youth sport can also be an effective vehicle for promoting psychological benefits such as enhanced self-esteem” (in Martin, 2006). Literature overwhelmingly supports that physical activity, recreation, and sport have the potential to positively and significantly impact the lives of participants (Hogan, Catalino, Mata, & Fredrickson, 2015; Gaskin, Anderson, & Morris, 2010). Accordingly, Zabriskie, Lundberg, and Groff (2005), found that individuals with disabilities who participated in community-based therapeutic recreation and adaptive sports programs felt that the

activities had a positive effect on their lives. Additionally, research participants agreed that participation positively impacted overall health and quality of life not only for themselves but also for their family (Zabriskie, Lundberg, & Groff, 2005). The cited psychosocial benefits of participation in sport for individuals with various disabilities are numerous.

Hogan et al., (2015), found that time spent physically active did indeed positively independently influence emotions. Further, individuals who experience positive emotions from physical activity participation are more likely to build psychosocial resources that also have emotional and psychological benefits (Hodge et al., 2015). On the other hand, living a sedentary lifestyle with minimal physical activity decreases positive emotions and does not assist in building psychosocial resources (Hodge et al., 2015).

Mood disturbances such as depression, anger, and tension have been cited as significantly reduced for Iraqi war veterans with acquired disabilities after participating in therapeutic recreational programming for three weeks (Lundberg, Bennett, & Smith, 2011). Specific to veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Lundberg, Bennett, and Smith (2011) found that participation in therapeutic adaptive sports and recreation programming helped to increase mood, quality of life, and psychological health. Competence in sports activities and increases in quality of life were found when comparing pretest and posttest questionnaires (Lundberg, Bennett, & Smith, 2011).

It is believed that mood improvements due to recreation involvement are a common outcome. Berger and Motl (2000) theorized that participation in recreational activities provides relief from everyday stressors and offers a time-out. Further, a study comparing non-athletes who use wheelchairs and wheelchair tennis participants showed that a sense of self-efficacy was significantly correlated to tennis participation. Additionally, tension, anger, depression, fatigue,

and confusion were lower for the athletes within the study (Greenwood, Dzewaltowski, & French, 1990). Participants within this specific study completed three questionnaires including two self-efficacy surveys and the Profile of Mood States (POMS).

Giacobbi, Stancil, Hardin, and Bryant (2008), found that individuals with disabilities participating in wheelchair basketball felt that they experienced numerous, “psychological, social, and health benefits associated with physical activity involvement... (these included) self-efficacy beliefs, feelings of empowerment, and motivation for continued involvement” (p. 189). Further, perceptions of self-efficacy are impacted through lived experiences from the past according to Bandura (Bandura, 1986). Therefore participating in recreational and sporting activities as an adolescent has the potential to impact self-efficacy development too. Additionally acquiring an athletic identity from participation in sport for adolescents with physical disabilities has demonstrated increased sense of quality of life, self-esteem, self-confidence, and well-being (Groff, Ludberg, & Zabriskie, 2005; Sherrill, 1997; Giacobbi et al., 2008).

In addition, Participation in activities during adolescence is a compatible environment to initiate, develop, and grow aspects of identity, self-perception, psychosocial skills, and interpersonal experiences (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003). The empirical evidence significantly supports that physical activity promotes a positive developmental process. Kleiber (1999) wrote that leisure contributed to identity development when it contained six characteristics including,

- (a) it allows for opportunities for exploration of emerging interests; (b) the interests are personal and are in line with the individual’s values; (c) action is taken by the individual in response to the interests, and feedback from the environment serves to reinforce those interests; (d) a degree of competence is achieved, which reinforces potential; (e) there is a

degree of commitment to the action and others who are involved; and (f) there is a level of comfort with others in the social worlds that is created around those interests. (as cited in, Anderson, 2009, pp.429-430)

Anderson (2009) found that when female adolescent peers shared similar sporting experiences it assisted in fostering the development of a positive sense of athletic identity and perceived self. In terms of an athletic identity, Sherrill (1997) reported that serious athletes with disabilities have a sport identity that is similar to that of able-bodied athletes. Further, individuals with disabilities who strongly relate to an athletic identity are more likely to remain physically active later in life (Zabriskie, Lundberg, & Groff, 2005).

Another empirical finding relative to physical activity, sport, and recreation for individuals with disabilities is that self-esteem and sport have been found to have a positive correlation. Hopper and Santomier (1984-1985) wrote, "Self-esteem is an individual's perception of self-worth" (p. 27). Hopper and Santomier (1984-1985) go on to explain that through sport participation individuals can assess their performance in order to develop self-esteem outcomes. Further, the Special Olympics has been shown to assist with the development of social and emotional well-being. Although more research is necessary in order to make strong conclusions, the most researched areas are self-esteem and social competence. In terms of social competence there is a positive correlation between lengths of time that an individual is active within Special Olympics (Dykens, Rosner, & Butterbaugh, 1998). Sport socialization can be used as a tool to assist in the integration between sport participants with and without disabilities (Dykens, Rosner, & Butterbaugh, 1998). According to research on Special Olympics, athlete's self-esteem is linked positively with participation in sports (Sherrill, 1997). Additionally, individuals with disabilities

who participate in sport have been found to have a significantly higher level of self-esteem than inactive individuals with disabilities (Sherrill, 1997).

Next, socialization due to participation in physical activity, whether through a sport, recreation program, or fitness regime has important implications for those with disabilities.

Martin (2006) wrote,

It may be particularly important to examine peer relations in youth disability sport because children who are perceived to be different (e.g., have a physical disability) or seem to lack strong motor skills (e.g., developmental coordination disorder) may be at increased risk for peer rejection or neglect. (p. 67)

(Parker & Asher, 1987; Schoemaker & Kalverboer, 1994; Sigelman, Miller, & Whitworth, 1986; as cited in Martin, 2006, p.67). Individuals with differences such as disabilities often lack feelings of social acceptance from peers without disabilities (Rose, Larkin, & Berger, 1997). Moreover, individuals with disabilities have less extensive social networks in comparison to individuals without disabilities (McNeil, 1993). Thus learning means to promote the construction of social support networks, such as through sports participation, which is essential for individuals with disabilities because we know that strong social networks promote positive outcomes relative to health and quality of life. Hopper and Santomier (1984-1985) shared that sport enables individuals with disabilities to gain interpersonal skills relative to social skills that can be beneficial both within sports participation and in other life domains.

The use of sport and recreation as a modality to facilitate a therapeutic process with positive outcome benefits is not new. After reviewing various environments in which sport and

recreation have been utilized there is much data supporting potential positive development for individuals with disabilities. Participation in sport and recreational programs during the rehabilitation process supports the transition of the individual's adjustment by assisting in the development of positive coping techniques. Positive coping skills include a sense of stability, self-reliance, and social collaboration (Heimer & Relac, 1998). Within the context of post-secondary education, it has been found that for students with disabilities on college campuses that participation in sports is linked to reduced stress, increased school spirit, leadership skills, and strong work ethic (Promis et al., 2001). The positive outcomes attributed to sport and recreation participation are important largely because they have transferability. This means that if an individual with a disability develops social skills, self-esteem, and confidence those attributes can be spread into other areas of the individual's life (Zabriskie, Lundberg, & Groff, 2005).

However, it should be noted that stress and negative peer interactions are experienced as well, but are reported to a much lesser degree (Hansen, et al., 2003). On the other hand, participation in physical activity for individuals with physical disabilities is not without negative implications. According to Taub and Greer (2000), adolescents with physical disabilities may be embarrassed or feel self-conscious toward their participation in such activities in inclusive settings. Within the same study adolescents also expressed frustration in comparing their abilities to the able-bodied participations in recreational sports. In a study reviewing self-narratives from individuals with acquired physical disabilities, some individuals who were classified as having "chaos narrative" and "restitution narratives" found that sport participation did not assist in the re-embodiment process (Ferreiera & Fox, 2008, p. 37). However, for individuals within the same study those classified as having "quest narratives" found that sport participation did assist in generating transformative perspectives of self (Ferreiera & Fox, 2008, p. 37). Overall, literature

tends to more positively support participation in sports, recreation, and physical activity for those with disabilities but more research is needed to examine specific facilitators within each environment of participation in order to learn what attributes contribute to positive versus adverse psychosocial outcomes of participation.

Physiological Outcomes

Similar to the psychosocial implications of participation in sport, recreation, and physical activity for individuals with disabilities, participation in these activities have many meaningful links to physiological outcomes. Rimmer and Braddock (1997) have identified physical activity for individuals with disabilities as a national priority needing to be addressed. “Research examining disability specifically and physical activity is considered vital because many individuals with disabilities are often inactive, and the ramifications of being inactive exacerbate the detrimental effects of a disability for many people” (Heath & Fentem, 1997, as cited in, Martin, 2006). Individuals with disabilities are at increased risk for medical conditions such as obesity due to inactivity from lack of exercise and sport participation (Ryan et al., 2014). Rejeski, Brawley, and Shumaker (1996), write that increasing physical activity through sport participation is a means to positively influence health related quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

Thus, encouraging youths with disabilities to be able to participate with others and not sit on the side or do different tasks than their peers is necessary. Individuals with disabilities are more likely to have reduced physical activity, which may cause secondary health issues so implementing policies to include individuals with disabilities into physical activities at a young age is imperative to encouraging the development of a healthy life style (Rimmer, Braddock, Pitetti, 1996). Participation in sport for those with disabilities does not need to be done at the elite level to reap

benefits. Recreational participation in sports provide a great deal of physical benefits such as, “being able to experience their bodies in new ways, enhance their perceptions of physical attributes, redefine their physical abilities, and increase their perceived confidence to pursue new physical activities” (Promis et al., 2001, p. 42). Similarly, “participation in physical activity can positively impact how the body is experienced, develop perceptions of physical attributes, redefine, personal capabilities and potential, and enhance independence, and self-actualization” (Thurmeier, Gustafson, 2004, p. 382). These findings support that physical activity and sport participation have a significant effect on the identity development for individuals with disabilities and in turn are an effective means to promote perception of disability.

According to the results from many studies, adults with physical disabilities who choose to participate in sports and exercise have increased and maintain their physical performance including “(a) muscle strength, (b) aerobic fitness, (c) physical function, (d) increased HDL-C, (e) decreased BMI, and (f) preservation of transfer independence” (as cited in, Hawkins, Cory, Crowe, 2011, p. 310). Another reported benefit included aerobic endurance improvements for wheelchair basketball players participating in a short-term moderate intensive high volume training programing, which yielded results supporting increased peak oxygen uptake and peak power output (Skucas & Pokvytyte, 2017). Similarly, Bernardi and colleagues (2010) found that elite athletes in sit skiing, wheelchair distance racing, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair fencing, and wheelchair tennis had improved cardiorespiratory fitness and that performance was strongly connected to aerobic fitness levels. Additionally, the habits learned in adolescence can positively significantly impact adult life. Papas, Trabulsi, Axe, and Rimmer (2016) reported that for children with disabilities interventions focusing on physical activity, diet, and weight control could support a healthy lifestyle that reduces obesity, which is a concern for individuals with disabilities.

Further, wheelchair sport in particular has been found to have benefits in “cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains” (Barfield & Malone, 2013, p.231). Wheelchair sport participation has been linked to enhancing executive processing skills (Di Russo et al., 2010). Other beneficial outcomes from wheelchair sport participation include psychomotor ones such as improved fitness (Giacobbi et al., 2008; Goosey-Tolfrey, Castle, Webborn, & Abel, 2006; Morgulec, Kosmol, Molik, Hubner-Wozniak, & Rutlkowska, 2006; Shiba et al., 2010) and mobility while using a wheelchair (Furmaniuk, Cywińska-Wasilewska, & Kaczmarek, 2010; Sporer et al., 2009). It should be noted that in contrast to all of the cited physical benefits of sport participation that there are also high incidences of overuse injuries amongst wheelchair athletes including shoulder and hand injuries (Ferrara & Davis, 1990). However, there is other research that supports that wheelchair athletes have significantly less shoulder pain than wheelchair users who are not athletes (Fullerton, Borckhardt, & Alfano, 2003).

Next, participation in long-term rehabilitation programs, including sports programming, can improve physical functionality and health (Heimer & Relac, 1998). Individuals with disabilities who are athletes have increased achievement in areas such as physical functionality and occupation (Heimer & Relac, 1998). Outcomes supporting this information include higher monthly earnings and less disability related health problems (Heimer & Relac, 1998). A sedentary life style for individuals with acquired disabilities can cause adverse health effects such as muscle atrophy and/or diminished strength and endurance. Participation in long-term rehabilitation programs can improve physical functionality and health, however, being physically active can greatly reduce these adverse outcomes (Heimer & Relac, 1998).

The physiological benefits of sport participation are supported for individuals with physical disabilities as well as individuals with developmental disabilities. In accordance with the literature individuals with developmental disabilities, in general, have an increased risk of maladaptive behaviors including psychopathology (Dykens, Rosner, & Butterbaugh, 1998). Maladaptive behaviors are an extremely significant barrier for individuals with developmental disabilities as they can influence living placements and social interactions (Dykens, Rosner, & Butterbaugh, 1998). Exercise empirically reduces maladaptive behaviors. Individuals with autism have been found to reduce maladaptive behaviors through exercise due to focus on self-stimulation (Dykens, Rosner, & Butterbaugh, 1998).

Further, for individuals with intellectual disabilities it has been found that cardiovascular disease risk factors have been decreased through participation in Special Olympics when compared to individuals with intellectual disabilities not participating in Special Olympics (Draheim, Williams, & McCubbin, 2003). Additionally, Ninot et al. (2000) found that individuals with an intellectual disability who participated in Special Olympics swimming and basketball programming over an eight-month period showed improved athletic skills, however, the study yielded no changes in perceived self-acceptance or self-worth. In general the literature supports various improvements in physiological domains (lower blood pressure, lower body fat percentage, decreased abdominal fat, improved peak oxygen consumption and muscle strength, and greater motor skill development) when examining individuals with intellectual disabilities participating in a Special Olympics program as well as when comparing individuals with intellectual disabilities whom have participated in Special Olympics programming versus those that are inactive (Balic, Mateos, Blasco, & Fernhall., 2000, Draheim et al., 2003; Favazza et al., 2013).

Theory

Symbolic Interactionism

The theory of Symbolic Interactionism (SI) (Blumer, 1969) emphasizes the importance of interactions between individuals, groups, and their meanings, as well as individuals' interpretation of these interactions. Likewise mainstream, disability sport, reverse integration, and adapted physical education environments offer the opportunity for participants to have differing experiences. These differing environments allow participants to draw unique meanings from their interactions with individuals, groups, and objects enabling them to construct their own meanings of each experience just like the foundation of SI.

Based upon Mead, Dewey, Park, James and many others' bodies of work, Herbert Blummer conceptualized and coined the term SI (Blummer, 1969). The basic tenets of SI include how, "human beings act toward things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them... the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows," and lastly how, "...these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (Blummer, 1969, p.2). Human beings also have a self, and interactions occur within one's sense of self. This internal interaction is just as important as external social interactions, which create a constant dialogue between self and things and in turn self and self. The multiple dimensions addressed within SI also make it representational of the human experience. Blummer's theory accounts for "actors," "social interaction," "joint interactions," "objects," and "self" (Blummer, 1969, p.62-70). This symbolizes an understanding that the human experience is complex and multi-dimensional. To summarize, this theory takes into consideration how one interacts with objects as well as others and how that

affects one's interpretations and meanings towards these constructs and their socially constructed world.

These fundamentals of SI fit within the purposes of this research line, as the meanings of each sport environment will be explored based on the interpretations and lived experiences of the participants. To expand, participation in disability sport programming differs from mainstream/integrated sport programming through the equipment used, individuals allowed to participate, and how individuals choose to participate. Accepting that the environments differ means understanding that participants gain different experiences from each environment and thus diverse meanings from their participation. SI allows for this open interpretation of interacting constructions as meanings are derived from social interactions, which again would differ dependent upon sport participation environment.

Further, deriving meaning from social interactions is a fluid concept and SI allows for such acknowledgement through its interpretive process (Aksan, Kisac, Mufit, & Demirbukan, 2009). The interpretive process describes an individual recognizing what they are drawing meaning from and the individual communicating with him/her self (Blummer, 1969). The second component of the interpretive process is that the person then, "...selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms, the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action" (Blummer, 1969, p.5). This process is constantly changing as people are always interacting in social environments, hence meaning can change throughout time. For example, disability as a social construct may be interpreted differently from someone interacting within an adapted sports environment with all peers with similar functional abilities and similar lived experiences, in comparison to individuals interacting within an environment that emphasizes physical differences in participation.

While SI is not one of the most common theories used within sport, recreation, and disability literature it is prevalent and relative to certain domains of study in conjunction with recreation, sport, and disability. Several articles with the objective of understanding social relations have used SI in order to do so (Wood & Denylchuk, 2012, Schwartz & Tait, 2007). Schwartz and Tait (2007), aimed to understand how sense of community developed through recreation, art, and festival events in a small rural town. Sense of community was found to be a strong concept in, “value and belief systems of societal members”, further, “...it can be argued that recreation, arts, events, and festivals are extensions of health promotion activities, as they create connections between individuals and the networks, norms, and trust that arise from those connections” (p.130). Shannon (2006) aimed to explore parents’ messages to adolescents about leisure participation and framed their findings through SI in that they were interested in the interpretations of the adolescents through, “how individuals interpret people, events, and objects in their lives and how that process of interrelation leads those individuals to engage in certain behaviors in certain contexts”. Further, using SI, Wood and Denylchuk (2012), meant to explore women playing golf related to the social group setting and social interactions and hence opted for SI as their theoretical framework.

An example of an application of SI within leisure literature is evident in Anderson’s (2009), research focusing on adolescent females with physical disabilities participation and development of a sporting identity. Specifically adolescence is an appropriate time period to apply SI in that during this period adolescents are reflecting and attaching meaning to experiences, which in turn affects growth and development. One of Anderson’s (2009) conclusions included that a social world filled with like individuals allows for a sense of community acceptance and growth. She continues to explain that SI and disability sport for adolescents is a beneficial fit because sport

is a social institution and the meanings that participants draw from those interactions offer insights into the perceived experience (Anderson, 2009).

SI has also been applied to mental health research, specifically examining potential applications for the purpose of reviewing stigma and the recovery process (Roe, Joseph, & Middleton, 2001). Specially, SI and disability sport research is limited within the literature. This finding is unexpected given support for the social model of disability and ICF, which both take into account the importance of the lived experience and social construction of disability. Collinson & Hockey (2014) write, “Symbolic Interactionists theorists such as Goffman (1969) have noted the importance of leisure in the construction of personal identity...” (p.383). In addition, Stodolska and Alexandris (2004), use SI to examine participation in recreational sport activities of first generation immigrants in the United States for the purpose of interpreting meanings that their target population assigns to objects and things.

Also discussed commonly is the symbolism of things and objects within an environment. The elements such as equipment, peers, practices etc. of recreation and sport create meaning to participants (Collinson & Hockey, 2014). Moore, Scott, and Moore (2008) study and learn about how different genders interpreted their experiences as birdwatchers. Moore, Scott, and Moore (2008) also discuss that, “experiences have meaning because they are interpreted by individuals who ascribe particular meanings to their actions as well as to the actions of others” (p.91).

Emergent themes from Wood and Denlychuk (2012) whom utilized SI as a lens to interpret their data were “connecting with group members” and “constructing a group culture” (p.372). This theme has application to seeking to better understand how intergroup relationships affect self-interpretations. While not implicitly disclosed as using SI, Knapp (2011), describes females

cultivating identities as football players and found that the participants reported that the socialization process was a large component. Knapp (2011) broke down this overarching concept into including specific relationships found within the sporting context that enabled this specific identity development. Similarly, the proposed dissertation will be reviewing two contexts in order to learn about how meanings are interpreted to those involved interactions with peers, activities, self, etc. in order to engage in an enlightening discussion of disability identity and perception of disability.

While the vast majority of empirical information supports that interactionism can be utilized as a framework to understand an athletic disability identity, Williams (1994) argued that this is too simplistic of an understanding of identity. Williams (1994) claims that a more systematic structure is needed in order to interpret this complex phenomenon and that there are several athletic disability identities that need to be further explored in a non-collective grouping. However, when applied SI fundamentally examines the world within its natural setting (Anderson, 2009). Further, the premise of this study is to examine the experiences of adolescents with physical disabilities within differing sports environments and while identity discussion may emerge it is not the focus of this study. Thus when conducting research on the human experience and respecting interpretations of the individuals perceived reality SI should be deemed an appropriate theoretical framework as such is the case for this particular research.

Social Comparison Theory

Another social psychology theory utilized to frame this research will be Social Comparison Theory (SCT). Leon Festinger in 1954 conceptualized SCT as a theoretical framework which, “hypothesized human beings have an innate drive to compare one’s self to others who are similar”

(Shay, Knapp, & Farmer, 2012, p. 315). Festinger's (1954), first hypothesis in regards to SCT is, "there exists, in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and abilities" (p.117).

Gilbert, Price, and Allan (1995) even stated that humans need to compare ourselves with others, which is a powerful, old, and biological trait (as cited in, Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). The general process of comparing one's self to others is described as, "spontaneous, effortless, and unintentional" as well as being "relatively automatic" (Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995, p.227).

Poignantly, the primary aim of comparisons to others is to learn more about one's self. The three motivations largely accepted by social psychologists for social comparison include, "self-evaluation", "self-improvement", and "self-enhancement" (Taylor, Wayment, & Carillow, 1995; Wood, 1989). Self-evaluation is part of the original SCT as conceptualized by Festinger (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). The two main foci of self-evaluation are opinions and abilities (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Opinions are thoughts and feelings are assessed, whereas, for abilities the comparison is meant to gauge how one is doing (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999).

While not part of Festinger's original SCT, a natural development of the theory includes self-improvement. Self-improvement applies to using information gained from comparing oneself to others with the purpose of improvement. After comparisons occur an individual may work towards "unidirectional drive upward" (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999, p.130). Thus through the process of comparing one's self to others positive development is possible. Lastly, enhancement was also not specifically included within Festinger's conceptualization of SCT, however, comparison with the task of enhancing self-esteem and self-concept fits within the scope of SCT (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). These concepts, which impact self-enhancement, may be directly correlated to environment and context (Gibbons & Bunnk, 1999), which fit within the purpose of this study well due to exploring interpretations of diverse sports environments.

It should be noted that social comparisons do not always result in positive outcomes. Dependent upon situational circumstances comparisons that result in negative self-reflections are prevalent (Brickman & Bulman, 1977). Further, competition has been and performance-based situations have shown to increase social comparisons (Ruble & Frey, 1991). These nuances add an interesting dimension to exploring sporting environments as sport participation often includes components of competition with one's self and others as well as performance.

In accordance with literature on SCT certain types of individuals are more inclined to compare themselves to others. Individuals who tend to have lower self-esteem and perceive themselves as being unsure about self-concept tend to make more social comparisons than those with higher self-esteem and a strong sense of self (Campbell, 1990). In terms of disability application when looking at individuals with acquired disabilities sense of self has changed, hence SCT may become increasingly prevalent during the rehabilitation and adjustment process.

SCT has already found a place within empirical research focusing on disability, recreation, sport, and physical disability. Pila, Stamiris, Castonguay, and Sabiston (2014) applied SCT to examine body-related envy in athletes within sport and exercise. As noted, comparisons may be either upward, "where the self is compared with a perceived superior other" or downward, "where the self is compared with a perceived inferior other" (Pila et al., 2014, p. 93). Pila and colleagues found that within the environment of sport and exercise their participants both upward and downward comparisons in that themes emerged of unfair or undeserved comparisons, comparisons that created motivation, and comparisons which resulted in jealousy (2014). Additionally, Hawkins, Cory, and Crowe (2011) while utilizing Self-Determination Theory found that for participants in a Paralympic military sports camp comparing experiences from sport participation and other lived experiences provided a lens to explore the United States Paralympic Military

Sports Camp (USPMSC) environment and outcomes of participation. Further, through social comparison, the researchers' results yielded themes of "perceptions of disability and normalization", "experiencing a sense of relatedness and social connection", and "establishing a connection with previous interests" which were relative to social comparisons allotted throughout the sporting activities (Hawkins, Cory, & Crowe, 2011, p.316).

Another example of SCT being applied empirically within the domain of disability is with a study examining a self-help group for individuals with chronic illness. Through comparisons, it was found that, downward comparisons were experienced by participants, because they felt stressed or threatened in order to feel positive advantages such as self-image (Dibb & Yardley, 2006). Just as SCT implies, comparisons can be either positive or negative and thus result in positive or negative outcomes. This study in particular supported this aspect of the theory in that participants' interpretations of their social comparisons largely affected their self-perceptions (Dibb & Yardley, 2006).

Summary

Overwhelmingly, literature supports the multiple benefits of physical activity, recreation, and sport for individuals with disabilities (Gaskin, Anderson, & Morris, 2010; Hull, 1990; Hogan, Catalino, Mata, & Fredrickson, 2015; Ryan et al., 2014; Whitehead & Corbin, 1997). Further, individuals with disabilities face higher incidence of poor health, less community involvement, and reduced quality of life (Groff, Lundberg, & Zabriski, 2009). With the breadth of research clearly generating information that individuals with disabilities lack the copious benefits of physical activity and that they are experiencing detrimental health effects from not being more

active it is logical to push to gain knowledge on environments that foster participation in physical activities such as sport. While appropriate participation in sport is ideal we do not know what unique differences are gained from participating in mainstream versus disability sport environments. This chasm of knowledge creates disconnect between research and suggestions of evidence based practice and best-fit practices within the discipline of therapeutic recreation. Nixon (2007) writes that, “sports organizers and administrators must be flexible, adaptable, and open to change, and they must understand appropriate participation, that is, how to match the abilities, interests, and motivations of athletes with disabilities with the structural parameters of their sport or event in both mainstream and disability sport settings” (p. 431). Nixon (2007), goes on to state that, “the opportunities in the mainstream do not have to be the ultimate goal in expanding sports opportunities for people with disabilities. Choice has become an important issue among disabilities activists” (p.431). Thus learning what is uniquely gained from participation within both mainstream and disability sport environments needs to be acknowledged in order to truly provide a most appropriate sport participation experience.

Beyond practical implications the concept of sport transcends physical activity and reflects societal and cultural practices, “sports and physical education are practices which are socially constructed within the culture in which they exist, and any adequate account of them must be grounded in an understanding of power, privilege, and dominance within society” (Sage, 1993, p.153). Additionally, DePauw (1997) wrote,

The transformation of sport culture will mean when we are able to “see” sport and athlete with a disability without any contradiction, without assuming a physical liability, stigma, or deformity, and without assuming an impaired athletic

performance. That is we will see an athlete, an athletic performance, and a “sporting body. (p. 427)

Further, if we recognize that sport is a socially constructed system then sport participation can support transformational meanings and impact the interpretation of the lived experience. To explain, athletes with disabilities have the opportunity to become agents of change and assist in redefining concepts of disability and sport, which includes the environment. Gaining insights into the experiences of those with disabilities who participate in various sport environments not only represents interpreted meaning of lived experience but also a much larger complex sociological phenomenon of disability, sport, inclusion, and segregation on a macro level. Depauw (1997) capitalized on this transformative process by writing, “The lens of disability allows us to make problematic the socially constructed nature of sport and once we have done so, opens us to alternative constructions, actions, and solutions” (p.428). Additionally, Wilhite, Mushett, and Calloway (1996) state, “the meaning and value of disability sport extends far beyond athletic accomplishments of what happens on the field of play. Disability sport has a much larger and greater significance as a celebration of life and human achievement” (p.112).

Thus SI is an appropriate theoretical framework to understand and interpret participant’s lived experiences about their sport environment. Each participant constructs his/her meaning of a sporting environment based on his/her interpretation of the interactions between others, objects, and those experiences. Further, with adolescents being within a developmental life stage the environments of mainstream sport and adaptive sport provide an environment allowing comparison of how others behave to each other and his/her environment. Thus SCT will collaboratively with SI enable in depth understanding into the attributes of both a mainstream and adaptive sport environment. It is the aim of this study to provide insight into the characteristics of each

environment by participants that are unique and similar in order to create a foundation for therapeutic recreation specialists to use evidence based practice when prescribing sport for therapeutic purposes to their clients.

CHAPTER 3 Methods: Getting in The Zone

Let us introduce meaningful voices in the world of silence to bring rays of hope in the lives of those who live in darkness, and lend our helping hands and understanding to those who need love and concern. It is said, “Strength does not come from physical capacity, It comes from an indomitable will.” So, let us induce this indomitable will in every child with a disability and light an eternal flame to help them realize that each one can be a useful and productive member of the family and society. Integrated sport can be one effective measure in achieving this goal and mission of equal opportunities for all. (Tuli, 1998, p. 13)

Introduction

The intention of this qualitative exploratory study was to further understand the unique and common attributes experienced from participation in mainstream sport environments and disability sport environments for adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities. Learning more about these specific sporting environments will offer insights into best practice for the field of recreation therapy. An understood weakness to the field of therapeutic recreation is a lack of evidence based practice. Mrkic (2011) cited that 58% of Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialists (CTRS) reported that they never or rarely did research and that 48% disclosed that they never or rarely have time to read research in the field (as cited in, Steffen & Reid, 2017). As of now there are limited empirically supported sports protocols for practice for recreation therapists to utilize when working with clients. A lack of evidence based practice being used in the field does a disservice to clients utilizing leisure based activities to work towards achieving specific goals and

objectives, which is the foundation of recreation therapy as a field. Further the integrity of practice is reduced when clinicians only refer to past experience, intuition, and contextual factors as opposed to integrating evidence based practice into his/her scope of practice (LeBlanc & Singleton, 2008; Stumbo & Pegg, 2010). Just like other allied health fields, recreation therapy needs to empirically justify therapeutic practices in order to best benefit clients, improve outcomes of participation in therapeutic practices for clients, and measure those outcomes (Paterson, Rachfall, & Reid, 2013). While the field of recreation therapy is a newer one, especially in comparison to other allied health fields the practice must be founded on sound evidence (Stumbo, 2009). The future implications of such research have the potential to make positive changes in evidence based practices for the field of recreation therapy.

Within the privy of this research study each participant's experiences assisted in exploring the potentially differing and/or similar attributes of the sport environments being examined. While this examination varied between participants, it was hypothesized that if adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities participate in disability sport environments he/she potentially may cultivate a more positive interpretation of disability than in a mainstream sport environment where the individual with a disability participates in a different capacity than the majority of his/her peers. Research overwhelmingly supports the benefit of participation in sport for individuals with disabilities; however, the various environments have not been well examined (Groff & Kleiber, 2001). It is believed that disability sport environments may offer a means to cultivate a strong shared connection among participants and, in turn, create a positive community of peers with similar disabilities and positive perception of one's self. To interpret disability under this framework postulates that due to one's disability he/she may achieve unique lived experiences that enable him/her to gain access to a specific community and culture meant for those with disabilities.

The two specific sports environments being explored within the scope of this study are disability sport and mainstream sport. Disability sports environments are specifically meant for individuals with disabilities (Depauw & Gavron, 1995). This means that the actual sport does not require accommodations because it is designed for individuals with disabilities to participate in. Whereas, mainstream sports environments are intended for individuals without disabilities but may apply minimal accommodations in order to allow participation for someone with a disability (Nixon, 2007). Learning more about attributes specifically associated to each sports environment has evidence based practice implications in that as of now there are no best practices for recommending a specific type of sports environment for adolescents or young adults with physical disabilities based on his/her individual therapeutic needs. Through this research the emergent themes specifically associated to each sports environment will enable further research to occur to empirically construct best practices for certified therapeutic recreation specialists to recommend the best fit environment of sports participation for each client based on his/her goals and objectives.

Both sports environments being explored are largely complex, which means they are open to multiple interpretations from participants. Thus, in order to complete this line of inquiry multiple qualitative methodological tools will be employed. Research tools including survey, semi-structured open-ended interviewing, field notes and observations, and photo voice will be used. Much is empirically unknown pertaining to the environments being reviewed, which include disability sport environment and mainstream sport environments, and how participation in each may contribute to the sport experience for adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities.

There is great diversity in the population of individuals with disabilities so this data is not meant to be generalizable but to learn more in depth about the experiences of adolescents and

young adults with physical disabilities who have participated in mainstream/inclusive and/or adaptive sport environments. The theoretical frameworks of Symbolic Interactionism (SI) and Social Comparison Theory (SCT), as well as the concepts of interpretive and social constructivism, guide this research. An emphasis has been placed on allowing participants to write their own narratives, as they perceive them. It was extremely important to the researcher that each participant is in control of his/her representations and interpretations of his/her lived experiences. This supports disability studies concepts of using research as means of empowerment and respecting the integrity of each participant. Further the researcher aims to not contribute to the oppression of individuals with disabilities by ensuring that each participants' experience be considered a highly valued beneficial component of this research.

Research Questions and Aims

Research Question 1: How does participation in mainstream sport or disability sport environments impact the experience of adolescents and young adults who have physical disabilities?

Specific Aim 1: To explore participation in mainstream sport environments from perceived experiences and emergent themes.

Specific Aim 2: To explore participation in disability sports environments from perceived experiences and emergent themes

Research Question 2: How do experiences compare and contrast between adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities participating in mainstream sports versus disability sport

environments?

Secondary Aim 1: To assign specific perceived participation attributes from adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities based on emergent themes to mainstream sports environments

Secondary Aim 2: To assign specific perceived participation attributes based on emergent themes to a disability sports environment

Secondary Aim 3: To explore and cultivate a usable guideline protocol to assist recreation therapists in utilizing evidence based practice, when working with adolescent and young adult clients with physical disabilities to achieve prescribed specific goals through the modality of sport.

Qualitative Research Theory

Qualitative inquiry offers the opportunity for research to seek and develop breadth and depth of data.

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense

of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.3)

Denzin and Lincoln elegantly explain the qualitative position that will be applied within this study. The strong emphasis on qualitative methods of inquiry is in contrast to positivist epistemology; this work aims to understand, “events by discovering the meanings human beings attribute to their behavior and the eternal world. The focus is not on discovering laws about causal relationships between variables, but on understanding human nature, including the diversity of societies and cultures” (Della Porta & Keating, 2008, p. 26).

Further, the primary focus of this study will be qualitative, as this is a social research study and, “social researchers seek to identify order and regularity in the complexity of social life; they try to make sense of it. This is a fundamental goal” (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, p. 33). Additionally, Silverman (2000) wrote, “qualitative research has moved social research away from an emphasis on cause-and-effect explanation and toward personal interpretation. Qualitative inquiries are distinguished by its emphasis on holistic treatment of phenomena” (as cited in, Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 825). This qualitative inquiry explanation supports the methodologies representing the qualitative research body of thought.

Being that the goal of this research is to explore and seek to understand how environment impacts the experience of participation as well as to provide a platform to hear the voices of those with disabilities on this sociological phenomenon qualitative aims are appropriate. Thus, the aim of this research fits within the scope of a qualitative study, allowing for comparative methods of interpretation through emergent patterns and interpretive design. Providing a platform for the participants to share their voices and interpretations of the meaning of their participation experiences in mainstream and adaptive sports environments is vital. Creating a respectful

environment promoting, “giving voice to a marginalized group contributes to the larger goal of generating transformative knowledge; so does the goal of making predictions about which policy alternatives will result in the desired outcomes” (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, p. 34). It is the hope of the researcher that a dialogue between evidence and ideas can be analyzed in order to gain insight into social concepts of the human experience. As discussed by Linton (1998) methods of research involving individuals with disabilities have inherent inequalities of power in both qualitative and quantitative paradigms. She continues in her discussion that, the interpretation and opinions of those with disabilities within research are larger representations of cultural, social, and political systems and structures that are currently in place (Linton, 1998). The methods from a qualitative stance allow the researcher to be in an optimal position to discourage hegemonic superiority.

Again, Denzin (2001) writes,

Interpretive interactionism attempts to make the meanings that circulate in the world of lived experience accessible to the reader. It endeavors to capture and represent the voices, emotions, and actions of those studied. The focus of interpretive research is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their experiences. (p. 1)

Denzin excellently describes the scope of this study in its qualitative aims regarding the lived experience and the environment with regards to interactions occurring within the sports environments. Further Greene (2007) states that

In all forms of social inquiry, data analysis serves to (1) reduce and organize the raw data into manageable form that enables comprehensive descriptive reporting, as well as defensible further analysis; (2) assess patterns of interrelationships, connections, or trends,

as well as differences, in the data; and (3) support and validate conclusions and inferences.
(p. 144)

This research will be capturing an essence of the interpretation of the meaning of each participant's sport experience with regard to specific type of participation environment. Qualitative inquiry will be the most appropriate and effective means to do so in order to capture intended meanings to through a cultivation of qualitative tools.

Interpretive and Social Constructivist Epistemology

Interpretive epistemology allows for the understanding that reality has multiple meanings without determining that one reality is more correct than another. Differing factors impact how one constructs their meanings similar to the tenets within SI. Understanding an interpretive paradigm means accepting that there are different ways of seeing experiences and interpreting data.

The aim of the use of an interpretive epistemology is to understand subjective reality through contextual knowledge. Evidence collected throughout this research will collaboratively come together to create an image of each participant's lived experiences through his/her lens of understanding the world. Thus an interpretive phenomenology fits appropriately within this social research and likewise the social theories of SI and SCI being applied create a cohesive means of understanding participant's experiences.

With the belief that we can cultivate meanings from social interactions comes social constructivism, which encompasses seeking to understand the world we live in (Creswell, 2013). Social constructivism seeks to assign meanings to complexities without limiting interpretations. The meanings derived through inquiry in line with social constructivism is a collaborative effort by researchers and their participants, which allows the participants to take the lead and explain their

values, experiences, beliefs, and realities to the researcher. Again, emphasis is placed on the participant's perspectives and subjective meanings. These active conclusions are drawn from interactions, exchanges, and experiences. Both epistemologies describe an allowance of a process of subjective reality. This interpretive process strongly depends on how individuals position themselves in their sense of reality.

Traditionally, SI in research has had a focus on researcher observations and while field notes will be utilized, the researcher will be placing an emphasis on paradigms that have come to fruition after the main tenets of SI had been written. To expand, while SI distanced itself from traditional scientific epistemology, it was still not yet within the stance of interpretive inquiry and more progressive qualitative understandings of the social world. For example, Denzin's work on interpretive inquiry was not yet explored when SI was conceptualized in the 1960s. The researcher plans to further remove bias from the interpretive process through using methods such as member checking, triangulation, and photo voice, but does recognize that bias and researcher interpretation will still be present within the research understandings. In this sense, SI will be pushed forward to a contemporary application of methodologies while still maintaining the theory's integrity, values, and conceptualizations.

SCT enables further depth of data to be shared and understood through the perspective of each participant. The values behind SI, SCT, interpretivism, and social constructivism all corroborate with the emphasis of voice and acceptance of a subjective reality being interpreted and explored through the participant's lived experiences. More so, qualitative methods of inquiry align themselves with these values in that they enable a platform for the participant to use his/her voice to express their reality. Open ended interviews, photo voice, observations, note taking, member checking enable a dialogue to occur between participant and researcher, which will allow for a

deep rich conversation in order to enhance understanding of each participant's sense of reality.

Methods

General Overview

Qualitative data was collected through closed and open ended survey, in-depth semi-structured interviewing protocol, photo voice, and field notes and observations. Data collection was done after participants had the opportunity to complete participation in either disability and/or mainstream sports environments. All participants either met in person or via video conference technology for the purpose of data collection and member checking a minimum of two times each. For the purposes of this study participants who had experiences participating in a range of sports environments (mainstream and disability) were selected to participate in order to be able to collect rich data. The exact number of participants was dependent upon when emergent themes reached saturation. Each participant was required to have participated in mainstream and/or disability sports for a minimum of six months overall. Participants were all required to be between eighteen to thirty-three years old and have a physical disability.

During the first meeting with each participant the researcher collected data using closed and open ended survey, in depth semi-structured interviewing, and field notes and observations. A second meeting occurred after the participant had time to retrieve or take pictures for his/her photo voice representation of his/her experiences. This piece was used as a means to encourage a deeper discussion for each participant's sport experience and how each specific sport environment impacted his/her experience. The additional interaction also provided an opportunity to do member checking from the first session's field notes and semi-structured interview.

“In the qualitative research paradigm, a primary focus is for researchers to capture authentically the lived experiences of people” hence the next method utilized was photo voice, which was meant to represent the participant’s interpretation of his/her experience and what it meant to him/her (Greene, 2007, p. 275). This piece was used as an additional means to generate a deeper discussion and understanding of the participant’s interpretations on the subject area. The framework of using interpretive phenomenology allowed for each photo representation to provide a dialogue through explanation and conversation in which, image representation could be explained and depth of understanding was elaborated upon and further explored.

Further, the photo voice component sought to empower the participant to represent him or herself as opposed to the researcher assigning meanings solely through field notes, observations, and interview data. Similarly, leaders in the interpretive inquiry field, Denzin and Lincoln (2005), wrote that

Such experience, it is argued, is created in the social text written by the researcher. This is the representational problem. It confronts the inescapable problem of representation, but does work within a framework that makes the direct link between experience and text problematic....a serious rethinking of terms such as validity, generalizability, and reliability, terms already retheorized in post positivist,,, constructivist-naturalistic..., feminist..., interpretive..., poststructuralist..., and critical... discourses. This problem asks ‘how are qualitative studies to be evaluated in the contemporary, poststructural moment?’ (p. 19-20)

This explains the researcher’s attempt to provide an alternative means of participant representation to assist with representing the participant as he/she intends. Utilizing photo voice enabled the researchers to support the, “... plurality of possible interpretations... to free ourselves from the

mistaken identification of explanation... It allows us to ask interesting questions instead of eliminating them from the research programme because of a problematic understanding of science” (Della Porta & Keating, 2008, p. 97).

Collinson and Hockey (2014), used SI to interpret data from autoethnographic projects, which in essence, is similar to the interpretive photo voice. To explain, the photos were an alternative means to promote self-representation within the proposed study just as autoethnography emphasizes the individual’s experiences and derived meanings from those experiences. Forms of ethnography and photo voice offer yet another outlet for the lived experience to be discussed with an opportunity for deeper understanding of the construct.

Field notes were used during both meetings with participants and provided the researcher with an opportunity to learn, reflect, and further develop his/her thoughts on concepts being explored (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). Stake and Trumball (1982) shared that qualitative research often aims to produce descriptions and situational interpretations of phenomenon that researchers provide to others in order to transform comprehension of the phenomenon. Field notes are a way of looking at a site and/or interaction and are subjective to the researcher’s experiences and knowledge of the social world. Acknowledging that what is deemed significant by the researcher is not definitively accurate of what the participants are interpreting is vital; however, it does not dismiss the method as it still has value as a means of allowing for a deeper understanding of the sociological phenomenon.

Field notes align with the research question, design, and implied paradigms as, “...interpretive research is investigation that relies heavily on observers defining and redefining the meanings of what they see and hear” (Stake, 2010, p. 35). Field notes, “... are important to the story... Our interpretations depend on good understanding of surrounding conditions, the context

and situation” (Stake, 2010, p.50). Observing and noting what the researcher sees and understands from a context offers a different insight into a sociological interaction.

These multiple qualitative methods enabled the researcher to collect rich description on the sociological phenomena of participation in mainstream and disability sports environments from adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities. The majority of methods were employed simultaneously, instead of sequentially because the aim was to explore and better understand each participants’ meanings of their lived experiences. The semi-structured interviews, field notes, and closed ended survey were completed at the same time with each participant and photo voice was likewise completed simultaneously with the second open ended interview protocol, field notes, and observations.

Triangulation of the multiple methods used for the qualitative methods of the researcher provide, “greater validity” which, “refers to the traditional view that quantitative and qualitative research might be combined to triangulate findings in order that they may be mutually corroborated” (Greene, 2007, p. 262). Supplementary, having data from a survey, in-depth interview, field notes, and photo voice provided multiple means of learning, exploring, and understanding the sociological event being examined.

Further the researcher used the method of constant comparison of the data throughout the data collection and analysis process. Reviewing multiple participants’ interviews and data collected impacted the interpretation of meaning and corroborated emergent themes. A constant comparative design was utilized to assess patterns of the various contexts and create a dialogue between patterns. Between the first and second meeting, beginning to fully review and interpret the data enabled a deeper and more meaningful dialogue for the second meeting increasing the credibility of interpretation.

Identification of Participants

Participants were recruited through emails to disability sport and mainstream sport organizations, newsletters, and online sources from sports and recreation organizations.

Participants could also self-identify in order to contact the researcher for participation in the study.

For the purposes of this study universities with adaptive sports, adaptive sport associations, rehabilitation centers/hospitals with adaptive sports and fitness programs were contacted as well as several of the special recreation associations in Illinois were contacted in order to reach the targeted population. Participants were within the age range of eighteen to thirty-three, had acquired or congenital physical disabilities only, and could identify as being female or male. Adolescents and young adults must have had experience participating in either mainstream sport environments and/or disability sports environments for a minimum of six months, not necessarily consecutively.

All participants were read the IRB approved consent form in its entirety and agreed to the participant in this study. Participants whom completed the entire research process were eligible to be entered into a raffle where he/she would be awarded a fifteen dollar amazon gift card.

Closed Ended Survey

Prior to completing the demographic survey, the approved IRB consent form was read, discussed, and agreed upon by each participant, then a brief inclusion criteria pre-screening questionnaire was completed by each potential research participant. These questions focused on gauging if the participant had the necessary communication skills in English to participate, if the participant was able to make the time commitment to the study, and if the participant had access to the necessary technology to effectively participate. If the participant was able to demonstrate

effective communication skills, had access to the tools needed to participate as well as met the participant eligibility, and agreed upon the IRB approved consent form then the participant was selected for the study.

Next a demographic survey was designed to be utilized prior to a semi-structured interview protocol in order to generate basic information and to encourage the participants to begin thinking about the topic area being explored. An initial demographic survey also allowed the researcher to begin building a repertoire with each participant before asking more in depth open-ended questions. The data from multiple qualitative research tools allowed for triangulation to occur. The survey data assisted in correlating emergent themes with specific demographic characteristics such as gender, age, race, and disability type taken into consideration. In order to do this, qualitative features within the survey were assigned numbers for coding purposes so that data could be entered and manipulated (Czaja & Blair, 2005).

Other question topics that were included on the survey aside from basic demographics, collected background information on sport participation such as length of time, type of activity, age of initial involvement, and hosting organization. The survey was completed during the initial meeting and was used as a tool to encourage starting a dialogue with each participant and to encourage each participant to become engaged in the topic. For the purpose of the survey an identification number was assigned. There was a locked file maintained throughout the data collection process for any paper work linking names and identification numbers. After data collection, analysis, and publication all personal information will be permanently deleted in order to protect confidentiality and privacy.

Survey

Inclusion criteria pre-screening questions

1. Are you typically able to understand when others ask you questions in English?
2. Are you able to communicate in English with others well?
3. Are you able to access a computer and/or phone for interviews and taking/sharing pictures?
4. Are you willing to schedule two sessions, the first for approximately 60 minutes and the second within 2 weeks of the first session for approximately 30 minutes, to answer questions with the interviewer?

Demographic closed ended survey and open-ended survey

1. Identification Number:
2. Birthdate:
3. Preferred Gender Identifier:
4. Race:
5. Do you have a job? If yes, what do you do? (If in school, what does the participant plan to do in the future occupationally?)
6. Where do you live now? Where have you lived? (Town/state)
7. Who do you live with?
8. What kind of impairment do you have?
9. How would you describe your disability impacts you?
10. What sport(s) do you participate in currently?
 - How many days a week and for how long do you participate in each sport?
 - What organization hosts the activity? Or is it unorganized?
11. What sports have you done in the past? Please explain in detail.
12. What types of environments have the sports you have done/currently do been in?
 - Disability Sport or adaptive sport: participating with peers with disabilities
 - Mainstream/inclusive: participating in sports with peers with and without impairments)

Interview

A semi-structured interview guide (Patton, 2002) was developed in order to obtain rich description of participants' disability identity and perceptions on disability. Interviews were meant to deepen the understanding of knowledge (Della Porta & Keating, 2008). Several open-ended questions were written in advance for the interview guide with the intention of allowing participants to elaborate and take questions in the direction of his/her interpretation. This data

collection strategy is most appropriate for this exploratory study as it allows the greatest opportunity to be guided by the participants' interpretations and allows participants to lead the interviewer where he/she wishes to take discussions. Semi-structured interview guides allow for interviewers to explore specific questions with participants in whatever order they come up and expand on interesting lines of discussion without the constraints of a more standardized interview protocol (Patton, 2002). The result of this open-ended semi-structured interview guide is much richer data that will be beneficial during data analysis. The focus of interview questions was meant to address participants' experiences and reflections from participating in mainstream or disability sport environments. In-depth interviews were completed after participants had participated in mainstream and/or disability sport environments sports programming. The researcher gently guided the topics but allowed for each participant to direct his/her answers and provide their opinions on the each topic area.

Qualitative Interview/Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

The interview will follow this proposed structure: Interviewer explanation: I am aiming to learn more about how the type of sport environment impacts the sport experience for adolescents with physical disabilities. My questions are intentionally open because I want to learn about how you feel about your personal sport experiences. If you have any questions please interrupt me at any time. If you feel I am not understanding something you are sharing as you intend please interrupt and clarify because it is important for me to represent how you feel about your experiences about sport environments that you have and are participating in.

Semi-Structured Open-Ended Survey

1. What sport environments have you participated in?
 - a. Mainstream sport
 - b. Disability sport
 - c. Both
- If the participant has participated in one sport environment only inquire about that specific sport environment for each question
- If the participant has participated in multiple sport environments inquire about each sport environment for each question
2. What sport(s) do you participate in currently?
 - a. How many days a week and for how long do you participate in each sport?
3. What organization hosts the activity? Or is it unorganized?
4. Please describe your past sport experiences.
 - a. Environment type
 - b. Specific sport
 - c. Participation schedules/commitment level
5. Describe what you like/d about the environment/s?
6. Describe what you dislike/d about the environment/s?
7. If participant has participated in more both sports environments
 - How were the sport environments different?
 - How were the sport environments similar?
8. What would you change about the sport environment?
9. What would you make sure to keep the same in the sport environment?
10. Describe your peer interactions during your sports experience?
11. Describe how did equipment impact your sport experience?
12. Describe how coaches/staff/volunteers etc. impact your sport experience?
13. Describe how the location impacted your sport experience? (Geographic and the actual space that was used to participate in)
14. Describe how cost of program/s impacted your experience?
15. Describe how having a disability impacts your sports experience (how does this impact both the people you participate with and your other social interactions with peers with and without disabilities)
16. Do you socialize with your sports peers outside of the sports environment?
 - If yes, how? Describe what these interactions look like for you.
 - If no, why not? Describe if there are reasons you choose not to socialize with your peers outside of your sport.
17. Do you consider yourself an athlete, an athlete with a disability, or not an athlete? Explain why or why not. (Ask for clarification of if the participant considers himself/herself an athlete and/or an athlete with a disability or both)
18. Would you or do you prefer to do sports with other individuals with or without disabilities? Why? (Participants may say both. Ask for clarification on his/her answer to learn why)
19. If you were to give advice to an adolescent with a physical disability about which sports environment to try what would you suggest? Explain.

20. What else impacts your sports experience?

At the conclusion of interview protocol ask if there is any information each participant would like to share.

- If yes, ask the participant to share that information and provide necessary follow up questions. Then schedule the next interview for no more than 2 weeks from the current date. This interview will be shorter and take approximately 30 minutes.
- If no, schedule the next interview for no more than 2 weeks from the current date. This interview will be shorter and take approximately 30 minutes.

Before ending the conversation request that the participant send via text, email, or other preferred method 2 photos of him or herself participating in sport. This image should represent what sports participation means to that individual. Explain that the images will be the main focus of the second discussion as well as reviewing the analysis of the information from this interview.

Participants were then provided the researchers professional email and phone number in order to text, email, or scan photos directly to the researcher when ready, prior to the second photovoice interview.

Photo Voice

Photo voice was used as the primary focus of the second meeting with each participant.

Each participant was asked to either take one to two pictures or retrieve one to two pictures that they have already that represent his/her experiences when participating within either a disability or mainstream sport environment. Through using photo voice the analysis of data was able to reach new depth and further conversations occurred based on the participant's captured image and what it meant to him/her.

Photo Voice Prompts

Instructions: Please send me via mail, text, email, fax or any other means most convenient for you that we can discuss one to two pictures of you participating in a sport

These pictures should show you actively engaging in a sport in some way and may be current or old.

During discussion with photos ask the following questions and include additional questions as needed to gather as much pertinent detail as possible.

1. Please describe each picture you chose (include equipment and space descriptions. Specific objects and places as well as how you feel about these objects and spaces)
2. Why did you decide upon each picture shared?
3. What does each image mean to you?
4. How do you feel about the interactions you had in retrospect about the environment? (Peers, coaches, volunteers, teachers, other players, audience members, etc.)
5. What did you enjoy about your sport experience in the picture?
6. What did you not enjoy about your sport experience in the picture?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the photos?

Observations & Field Notes

Being that the participant's interpretations are most important for this study the field notes of interviews and observations of sports environments will be a supplemental method used in order to gain further understandings and assist with creating a repertoire with the adolescents. The researcher will take notes during both meetings with the participants. These notes will be typed and reviewed in conjunction with the data collected. They will also be used to gain increased depth of conversation during the second meeting as additional questions or clarifications may arise from the field notes and observations from the first session. Notes will be written informally and observations will include feedback on body language, emotions expressed during topics discussed, and the general tone of conversation during different topics being discussed.

Data Analysis

Due to the multiple qualitative data collection tools being utilized data analysis began once the first interview had been completed. With the use of the constant comparative method reading

and re-reading transcripts, field notes, and observations allowed for information to be interpreted and analyzed many times while new information was introduced to impact those interpretations and meanings. This process increased the understanding through continuously examining the available data (Della Porta & Keating, 2008). Thus, field notes and observations were taken in conjunction with interviews as well as at the completion of each interview by the researcher via coded memos (Emerson, Fret, & Shaw, 1995). Accordingly, each interview was recorded then transcribed shortly after to begin the review and reflection process.

To expand, once the data collection began the data analysis began as well. Through data analysis interconnected themes will be identified and categories will begin to emerge. Two researchers trained in qualitative data analysis with a background in sport and disability reviewed data in order to reduce researcher bias and increase inter-rater reliability. Further, common themes were teased out from within each transcription individually and then in comparison to the other transcriptions. This process entailed utilizing open coding, axial coding, and finally selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Coding is the classifying and sorting common features (Greene, 2007).

Next each transcription was read separately, then in conjunction with the researcher's field notes that were collected at the time of the interview. A note taking and color assigned coding strategy were used to categorize emergent themes and were reviewed multiple times in order to increase trustworthiness. Being that two researchers were completing coding data they did so individually then compared codes and emerging themes continuously throughout the data collection and analysis process. A third party researcher was available to discuss emergent themes and provide insights to any debated coding between the two researchers. However, though different terminologies and organizational structures were discussed between the two researchers

all themes were discussed without necessitating a third party reviewer. Additionally, member checking was done with each semi-structured interview coded transcript. Member checking is presenting a recording or draft copy of an observation or interview to the persons providing the information and asking for correction and comment. During the member checking process researchers seek information pertaining to accuracy, any possible insensitivities, and new meanings. (Stake, 2010, p. 126)

Member checking will occur during the second meeting when each participant will share two photos that he/she took while currently or previously participating in sports in either a mainstream or adaptive environment. During this second meeting additional field notes and observations were made pertaining to member checking as well as photo voice. Again, this supplemental information was transcribed, read individually, and re-read in comparison to other collected data, then coded. Coding occurred through a similar method of utilizing a note taking color coded axial and open coding system in order to locate emergent themes.

Through open and axial coding, reviewing transcriptions multiple times, and discussing the photo voice piece with the participant, triangulation was effectively applied. Triangulation involves rethinking and considering interpretations of meanings at different points throughout the research process. Further, “Triangulation seeks convergence, corroboration, correspondence of results from the different methods” and this aims to “increase the validity of constructs and inquiry results by counteracting or maximizing the heterogeneity of irrelevant sources of variance attributable especially to inherent method bias but also to inquirer bias, bias of substantive theory, biases of inquiry context” (Green, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; as cited in, Plano Clark, & Creswell, 2008, p.127).

To improve the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the analysis, a variety of procedures suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were followed. First, member checking of individual participants' interview transcripts will be carried out to ensure participants feel that his/her voices were accurately represented through his/her interview. Second, transcripts were initially coded individually then in comparison to each other when themes began to emerge to increase the reliability of the final themes. Finally, data was triangulated by comparing individual responses against responses of others, particularly in relation to similarities such as gender and type of disability.

When data is interpreted through the guidance of SI a deeper understanding of the lived experience will be developed (Wood & Danylchuk, 2012; Bocarro, Henderson, & Witmer, 2011). Wood and Danylchuk (2012) used SI to analyze constraint negotiation for women participating in recreational sport groups. Many studies using SI also applied in-depth interviews, informal interviews, and participant observations (Bocarro, Henderson, & Witmer, 2011; Wood & Danylchuk, 2012). The research being discussed intends to include an interpretive framework as well, which accounts for the additional methods being used. Further, within any type of interpretive and qualitative inquiry, multiple methods may be performed to collect and analyze information so long as they are appropriate to the research question and objectives.

Development of Guidelines

After themes and subthemes were finalized, a best practices protocol or guide was developed based on the study's findings. As per Hood (2001), protocol development requires identifying two important stages for clinical practice guidelines for recreation therapy. The first stage includes being able to identify client treatment needs within the scope of recreation therapy

practice (Hood, 2001). Data from the emergent themes and subthemes were used to identify the specific client needs being met by each specific sports environment. The second stage should entail reviewing literature and constructing a document describing the interventions (Hood, 2001). For the purpose of this study an initial drafted protocol has been completed based upon the results of this study while being informed from current literature.

After themes emerged from this qualitative analysis the specific experiential attributes associated with each sport environment (disability, mainstream, and integrated disability) are now better understood. Initial hypothesized recommendations for practice have been made and a foundation for future research posed. These recommendations have been formatted into a drafted guide for clinicians. The emergent themes informed the guide in that when reviewing each theme, each sports environment had both unique and common attributes experienced from participants. These differences and commonalities were organized by environment and written into the best practices guide. Next the recreation therapy process was applied to the emergent information and organized in an easily usable format for clinicians. To expand, the results from this study guided the construction of suggested best practice practical considerations. These practical considerations were organized into an easy to follow format for clinicians to follow. Through using the recreation therapy process to guide the recommendations for practice there is a common understanding of how to apply these practical considerations into current practices.

The intent of these best practice guidelines are to enhance the use and availability of evidence based practice in recreation therapy. This means that as opposed to certified therapeutic recreation specialists prescribing sports modalities based on his/her professional experiences he/she may also rely on proven evidence when recommending a sports environment for his/her clients. This protocol once finalized has the potential to improve recreation therapy practice,

quality of services provided, and improved outcomes for clients. While these guidelines are not yet generalizable until further confirmed with experts in recreation therapy and standardized further, the benefits of creating it are immense. By having a drafted protocol to be further researched and applied for certified therapeutic recreation specialists' practice may be enhanced.

Conclusion

Overall, this study aims to explore the experiences of adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities participating in adaptive and mainstream sports environments. The emergent similarities and differences discovered through this research will offer insights into the specific attributes experienced within each type of sports environment by adolescents with physical disabilities. Through the utilization of multiple methods of qualitative inquiry such as survey, semi-structured open-ended interviewing, photo voice, and field notes and observations an in depth understanding of each participant's experiences in adaptive or mainstream sport environments will be gained. Further, these multiple methods of qualitative inquiry will enable each participant to offer his/her voice of experience and interpretation of those experiences.

Currently there are no protocols related to best practices for adolescents with physical disabilities and participation in specific environments for the field of therapeutic recreation. These findings will have implications towards evidence based practices within the field of therapeutic recreation. To expand there is a lack of research validating the practices utilized by recreation therapists thus exploring sport environments has practical applications. It is hoped through this data collection and analysis valuable insights into the specific attributes associated with adaptive and mainstream sports environments will be gained. Based on the emergent themes hypothesized protocols may be developed with further research to create standards of best practices for

adolescents with physical disabilities in terms of sport participation. Within the scope of practice for recreation therapists leisure and recreation participation is prescribed based on several factors such as client-focused goals and objectives, available resources, and client interests thus if sport is a viable opportunity being able to provide a best fit environment to enable achieving client specific goals and objectives it would be highly advantageous to the client.

CHAPTER 4 Results: The Main Event

Stephen Hawkings said,

Each one of us has within us a spark of fire, a creative force ... Some of us have lost the use of parts of our bodies, through accident or illness, but that is really of minor significance. It is just a mechanical problem. The important thing is that we have the human spirit, the ability to create. This creativity can take many forms, from theoretical physics to physical achievement. The important thing is that one should be stretched to be outstanding in some field. These Games provide an opportunity for that. (as cited in, Giralt, 1993, p. 119)

Participants

Overall nine participants agreed to participate within the scope of this study. There were eight individuals who identified with being female and one who identified as male. All participants were Caucasian. The youngest participant at the time of the interview was 21 years old and the oldest was 32. The mean age of all of the participants was 25.22. Participants lived in various Midwest and East coast states including Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Multiple participants spoke about participating in sports in states where they grew up as well as in states where they went to college or currently reside. There was a range of type of physical disabilities that participants had inclusive of Muscular Dystrophy (MD), Spina Bifida, Cerebral Palsy (CP), Ehlers-Danos Syndromes (EDS), Fibular Hemimelia, Transverse Myelitis (TM), and Paraplegia. These disabilities were largely described as impacting physical mobility in terms of

balance, activities of daily living (ADL's), and coordination to differing degrees. Further, some participants had congenital physical disabilities while others had disabilities with onset in their later childhood or adolescents with some being progressive. All participants utilized either a manual or power chair for mobility except two participants. One such participant had a later onset of EDS and her mobility is progressively decreasing and another participant likewise with MD has recently transitioned from a manual chair to a power chair to accommodate her lifestyle and changing physical needs. Additionally, the two participants with CP also experience expressive speech difficulties but still met the eligibility speech requirements of this study.

In terms of sport participation there was a wide range of environments and sports discussed. Participants were active in mainstream sports such as crew, figure skating, skiing, water polo, swimming, fencing, and basketball. Disability sports participation included wheelchair basketball, power soccer, sled hockey, sled skiing, power floor hockey, adaptive surfing and water skiing, wheelchair track, and wheelchair fencing. While not initially within the scope of this research an emergent sports environment, integrated disability sports included sports such as baseball, physical education sports activities, basketball, and tennis.

Table 4.1 Participant Demographic Chart

ID	Gender	Alias	Race	Age	Location	Impairment	Sport
P1	F	Lindsay	Caucasian	23	PA/FL	Muscular Dystrophy	*Crew, Figure Skating & Skiing
P2	F	Kate	Caucasian	21	IN	Spina Bifida	*Wheelchair Basketball Wheelchair Tennis, Adapted Water Skiing, & Sled Hockey
P3	F	Erin	Caucasian	25	NJ/IL	Cerebral Palsy (Quadriplegic)	*Sled Skiing, Powerchair Soccer, Integrated Baseball

P4	F	Carly	Caucasian	24	NY/IL	Cerebral Palsy (Quadriplegic)	Track, Physical education sports, swimming, archery, baseball (No primary sport association)
P5	F	Jane	Caucasian	21	OH	Ehlers-Danos Syndrome	*Water Polo, *Swimming
P6	F	Chelsea	Caucasian	22	IN	Fibular Hemimelia	*Wheelchair Fencing, *Wheelchair Basketball, Fencing
P7	F	Mandy	Caucasian	32	PA/IL	Transverse Myelitis	*Wheelchair Track, Wheelchair Basketball
P8	M	Charlie	Caucasian	29	NJ/IL	Paraplegia	*Wheelchair Track, Sled Hockey
P9	F	Mary	Caucasian	30	PA	Cerebral Palsy	*Power floor hockey, Sled Skiing, Surfing, Wheelchair Tennis, Adaptive Horseback Riding

*Indicates primary sport

Themes

After coding the transcriptions from the semi-structured interviews six themes emerged along with several subthemes. The following themes of environmental consideration specifically related to mainstream sport, integrated disability sport, and disability sport, competition versus recreation, support of sport participation, socialization in sport, the meaning of sport experience, advocacy through sport, and athlete identity were the most prevalent saturated themes, which emerged from the analyzed data.

Table 4.2 Emergent Themes Chart

Theme	Subthemes
1. Environment considerations	Disability sport Integrated disability sport Mainstream sport Try it all
2. Level of competition	Recreation Competition Best Fit
3. Support of sport participation	Coaches Family
4. Socialization in sport	Friendships Sense of community networking
5. Meaning of sport experience	Perception of disability during sport The feels Special Moments
6. Advocacy through sport	Advocacy Educating others
7. Athlete identity	Athlete with a disability/disabled Athlete Athlete Not an athlete

Environmental Considerations. Environmental considerations such as type of sport and appropriate sport accommodations among others, were referred to in some way by each participant within the scope of this study. These considerations were impacted by each participant's type of disability, when the disability was acquired or if it was congenital, the participant's desired level of competition, his/her sports goals, and perception of their lived experiences in relation to having a disability. As shared by several participants, different sports environments accommodate differing roles and abilities within the context of sport participation. To expand, Chelsea (Female, Fibular Hemimelia) felt like a leader in disability sport but became more of a "clown" in mainstream sports. Chelsea said about her mainstream sport participation,

It was like being the clown. Obviously, I wasn't the best at the sport so being able to laugh at myself and laugh at other people gave me something to bond with other people about.

But then in adaptive sports, my peer interactions, I was a leader, tried and true.

Chelsea was able to laugh at herself and still feel part of the group and bond with a sense of humor while in mainstream sports, however, in disability sport she felt like more of a leader. Participants voiced strong opinions based on their experiences relative to the type of environment in which sport participation occurred. Given the emphasis on sports environments for the purpose of this study, the strong feelings that the majority of research participants had towards certain sports environments based on his/her experiences and perceptions of self and others with and without disabilities was one of the strongest emergent themes.

Mainstream sports. Participants generally enjoyed participating in mainstream sports but shared some specifications of when participation in mainstream sport was preferred or appropriate as well as when mainstream environments were not preferred. Erin (Female, CP) shared that when in high school she was a member of the ski team and was the only individual with a disability on the team. She summarized the experience by saying,

... I was the only kid with a disability. The rest of my friends were just my friends from high school. So, that was an awesome experience. For me, that was the only experience that I've ever had with being with non-disabled peers of mine in an athletic environment and it was a lot of fun. I still keep in touch with a lot of them to this day.

Further, Erin shared that her mainstream experience participating in her high school's mainstream ski program transformed how her classmates viewed her. Erin felt it was beneficial that her peer saw her in a different capacity, "...just to show them-they saw me in class every day in my chair with [an] aide writing for me, with an aide reading my words to me, doing all sorts of thing[s]...then we were on skis, I could beat every single one of them". This speaks to the transformative power of sports participation and how Erin felt empowered through skiing within the mainstream environment. Similarly, Mary (Female, CP) shared that, "...because for some reason I never was very comfortable around other people with disabilities. I always liked to interact with able-bodied people because it makes me feel more like them." Mary did not want to feel stereotyped and preferred to participate in sports with peers without disabilities. Mary and other participants that felt the same explained that through participating in mainstream sport they could educate others and increase awareness about those with disabilities. Mandy (Female, TM)

wanted to feel included and not be “different” from her peers without disabilities. Further, participants such as Charlie (Male, Paraplegia), wanted to advocate for inclusion and had enjoyable experiences of feeling “included” while participating in mainstream sports environments.

On the other hand, mainstream sport was not preferred when the sport was not adapted appropriately, which inhibited participation. For example, Mandy spoke about how she needed to self-accommodate at times and had issues adapting mainstream sports that were not inherently adaptable for someone with a disability. This concern was repeated by Carly (Female, CP) who said about her mainstream physical education sports experiences that,

Theoretically, they were supposed to adapt it but they didn’t really, so it was more like, “We don’t really know what we’re doing so let’s make some halfhearted attempts to adapt this. We’ll struggle along and she’ll get credit for going to gym”.

Multiple participants had similar issues involving coaches, volunteers, and physical education teachers in a mainstream sports environment that were unable to appropriately and inclusively adapt a sport for meaningful participation. Lindsay (Female, MD) felt that she missed out on some “socialization” because she had a disability and could not participate fully with her peers without disabilities in certain aspect of her sports team. For example, this participant was involved in a competitive mainstream sport and felt she missed out on some aspects of, “team bonding” because she could not ride the bus with all of her teammates to competitions and had to meet her teammates at each location because the bus was not accessible for her physical needs.

Additionally, mainstream sport was perceived negatively when the sport did not allow for proper integration. The example of this provided by Mandy was that she could play tennis with both peers with and without disabilities because the sport did not differ whether a player used a wheelchair or not. However, Mandy felt in the mainstream environment at the elite sports level participation for someone who used a wheelchair was not compatible or equitable. She compared this to men and women competing against each other at an elite level and how there would be differences in levels of ability. Moreover, Mandy said that this would impact the experience and sense of inclusion for athletes because individuals would be inherently participating in the sport differently. Overall, there was an interesting commonality that if a participant wanted to participate in sport with a high level of competitive intent that mainstream sport was not an appropriate fit but if the sport participation was done on a recreational level mainstream sport could be deemed as an appropriate social activity with benefits.

Integrated Sport. Integrated sport, similar to the other environments provoked strong opinions based on a variety of factors that impacted each participant's experiences. To begin, Carly felt strongly supportive of promoting a fully inclusive sports experience for everyone with various disabilities. She explained,

One thing I really appreciate about [fully integrated baseball program] is it taught me not to be snooty towards people with other types of disabilities besides mine. A lot of times, in the physically disabled community you hear people say things like, "I don't wanna do that because I'm not like them," or, "I'm not like those kids," or, "I don't have anything

mentally wrong with me.” That is really ableist and rude. I’m glad that I wasn’t raised with that kinda attitude...

This perception was emphasized within Carly’s entire interview. She was very conscientious of being inclusive within the scope of her sports and recreation experiences. This discussion evolved into addressing a disability hierarchy within the disability community of individuals with physical impairments who used manual chairs to individuals with more severe physical disabilities who use power chairs and then to individuals with other disabilities such as cognitive impairments and developmental disabilities. Carly and Chelsea spoke about parents feeding into this disability hierarchy,

Like some people’s parents feed into it, and they’ll say really ableist things, like, “Make sure you tell them you’re just in a wheelchair and that you’re not”-whatever. I don’t like to use the word retarded, but usually what people say or parents, “make sure you tell them you’re not retarded”.

Other participants such as Jane (Female, Ehlers-Danos) and Carly, who felt similarly, shared that,

Well, see I feel that people who see that as a negative thing are kind of being disability snobs. And I just-I think it’s a little bit weird to expect other people to accept them and treat them a certain way when they wanna turn up their nose at people with other kinds of disabilities. So, it’s like what you would call horizontal oppression

This discussion raised an interesting insight into a larger hegemonic representation of disability in which the sport environment can play an integral role in.

In contrast, Erin had strong opinions opposing integrated sports environments. This clear difference of experience and opinion seemed to be founded upon the difference of Erin being positioned as a highly competitive sports participant and Carly being a recreational sports participant. Erin shared that a multi disability sport should be stratified by disability type citing sports for people with physical disabilities or sports for people with cognitive disabilities. Erin even said,

...again, just my opinion...I've had a lot of people tell me, "you need to include everybody, blah, blah, blah." I get that. An opportunity for everybody, I get it. But when you mix them, you take away from everybody, in my head and also in my own experiences.

Another issue of concern discussed for participation within an integrated sports environment was that some participants felt out of place participating in sports with those who had differing disabilities. This was not dissimilar to those participants with disabilities that felt out of place in a mainstream environment in that he/she was not able to fully feel comfortable with similar peers and participate in the sport in a similar manner. Erin shared that she participated in sports from a competitive perspective and that in her experience,

...a lot of people that were there [in the fully integrated disability sports program] had autism, down syndrome, things of this nature, more severe CP. I am a very competitive

individual. I understand the concept of if you're playing a game of baseball, the object is to win said game. That wasn't really the mindset there.

This participant, as well as others who wanted a more competitive experience, wanted an environment to support a competitive sports environment. Carly, whom in contrast largely supported participation in an integrated disability sports environment stated that while she enjoyed participating with others with a range of disabilities she felt that there was a lack of knowledge in how to appropriately accommodate all of these individuals within the scope of the sports environment. Further, Carly said that it was different to adapt or accommodate an individual with a cognitive disability versus someone with a physical disability and that many of her teachers/coaches were not able to fully integrate all of these differing abilities into one game. Even Carly, who adamantly supported the integrated sports environment felt that,

We were a mixed group in my gym class, which is totally fine, I loved everybody in my gym class very much but it's different adapting a game for someone who has a cognitive disability that can run and then someone who doesn't have a cognitive disability but can't walk. I think the teachers viewed us as harder to adapt for because they just couldn't think outside the box.

In this sense, while an integrated environment was enjoyed and supported it was also problematic due to a lack of true integration.

Disability Sport. In comparison to the other sports environments, disability sport was overall more positively described by the majority of participants, but even so, there were negative experiences within this environment as well. For example, several participants felt safe when doing sports with others with similar disabilities to him or herself. The participants felt that through participating with others with similar abilities he or she was able to fully participate and be competitive in an equitable way that was not possible in the other sports environments. This equitable competition allowed for the potential aspiration of elite competition with the addition of high motivation and high-level training. As explained by Chelsea, several participants explained that,

...That's what we were made for. And like, that's stupid, but, that evens the playing field. Because whether we like it or not, we're not playing with a full deck of cards. So, that is where you'll be able to excel to your full potential the fastest.

Thus a disability sport environment is inherently made for individuals with disabilities to participate in. No adjustments need to be made to the actual sport, because it is meant to be played by individuals with disabilities. Additionally, Carly said about her sport participation that,

... I would much prefer to be with other people with disabilities because I feel like that's the only way that I can realistically keep up without being super conspicuous. And it's not that I really care how people look at me or anything. It's just that when you're the only one on your particular physical level, it's not really that fun for you.

Upon reflection, many participants shared that through participation in the disability sports environment he or she was able to learn more about him or herself. Some participants were not exposed to others with disabilities and felt disability sports was a safe environment to discuss personal matters that peers without disabilities would not understand. Kate (Female, Spina Bifida) shared that she had the opportunity to meet other peers with disabilities similar to hers for the first time. Disability sport also enabled a sense of a larger disability community to develop.

... because it's like the one place that I feel comfortable. Sometimes, you feel like the odd man out, having to do all these extra things or use this extra stuff, but when you're with people with disabilities, it's like everybody has it.

Additionally, Chelsea and Charlie both specifically cited that they felt privileged to meet people with disabilities from all around the world because of their participation in disability sport. Other participants also shared that they felt more self-sufficient during participation in disability sport because the actual sport was made for someone with a disability.

In contrast, other participants with more severe physical disabilities felt that there was a lack of opportunities in disability sport for those who use power chairs. This concern was common amongst research participants who used power chairs but not often mentioned for those participants who used manual chairs (Mary). Other issues with this environment stemmed from a lack of awareness for those without disabilities to fully understand and respect the competitive nature that disability sport allotted. Additionally, lack of awareness also impacted people with disabilities in not knowing about sports opportunities because there were less programs for them (Charlie). For a few participants who were exposed to disability sport later in their adolescence

they shared that they each struggled with relating to those with disabilities because they found that they still had differing experiences than their peers with disabilities. For example, when Chelsea started participating in disability sport her teammates, while all having physical disabilities, had acquired them in a different manner than herself and were significantly older than her, which made it difficult to relate to her teammates even though they all had physical disabilities. Another example of this is Charlie, whom did not begin disability sport until early adulthood and he felt uncomfortable engaging in sports with all peers with disabilities because growing up all of his friends and teammates did not have a disability. Although it should be noted that Charlie adjusted and is currently comfortable participating in a disability sports environment now that he has become part of the community and has formed relationships with his peers and teammates.

Try It All. Interestingly, for many participants there was a pattern of participation. To expand, many participants experienced mainstream sports first through physical education and unorganized sports participation and then were later introduced to disability sports environments. Often, a coach or current participant recruited these individuals with physical disabilities into disability sports. Thus these environments are not experienced in isolation. All participants had done sports in a multitude of environments. Charlie said that these environments are not disconnected and that his involvement in mainstream sports led to his current involvement in elite disability sport.

Repeatedly, when asked which environment he or she would recommend, participants, even with strong opinions on their preferred environment were adamant about “trying it all”. All participants advised that others with disability should try multiple sports environments to gain a

range of experiences and build a diverse support network of both peers with and without disabilities. For Chelsea considerations for best fit environment,

...really depends on the person's personality. Because I think kids like me, who really have this drive, and aggression, and don't let people get them down, or don't let their physical disability get in their way, and don't believe when people tell them that it will. I think definitely trying mainstream sports is worth it. But that you will thrive, and everyone will thrive, in adaptive sports.

Chelsea goes on to say that she recommends that everyone with a physical disability try mainstream sport at least once. She felt strongly that it teaches each individual about his or her personality. Chelsea further said, "It shows you how much you're willing to work for something in mainstream sport. Because you do have to work harder." Charlie shared that he had great experiences in both mainstream and disability sports environments and appreciated the opportunity to do both. Lastly, Mary said that she is always looking for new sports and recreation opportunities to try whether it be through a disability, mainstream, or integrated sports environment. Overall, the sentiment and advice from participants was for adolescents with physical disabilities to try multiple environments and gain those unique experiences prior to determining one specific environment. The main sports environment chosen needs to be based on individual needs that will best fit the individual participating.

Level of Competition. The difference between high level of competition and competitiveness and recreational sport participation was prevalent throughout all interviews. This theme became very ubiquitous for all participants as having a recreational or competitive attitude

and motivation towards sports participation heavily impacted the participants' experiences and perceptions of sports environment. Erin emphasized that it should be an individual decision whether someone wanted to participate in sports competitively or recreationally. Erin even shared that she wanted a high level of competition even if she was the worst one out there.

Recreation. If participants were interested in a more recreational sport environment then certain environments were appreciated. To expand, when recreation was the focus, words such as “fun” and “social” were used to describe the experience in relation to the mainstream and integrated sports environments. However, participants who were in competitive sports, but while being more recreationally minded, did not share the high motivation towards success and often spoke about tension between teammates because they did not share a similar focus on competitive achievement. Carly as well as many other participants cited just wanting to have fun and enjoy him and herself through sport as a predominant motivation for a recreational sports participation focus. Carly stated that she wanted to have fun,

I think that it's a nicer environment in a way when it's just for fun. I always find that the competitive wheelchair athletes have an attitude towards people with more severe disabilities anyway because disability hierarchy, and I don't wanna be like that. It was way more fun to just do it for recreation...

Overall, participants describing wanting to have fun and just enjoy his or her sports participation appreciated being able to participate in recreational sports, whereas, individuals who wanted a more competitive experience did not always appreciate being in a recreational environment.

Competition. In terms of a competitive environment, many participants spoke in favor of this if they were more results focused. This sense of competitive was described by Chelsea as a, “competitive spirit”. For team sports having a similar level of competitive spirit created a strength and positive bond, whereas, differing levels of competitiveness caused some tension amongst teammates. Erin said that she tries to participate in power soccer programming for example, when she can, “because of that ... competitive itch that I have, that’s a very appealing game to me.” Erin specifically spoke at length about how she wanted a very competitive sports experience, which was difficult to find as a powerchair user.

Mandy discussed that she was frustrated when it was assumed that because she had a disability often it was assumed that she was not a competitive athlete. She said,

I have to say one of the things that frustrates me the most, and it did when I was a kid, and it continues to frustrate me is the assumption that the purpose of para sport and all parasport is recreation and social, not that there are ever any athletes that train hard and reach an elite level, I remember getting really, really, frustrated when I was a kid, and everyone would always assume that I was doing Special Olympics, and they would ask me if I won the Special Olympics. That drove me crazy.

The participants which shared that the competitive experience was important to his or her participation spoke about continuously striving to improve and do well. There was an emphasis on needing to excel. Specific goals that participants discussed were qualifying for National competition, participating in sanctioned races, and wanting to be respected for his or her

competitive attitude and ability to participate in sport. Many of these participants included that not only did they train with a group and a coach but they also made it a priority to train on their own in order to do better. Charlie said, "...it's serious business. Not that I'm not having fun and not that I'm not enjoying it, but you put on your uniform, and you're there to race, and to do well. It reflects a more serious side of sport".

In contrast, one participant, while appreciating the competitive intensity of her sport, did share that when she began at the collegiate varsity level the level of competitiveness increased and her enjoyment decreased. Lindsay said that,

...When I was at the D-1 level, I didn't like it-it took the fun out of the sport. Getting up at 4:50am for practice every day and lifting. And it was just too much on my body. It took the fun out of it, so it really wasn't enjoyable anymore.

Interestingly, this same participant more recently shared that she had tried participating in her mainstream sport on a recreational collegiate team and did not enjoy it as much because of the lack of competitiveness. Thus the level of competition is an important contributing factor to the sport experience and determining the appropriate sports environment.

Best Fit. In general, it seemed participants' felt that their competitive drive and abilities needed to be matched appropriately to their sport and even more specifically in the role within that sport. For example, Kate said, "I didn't take to sled hockey very well, I will say that, just because of my balance. Even sitting, you're on hardly anything, and so to keep my balance was really hard, and I kept falling over". Thus he tried the sport and felt it was not a good match for him and chose

to participate in other sports that he could excel in as he was looking for the more competitive experience. Lindsay also provided a great example of this in that her position within crew fit her physical and personality characteristics. She described her role as a coxswain, necessitating an individual who was small and loud. Other times the actual environment of a sport may not be conducive to participation for someone with a disability. Carly used to be a competitive swimmer in mainstream sport but as her impairment was diagnosed and progressed she changed from swimming to water polo but still shared that the water temperature was not ideal for her body because the cold water “messes” with her impairment. Carly who participated in sports recreationally, shared that when she did integrated disability sport she felt less embarrassed,

There were more kids with disabilities there so we had an adapted gym class and I loved the environment because I was finally with other kids with disabilities and gym wasn't so hard for me anymore. I've never been embarrassed about the fact that I have a disability, but it is a little bit humiliating when you're just getting thrown into a bunch of games that you can't keep up with.

This speaks to the theme that of appropriateness in terms of sport matching one's abilities as well as his or her competitive aspirations. Carly wanted a more recreational experience and when participating in an integrated disability sports environment she felt she could just play the sport without judgment but also recognized that it was not conducive to a competitive environment. Likewise, Kate was not very results driven and thus had very different participation experience when participating in disability sport when other teammates were results focused. Kate said,

Some teammates were more competitive than others, for example, I think it was my second or third year playing, and we got the chance to go to nationals, and we made it to the championship game, and we lost. Every person on our team was crying except for me and one other person, so, just things like that, why are you crying? It's just a stupid game.

She goes on to say, Kate said,

...It's competition, but I don't take it so dang seriously. That's another thing that I really enjoyed about it is that, when I was in [her sports team], we had so much fun. It was, yeah, win, but most importantly have fun.

This demonstrates the difference of experience solely based on the desired level of competition from the participant. This emergent theme was prevalent within the scope of all interviews and is deemed an important consideration that impacted the sport experience and best fit sports environment.

Support of Sport Participation. All participants mentioned numerous times that they were able to participate in and continue to participate in their sport environment of choice largely with the support of coaches including teachers, volunteers and family. The relationships with coaches and family offered a level of support both in terms of reducing barriers but also relative to motivation and support.

Coaches. Coaches including teachers and volunteers were mostly deemed an important positive impact on sport participation. There were some participants which did note some negative experiences stemming from issues when working with coaches but the coaching relationship in general was significantly cited throughout this study. Both Chelsea and Mandy spoke fondly about the close relationship they shared with their coaches, whom they considered to be part of their family. Kate felt she had a strong relationship with her current coach as an adult and still keeps in touch with her coaches from her childhood and adolescence. Carly even went on to share that, if anything happened to her father, that her coach was the next closest person to her. Further, coaches, volunteers, and teachers often were the recruiters for these participants to try new sports environments or even just get involved in a sport in general. For Charlie, he was approached by his high school track coach to participate in the mainstream track team. Charlie prior to this interaction was not actively involved in sports and now he has successfully transitioned to disability sports and recognizes the significance of this initial recruitment into what is now an important part of his life. Coaches were also credited with promoting inclusion in mainstream sport as well as negotiation of barriers such as fundraising for sports equipment when needed. For Erin, she felt that her coaches saw potential and believed in her, which motivated her to continue her competitive sports endeavors. Lastly, Mary spoke about appreciating the direction and leadership that having active and engaging coaches brought to the sports experience.

In contrast, Chelsea and Kate shared that some of their previous coaches lacked the knowledge on how to include people with disabilities within their mainstream sports environment and thus they felt excluded. While this was more common experience within the scope of mainstream sports, it should be noted that other participants shared that their coaches and themselves had to learn about disability sport as they went along especially at the recreational and

grassroots level. Participants did not find this lack of knowledge problematic though because those coaches had a positive open-minded attitude and collaboratively worked with these participants to learn and grow so that they continually improved their coaching knowledge and the participant's sports performance in turn.

Kate and Chelsea also spoke about if a coach had a bad attitude that it drastically impacted their sports participation negatively as well. Other negative experiences with coaches stemmed from when coaches felt they knew more than the individual with a disability and did not listen to direction from the participant. Erin shared that she preferred coaches that took her seriously and listened when she explained what she needed during her sports participation.

Family. Another significant contribution to sports participation was family. The participants' families were credited with assisting in negotiating many of the common barriers to participation in sports. Chelsea credited her family as to why she was so successful in her sports achievements. Mandy spoke about how her family assisted with travel to practices and competitions as well as financially enabling her to participate in sports. Similarly, Lindsay shared that her family provided transportation, which enabled her to participate in sport as a youth and young adult. Family was also supportive in finding sport programming for several participants. In general, all participants within the scope of this study had positive experiences with his or her families providing financial support, transportation, and assistance during participation. Lastly, participants spoke about the emotional support that their family provided for them throughout their sports experiences.

Socialization in Sport. Another common experience amongst all participants was the aspect of sport being social regardless of specific sport environment, competition level, and type of sport. Several relationships were initiated and strengthened through participation in sports environments. These developed relationships were organized into three subthemes including friendships, community, and networking.

Friendships. Again, every participant mentioned the friendships they developed through participation in sports. Kate said, “I found my best friends through that sport, pretty much. To have that, it was very eye-opening, and it was great to have”. Lindsay is still best friends with her former co-captain from sixth grade and shared that they text or talk almost every day even though they now live in different states. Lindsay specifically chose a photo with her best friend and her participating in mainstream sport. She goes on to say, “It was me and my best friend from sixth grade. I guess we were just in the boat smiling and I guess we were just sort of feeling happy, you know. Like happy high school crew, senior year...” when describing the picture, she chose to represent her sports experience in mainstream sports. Interestingly, the other photograph chosen, while representing a competitive achievement, was largely described through social events with teammates who were considered friends. Likewise, Kate explained that wheelchair basketball, which she fell in love with, was really about the friendships she shared with her teammates. Specific to integrated and disability sport, Carly shared that,

Other than the opportunity to take part in a recreational something or other, it’s just two environments where I met a lot of my friends and where I got to meet a lot of other people with disabilities and two places where I was just very much at peace with myself.

Similar and yet unique from other participants in the study, was the perspective on friendships offered by Jane, as she has a progressive and fairly recent diagnosis of her impairment. She felt that the social aspect of her sport environment was a motivating factor to continue to participate in recreational mainstream sport because it would be difficult to achieve her earlier mainstream competitive role in swimming. Jane said, “Because I feel like if I was focusing on the physical environment, I wouldn’t be playing sports. So, it’s like in my head, I have to focus on the social environment to keep myself motivated”. Thus the importance of friendships in sport is pivotal in the environment. Further, Kate shared about being on her sports team that, “I loved it. I loved being part of the team”. Erin shared this sentiment in sharing that she felt a high level of bonding socially and Carly enjoyed laughing at herself and her teammates and the camaraderie shared amongst her teammates with disabilities because they got each other and enjoyed a close knit friendship.

In contrast to the largely positive role of friendship in the sports environment it needs to be noted that not all peer interactions resulted in positive friendships being developed. Chelsea shared that when she transitioned into disability sport that her teammates were older than herself and had largely acquired their disabilities through active military involvement. To expand, the participant felt that not only because of the significant age difference between teammates, she also had a different disability experience not being a wounded veteran, so she had trouble relating to her teammates’ experiences at the time and often felt isolated even at notable sporting moments for herself. As a young adult now, the participant said that her relationships have improved with those former teammates and that she is still proud of and glad to have had those experiences even though at the time she had very mixed emotions on it. Even in the less positive experiences, a certain level

of camaraderie was felt amongst teammates that occurred through the socialization in the sports environment.

Sense of Community. Sense of community was another described outcome of the socialization process experienced by participants in their respective sports environments. Kate said about participating in disability sport that,

The fact that I'm not the only one with a disability, it really brings a sense of community, and I could talk to my teammates about things that they would understand, things that my parents wouldn't even understand or my friends around here.

This speaks to the fostered sense of community from participating in disability sport with peers with similar physical disabilities. Further Kate, among other participants, felt the integrated sports environment promoted a sense of companionship between peers with differing disabilities through the high level of engagement. Additionally, Jane said of the camaraderie on her mainstream sports team during and after a very challenging time,

I guess it's really just the support of this and the community aspect of the game, and the team especially because it's like- our team went through a really hard time a couple years ago because one of our players died from an epilepsy episode. As a team, we really had trouble getting over that, so we stuck together, and we got through it. And then-I don't know. It's very camaraderie and those pictures are camaraderie personified.

This special and arguably unique bond developed in the sports environment was prevalent among all sports environments discussed in some sense. Mandy even shared that the disability sports

community is small and everyone knows everyone, which makes participation social and she feels like she has a supportive community. Participants Kate and Erin whom did sport in a mainstream and disability (with assistance of an able bodied skier) sport environment did state that a sense of trust and safety was necessary in their relationships with those without disabilities to enhance their participation in that specific environment. Charlie eloquently described sport from a perspective of participants, audience, and coaches and stated, "...Sport brings people together".

Networking. Another aspect of socialization was the opportunity to network during participation in sport. To elaborate Mandy spoke at length about being able to meet many other individuals, network, and create sense of community. Chelsea described sports enabling her to meet and bond with other athletes and teammates. Mandy "build a friend group" from her networking opportunities in sport. Participants in disability sport spoke about opportunities where he or she was able to meet role models with disabilities who went to college, had families, and careers, which was an empowering experience as a youth or young adult with a disability. Lindsay, who participated in competitive mainstream sport, described that because of her relationship with her teammates she was able to accommodate for her progressive disability and stay in mainstream support because she had built strong relationships with her teammates so they assisted her when needed and that it was not "uncomfortable" because they had become "best friends". Elite disability sports participants shared that because of their training and competitions they had met friends and mentors from all over the country and in some cases around the world and with technology they could easily stay in touch.

In general, sport was a social environment regardless of if it was mainstream, integrated, or disability. Interestingly, this subtheme was prevalent regardless of if the sport was individual or team based.

The Meaning of the Sport Experience. The feeling that one gets from participation in sport was continuously brought up and discussed in many ways. Participants often spoke about their perception of their own disability during sports participation, the feelings they had during and after sports participation, and the special moments that stuck out in their minds even years later that significantly impacted their lives.

Perception of Disability during Sport. Interestingly some participants spoke about sport erasing their disability. The participants with these feelings towards disability often preferred interacting with peers without disabilities. This speaks to their perception of living with a disability. There was no uniform generalizability between participants if individuals who had this experience were more inclined to feel this way during mainstream social activities and disability sport. To expand the feeling of not having a disability was discussed within both mainstream and disability sports environments for diverse rationale. Individuals felt that they were not different from his or her peers in disability sport because all participants had a disability. Whereas, other participants felt because they were socially participating in activities (this was more frequently discussed in a social environment not a sports environment) with peers without disabilities that he or she felt grouped in with those without disabilities and was thus part of the group of peers without disabilities.

Further, a sense of “freedom” was described by three of the participants when referring to being free from the negative struggles experienced from having a disability and being in the moment of floating or scuba diving in water or going fast down a ski slope. Mary went as far to say about skiing downhill quickly that, “I don’t notice my disability during that time”. In contrast,

there were other participants that felt that an environment such as disability sport assisted in them embracing having a disability identity. This speaks to the fact that sport experiences are unique to each participant and that perception of disability as an identity or community is diverse amongst those with disabilities.

The Feels. In general, the meaning of sport participation was discussed. Participants candidly shared their perceptions on how they felt about their participation. Chelsea and Erin shared the larger impact of sport on their lives when Erin said, "...from a social interaction perspective, sports have been everything for me. I've met a lot of friends through them. I've defined my entire life through them, from personal background, academic background, everything". This particular participant studied sports in college, socialized with athletes and friends from sport participation, and wanted to work in a field involving sport and recreation.

Another common discussion pertaining to feelings experienced when describing sport participation was that sports were "fun" regardless of specific sport environment or competitive level. Lindsay felt it was a nice balance to have an activity aside from school work that offered an alternative focus for her. Additionally, feelings described in the photographs chosen by all participants had many common features including a sense of fun, happiness, and freedom. Further, during discussions of the photographs, participants were noted to express smiling and a light mood while fondly recalling their experiences. There was a sense of joy and excitement typically during discussion of specific sporting experiences. Carly likewise shared, "I just have happy associations with them. And, also, I feel like I had to pick one from [my integrated sports event] because that was really probably my first exposure to any kind of adapted rec anything" as well as stating about her disability camp where she participated in sports, "...I loved camp, so it's a happy memory for me". Even though sports participation did not always have a positive outcome and at times social

tensions or lack of appropriate accommodations were discussed, overwhelmingly participants genuinely seemed to enjoy and have fun doing and reminiscing about his or her sport participation regardless of environment.

Special Moments. Especially prevalent within the photovoice component of data analysis was that the images chosen represented momentous sports events that were significant to each participant's life. A strong sense of pride and accomplishment were often the explanations for why a photograph was chosen. Some images represented a simple accomplishment of beating a personal best in a physical gain in order to enhance sports performance while others were lofty achievements experienced through years of working towards recognition in sport. For example, Chelsea spoke about feeling a great sense of pride and accomplishment from a very humbling experience where she was able to represent her country on an international elite disability sports arena. Other elite disability sports participants spoke about the sense of pride in representing one's country or earning a medal in such a public domain as well. Further, Erin worked hard to create a sanctioned ski race to have equitable competition and discussed the first race that she participated in after achieving this. This was a proud moment where the participant was able to demonstrate all of her hard work and compete in a race that promoted enhanced inclusion in competitive disability sport. Next, Charlie said that his image,

Represents hard work, and commitment, and shows the opportunities that are available to you or opportunities available to people participating who in sport. I don't wanna say if you try hard enough, you can do it because I think that's a cliché saying and not everyone gets

to the Paralympics even if they try hard, But I think that it's representative of working hard towards setting a goal for yourself and seeing your dreams come true.

Charlie was describing his achievement of earning a spot at his first Paralympic Games, which was a momentous and long-term special moment.

Interestingly, not all special moments were momentous moments. Some moments were discussed as being special because of the fond memories and social connections shared between teammates or friends within the sports environment. Lindsay shared a story where performance was not a strength but that her and her teammates had so much fun the night before that they actually performed poorly, however, this was a fond special memory that was significant enough that she wanted to share it. Similarly, Jane chose a picture of herself playing goalie in a mainstream water polo tournament for the first time, where she described herself as doing "poorly" but still chose this photo because her team was playing a memorial tournament to remember a teammate who had passed. This special moment was more about support, friendship, and doing something to remember a teammate instead of a competitive or personal accomplishment.

Other special moments included one-time or infrequent sports-based opportunities such as scuba diving, camp, surfing, and skiing. An example of this was when Kate explained she chose a picture from a special once a summer event that she participates in annually. The surfing program described was run largely with volunteers and is one of the participant's favorite sporting activities to participate in even though it only happens once a year for a few hours. The participant described this day with a smile and fondly recalled several memories about the instructors, volunteers, and her family who made the day possible. Another example of this is from Carly when describing swimming at camp she explained,

...it's not an easy activity to pull off, which is another reason camp was fun because we could do a bunch of different things when you had a group of people who were young and strong around. It's much harder for my 50-something-year-old mother to haul me in and out of a pool.

The camp being described is for adolescents with disabilities and provided an opportunity for participation in a wide range of adapted sports activities for participants.

Advocating Through Sport. Several participants shared experiences involving times they either wanted to or felt they had to advocate for him or herself within the sports environment. Interestingly, many participants also felt that at some point during sports participation they advocated for others or intentionally took on a role of promoting education and awareness for people with disabilities in general through their sports participation. These roles of advocate and educator at times were done out of necessity and not desire to but through sports participation participants often also had a choice to do so as well.

Advocacy. Advocacy came through from many of the participants differently. Lindsay was proactive in order to participate in sport and through doing so she advocated for herself to have a sports opportunity at a young age. Lindsay reached out to coaches prior to entering high school to see about participating on her high school rowing team and in essence created the opportunity for herself to compete in mainstream sports in high school and then in college. Kate participated in mainstream sports during her physical education class in school and had to create her own

accommodations in order to participate in sports and other activities with her peers because her physical education teacher did not provide the modifications she needed in order to be included. Advocacy for other participants included articulating what he or she needed while participating in sports. For example, Mary had to use her voice to direct volunteers during sports to meet her needs, which required self-advocacy. This self-advocacy for self-process was described as a learning opportunity to reflect and learn what their individual needs were so that he/she could let others know. Carly said that,

My gym teacher was really well intentioned but sometimes when I got older he really wanted me to do everything when there were just things I couldn't do. I got to an age where it was like, "Mr. Williamson, this is not safe for me to play scooter hockey. I don't wanna hurt my back," and he would be like, "You can do it. You can do it just try." I know he was trying to be motivating but it gets annoying when you get to an age where you know your own needs really well and you're telling someone that something's not a good idea and they're not listening to you.

This quote speaks to the self-reflection process, knowing ones needs, and letting others know what they are. Interestingly, this was not the only participant that shared they knew his or her self and voiced what he/she wanted but had to strongly advocate anyway because their voices were ignored at first by teachers or coaches who felt they knew better.

Educating others. Many participants shared stories of experiences where they felt obligated, whether wanting to or not, to educate others and raise awareness about disability within

the sports environment. Kate Participated in mainstream physical education and had to make her own accommodations and felt it was her responsibility to educate others on disability through her sports participation. In contrast, Carly described feeling forced to educate others when she did not want to. Carly felt that when she was younger, because she had to strongly advocate for herself to participate in sports, that she also had to educate others and she did not want that responsibility. She just wanted to play her sport and be included in an activity. Carly goes on to say,

We're constantly having to educate and teach everything that we need done for us and it would be like, "do you have any ideas on how to adapt this?" It's like, "I don't know".
Why don't you do some research? Educate yourself?

Carly had some animosity towards feeling like she had to always educate others especially from a young age about disability and how she could be accommodated in order to participate inclusively in mainstream sports environments.

On the other hand, other participants such as Charlie wanted to use their sports participation as a platform to advocate not only for him or herself but to raise awareness and educate others about disability. Additionally, Kate said she knew that she had changed how even her family perceived people with disabilities because, "...[they] have commented after tournaments and stuff... you bang into each other so hard that people have found a new respect for people with disabilities, I feel like, because they're like, 'Holy crap, How did you just do that?'" Kate felt she educated her friends and family through showing them how she played sports. Similarly, Erin said about how she felt others perceived her because she uses a powerchair that,

...they say, “oh, look at me, I have a disability. I’m different” In my head, that’s the last thing you should be doing. From the sports perspective, that’s where I can really help because I can say, “Hey, yes, I’m in this wheelchair, but that’s not the first think you’re gonna notice once you hear what I’ve been able to do.

Erin as well as many other participants spoke about educating others about disability that it was something they took pride in even though a few other participants felt burdened by the necessity and obligation to educate others about disability when it was dependent on enabling participation.

Athletic Identity. No generalizable consensus was determined on preferred athletic identity for sports participation for participants with disabilities. While some participants had firm belief systems as to which identity they felt connected with many participants had changing terminology or expressed a wide range of rationale for whether they felt they were an athlete with a disability, athlete, or not an athlete. Generally, these associations seemed to depend upon the lived sports experience that was unique to each individual as well as the level of competitiveness or recreation related to sports participation, and the individual’s personal identity.

Athlete with Disability/Disabled Athlete. Jane whom, was diagnosed with her progressive disability towards the end of high school considered herself an athlete prior to knowing she had a disability, but then once she knew about her physical condition, she viewed herself as an athlete with a disability. Jane offered an interesting perspective because she went from a highly competitive mainstream sports environment to a more recreational sports environment knowing

she had a disability and her athlete identity stayed intact regardless of competitive level or disability.

While Charlie has a very different lived experience he also claims the identity of an athlete with a disability. Charlie said,

Back when I was in high school, I said I was a disabled athlete... And then as I've had more experience and I've raced in Paralympics and everything, I feel very strong about identifying myself as an athlete with a disability. And obviously, person first language is super important and everything.

Clearly based on Charlie's sports experiences he feels strongly that he is both an athlete and individual with a disability and that it is important to include both pieces into his sports identity. Charlie specifically, uses the term athlete with a disability because he feels it is important for others to know that one can be an athlete and have a disability.

Athlete. Kate perceived herself as an athlete when asked stating, "athlete, just simply athlete". She chose this identity over others, "Because when I'm with people in the disability community, it's almost like the disability goes away. I feel like you don't even register the disability at all, and it's like you're on the same level." Interestingly, Chelsea who is an elite sports participant said that she felt she was an athlete but that she does have a disability. She clarified that she is never a "disabled athlete" but she is an athlete who happens to have a disability. This is reflective of her highly competitive nature and desire to perform at a highly elite level for her sport. This perspective is reiterated by Chelsea sharing that she and several of her athlete friends

got tattoos and her friends chose to get the Paralympic rings but she chose to get the Olympic rings instead. Another participant took time to deeply reflect upon her lifetime experiences as a youth, adolescent, and now adult in sport and said about her sports identity,

when I first started, I think as my skill level changed and my motivations for participating in sports changed, I think that my identity changed as well, and so definitely when I started out, I didn't consider myself an athlete at all; I was just a kid, having fun, going to team practice and playing around a little bit, and then I think that grew. When I was in college, I think I would have identified very firmly as an athlete with a disability, but I think that's even changed a little bit now, and especially through – the marathons have been super, super inclusive of wheelchair athletes, and I feel that that distinction of athlete versus athlete with a disability is less necessary, and it's not something that I grasp onto as firmly. I just think that I'm an athlete.

Mandy goes on to say that as her sports environment has changed her perspectives on her identity in those environments have changed as well. When she participated in wheelchair basketball she felt like an athlete with a disability because she played a sport for those with disabilities. However, she now focuses on track and marathons and she competes with able-bodied athletes and her definitions and feelings have changed because she when she does marathons now she is in an elite grouping of athletes with and without disabilities. Lastly, Chelsea said,

...seeing this picture brings back the memories and the feelings that I had when I first walked out. And like I said previously, this was the first time I'd ever seen that many

people with physical disabilities before. And it really, it didn't feel-this was the first time I felt like I was a competitive athlete, and not an athlete with a disability.

These final quotes emphasize the perspective of the athlete identity regardless of disability and what that means to each participant interviewed.

Not an Athlete. When asked, Lindsay considered herself not an athlete because she felt that to be an athlete one needed to have physical strength and a competitive spirit. Lindsay explained that due to her role on her crew team, while she was competitive that she did not physically contribute to the team because of her role and disability so she didn't actually consider herself to be an athlete even though she was on a varsity mainstream sports team. Carly shared that she also did not consider herself an athlete she said,

I more consider myself a disabled person that did some adaptive recreation stuff and was better for it. I jokingly use the term athlete, but I don't really see myself that way. I more see myself as a participant in adaptive rec.

Kate participated in mostly a disability sports environment but did not take sports seriously in a competitive manner. While Kate enjoyed participating in sports it was more about the socialization and fun for her than it was about being competitive.

CHAPTER 5 Conclusion: The Cool Down

Just play. Have fun. Enjoy the game. (Jordan, as cited in, Brainy Quotes, 2001-2018).

Overall the premise of this study was to explore the experiences of adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities in different sports environments such as mainstream and disability sport. Interestingly, a third environment of integrated disability sport strongly emerged through discussion with the majority of participants and was thus included as it is relevant and pertinent to the scope of this study. Overall, there was a uniqueness of each individual's narrative pertaining to sports even with saturation of data being reached. Themes emerged in regards to specific environment as hypothesized but also in relation to specific features such as perception of disability, meaningful support systems, and socialization, which were not necessarily directly relate to the sport environment.

In general, participants expressed a strong opinion on which environment they felt was a best fit for him or herself, but overwhelmingly agreed that it was important for youth with physical disabilities to try out multiple sports environments before determining which one was the right fit for him or herself. Similarly, an important environment characteristic for finding an appropriate sports environment was relative to the desired level of competition or recreation. Individuals that strived to be competitive tended to find disability sport to be the most appropriate fit environment, whereas, individuals focusing more on fun or socialization were amiable to mainstream sports environments. However, the caveat to mainstream sports environments in general and especially for the purpose of physical education, were that there was a lack of appropriate accommodations provided to participants to encourage a sense of true integration, which in turn created problems of

not feeling included both socially and physically in the environment. This was largely attributed to a lack of understanding of disability overall, not listening to those with disabilities about his or her needs or expecting youth to know exactly what their needs were already, and an overarching lack of knowledge on how to effectively accommodate the needs of those with disabilities into a mainstream sports environment.

Similarities between participants' sports experiences stemmed from who supported their sports involvement. The common supports for participants included family (parents) and coaches. Both these support units played pivotal roles in negating the typical barriers to sports participation for those with disabilities. The literature largely shows that barriers such as time, transportation, cost, and knowledge are difficult to navigate when encouraging participation in sports (McLoughlin, Weisman Fecske, Castaneda, Gwin, & Graber, 2017) and these barriers were often discussed but through having strong support systems participants within this study were able to participate in many sports opportunities. Another important component of the sports environment was the aspect of friendships, community, and networking. Participation in sport, regardless if in an individual or team sport, was essentially described as a social process. Across mainstream, disability, and integrated disability sports participants formed strong bonds of friendships, many lasting beyond the timeframe of sports participation. These relationships fostered a strong sense of community founded in sport, which extended into each participant's lives fundamentally. To expand, these built communities and networks created and impacted life-long friendships, changing identities, occupational paths, educational choices, and continued self and disability community advocacy.

The meaning of the sport experience was significant in each participant's life. In each sports environment an individual's perception of disability was explored and often unique from

other participants. For example, swimming for participants was often an activity which impacted sense of disability. Some participants described feeling like they were free or did not have a disability when in the water, whereas, others had a prevalent disability identity and never separated him or herself from having a disability regardless of the environment, sport, or activity. Regardless of environment each participant chose to share special moments which expressed strong positive and negative emotions towards sports participation. Largely moments of high achievement, pride, accomplishment, and friendship were discussed and exemplified through the photovoice component of this study.

While not unexpected, an emergent theme of advocacy and education also emerged. Participants either felt obligated, frustrated, or committed to advocating from him or herself as well as educating others about people with disabilities while participating in their sports environments. The perspective on advocating for self and educating others was varied but seemed potentially connected to sense of disability identity and in turn athlete identity. There was no conclusive census on an athletic identity. Participants had associated as being an athlete with a disability/disabled athlete, athlete, or not an athlete. While level of competitiveness versus being a more recreational sports participant impacted this decision, perception of disability and specific disability identity were also a contributing factor to this discussed identity. The themes that emerged were complimentary to the theories framing this study. Aspects related to SI and SCT were relevant to the emergent thematic development.

Theoretical Implications

The themes of environmental consideration specifically related to mainstream sport, integrated disability sport, and disability sport, competition versus recreation, support of sport participation, socialization in sport, the meaning of sport experience, advocacy through sport, and athlete identity all were extremely relevant and applicable to the applied theoretical frame works of SI and SCT. Both of these theories added to the understanding and interpretations of the narratives shared from the nine participants' experiences. These theoretical frameworks were collaboratively complimentary and organically integrated into the emergent themes.

Symbolic Interactionism (SI)

The emergent themes were representative of the interpretations of participants' experiences with peers, coaches, friends, family, teammates, and audience, which connects to SI as there is an emphasis on the importance of human interaction. These interactions are multidimensional between the individual and groups and the meaning derived from these interactions which is key to perceptions of each sports environment. When participants shared experiences involving building relationships with peers, teammates, friends, coaches, and family these are all integral to SI. These relationships often were positive and encouraged sports participation regardless of sports environment but seemed essential to facilitate the successful negotiation of potential participation barriers.

In contrast, not all of these human interactions were positive. Some participants described coaches that were not supportive or especially in the mainstream environment were unaware on how to promote integration or inclusion. This was also evident in integrated disability sports environments when coaches were not knowledgeable in being able to provide accommodations for

the various needs of each participant with differing disabilities in the sports environment. For disability sport, in general, coaching relationships were very positive; however, finding knowledgeable coaches specific to disability sport was challenging. The disability sport coaches at the recreational and grassroots level while not always knowledgeable were, however, willing and eager to learn. One standout negative coaching experience involved a particular participant's coach allowing incorrect swimming form due to a focus on winning and not participant well-being, which may have actually exacerbated, her at the time, unknown physical disability and caused physical harm.

Other adverse peer interactions included when some participants had a different desired level of competitiveness than his or her peers. This created tension and a lack of cohesiveness within the sports environment. The theme of level of competition largely was relevant to peer engagement. When peers had the same understanding of desired level of sports performance or similar motivations such as winning and/or fun the relationships were more positively described. Additionally, the sense of community felt by many participants implicated a strong human interaction between self and others. Being a part of the sports community, and for some the disability community, allowed for a sense of belonging and offered a complex perspective on the interpretation of disability, sport, and self.

Next, each participant's relationship within one's sense of self and identity was something that provided diversity between participants. Based on the interactions with others a certain level of reflection occurred, which impacted how participants viewed him or herself. One's relationship with self cannot be ignored when discussions touched on identity and disability interpretation. Each attribute that was a prevalent characteristic of each participant impacted his or her lived experience in the sports environment. Certain characteristics such as gender, geographic location,

desired level of competition, age, disability, and lived experience were all relevant factors that impacted sense of identity in the sports environment. This topic involved a fluid concept, which is supported through SI as our interactions change our perception of self, which may change as well. For example, Charlie spoke about how his understanding of disability and athletic identity had changed over time and may continue to change.

Further, the environments discussed, mainstream, disability, and integrated disability sport, provided unique and similar experiences between participants. For example, the first theme of environment considerations specifically focused on each sports environment in terms of whom the environment was meant for such as in disability sport where the actual sport is meant for those with disabilities. For mainstream sport modifications were necessary to ensure full inclusion in sport but were often not executed appropriately. Thus, the sports environment and its features impacted the experience for each participant. To expand, when the sport environment promoted positive experiences the participant felt positive outcomes, but when an environment was not supportive the participant had a negative experience. Interestingly, Chelsea had a negative disability sports experience due to peer interactions, but upon reflection years later appreciated the experience so time and growth seems to also be an important contributing factor to understanding one's lived experience. This fits well within the scope of a social constructivist and interpretivist paradigm in that she built her social world and changed the meaning of it after having time to reflect upon her experience, as nothing actually changed about her experience, but her interpretation of the experience changed.

Next, each environment offered a range of specific sports equipment, norms, and spectators. Most participants did not have strong emotions specific to sports equipment such as basketball wheelchairs, racing chairs, skiing chairs to name a few, but all had to learn about these

essential pieces of sports equipment which did impact their involvement in sports. Each participant required either accommodations and/or personalized sports equipment in order to participate in any sports environment. Erin spoke about having guides in order to participate in skiing and in a sense her guide was a necessary piece of equipment to enable participation. This guide impacted her experience in that, when the guide listened to her needs she had a better experience, versus when guides tried to dictate her needs to her, and she felt marginalized and that her sports performance suffered. Additionally, this participant as well, as Carly, spoke about a disability hierarchy where individuals who used powerchairs were not as valued as those who utilized manual chairs. Thus, a powerchair represented a different meaning than a manual chair in sport and in life. Again, the connection between SI and the data is clear within the multiple topics, which have emerged as a result of this study. SI is extremely relevant and adds insight and meaning to the data analyses and interpretation of the findings.

Social Comparison Theory (SCT)

As noted earlier, SCT naturally infused itself into the emergent themes and integrated well with SI. To expand, SCT aims to examine the inherent drive of humans to compare themselves to others who are similar (Shay, Knapp, & Farmer, 2012). All participants, whether participating in a team or individual sport or mainstream, disability, or integrated disability sports environment spoke about his or her peers in comparison to self. Importantly, within the scope of disability sports many participants felt that they could be themselves because there was a certain understanding about disability since all participants had that shared experience. Although it needs to be noted, that Mary actually stated that she preferred to socialize with individuals without disabilities because it made her feel like she was not different, which correlates to her perceptive

on disability. Charlie also spoke about how he was initially uncomfortable participating in disability sports because he was not used to being around so many peers with disabilities. However, now that he is comfortable engaging in sports with peers with disabilities he no longer feels this way.

In contrast, for a mainstream environment, many participants felt they could not be competitive and the environment was not built with him or herself in mind so they felt isolated from fully participating with their peers. Some participants such as Carly, who was very supportive of inclusion, did not particularly enjoy participating in mainstream sports environments because she felt she could not participate like her peers. Another interesting comparison to peers was discussed by Chelsea who felt that her specific role changed based on if she was in a mainstream or disability sports environment. She noted that she was a “leader” in disability sports and a “clown” in mainstream sports because she felt she had to act differently based upon the environment and her peers she was participating with. To expand, Chelsea was able to be competitive in a disability sports environment so she felt she could take the lead, whereas, in a mainstream sport environment she could not participate at a highly competitive level so she felt instead she could be more clown-like and entertain her peers.

Chelsea again raised an important discussion towards SCT, in that when she transitioned from competitive mainstream sport to competitive disability sport she struggled to relate to her new peers. She shared that many of her disability sports peers were much older than her and had acquired their disabilities in a very different manner than herself, so she often felt lonely and isolated even though she likewise had a physical disability. This example raises the valid point that just because an individual with a disability is participating in a disability sports environment with peers who also have a disability, it does not mean that they will automatically be able to relate to

those peers. This poignant nuance relates to the concept of positive and negative development through peer comparisons. It is evident that even within the scope of a particular sports environment there can be positive or negative comparisons, thus no overarching generalizable conclusion can be made about a specific sports environment.

Another significant application of SCT to the data is that participants shared differing claimed identities and interpretations of what it meant to have a disability. These reflections were based on their lived experiences, which included participating in multiple sports environments with similar and dissimilar peers. This process of continuous self-evaluation and reflection is implicated in the SCT process and likewise accounts for the impact of peer interactions and the inevitable comparison between peers, among other factors that influence the sports experience. While it was not within the scope of this study, it could be a valuable consideration to examine in the future and consider that within SCT it is postulated that those who have lower self-esteem or an unsure self-concept compare him or herself to peers more. Self-esteem was not directly within the premise of this research topic and did not emerge as a theme or subtheme. Although, Jane did speak about her lacking water polo skills in comparison to her peers in a self-deprecating manner, but being that she felt she was still a valuable team member whose participation was typically appreciated and that she was playing water polo recreationally, she did not address any self-reflection concerns. Jane was also still adjusting to her newer diagnosis of Ehlers-Danos Syndrome and her progressively changing physical abilities in turn. Additionally, Carly also used humor as a means to describe her discomfort and poor sports performance when participating uncomfortably in mainstream sport given her more severe physical disability (Quadripligic CP) and lack of appropriate accommodations to do so.

Limitations

While rich narrative data, notes, and observations were cultivated and analyzed within the scope of this study there were limitations as well. This is an exploratory qualitative study, which means that it lacks external validity in terms of being generalizable to the larger population of adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities. Further, snowball sampling was utilized as well as purposive sampling as a means to recruit study participants. These types of sampling, while appropriate for the research design and aim of this study, do not offer the strength or lack of bias such as with random sampling. Also, the researcher did know some participants prior to the research study, but this is viewed as an asset as it strengthened the rapport between researcher and participant. This pre-existing relationship allowed for interviews to be personable and extremely informative, which are essential when aiming to collect a great depth of rich data.

It does need to be noted that due to technical issues, interview one for Jane was not recorded, however, copious notes and observations were made in order to still gather rich data from this initial interview. The second photo voice interview with this participant was recorded, transcribed, and coded as with the other interviews. All other first and second interviews with each participant were recorded, transcribed, and coded as intended.

Two qualitative researchers very familiar with working with those with disabilities and knowledgeable about mainstream and disability sports coded interviews in order to reduce potential inter-rater bias. Transcriptions were reviewed multiple times individually and in comparison, to each other. Both researchers agreed upon the final emergent themes and subthemes after verbal and written discussions. Further, after the first interview follow up questions were addressed in order to clarify or add depth to the initial interview during the second scheduled photovoice interview. Due to the semi-structured format of both interviews, participants were able

to lead the focused narrative based on his or her experiences and perspectives on sports environments.

Future Implications

This research has several implications for both future research and practice. In terms of research, this is an underrepresented area that needs more empirical data to learn about how specific sports environments impact participation with physical disabilities. Gaining these insights into the sports experience for adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities opens the narrative to create a dialogue of enhancing the knowledge base about sports participation for this particular population, which is often marginalized or left out of the conversation. Further, the practical implications for the purpose of practice, specifically for recreation therapy is to connect the empirical evidence through evidence based practice to actual practice. Thus, it is imperative to continue to grow the research line on this topic and in turn translate this to practice to develop more standardization of practice in the sports environment for adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is recommended that more research continue to develop to focus more specifically on the unique attributes of each sports environment. This exploratory study offers insights into the complexities of the experiences of adolescents and young adults within mainstream, disability, and integrated disability sports environments. Specifically, learning more about how a particular type of physical disability impacts these experiences would be beneficial. For the purpose of this study all participants needed to have a physical impairment, however, there were participants with a

wide range of acquired and congenital physical disabilities. These participant characteristics may have impacted experiences within the sports environment. However, it did add depth and widen the perspectives shared for this particular study, which was advantageous.

Further, it would be noteworthy to focus on athlete and disability identity. The results from this study indicated that many factors contribute to the interpretation of the meaning of disability in relation to identity but there was so much heterogeneity amongst the nine participants that this area is one that would need much deeper focus to provide more in depth insights on the complex sociological phenomenon. The semi-structured interview protocol solely focused on how an athlete and/or disability identity may have been developed or not through participation in various sports environments for adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities. This is definitely an area where more research could be completed in disability studies to enhance an understanding of how disability and athlete identities are formulated and how they change over time. This study did learn that many characteristics seem to impact this interpretation of identity but did not seek to go into a great deal of depth on this particular topic.

Next it is accepted that there are common barriers for individuals with disabilities to participate in leisure activities and sports. It is also essential as the literature develops to include the voices of those with disabilities directly in this conversation, which is why continuing to utilize qualitative or mixed methods research designs will be important to the growth of this line of research. Learning more about the specific experiences unique to each individual who has participated in each type of sports environment has added insight into each sports environment. It should be recommended to now focus on how to move this knowledge into practice as well as gathering even more empirical data on this phenomenon.

Lastly, it would be advantageous to review the results of this study and evaluate programming in mainstream, disability, and integrated disability sport environments to learn how to create the most accessible, knowledgeable, and accommodating programming for adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities. From this data much was gained in terms of common experiences found within each sports environment but connecting this to practice is where enhanced benefits of promoting sports involvement will be seen. Now is the time to continue to empirically develop a deeper understand of how individuals who have negotiated these barriers to participation have done so and to delve deeper and learn more about each unique sports environment to learn positives and negatives and in turn link this to practice.

Practical implications of findings

In terms of recommendations for practice it is important to connect empirical data such as through this study to enhance practice. As noted earlier, it is pivotal to bridge the gap between research and practice. Recreation therapy along with the other allied health fields are focusing on supporting practice in empirical evidence to justify practices and create more standardization of practice. Specific to this research, the results imply that recreation therapists should place a great deal of thought on the specific sports environment placements for each client he or she works with.

Based on the emergent themes, considerations that are impactful for an adolescent or young adult client with a physical disability, interested in participating in the modality of sport, would include trying different sports environments if the client has not yet done so, letting the client advocate for him or herself in terms of which environment he or she may be more comfortable in and learning why, and asking about the competitive drive of the client. All of these areas would be essential to be aware of, as well as being knowledgeable about the composition of participants

within current sports programming. An important factor impacting the experience across sports environments was who is participating in the sport with the individual as this will either positively or negatively impact socialization, sense of community, networking opportunities, identity development, interpretation of disability, and support systems.

Further, knowing who is coaching a sport and what his or her knowledge base is towards working with those with disabilities would also be significantly important. It seems especially at the grassroots disability sports environment that coaches may lack knowledge on the sport so his or her attitude is important. For the mainstream sport environment and the integrated disability sports environments it would be important to learn if the coach has knowledge on accommodations as well as his or her attitude towards those with disabilities. To expand, is the coach willing to listen to the needs of the individual and are they able to provide accommodations if and when needed that are appropriate for the client.

It would also be necessary to learn from a client what he or she is hoping to get out of the sports experience. Does the client want to excel in terms of sport performance or is having fun and socialization more of a priority? A recreation therapist would also need to understand if the client prefers engaging with peers with or without disabilities and think about the implications and reasoning for this. All of these considerations should be accounted for when determining which type of sports environment may be a best fit for a client. Of course, in an ideal situation a client would have the opportunity to participate in multiple sports environments, however, depending on the client's location, type of sport of interest, financial means, and support system having a choice of environment may not be possible. Thus, knowing this information would still provide insight into what to be aware of in order to create a positive sports environment for the participant in relation to his or her goals and objectives.

Drafted Practice Guidelines

Based upon the emergent themes and subthemes a drafted best practices protocol was constructed. This protocol represents the perspectives of the lived experiences of all participants within the scope of this study. The first part of the protocol focuses on specific features of each sports environment. Mainstream, disability, and integrated disability sports environments are separately addressed. This section is meant to be useful for a recreation therapist when thinking about the specific attributes assigned to each particular sports environment. These specific attributes as well as the individual client should inform sports environment decisions and collaboratively made goals. Mainstream sports include recreational level of competition, participation typically with peers without disabilities, coach may or may not have knowledge of appropriate accommodations, client may need to educate coach and peers about disabilities, sense of friendship and community, and opportunity to build special sports-based moments. The features specific to disability sport include recreational or competitive level of competition, participation with peers with physical disabilities, coaches at the grassroots level may not know about disability sport thus the client may have a collaborative learning experience, peers may have differing disability experiences which may or may not be relatable to the client, possibility of a claim to the disability community and networking opportunities, and the opportunity to build special sports-based moments. Lastly, integrated disability sports specific features indicated are recreational level of competition, participation with peers. With various types of disabilities, coach may or may not know how to accommodate a wide range of disabilities at one time, client may need to advocate for specific accommodations, develop diverse friendships, and the opportunity to build special sport-based moments. As evident these environment specific attributes are unique and similar. All

features were developed from the emergent themes and subthemes based on participant experiences.

Thus, a recreation therapist could apply this information by thinking of what the client needs, wants, interests, and assessments are in conjunction to knowing these specific environmental attributes. To expand, if a client has a congenital disability but has had limited interactions with like peers a disability sports environment may be preferable. Additionally, if an individual has an acquired or progressive disability being able to participate in sports with those with similar experiences may provide an upward social comparison and/or positive role model. In contrast, a client with a physical disability may prefer to participate in sports and social engagements with those without disabilities and then the rationale for this should be further examined. For example, if an individual has had limited exposure to those with disabilities and is uncomfortable engaging with others with disabilities, then encouraging a disability sports environment could be something that is recommended. On the other hand, if the adolescent/young adult with a physical disability prefers to engage with peers without disabilities, being able to participate in mainstream sport may be a more appropriate fit dependent upon the clients' specific goals. Overall the drafted guide offers insights into best practices while still allowing for individualized client attributes, needs, goals, and outcomes to be addressed. The purpose of this protocol is to provide a recreation therapist with a means to provide informed insights into the specific sports environment in order to enable best practice recommendations for clients while allowing for personal and realistic factors in terms of sports environment.

Also included are some general considerations for recreation therapists to consider when working with adolescent and adult clients with physical disabilities. These considerations include learning specific client needs and wants, specific client goals and objectives both towards

performance and psychosocial domains. Other considerations included involve if the client has no sports experience to provide the opportunity to try multiple environments so that clients can form his or her own unique opinions and experiences about environment preferences. The last consideration is being aware of the client's sports agenda. To expand, does the client want to be considered an athlete, want to be considered an athlete with a disability or disabled athlete, or does the client not care about being an athlete and just wants to have fun or participate recreationally.

One of the foundations of the field of recreation therapy practice is the specific recreation therapy process. This process includes assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation and is referred to as the APIE process (Long, 2008). Thus, the final component of the protocol applies this process to the emergent themes resulting from this research. Step one is assessing the client. Important considerations when assessing a client should include his or her sports interests, type of disability, perception of disability, peer participation preferences, desired level of competition, and personal performance and psychosocial goals and objectives. Step two is planning with your client. Note the intentional use of the word "with" because this should be a collaborative and empowering process for the client. The practical considerations during the planning process need to include availability of desired sports programs and environments, costs, needed equipment for participation, available support systems to the client, coaching styles and attitudes, transportation options, and expected level of competition of the team or program. Step three, implementation touches on topics to check-in about with clients during participation. Topics listed are coaching relationships, sense of community, networking, findings special sports-based moments learning to advocate for yourself, client accommodation needs being met, and the social connections or friendships being developed. The last step, step four or evaluation discusses final thoughts that should be considered in relation to the sports environment. These final thoughts include asking the

client if the environment was appropriate, was the level of competition appropriate, how was the coaching relationship, did the client have a support system to assist in negotiating potential barriers to participation, were friendships developed, was a sense of community cultivated, were special sports related moments made through participation, and did the client advocate for his or herself when needed. These questions are meant to learn more about the client's experiences and answers may impact future sport environment suggestions for the client.

To expand, in application this second protocol section would align with the already being utilized APIE process for a recreation therapist. A recreation therapist would follow their typical assessment practices but also consider specific sports focused information that would be relevant to inform their decision about the appropriate sports environment. It is always necessary for a recreation therapist to be aware of community and program availability as well as other practical considerations thus sports focused considerations are described that may impact the options of sports environment available for a client. While a client is participating in a sports environment it will be imperative to continue to be aware of how participation is being experienced. Maintaining a focus on the designated goals and objectives is essential during participation in order to next evaluate this progress. Learning about the areas that strongly impact participation experience within the sports environment will directly impact outcomes. The final step of evaluation provides questions to consider when determining progress made towards a current goal and potential future goals. These questions address specific sport environment features, which will demonstrate insights in to how the chosen sports environment has assisted with or inhibited client goals, which will be beneficial if the client chooses to continue sport participation.

Overall, this drafted protocol titled, Recreation Therapy Best Practices: Supporting Appropriate Sports Environments for Adolescents and Young Adults with Physical Disabilities is

meant to represent the important themes, which emerged based on lived experiences of the targeted population. These suggested considerations may be directly applied to practice hence connecting research to practice and furthering evidence based practices for the field of recreation therapy. This protocol currently, represents the collaborative voices and lived experiences of participants from the current study. However, because the research beneath these recommendations is not generalizable due to the qualitative nature of the methodologies employed within the scope of this study more revisions of this protocol will need to be made.

Future Research. In accordance with Hood (2001), the next steps in this drafted protocol will include conducting a Delphi study in order construct a sound usable protocol for practice. To explain, Hood (2001), cites that experts in the field need to be consulted in order to have a comprehensive protocol and this has not been done yet. Thus, a Delphi study would be an appropriate means to do so because it is, “a widely used and accepted method for achieving convergence of opinion concerning real-world knowledge solicited from experts within certain topic areas” (Hsu & Sandford, 2007, p.1). Further, this demonstrates that if a Delphi technique study is completed with regards to the results of this protocol, with certified therapeutic recreation specialists who are experts in working with adolescent and young adult clients with physical disabilities with sports modalities, that it would be in line with the process described by Hood (2001). The invited experts will collaboratively work with the researcher in order to provide in depth insights into the constructed protocol based upon the emergent themes of this study and then appropriate edits will be made. The intent of this is to create a multistep conversation between adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities, experts in the field, and the literature in order to create an informed holistic representative protocol to be applied to practice. Overall,

through completing these multiple research processes a true collaboration of the voices of all stakeholders in the recreation therapy process will have informed the construction of this best practices protocol on sports environments (disability, mainstream, and integrated disability) for adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities.

Final Statements

In conclusion, sports environments are an important area to gain insights into in terms of practice for recreation therapists in order to enhance intended outcomes and individualized goal achievement for adolescents and young adults with physical disabilities participating in the modality of sport. The results of this study indicated that there are unique features to each sports environment, mainstream, integrated disability, and disability sports. Additionally, there are commonalities amongst these environments that are not specific to the individual sports environment but more to the individuals creating and participating within the environment. Connecting this research to practice will provide further insights as well as following up with additional lines of research to learn even more about sports environments for individuals with physical disabilities.

Autobiographical Reflections

Beginning this research process, I had planned on recruiting participants who had completed his or her sports experience in one specific sports environment. I thought I would have participants who had done primarily mainstream or disability sports. After the recruitment process began it became clear that for individuals with physical disabilities, especially those who had congenital disabilities or for those who had acquired their disabilities at a young age, that this was

not the typical process of sports involvement. While there was a trend for individuals to have experience in mainstream and then disability sports, all participants had done sports in multiple environments. Further, almost all participants shared about participating at least once in an integrated disability sports environment. Some participants shared this happened through physical education in school where all students with disabilities were put together. Other participants shared that they had participated in sports that were meant to be inclusive of anyone with any type of disability. Adjustments to this research study were made to adapt to the participants' experiences.

An assumption I had expected to prove was that individuals with disabilities may feel more comfortable participating in disability sport because they would be participating with peers with a similar lived experience. While this was true for many participants, depending on the participant's interpretation of what it meant to have a disability and his or her identity this was not always the case. To expand, it was interesting to learn that some participants were originally uncomfortable being around others with physical disabilities because they grew up in communities where they were the only person with a disability. Additionally, other participants shared that they felt more "normal" when socializing with peers without disabilities and that peers without disabilities could provide physical assistance when needed, which peers with similar physical disabilities may not be able to.

Another topic that I was aware of, but did not ask about due to the aim of this study, was a hierarchy within the disability community. This topic came up organically from the participants who used powerchairs in the study. I think this would be interesting to explore in the larger scope of the disability community, but is a sociological phenomenon that clearly has spread into the sports community. Additionally, having been a competitive and recreational athlete during my adolescent and young adult years, I was able to utilize my own experience to aid in my

understanding of the narratives I collected. Due to the qualitative nature of this study it was appropriate to have this background and was beneficial to have a lived experience where I could relate to being both an elite and a recreational athlete similar to the participants interviewed. Further, having completed my Bachelor's degree at the University of Illinois also provided me with a unique lived experience relative to disability sport, disability on a college campus, and socializing with elite disability sports athletes. I firmly believe, that these experiences along with my academic background provided me with valuable insights into the participant's narratives and assisted in the dialogues constructed between myself and each participant.

Overall, I found this study to be expected and unexpected at times. I truly enjoyed my co-constructed dialogue with each research participant and find each individual contributed valuable experience to this study. This study reinforces my strong belief in the value of qualitative inquiry. While I am aware of the limitations of qualitative inquiry, the opportunity to provide voice and representation to a marginalized population that is often left out of the conversation is something that as a researcher I am proud to promote. I truly feel the results of this project can continue to contribute to both the empirical data and field of recreation therapy. As a CTRS, an academic, an advocate, an ally, and an individual with a disability, I strongly believe we must strive to build a stronger connection from research to practice and I hope to do this in order to enhance quality of life for individuals with disabilities as well as strengthen the quality of services provided by recreation therapists.

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APPENDIX

Recreation Therapy Best Practices: Supporting Appropriate Sports Environments for Adolescents and Young Adults with Physical Disabilities

Specific Features of Sports Environments

Mainstream Sports

- Recreational level of competition
- Participation typically with peers without disabilities
- Coach may or may not have knowledge of appropriate accommodations
- Client may need to educate coach & peers about disabilities
- Sense of friendship/community
- Opportunity to build special sports-based moments

Disability (Adapted) Sports

- Recreational or competitive level of competition
- Participation with peers with physical disabilities
- Coaches at the grassroots level may not know about disability sport and may have a collaborative learning experience
- Peers may have differing disability experiences which may or may not be relatable to client
- Possibility of claim to disability community & networking opportunities
- Opportunity to build special sports-based moments

Integrated Disability Sports

- Recreational level of competition
- Participation with peers with various types of disabilities
- Coach may or may not know how to accommodate a wide range of disabilities at one time
- Client may need to advocate for specific accommodations
- Develop diverse friendships
- Opportunity to build special sports-based moments

General Considerations

- Specific client needs/wants
- Specific client goals & objectives towards performance & psychosocial domains
- If client has no sports experience, trying it all mentality should be suggested at first
- Client sports agenda
 - Wants to be considered an athlete
 - Wants to be considered an athlete with a disability/disabled athlete
 - Does not care about being an athlete or not

Assessment, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation (APIE) Process in Deciding Appropriate Sports Environment

Step 1: Assess your client

Important client considerations

- Sports interests
- Type of disability
- Perception of disability
- Peer preferences (with or without disability)
- Desired level of competition
- Personal performance & psychosocial goals & objectives

Step 2: Planning with your client

Practical Considerations

- Availability of desired sports programs/environments
- Cost
- Needed equipment for participation
- Available support systems
- Coaching style/attitudes
- Transportation options
- Expected level of competition of team/program

Step 3: Implementation

Topics to check-in about with clients during participation

- Coaching/instructor relationship
- Sense of community
- Networking
- Finding special sports-based moments
- Learning to advocate for self
- Accommodations needs being met
- Social connections/friendships

Step 4: Evaluation

Final thoughts to consider in relation to sports environment

- Was the environment appropriate?
- Was the level of competition appropriate?
- How was the coaching/instructor relationship?
- Did the client have a support system to assist in negotiating potential barriers to cost, transportation, & provide psychosocial support?
- Were friendships developed?
- Was a sense of community cultivated?
- Were special sports related moments made through participation?
- Did self-advocacy occur?