Moving beyond 'models': Theorizing physical disability in sport

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Introduction, aims and purpose

The term 'disability' is a contested concept that has social, psychological, biological, historical and political dimensions. This is evident in the emergence of the interdisciplinary field of scholarship known as *'disability studies'*, which aims to provide a critical response to two historically dominant cultural understandings of disability; 1) a *moral perception* which determined that disability was as a punishment form God that is forgiven through divine intervention (e.g. Snyder & Mitchell, 2001) and 2) *a medical position* which evolved through the rationality of modernistic thinking and the fields of medicine (Goodley, 2011a). The latter, which has come to be known simply as the 'medical model', positions disability as a personal tragedy with impairment being framed as a biological abnormality that needs to be 'fixed' through curative intervention to return the individual to 'normality' (e.g. Oliver, 1996; Thomas, 1999).

Whilst individual medical and rehabilitative interventions have clear benefit to disabled people[1] and utility for disability sport practices such as classification, coach education and developing coaching strategies designed to support high performance (Author, date), the medical model has become a totalitizing hegemonic device, pathologizing disabled people's lives and restricting material, perceptual and structural change (e.g. Oliver, 1990; Barnes, 2020). Consequently, a number of theoretically and

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[1] In the United Kingdom (UK), under the social model, the preferred term is 'disabled people' as this is seen to reflect that disability is a social product rather than an individual characteristic. Internationally, and under the minority model of disability, 'people with disabilities' is used as the preferred term because it highlights personhood rather than disability and recognises diversity beyond the narrow definitions of labour and consumption. As UK scholars, we are using the term that is culturally appropriate in UK settings and the term that participants refer to themselves in our research projects with them.

politically informed conceptual frameworks, each of which with their own unique disciplinary, cultural, geographical and temporal context termed as 'models' have been proposed to capture and transform how disability can be understood. Central in disability studies discourse were the emergence of the 'social' and 'minority' models which offered foundational opposition to the medical model by repositioning disability as a product of social, cultural and environmental dynamics. Since then, a number of further models have been presented that aim to progress how we understand disability.

Conceptualizing disability through a 'models approach', discussed in more detail below, is important in contextualizing the historical conditions in which disability has been understood and categorized. Recently however, scholars have sought to extend conceptualizations of the complex production and experience of disability through engaging with social theory. As Moola and Norman (2012) distinguish, in spite of the potential of these theoretical explorations to contribute to our understanding of the experiences of disabled athletes and reveal the inequality present in disability sport, there has been a relative failure of disability studies and sport sociology to marry, resulting in the "sociological understanding of the sporting lives of disabled athletes [being] beyond our intellectual grasp" (p.285). As a consequence of these academic disciplines progressing in isolation of one another medicalizing and individualizing ideologies are often reinforced in disability sport research and the social, cultural and structural barriers that constrain and shape the lives of disabled athletes left inadequately critiqued.

Since Moola and Norman's (2012) call to broaden the conceptual landscape of disability sport research, theoretically informed empirical investigations *with* disabled athletes have begun to emerge in the fields of sports sociology (e.g. Author, date; Apelmo, 2018; Powis, 2018a; 2018b; 2020), sports psychology (e.g. Smith, Bundon & Best, 2016), sports coaching (Author, date), physical education (e.g. Fitzgerald, 2018; van Amsterdam, Knoppers & Jongmans, 2012) and physical activity and rehabilitation (e.g. Richardson, Smith & Papathomas, 2017a, 2017b; Author, date). This body of research highlights the complexity and heterogeneity of conceptualizing disability whilst demonstrating a commitment to expanding our "repertoire for thinking and understanding disability" (Smith & Bundon, 2018, p. 30).

In spite of these contributions however, there remains a relative lack of theoretically informed empirical sociological research in disability sport.

Given the above, the aim of this paper is to discuss how sociologists of sport can more adequately and imaginatively illuminate the social, cultural and structural dimensions of oppression in disability sport *beyond* a models approach by engaging with social theory from disability studies. Indeed, as Smith and Perrier (2014, p. 95) assert, as researchers of disability, it is our "moral imperative" to productively engage in theories from alternative disciplines in order to advance our understanding. In order to do this, firstly, we provide an overview of the key models of disability which have been richly debated in disability studies. Subsequently, we demonstrate the value of moving beyond these models, which for some, has coincided with a disciplinary shift to the emergence of what is more adequately distinguished as *critical disability studies* (CDS)[2]. In doing so, we outline both theoretical architecture that has been used effectively in sociology of sport research, and theories which to date have been scarcely employed in order to illustrate their potential strength and utility. Whilst there are a number of theories available to draw upon, we focus our analysis in this paper on sociological (Bourdieu, Foucault, Bauman), aesthetic, cyborg and new materialist approaches which we have used in either used in our own empirical research with disabled athletes or we believe offer particularly fruitful avenues of exploration.

Conceptualizing disability through a 'models' approach

At the heart of the transformative movement of disability studies was the evolution of the 'social' and 'minority' models. With its roots in political activism, the 'social model' - established by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1976 - sought to reframe impairment as biological and disability as a social construction. Emphasis was placed upon material and structural *barriers* disabled people encountered and impairment situated as only salient in specific settings (e.g. Oliver, 1992; Barnes & Mercer, 2003). Informed by Gramscian ideas of counter hegemony and neo-Marxist critiques of capitalism, the social model was, and remains, instrumental in

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[2] Other scholars argue that the social model at the heart of disability studies discourse is grounded in Gramscian and neo-Marxist understandings of the world (see discussion below) and could therefore not be more critical in illuminating oppression and alienation that disabled people experience and promoting social change

contesting the "systemic removal of disabled people from mainstream economic and social life" (Barnes, 2020, p.15). The importance of the social model is evident in disability sport research in which the need for access to facilities, enhancing information about opportunities, and developing knowledgeable and supportive workforce to deliver social inclusion agendas are highlighted (e.g. Author, date; Hammond, Jeanes & Penney, 2019).

At about the same time, and heavily influenced by the American black civil rights movement and gay, lesbian and trans political climates, the 'minority model' was developed which aimed to "give life" (Mitchell & Snyder, 2020: 45) to the positioning of disability in the environment through elucidating shared marginalized experiences of disabled people with other racial, ethnic and minoritized groups (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001; Goodley, 2010). Combining neo-Marxist capitalist critique with racial theory, diverse approaches are taken to challenge the cultural embeddedness of '*ableism*'; the social bias against those people with bodies not considered normal and discrimination in favour of the able-bodied norm (Campbell, 2009). In doing so, the minority model opposed "the cutthroat" individuality and achievement of dominant North American and Canadian society (McRuer & Wilkerson, 2003: 4) through offering diverse understandings of the social and cultural constructions of disability.

Whilst we recognize that the social model remains foundational as the 'big idea' (Hasler, 1993) in challenging adverse medico-tragedy perceptions, politicizing disability through addressing structural inequality, and providing a powerful set of tools for disability advocacy and ethical research, as an academic debate, it has been subjected to a number of critiques. These include: i) homogenizing the forms of oppression disabled people encounter; ii) ignoring the embodied, emotive, psychological dynamics of experience and not accounting for the experiences of disability enmeshed with other socially differentiating and intersecting identities such as gender, race, sexuality and class; and iii) creating idealistic assumptions that social and environmental change is possible and will positively impact all disabled people's lives (e.g. Shakespeare, 2006; 2014; Thomas, 2002, 2007).

In response to these criticisms, a number of alternative models have been presented which aim to progress the social model by more adequately accounting for disability experience. For example, a 'social relational model' (SRM) has been advocated that contends that disabled people's realities are shaped by impairment *and* the effects of disabling and discriminatory conditions that impede their function, everyday activities and social participation (Thomas, 2007; 2012; Smith & Perrier, 2014; Smith & Bundon, 2017; 2018). This model extends our understanding of '*disablism*'[3], and in particular psycho-emotional disablism, by recognising the biological, socially constructed and culturally fashioned experience of the impaired body, and accordingly, is beginning to be well applied in research in sporting contexts (e.g. Author, date; Kerr & Howe, 2017).

Also building on the social model in recognizing that disability is the outcome of social processes and with a focus on civil rights that acquiesce with the minority model, a 'human rights model' to understanding and explaining disability has been inaugurated. Grounded in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities (UNCRPD, United Nations, 2006), the first legally binding convention to establish the rights of disabled people to access *all* areas of citizenship, this model advocates access to sporting opportunities as a basic human right (Misener & Darcy 2014; Smith & Bundon, 2018). Thus, inequalities in disability sport are challenged through arguing for political, social and cultural change, for example by exploring the marginalization of people with intellectual disability in sporting contexts (Darcy & Dowse, 2013) or addressing the use of legal precedents by disability sport advocates to advance disability sport practices (Bundon & Clarke, 2015)[4].

Constructed through media discourses of inspiration of disabled people and disabled athletes in particular, it is also worth acknowledging that a term known as the 'supercrip' has materialized. A

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[3] Under the minority model, social oppression faced by disabled people is referred to as 'ableism' to represent discrimination in favour of the able-bodied norm (Campbell, 2009) whereas under the lens of the social model, the term disablism is employed to denote discrimination against disabled people.

[4] In addition to the 'models' identified above, a number of alternative approaches, including Nordic models, have been forwarded globally with in depth discussion of their importance are offered elsewhere (see Goodley, 2010; 2017 for example).

representation rather than a theoretically derived conceptual model, the supercrip moniker implies that with hard work, courage and determination, individuals can overcome the 'tragedy' of their impairment through demonstrating physical, sensorial or intellectual abilities beyond those that would be expected of a disabled person thereby succeeding against the odds and living a 'normal' life (e.g. Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Howe, 2011; Silva & Howe, 2012). Although moving for the ablebodied majority as a form of 'inspiration porn' (Grue, 2016), the supercrip reproduces common medico-tragedy understandings of disability by promoting human interest story (i.e. pity) over athletic achievement which is belittled and trivialized (Peers, 2009) and feeds the "illusion that disabled people's lives can be controlled by human agency" (Silva & Howe, 2012, p. 190). Whilst the models identified above make important conceptual contributions to disability sport research, they should not be the only approaches considered. The potential of an array of theory is being increasingly debated in disability studies, an eclecticism that is central in what *some* scholars recognize as a disciplinary shift towards '*critical*' disability studies (CDS).

Moving beyond 'models': Engaging with 'critical' disability studies (CDS)

As a discipline, disability studies has not been without criticism. This includes a failure to duly address the gendered (e.g. Morris 1989; Thomas, 1999) and intersectional nature of disability (Goodley, 2014) and an over reliance on a models approach which has been criticized as being reductionist in emphasizing the economic, material or relational production of disability (e.g. Roulstone *et al.* 2020). For some scholars therefore, in recent times, there has been a disciplinary movement in which the field should more adequately be labelled as critical disability studies (CDS). Borrowing from fields of sociology, feminism, gender studies, queer theory, critical psychology, cultural studies, psychoanalysis and education, CDS seeks to progress understandings of disability in ways that acknowledge the lived, psychological, emotional and corporeality of experience and the material, social, cultural and structural barriers encountered by disabled people (e.g. Goodley, 2014; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2015; Smith & Bundon, 2018). As Shildrick (2020) summarizes:

…the powerful emergence of what has come to be called critical disability studies (CDS) has added new force to the theoretical impetus already at the heart of the social model, taking it in innovative directions that challenge not only existing *doxa* about the nature of disability, but questions of embodiment, identity and agency as they affect all living beings. (p. 32; italics in original)

According to Smith and Perrier (2014, p. 97) the key characteristics of CDS include: i) a welcoming of multiple academic disciplines; ii) challenging 'dogmatic' theoretical approaches through harnessing eclecticism and intellectual imagination; iii) emphasising community, social change and well-being; iv) moving beyond thinking about disabled people to engaging with disabled people; v) a shift in theorising beyond a models approach; and vi) explorations of disabled peoples experiences that encompass culture, the body, impairment and narrative. CDS, therefore, is not bound by particular methods or academic disciplines; rather it is geared towards social criticism and emancipation (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Echoing in the traditions of critical theory, it speaks truth to power, exposes injustice and values multivocal perspectives, including recognition of the intersection of disability alongside and in conjunction with other politicized dimensions of identity such as gender, sexuality, race, and class. Having now provided an overview of a models approach to understanding disability, we now explore how selected theoretical thinking from CDS can progress sociologically informed disability sport research.

Sociological Approaches

In spite of the powerful deconstructive lenses that key sociological thinkers Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Zygmunt Bauman offer, their work remains relatively under-developed in illuminating the lives of disabled athletes. Accordingly, central features of their key theories and how they can develop critical understandings of disability sport are explored below.

Pierre Bourdieu: Bodies of Distinction

Bourdieu (1984) positioned sport as a field of social significance, and one that refracts issues of class, power and the representation of body practices. Comprising a powerful range of explanatory concepts such as habitus, field and capital, alongside a comprehensive array of secondary concepts such as doxa, symbolic violence and misrecognition, Bourdieu offers a theoretical language to deconstruct the mechanisms and relations of domination and reproduction that constitute disability. Whilst it is not possible here to fully explicate Bourdieu's conceptual framework[5], we focus here on the concepts of field, habitus, and capital.

Bourdieu's concept of *field* is an incisive analytical device for understanding and differentiating the social spaces which make up society. Fields are social spaces that are defined as a "network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.97). Each field has an intrinsic logic of practice - ruling principles that are often implicit, governing agents and their practices. Fields enter a doxic or 'taken-for-granted' mode when these principles are accepted by members of the field and unquestioned. Particularly important in disability research is the recognition that disabled people may simultaneously belong to a number of fields, including for instance sport and physical activity, medicine and health care, and education and social care that provide a shared system for the development of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977).

As a "socialised subjectivity" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.126), habitus provides a useful conceptual link between the medical model's agentic focus on the (impaired) body, and the constructionist focus on social structure emphasised by the social model. The utility of habitus is twofold; first it provides insight into the embodied dimension of disability - that is schemes of thought, affect, and dispositions - while locating this experience within a broader framework of social structure. Second, habitus provides insight into the principles of classification of division and vision (Bourdieu, 1984) that people draw on to understand disability (Edwards & Imrie, 2003). These principles produce social practice, allowing for the explanation of particular socially constructed systems and classifications that inscribe the

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[5] Excellent examples of the use of Bourdieu in theorising disability include Edwards and Imrie (2003), and in sport include Purdue and Howe (2012a, 2012b, 2015), Kitchin and Howe (2014), and Fitzgerald and Kirk (2009).

disabled body with social values according to the composition and volume of both material and embodied forms of capital.

Capital presents itself in three fundamental species; cultural, economic and social, and a fourth descriptor can be used when describing physical capital (Shilling, 2004). In certain social arrangements, these forms become recognised as symbolic capital, referring to the "form that one or another of these species takes when it is grasped through categories of perception that recognise its specific logic" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.119). The disabled body then, in its accumulation and expression of capital is a source of varying symbolic value (Edwards & Imrie, 2003). Simply, Bourdieu (1989, p.20) argued that "differences" - such as disability - can "function as distinctive signs and as signs of distinction, positive or negative" thus providing insight into the underlying and inherently relational properties of inequality.

In theorizing the interrelation between impairment and sport, Bourdieu's work has been useful in examining the management and integration of disability sport (e.g. Kitchin & Howe, 2014), contextualising the Paralympic movement (e.g. Purdue & Howe, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015) and to critique the production of coaching discourses in elite disability sport (e.g. Author, date). As Edwards and Imrie (2003) argued, disabled people are usually understood symbolically, only insofar as they "deviate from a prescribed set of norms" (p. 244), and the use of Bourdieu has highlighted a tension between disabled identities and identities that have more symbolic value, such as 'Paralympian' or 'elite athlete'.

Bourdieu's concept of misrecognition therefore provides some insight into the 'empowering' position assumed by transforming disabled athletes' identities from being "disability-based to sport-based" (Le Clair, 2011, p.1113), where "the imposition of a recognised name is an act of recognition of full social existence" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.482). For example, in elite disability sport, assumptions about disability empowerment reinforced the use of coaching and training mechanisms and discourses designed to subvert negative perceptions of disability (Author, date). In fact, these practices were part of a broader

structural framework that emphasize associations with elite sport (as symbolic capital) and disassociate from devalued, disabled identities (Author, date). Bourdieu's work highlights how disability is firmly embedded in social structure, and a "product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do" (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p.6). Simultaneously, these theoretical tools highlight and challenge the ways that disabled bodies become bearers of differential symbolic value in different social formations. Finally, Bourdieu enables researchers to question the extent to which disabled people have voice and autonomy in challenging the symbolic logic of 'differences' which "structure the established order" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.482) of disability sport.

Michel Foucault and poststructuralism

Understanding society as simultaneously "constructing of and constructed by people" (Goodley & Lawthom, 2006: 147), poststructural approaches focus on language and culture as key terrains for the discursive construction and regulation of disability. Under these understandings, disabled people are conceived not as autonomous creators of themselves or their social worlds but constituted in and through specific socio-cultural arrangements. Poststructuralism therefore provides a theoretical lens that destabilises the very claims through which disability is understood (Tremain, 2005). Here, Michel Foucault's genealogical method has been particularly useful here in revealing the discursive oppression faced by disabled people by problematizing how disability and impairment are produced and reproduced through "enactments of power within specific power relationships" (Peers, 2012a, p.298-99). Foucault's concept of biopower - how discourses are absorbed by and infiltrated into the body and operate through it - has proved particularly useful in demonstrating what bodies and behaviours are deemed 'natural' and those that have become understood as abnormal or deviant (e.g. Tremain, 2002, 2005).

This is demonstrated within the context of Parasport[6] by Peers (2012a) who utilized a Foucauldian discourse analysis of 14 historical Paralympic texts to trace how dominant discourses of disability and

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[6] 'Parasport' is often used as an umbrella term to describe disability sports that are governed by the International Paralympic Committee.

sport have (in)formed Paralympism and challenged commonly-held assumptions that the Paralympic movement is 'empowering'. Instead, Peers (2012a) outlines how discourses from rehabilitation, able-bodied sport, and 'enfreakment' collude in ways that "perpetuate, justify, and conceal the unequal relationships of power in and through which disability is enacted and experienced" (p.295). In doing so, she calls for future research that centralizes Paralympians' understandings of the ways that their bodies are policed through disability sport and how they navigate these social and cultural dynamics.

Foucault's later work on 'technologies of the self' have also been applied as conceptual and analytical tools, for example, in the rehabilitation and the politics of movement and contesting normality and abnormality (e.g. Sullivan, 2005). Such accounts reveal the resistance disabled people offer in the face of discursive regulation through demonstrating personal agency and challenging the hegemony of normativism in their everyday lives thereby not existing passively as 'disciplinary dupes' but as self-reflexive agents by constructing new senses of self in liberating ways (Corker & Shakespeare 2002; McRuer, 2006). Poststructural approaches therefore contest modernism's overarching, foundationalist and medicalized grand narratives and the systems of power inherent within them, repositioning disabled people as agentic in active becoming, rather than being docile to disciplinary oppression.

In spite of the potential of poststructural approaches to contribute to the sociological study of disability sport, they have been utilised sparingly. Ashton-Shaeffer et al. (2001) employed Foucauldian concepts of resistance and critical poststructural feminism in exploring how disabled men and women constructed positive senses of identity at a sport camp. Through observing how oppressive surveillance occurs on two levels (from able bodied society and disabled people watching and judging each other), they suggest that individuals demonstrate resistance to able-bodied norms and gain a sense of empowerment through experiencing enjoyment and fun, developing self-confidence in their skills, and being themselves in contexts accepting of ability and disability.

Alternatively, Peers (2012b) provides auto-ethnographic reflections of how she formed her own disciplined (in)coherent disabled Paralympic identity. Utilising Foucauldian notions of the confessional, the examination and panopticonism she disseminates the effect of Paralympism

identifying how she initially created understandings of her 'self' though the transparency of external surveillance, but subsequently, as a critically informed qualitative researcher, was able to deconstruct and re-imagine dominant narratives of disability and disability sport. Foucauldian concepts enabled the de-naturalization and de-composition of the dominant stories and practices of disability opening up "new possibilities of imagining, narrating and doing disability otherwise" (Peers, 2012b, p.175). Such research offers examples of how poststructuralist approaches can be useful in challenging normative, essentialist ideologies in disability sport, liberating disabled athletes from disabling cultural discourses.

Zygmunt Bauman and 'Liquid' Modernity

Central to Bauman's sociological work was the societal shifts from solid to 'liquid' modernity. For him, the solid modernity of the past can be characterized by attempts to make the world orderly and organized through the imposition of categories and definitions that were seen as equally solid and unchanging (Jacobsen & Marshman, 2008). However, Bauman argued that such categorizations are inappropriate representations of contemporary society and are unable to reflect rapidly changing circumstances and the social or cultural upheavals in which they currently exist. Rather, through processes of liquefaction, fixed categories of the past are now more erratic and unstable - a concept Bauman (2000) termed as 'liquid modernity'- which provides tools that help explore some of the most compounded conditions of contemporary society. In particular, the 'liquid' metaphor is used to address the juxtaposition of increased personal freedom and mobility with a life of accelerated anxiety in an era of reduced social security and deregulated consumption (Lee, 2011). Of central critical concern is the ephemeral condition of contemporary society; an observation of social change that attempts to uncover the consequences of advanced social differentiation and alienation. Importantly, Bauman's work does not consist of labels, instead he adopts metaphors to describe a representative cluster of individuals that help demonstrate his notions of a liquid society.

Bauman makes little direct comment on the subject of disability. Compellingly however, his sensitivity to modern patterns of exclusion and Othering provide a novel lens through which to view the connection

between sociological theory and disability. As Hughes (2002) acknowledges, Bauman is not interested in Otherness - or 'Strangerhood' as he (in Marotta, 2002) refers to it - as an existential outcome of life in modern times. Rather, he is more concerned with how social and cultural practices produce and invalidate those that can be consumed as 'strange'. Otherness is articulated in multiple ways, with different conceptions of identity underlying these multiple constructions. The discourse of the stranger is therefore used both to reinforce and question the boundaries between the Self and Other. However, what is considered Other within a society is heavily dependent upon the cultures existing within the population; cultures which have their own rules of ordering and boundaries set within them – a tiered system of self-regulation. Strangers threaten the boundaries seemingly required to impose stability and predictability on the social world and its cultural practices.

Bauman considers 'culture' itself to be oppressive, viewing it as a meta-structure imposing itself on the individual. In subscribing to a particular culture, the porousness of the boundaries of that culture determine the extent to which an individual will consider the aberrant. Culture is therefore an activity and a process linked to human praxis (Bauman, 2013). Liquid modernity is providing 'culture' the critical process in which individuals can transcend societal boundaries and tentatively explore the uncertain and the different. Culture, according to Bauman (1999) therefore, allows for existence within and between multiple realities within a single life. The social condition in liquid modern times is such that this cross-over of multiple realities creates the permeability of acceptance, devizing a continuum of difference from novelty, to ambivalence, to abhorrence. Considering this, the issue of the Otherness (or strangeness) of disability in times of liquid modernity is not necessarily one of monstrosity or disease or pity imposed by structural constraints, but more about the exercise of individual agency to perceive, recognise and accept the cross-over of one's reality with the reality of another individual.

Whilst a small number of studies have explicitly sought to address Bauman's sociology within sport (e.g. Best, 2013; Torchia, 2016; Pedersen et al, 2018), this body of work remains meagre in comparison to more ubiquitous social theorists such as Bourdieu and Foucault. This could be attributed to understandings of sport, in a liquid modern sense, are problematic. As Mastro, Hall & Canabal (1988,

p.81) suggest, there "is no culturally recognized need for competition and sports beyond therapeutic programs". Sport, certainly at an elite level, is therefore a manufactured pastime of human consumption, born from ideological traditions and a need for bodily perfection – it is nothing *but* tradition. So how would Bauman explain the omnipresence of sport in both liquid and solid societies? Solid modernity refers to the belief that a condition is "predictable and manageable" (Bauman, 2000, p.3) – two characteristics of culture favoured highly by the elite sporting world. Alternatively, as liquid modernity is "existence without parameters" (2004, p.32) borders and boundaries are superfluous. Sport therefore exists in a liquid modern state as excess without ultimate satisfaction.

Disability sport, however, does not provide a state of excess and is limited in its availability, attraction and its capacity to produce and to be consumed. It could be argued therefore that disability sport exhibits traits more accustomed to solid modernity; furiously stiff, quantifiable and rigid – demanding sacrifice and commitment from the athlete whilst simultaneously denying them freedom and security. Through calling for sociologists to 'de-familiarize the familiar' and 'familiarize the unfamiliar' (cited in Dawes, 2011) Bauman suggests we must be heretical and dissident in attempting to examine that which is taken for granted as embedded truth within historical rhetoric. This provides us with the conceptual tools through which to challenge the familiar, for example the Paralympic Games being positioned as an awkward Olympic side-show heavy with moral burden (Gilbert & Schanz, 2008) or Paralympians being labelled supercrips - familiairizing the unfamiliarity of disability sport.

In spite of the potential of incorporating Bauman's sociology when theorizing the interrelation between impairment and sport, it remains predominantly absent. Indeed, the only published research to specifically apply the lens of liquid modernity to disability and high performance sport is by Author c (2013, 2018) who has explored the lived experiences of elite student-para-athletes. She documents the complexities of living, belonging and progressing in a liquid modern world as an individual identifying as being a university student, a Team Great Britain London 2012 athlete and as being a disabled young adult. Her findings demonstrated that the participants saw their limitations to liquid modern living being rooted in their autonomy and agency to ascend within elite sport as opposed to the kismet of disability.

The solidness of their daily living; their perceived inability to interpret, flex and flow through consistently melting 'lifescapes' - indeed their understanding of being other *and* being othered – was not due to restraint from functional impairment, nor was it due to oppressive social structuring. They were other due to their devotedness to something – a concept that Bauman explains as being meaningless, deleterious and unendurable in a liquid modern word (Bauman, 2013). Employing Bauman's work to the study engendered data that contradicted much of the traditional disability and sociology literature, in that disability is not a dominant edifice; rather it features as a metaphorical wave – a fluid, passable yet potentially inconsequential aspect of liquid modern living for the participants. Such empirical accounts provide potency for the incorporation of Bauman's work in developing critical understandings of disability and sport.

Considering the above, exploring Bauman's 'art of life' in taking choices to live one's life as a piece of art and reject "the authority of former modes of existence" and instead "cope with the insecurity of a hitherto untried ontological status" (Blackshaw, 2013, p.174) may be particularly useful in conceptualizing disability in liquid modernity. More than ever, and even more so in sport, we have the tools to move beyond orthodox categorizations of disability and have many alternatives to choose from; yet being without categorization is precisely what is frightening. Under these understandings, disability is a category that whilst subject to Strangerhood, nonetheless provides safety from the fear of the unknown. Whereas solid modernity anchored people within given 'communities', each with their own unique set of concerns, liquid modernity, to a certain extent, levels all of these worries and replaces them with a universal anxiety regarding the constant need to be someone else (what Bauman calls the synopticon).

Liquid modernity therefore offers powerful lenses through which disabled athletes might artfully construct empowering liquid identities within the solidity of high performance sport. As Bauman advocates, the discipline of sociology should move more towards agency; how agency operates within its habitat (or life-world), the environment defining the levels of restraint placed on the freedom, and the dependency of the agents to ebb and flow between the fluid and the fixed. What, therefore, if these

agents were disabled athletes? As Blackshaw (2002, p.199) argues, employing Bauman's sociology and "stepping into uncharted waters" might be one imaginative way of challenging dynamics of strangeness and exploring avenues through which disabled athletes can demonstrate agency in oppressive contemporary ableist cultures.

Aesthetic approaches

Another way of challenging cultural ableism is to explore the imagery of impairment and how it plays crucial roles in influencing how disability is imagined and experienced. Aesthetic approaches address the politics of ocular-centric bias in contemporary society, revealing cultural categories of perception that continually juxtapose the tragic, weak, ugly, feared and medicalized 'imperfect' disabled body against the normative, desirable 'perfect' able body (Garland-Thomson, 2002). The disabling effects of body aesthetics have taken feminist (Garland-Thomson, 1997; 2002; Zitzelberger, 2005), poststructural (Hughes, 1999; Davis, 2002), phenomenological (Shakespeare, 1997; Hughes, 1999; 2000; 2002, Corker & Shakespeare, 2002), and psychoanalytical (Marks, 1999; Goodley, 2011b) perspectives in identifying how aesthetic criteria are constructed in ways that "sustain dominant group interests" commodifying how 'beauty' and 'normal' are judged (Silvers, 2002, p.229) othering disabled people who differ in relation to these norms.

Within embodied social interaction, Hughes (1999) indicates that aesthetic subjugation is enacted and reinforced through the non-disabled gaze, a product of non-disabled people "seeing" the world they claim to have discovered laying the foundations for the everyday production of alterity, discrimination and oppression. Garland-Thompson (1997) argues that if women are subject to and subjected by the gaze, then disabled people are subordinated and stigmatised via 'the stare' - an intensified form of the gaze that acts as "gesture that creates disability as an oppressive social relationship" (p.26) and a device through which visibly disabled people are made other, stigmatised and reminded that they are socially accountable for their existence and/or the specific formation of their body. Given that specific impairments are denoted as more socially acceptable than others, some disabled people are viewed

inhumanely and as a product of their impairment as "starrers gawk with abandon" at the abhorrence of impairment without looking to "envelope the whole body of the person with a disability" (Garland-Thompson, 2002, p.56).

Research that explores the disabling effects of the stare, and how disabled athletes may challenge and subvert it, is required, particularly given the visibility of impairment is often prominent in sporting contexts. In spite of this, little research has explicitly employed aesthetic approaches in exploring the dynamics of ocularcentric subjugation. Author (date) draw on the corporeal experiences of Dan, a male wheelchair bodybuilder, in order to explore how disabled people may aspire to normative notions of physical perfectionism. They examine how Dan's visibly hyper-muscular upper body positions him as a supercrip and reinforces embodied gender norms. In doing so, they illuminate that whilst on stage as part of a competitive bodybuilding routine and outside of sporting contexts, Dan was able to simultaneously able to attract and subvert the disabled gaze of the able-bodied majority away from his perceived weakness (his wheelchair) refocusing it on his physical capabilities, thereby challenging normative able/disabled binaries. Although Dan could be seen as a hyper-able supercrip, the analysis demonstrates how disabled people may be able demonstrate agency in ways that challenge entrenched discourses of body perfectionism *and* normalcy.

Further explorations of how disabled athletes exercise agency in constructing identity and selfhood in response to aesthetic judgement are required. For example, in response to the medical "blueprint for action" (Hughes, 2000: 56), amputees have historically been issued with prostheses that are both functionally and cosmetically normalising in order to disguise limb loss, thereby censoring the visibility of disability and reducing experiences of psycho-emotional disablism (Reeve, 2012). However, there is increasing evidence that disabled people, including athletes are choosing to wear and modify alternative forms of prostheses in ways that "solicit attention and express the personal style and self-concept of the individual with limb loss or absence" (Hall & Orzada, 2013, p.9). As Aimee Mullins (2009; cited in Reeve, 2012) an ex-Paralympian and disability activist points out: "A prosthetic limb doesn't represent the need to replace loss anymore. It can stand as a symbol that the wearer has the power to create

whatever it is that they want to create in that space". (p.106). The choices disabled athletes make on what prostheses to wear and how these prostheses and/or wheelchairs may be modified and adorned as aesthetic statements and forms of self-identification whilst exploring lived experience in response to the disabled gaze offer particularly fruitful terrains for further analysis. So too are explorations of the ways that disabled athletes might choose to mark their skin through body modificatory practices such as tattooing in order to challenge ocularcentric oppression and (re)claim empowering identities (Author, date).

Disabled athletes as cyborgs

Arguing that the boundaries between human and animal, natural and artificial, physical and non-physical are blurring in late modern, technology-dominant society, Haraway (1991, p.149) proposes that we are all cyborgs, hybrids of "machine and organism". In doing so, she provides us with an ontology through which we may move beyond established dualisms that contribute to the demarcation and domination of the 'Other'. By rejecting 'natural' binaries in favour of celebrating our hybridity, Haraway (1991) contends that our bodies may be re-imagined and re-configured in ways that provide "guiding maps for storylines for inappropriate/d others" (p.4) to live differently. Although disability is not explicitly addressed in her manifesto, other than to note that disabled people have the most "intense experiences of complex hybridisation" (p.178), scholars from CDS have raised the potential of a cyborg ontology in challenging disabling views by problematizing essentialized binary oppositions between abled/disabled, healthy/unhealthy, normal and abnormal (e.g. Reeve, 2012; Goodley, Lawthom & Runswick-Cole, 2014).

Discussions about how disabled athletes interact with technology have focused on how the 'disabled cyborg athlete' stirs anxiety by questioning human normativity (see Howe & Silva, 2017). For example, 'techno-boosting', or the perceived unfair use of technology by disabled athletes who use spring loaded prostheses or 'blades', has been heavily scrutinized (Cole, 2009; Burkett, McNamee & Potthast, 2011; Swartz & Watermeyer, 2011, Moola & Norman, 2011). These analyses shed further light on how

disabled athletes often find themselves tested on, placed under surveillance and dehumanised, reproducing discourses of 'enfreakment' (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001).

There remain however, very few in-depth empirical accounts of how disabled athletes relate with technology. Apelmo (2012) explored how young female disabled athletes relate to technology over time across three disability sports (sledge hockey, wheelchair basketball, table tennis), describing how participants incorporate their wheelchairs, assistive and sporting technologies into their embodied sense of self and subjectivities. Her findings revealed how participants used the cyborg metaphor to demonstrate resistance to common medico-tragedy conceptualizations of disability, using it as a "conscious strategy against pity" (p.404) in challenging the discursive construction of disabled women as non-gendered and asexual in the face of the medicalising non-disabled gaze. In articulating how technology facilitated feelings of risk, joy, pleasure and excitement, Apelmo's work acknowledges embodied experience, which remains largely absent in disability sport. This research, expanded in her later work (Apelmo, 2017) offers striking examples of how dominant able/disabled binaries can be transgressed and normalcy questioned through the construction of proud, fulfilling, sensual disabled and gendered sporting cyborg identities.

Another example of the usefulness of the concept of the cyborg is offered by Author (date) investigation into the phases undertaken in becoming a disabled sporting cyborg following SCI. Analysing the narratives of disabled athletes who compete in wheelchair rugby and basketball, they suggest that following disablement, individuals progress from taking technology for granted and relating to it for survival post-SCI, to experiencing technology in rehabilitation centres and becoming a technically-competent cyborg, to living everyday life as an embodied cyborg and finally becoming a disabled sporting cyborg. In doing so, they reveal how technology, the body and impairment are central in disabled athletes developing senses of self and how by becoming cyborgs were "released from and directly challenged the normative myth of the disabled body as weak, passive, undesirable and tragic to become agentic, strong, desirable and celebrated as corporeal beings who took pride and pleasure in their bodies and their achievements" (Author, date).

Further research should explore if disabled athletes are able to answer Haraway's (1991) calls to take control over their bodies and the extent of their cyborgification in response to normative discursive ideals. As Howe (2011) and Silva and Howe (2012) recognize, opening up discourses of performance enhancement beyond 'normal' may more appropriately frame disabled people as superhuman than current supercrip representations. In spite of the potential of cyborg theory, a number of concerns have been expressed namely; i) its inability to address the material disadvantages experienced, ii) the reproduction of the long established links between technology and ableist ideologies of rehabilitation and cure reinforcing individualising and medicalising models of disability (Shakespeare, 2006; Reeve, 2012); iii) the continual stigmatization, anxiety and dehumanisation the disabled-cyborg (Barnes & Mercer, 2003). This has been shown by Richard and Andrieu (2019) in their analysis of the Cybathlon, a futuristic sporting event for disabled people using advanced assistive technologies including brain computer interface, electrical stimulation, motorised prostheses, exoskeletons and powered wheelchairs. They distinguish how the event is experimental and exclusionary and promotes a form of transhuman cyborg that remains based on ableist and heteronormative conceptions of the body that oppose agentic and postmodern definitions of the cyborg as celebrated by Haraway. Any future research into the liberatory potential of cyborg theory should consider these issues.

New materialism

New materialism is a collective term used to capture a range of perspectives that focus on 'matter' (Fox & Alldred, 2016). The turn to new materialist theory is, in part, a critical response to what might be understood within realist, interpretivist, constructivist and poststructuralist research as a 'linguistic fallacy' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). This 'fallacy' is based on the humanist interpretive tradition that researchers – as ontologically distinct from the researched – interpret and represent individual and collective human experience as pre-existing phenomena (Barad, 2003). New materialism therefore attempts to cut across opposing realist-constructionist ontological assumptions, rejecting ontological dualisms and collapsing the 'nature-culture' binary (Fox & Alldred, 2016). Simply put, new materialism challenges the distinction between the material, physical world and a socially constructed social reality.

Focusing on the relation between the physical and social world both human and non-human elements new materialism can be understood as 'posthuman' (Braidotti, 2013). Here, we focus on Barad's (2003) contribution to new materialism, outlining what she coined as 'agential realism'[7], and the attempt to decentre social analyses from language and culture toward an understanding of matter:

> Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every 'thing' – even materiality – is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. …Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter. (Barad, 2003, p. 801)

It is perhaps unnerving to think of bio-social phenomena like impairment as having agency, but Barad considers matter to be an active participant in its "intra-activity", and thus has potential to generate important insights for understanding the "shifting entanglement of relations" between disabled people and sport as a process of ongoing exchange. However, the materiality of the body in sport is often overlooked, with an unequal focus on the "discursive construction of embodiment" (Longhurst, 2000, p.125). Indeed, it would be a difficult claim to suggest disability has little to do with the materiality of the body, the physical environment or embodied practices and is entirely reducible to discourse or a social relation (Norman & Moola, 2017). Doing so renders the (impaired) body as a passive, inert framework on which cultural meanings are imposed.

For Barad (2003, 2007), new materialism displaces the human subject from its centrality in producing knowledge and agency, instead focusing analyses on how material objects, spaces and objects as well as discourses actively participate in the production of social meaning (Norman & Moola, 2017). New materialism therefore claims that the 'reality' of phenomena, for example the lived experiences of wheelchair athletes, can only be understood through an ontological process of intra-activity, comprising

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[7]There are different variants of New Materialism. A useful example can be found in the work of Shildrick (2015), who theorised the construction of Paralympic athletes using Deleuzian concepts of assemblages.

an 'entanglement' of material and discursive elements. As we have begun to show throughout this paper, the, material elements of disability include the (impaired) body, the physical environment that disabled people inhabit, and the technologies used to address impairment (e.g. prostheses, wheelchairs). The discursive features refer to the social, cultural discourses and narratives we use to represent disability, and the institutionalised, ideological or cultural effects of disability, such as separate sporting structures for disabled people. In a new materialist framework, these elements combine, and should only be understood in relation to one another.

Research using new materialist frameworks might demonstrate a concerted effort to understand the impaired body and its materiality - for example its physiology, its effects and its technologies not as "passive and immutable" but as "conditions of possibility" (Barad, 2003, p. 801). Thus, to understand disability sport, material elements of impairment, prostheses, technologies, physical space, as well as discourses of elite sport, disability and culture combine where none has foundational status. For example, for athletes with a spinal cord injury, the wheelchair plays an active and forceful role in the becoming of the disability experience, intra-acting with and on the impaired body, the social arrangements of the sport and the unfolding practices of participating, generating a set of endless material-non-material entanglements (Author, date). Furthermore, new materialism challenges the creation of the category of 'disability' through its intra-relation with technologies, prostheses, treatments and medication, implants, classificatory practices, communicative devices, and adapted equipment, drawing attention to what Campbell (2009, p.9) describes as the technologies of ableism that continue to reinforce the distinction between "abledness and disabledness[8]".

Debates about the 'newness' of new materialism aside, this approach has scarcely applied to disability sport, perhaps due to its daunting conceptual language and lack of clear implications for 'doing' research or practice beyond vague claims towards 'rethinking' and 'producing new ways of knowing'. An interesting example, however, of new materialist analyses of disability and physical activity can be found in Monforte, Pérez-Samaniego and Smith (2018), who suggested that material environments in

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[8] These categories also are not fixed, but continually re-negotiated and re-enacted through perpetual intra-action.

rehabilitation sustain, create and 'territorialise' certain narratives related to physical activity and restitution, providing unique insight into the impact of rehabilitative environments on physical activity and disability. This offers an exciting example of how new materialist thinking can be implemented in disability sport research.

Reflections

Whilst we recognize their importance for emancipation, empowerment and social change and their position at the heart of the disability movement, in this paper we have sought to highlight the value of moving beyond the conceptual 'models' of disability that have received widespread and at times uncritical use. We are not suggesting that a models approach should not be employed in research with disabled athletes or that they should not remain central in progressing transformative disability discourse. Rather, we oppose their *exclusive* use. Drawing inspiration from CDS and using examples of current empirical research therefore, in the sections above we advocate more diverse ways to theorize disability in the sociological study of sport. As opposed to Barnes (212, p.22) who suggests that attempts to move away from the materialist and emancipatory traditions of the social model have led to "a politically benign focus on culture, language and discourse", we demonstrate how engaging in critical theory can help reveal forms of structural oppression, offer social and cultural critique, and promote disabled athletes as self-reflexive and agentic. Importantly, we argue that *each* of the different theories presented offer some ways forward for understanding the inter-relation of disability and sport. Indeed, disability is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon and multiple and interdisciplinary approaches should be considered Goodley, 2017). Although researchers may sympathize with particular perspectives and some theories may be deemed to 'fit' identified phenomena better than others - there is no 'grand narrative' or overarching theory that should be used in the sociological study of disability sport.

This can be demonstrated through considering a given topic or concept in disability sport and revealing how alternative theoretical architecture helps explore distinctive aspects of disabled athlete experience. In returning to Haraway's (1991) concept of the cyborg for example, a Bourdieusian lens might explore

the various forms of capital attributed to the technological disabled body and how these combine to construct identities within the field of disability sport. On the other hand, a Foucauldian approach would be more concerned with revealing how disciplinary power enacts to exclude, medicalize, and enfreak disabled cyborg athletes through networks of surveillance stripping athletes of independence and autonomy or how dangerous masculine and militaristic discourses of the cyborg are reproduced in disability sport (Author, date). Liquid modern perspectives would perhaps point more towards the instability between the organic and artificial on a cultural level through for example exploring how disabled cyborg athletes might "look in to the face of the Other, rather than in the rule-book for guidance on how to act" (Fitzpatrick, 1999, p.100) in constructing embodied identities amongst the myriad of consumer choices available (e.g. prostheses, technological interfaces).

Alternatively, new materialists might centre their analysis on exploring how artificial limbs and wheelchairs become intimately enmeshed with disabled cyborg athlete's senses of corporeality and bodily schemas enabling the creation new experiences of 're-embodiment' (Papadimitriou, 2008) or act to constrain individuals through the ableist and material conditions manifest in sporting settings. Finally, aesthetic approaches might allow for an analysis of 'prosthetic aesthetics' (Tamari, 2017) in investigating the choices disabled cyborg athletes make in, for example, wearing robotic, mechanical looking prostheses rather than normalizing prostheses that 'camouflage' impairment - thereby transgressing medicalized and pitiful able-bodied gazes (Garland-Thompson, 1997) and demonstrating agentic constructions of cyborg disabled athlete identity.

Clearly then, alternative theoretical approaches can powerfully influence the analysis, interpretation and representation of given phenomena within disability sport scholarship. To complicate matters further, choices on what theory to use are shrouded in individual agendas and political manoeuvring. As Powis (2020) reflected, having presented his empirical research on disability at a qualitative research conference his theoretical framework employed was subjected to the following 'critique':

> During the customary time for questions and feedback, an academic forthrightly offered a critique of my theoretical framework. He began by saying, "Theories are like toothbrushes:

everyone has one and nobody wants to use anybody else's". Without a hint of irony, he then suggested I use a different theoretical approach – his theoretical approach – and went on to proffer his own conceptualisations of disability and sport (p.14)

Rather than make any attempt to determine and direct theoretical decisions therefore, we appeal to researchers make open, principled and ideologically informed decisions about what approaches to use and distinguish why these are the most appropriate for the phenomena under investigation (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). We have presented some of these possibilities, but call for sociologists of sport to imaginatively expand repertoires for understanding disability and move beyond the worn out 'models' approach. In doing so, as Powis (2020, p.15) asserts, researchers of disability sport should not "feel obliged by tradition or dominant voices" but should think about the political, social and empirical implications of adopting a given theoretical approach.

Due to the limitations of what can be covered in one paper, we acknowledge that we are not able to fully capture the reach and power of the multiple approaches explored in CDS. We have therefore had to omit important theories. In particular, perspectives that account for the embodied experiences and byzantine nature of disabled athletes' lives warrant further analysis. Although discussions of the body and disability have remain relatively rare as they "tug somewhat disconcertingly" at the central conceptual distinction at the heart of the social model of disability, the splitting of impairment (biological) and disability (social) (Hughes & Paterson, 1997, p.325), the living, breathing, sensing body is however integral in perception and meaning making (Sparkes, 2009; 2017). Revealing the lived 'fleshy' experience of disability is therefore crucial in critiquing social and structural oppression experienced by disabled people (Hughes & Paterson, 1997). Here, phenomenology offers powerful ways of bringing the body 'back in' to CDS, as do narrative approaches that through focusing on the dynamics of embodied storytelling breathe life into "real bodies and the messiness and complexity of being human" (Smith & Sparkes 2008: 18). Other distinct theories that more significantly account for intersecting identities of gender, race, sexuality and class alongside disability such as feminist, postcolonial, queer and crip theory (e.g. McRuer, 2006) are also eminently required in research into disability sport. It is our hope however that this paper will encourage researchers to explore 'new'

theoretical possibilities which in turn will result in further informed investigations across a number of disability sport and physical activity contexts.

Importantly, questions involving theory will inevitably involve critical reflections on methodology and engaging in research *with* disabled people. In doing so, we ask that scholars of disability sport critically reflect on their own agendas, interests and subjectivity as well as their positionality, situatedness and reflexivity in relation to their participants and phenomena under investigation (Author, date). This is particularly important for 'able-bodied' researchers working with disabled participants and the danger of reproducing tacit, medicalizing and ableist forms of knowledge in the field (MacBeth, 2010; Author, date). Finally, although we have welcomed theoretical eclecticism from CDS in this paper, we have not adequately attended to its more activist and pragmatic foundations. As Smith and Sparkes (2020) highlight, a major challenge in moving disability sport forwards is conducting research that makes a real difference to the lives of disabled people over time. Reflecting on the current state of research into disability sport and physical activity, we need "more sport research committed to a praxis for radical change" (Smith & Sparkes, 2020, p. 400). Imaginative theorization is only one of the ingredients required in contributing to this collective effort.

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