

‘Elite athlete to disabled athlete to adaptive athlete.’

How coaches and teachers can help support the road to recovery.

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This paper will examine how an athlete’s identity changed after a life changing accident, and how she moved from being an elite athlete, to being classified as a disabled athlete and her journey to be an adaptive athlete.

The paper is a case study over 7 years through an autobiographical lens using techniques suggested by Abrahão (2012) of reflections, narratives, visual methodologies of photographs and videos. These are all used to help understand the impact of the change of athletic identity (Brewer, 1993). Photography in particular was used as it can capture feelings, emotions and moments throughout the years, as Anthamatten et al. (2013) proposed photography can inform research on behaviour from different perspectives.

Symes (2010) made us think about the question “Who am I?” within her discussion on athletic identity and this paper shows the conflict and the change in understanding the ‘who am I’ post-accident. The results from this paper suggests that changes in athletic identity are similar to the 5 stages of grief and loss, (denial, anger, depression, bargaining and acceptance) identified by Kubler-Ross and Kessler(2014).

As a teacher and coach, changes in behaviour linked to identity due to disability, injury, or long term illness are relatively under researched, but are important to know how to help support the road to recovery and understand their role. Therefore, it is proposed that this paper will inform learning and teaching in physical education and sports pedagogy in the ways that an athlete needs to be supported. It will analyse each of the stages experienced over the 7 years and offers a unique narrative of an athlete’s learner identity and how physical activity, and sport and the teachers and coaches within the physical activity and sport, can be used to help rebuild and redefine the athlete in a positive way.

References

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