Patients, Athletes, Freaks:

Paralympism and the Reproduction of Disability

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Abstract

In this paper, I analyze the discursive shifts, continuities and convergences from which Paralympic discourses, practices, subjects and institutions have emerged. I utilize Foucauldian discourse analysis to interpret 14 texts about Paralympic history, and to trace how dominant discourses of disability and physical activity have (in)formed Paralympism at four specific stages of its institutionalization. Contrary to popular assumptions about Paralympism's progressive empowerment of those with disabilities, I demonstrate how, in each of these historical stages, discourses from rehabilitation, mainstream sport and the freak show have colluded in ways that serve to perpetuate, justify and conceal the unequal relations of power in and through which disability is enacted and experienced.

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The problem for a modern promoter... is how to reconfigure the nineteenth-century freak show for a late-twentieth-century audience. What kind of exhibition would be grotesquely fascinating, politically correct, and a sure draw? (Dennet, 1996, p. 320)

Paralympism is often celebrated as a movement that empowers people with disabilities. Substantial critiques of this movement, and its practices and institutions, are extremely rare. In this paper, I draw on the theories and methods of Foucault in order to attempt such a critique. Specifically, I draw on Foucault's concepts of power and discourse to argue that there is more at stake in Paralympism than the benevolent empowerment of disabled[1] athletes.

Like any other institution, the Paralympics has emerged out of pre-existing relations of power, and therefore is implicated in the discourses, knowledges and practices that serve to reproduce those power relations. By analyzing the discursive construction of Paralympism, I interrogate how, throughout its various institutional stages, Paralympism has been (in)formed by other dominant discourses of disability and physical activity, including those that have found traction within the practices of mainstream sport, bio-medical rehabilitation and the 19th Century freak show. I demonstrate how, through the emergence of Paralympism, these discourses have been reconfigured to form a "grotesquely fascinating" and "politically correct" sporting spectacle that serves, in various ways, to perpetuate the power relations and social contexts that sustain disability.

I begin this paper by reviewing relevant literature in the socio-cultural study of elite disability sport, and by introducing my Foucauldian theoretical framework. I then discuss

my methods of discourse analysis, before presenting my analysis and concluding thoughts.

Literature Review

The last decade has seen a significant increase in the amount of socio-cultural research pertaining to elite disability sport, in general (Berger, 2009; Francis, 2005; Hardin, 2007; Page, O'Connor, & Peterson, 2001; Smith & Thomas, 2005; Stone, 2001), and the Paralympics, specifically (Ashton-Shaeffer, Gibson, Holt, & Williming, 2001; Brittain, 2004; Howe, 2008; Howe & Jones, 2006; Jones & Howe, 2005; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Schell & Duncan, 1999; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001; Thomas & Smith, 2003). Much of this literature embraces a social, rather than medical, model of disability: that is, disability is understood as *not only* physiological (impairment), but *also* the result of disabling social contexts, such as architecture, attitudes and stereotypes (e.g., Brittain, 2004; Hardin, 2007; Howe, 2008; Huang & Brittain, 2006; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001). The relationship between elite disability sport and disabling social contexts is most often represented, in this literature, in two ways.

First, scholars use data from athlete interviews to argue that disability sport empowers athletes to overcome and/or resist their disabling social contexts (Ashton-Shaeffer et al., 2001; Berger, 2009; Hardin, 2007; Huang & Brittain, 2006; Page et al., 2001). Huang and Brittain (2006), for example, use semi-structured interviews and a framework of identity construction to demonstrate how success in elite disability sport serves to increase the "positive subjectivity" and "sense of personal empowerment" of Taiwanese and British athletes (p. 372). Ashton-Shaeffer et al. (2001) employ semi-structured interviews, grounded theory methodology and a poststructuralist feminist interpretive framework to demonstrate that elite female athletes with disabilities use sport

both to resist disability, and to physically and mentally empower themselves. This sport-as-empowerment research has emerged from a variety of theoretical and epistemological perspectives, ranging from psychosocial positivism (e.g., Page et al., 2001), to critical theory (e.g., Hardin, 2007), to post-structuralism (e.g., Ashton-Shaeffer et al., 2001). Despite this range of approaches, Hardin (2007) is alone in arguing that institutionalized disability sport, like mainstream sport, might serve not only to resist, but also to reinforce, ableist and sexist ideologies.

The second way that scholars often study the relationship between sport and disabling social contexts is through analyses of how media representations of elite disability sport serve to reinforce disabling attitudes and stereotypes (Brittain, 2004; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Schell & Duncan, 1999; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001; Smith & Thomas, 2005; Thomas & Smith, 2003). Much of this literature is characterized by content or thematic analyses that critique the media and not the sporting events being covered. The theoretical frameworks of these studies are often not explicitly stated or substantially explained. As a prime example, Schantz and Gilbert (2001) use content analysis and a range of theoretically disparate concepts to argue that the French and German media are "misconstruing the Paralympic ideals" (p.87). Similarly, Schell & Rodriguez (2001) employ an unspecified disability studies approach to argue that television coverage of a particular Paralympian served to subvert the ways that she was resisting (hetero)sexism and ableism through, among other things, her androgynous appearance and her athletic identity. Smith and Thomas (2005) provide the only media analysis that criticizes both the media and sport organizers for their role in exclusionary and commercialized coverage. Interestingly, the implicated sport organization was the

Commonwealth games, an organization catering mostly to able-bodied athletes.

Although the above literature offers important critiques of mainstream media and of disabling social contexts, it offers only tangential critiques of elite disability sport and no specific critiques of Paralympism. The most explicit interrogation of Paralympism, to date, has emerged from the various works of Howe and Jones (Howe, 2008; Howe & Jones, 2006; Jones & Howe, 2005). Howe and Jones (2006), for example, use the concept of *practice community*, as derived from critical theory, to argue that recent changes to the Paralympic sport classification systems[2] serve to further marginalize certain athletes, fail to provide for fair competitions and diminish the control that disabled athletes have over their own sporting opportunities. Howe (2008) later expands on these critiques by applying ethnographic methods, the theories of Bourdieu, and to a lesser extent Foucault's concepts of technologies of dominance and governmentality, to issues of Paralympic classification, representation and governance. Howe's most developed argument is that recent changes in Paralympic governance have resulted in the further disempowerment of disabled athletes. Although providing the most substantial critiques of Paralympism to date, the scope and approaches of these few critical publications leave many important questions unexplored.

In her poignant theoretical article, Shogan (1998) addresses one crucial question that has yet to be considered within the specific context of Paralympism: "to what extent is adapted physical activity part of a social context that sustains disability?"[3] (p. 275). In this article, Shogan introduces the social model of disability, critical disability studies literature on normalcy, and Foucault's concept of disciplinary technologies in order to demonstrate a number of ways in which disability is socially constructed. She then offers

a few specific examples of how adapted physical activity might participate in the perpetuation of disability by dividing the normal from the abnormal (e.g., segregated sports), and by using disciplinary technologies (e.g., repetitive exercises) to normalize those deemed to be abnormal. In this way, Shogan historicizes discourses of normalcy and disability, which are foundational to many aspects of adapted physical activity, and politicizes these by linking them to the larger social contexts that reproduce marginalized disabled subjects. Although some of Shogan's examples address elite disability sport specifically, her analysis deals with the area of adapted physical activity more generally, and therefore does not account for the specific historical contexts out of which the distinct discourses, practices and institutions of Paralympism have emerged.

I will address this gap by analyzing some of the specific discursive shifts, continuities and convergences from which Paralympic discourses, practices, subjects and institutions have emerged. Like Shogan (1998), I use a Foucauldian approach to historicize contemporary Paralympic discourses, subjects and practices, and I politicize these by linking them to the broader social contexts through which disability is sustained. Due to the historic and discursive specificities of Paralympism, I have differed from Shogan in the ways that I have taken up Foucault's methods, and in the specific theoretical concepts that my analysis relies on most heavily. In the section that follows, I briefly introduce some of the most important Foucauldian concepts that I use in this analysis. This will be followed by a discussion of the Foucauldian methods that I employ.

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

My analysis of Paralympism is informed by Foucault's (1978; 1995; 2003c) conceptualization of power as a constantly shifting and elusive network that permeates

and informs all social relationships, rather than as a possession held by some powerful people, and given to others in the form of empowerment. According to Foucault (2003c), power exists only at the moments when it is exercised within relationships between subjects, that is, only when a subject or group of subjects acts in such a way as to control, coerce, limit, enable, produce or otherwise "structure the possible field of actions of others" (p. 138). This understanding of power is useful for this project because it can account for how a disabled subject's field of possibilities might be constrained by power relations, and particular enactments of power, that are seemingly enabling, benevolent and productive (such as charitable or medical interventions) (Sullivan, 2005; Tremain, 2005).

Foucault's (1978; 1995) understanding of power as not simply restrictive, but also productive, has catalyzed a significant shift in the ways that disability is conceptualized. In contrast to the social model of disability, adopted within all of the above-discussed literature, some disability scholars use Foucault to articulate the ways that both disability *and* impairment are produced and continually reproduced through enactments of power within specific power relations (Campbell, 2005; Davis, 2002; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006; Thomas & Corker, 2002; Tremain, 2002; 2005; 2006). For example, scholars have demonstrated that scientific, statistical and legal classifications, along with the resulting concepts of (ab)normality and citizenship, serve to produce politically useful categories of impairment out of an infinite and shifting range of human embodiments (Allen, 2005; Campbell, 2005; Davis, 1995; Tremain, 2005; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006). They have demonstrated how these categories of impairment serve to produce impaired populations when they inform the wording on questionnaires and censuses (Titchkosky, 2007; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006; Shildrick & Price, 1996). They have articulated how impairment

categories are utilized in the processes of medical examinations, diagnoses and treatments, in ways that serve to objectify bodies as impaired and thus to produce impaired subjects (Allen, 2002; Sullivan, 2005; Tremain, 2002; 2006). Within Foucauldian research, therefore, the production of impairment can be understood, like architecture or stereotypes, to be part of the social contexts that disable subjects: contexts that facilitate charitable, medical and other able-bodied subjects acting upon the actions of the impaired subject; contexts that can be understood both as expressions of, and a means of reproducing, unequal relations of power.

Despite the ways that disabled bodies and actions are systematically acted upon, Foucauldian approaches to disability do not conceptualize disabled subjects as passive and tragic recipients of diagnoses, treatments and other disabling practices. Disabled subjects often participate in reproducing the contexts through which they are disabled (such as succumbing to surveillance or claiming impairment) because this participation serves them in various ways (for example, in negotiating access to assistive technologies or legal rights) (Campbell, 2005; Shildrick & Price, 1996). Disabled subjects also often resist these same disabling practices, sometimes through collective action, and sometime through individual action or inaction. As Foucault (1978) argues, "where there is power, there is resistance": sometimes small, spontaneous refusals, sometimes calculated violent attacks, but resistance always occurs at the time and place where power is being exercized (p. 95). Because power must be continuously exercised in order to reproduce existing power relations, there are ever-present opportunities through which power relations might be recognized, resisted, de-stabilized, shifted and transformed (Sullivan, 2005; Foucault, 1978).

According to Foucault (1972; 1978; 1992), the effects of power, such as the *existence* of impairments and disabled subjects, often appear ahistorical, asocial and apolitical because of the ways that they are organized, represented and produced through discourse. Foucault (1972) used the term *discourse* in at least three interrelated ways: "treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements" (p.80). Although these three meanings of discourse necessarily inform each other, in this analysis I engage with discourse primarily in the second sense: as an *individualizable group* of linguistic and symbolic practices that, in referring to particular aspects of disability and sport, serve to systematically produce the very objects, subjects and practices to which they refer (Foucault, 1972; Markula & Pringle, 2006). In my reading of texts about Paralympic history, this concept is useful for understanding how various statements that refer to disability also serve to (re)produce certain understandings about disability (e.g., that it represents an apolitical, objectively defined class of people), as well as producing certain practices that sustain disability (e.g., segregating disability and able-bodied sport), and by extension, producing certain disabled subjects (e.g., Paralympians). This conceptualization of discourse is also useful for understanding how, in the context of Paralympism, discourses of disability might collude with and/or contradict dominant discourses of sport, and in so doing, may or may not lead to the production of new (or the transformation of old) knowledges, practices, subjects and power relations.

Methods

In this article, I use Foucault's method of discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972;

Graham, 2005; Kendall & Wickham, 1999) to "interrogate the productive power" of Paralympic discourses (Graham, 2005, p. 7), that is, to analyze how these discourses serve to produce and reproduce specific practices, subjects, institutions and relations of power.

I have grounded my analysis in 14 texts about the history of Paralympism. These texts include four articles (J. Anderson, 2003; DePauw, 2001; Labanowhich, 1989; Legg, Eames, Stewart & Steadward, 2004), three book chapters (Doll-Tepper, 1999; Gold & Gold, 2007; Steadward & Foster, 2003), five sections of larger sociological or historical analyses (Brittain, 2009; DePauw & Gavron, 1995; Goodman, 1986; Howe, 2008; Scruton, 1998) and two books (Bailey, 2008; Steadward & Peterson, 1997). I selected these texts through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). I went to great lengths to identify and retrieve every published text that met the following three criteria: the text is written in the English language; the explicit subject of the text, or of a significant portion of the text, is a history of the Paralympics or Paralympism; and the text provides some degree of detail about the historical period that it covers. In my initial search I identified 21 texts; seven of these were not included in the final sample because they dealt with the Paralympics for fewer than two pages, and offered only very vague descriptions. To the best of my knowledge, therefore, my sample represents every English language history that deals explicitly, and in some reasonable detail, with Paralympism.

I have chosen to ground my analysis in histories of Paralympism because the time span and details of their narratives facilitate my analysis of discourses, not only at the moments of their enunciation, but also through the discourses and power relations that have enabled their enunciation, and that have been enabled through their enunciation. In other words, they facilitate my engagement with Paralympism in a way that is more

closely aligned with Foucault's notion of historically constituted (and constitutive) discourses (Foucault, 1978; Foucault, Fontana & Pasquino, 1992).

I engage with Foucault's method of discourse analysis not as a systematized, step-by-step prescription, but as a theoretically situated strategy of inquiry, the specific articulation of which is necessarily contingent upon the specificities of the discursive formations under study (N. A. Anderson, 2003; Diaz-Bone et al., 2007; Graham, 2005). I begin by identifying statements about Paralympism, and its objects, within the 14 texts introduced above (Foucault, 1972; Graham, 2005; Kendall & Wickham, 1999; Tirado & Gálvez, 2007). A statement can be understood, in this context, as a well-regulated set of signs or symbols that forms the "function" of determining how such signs can be put together, how they can be judged as coherent or valid, what objects such signs serve to represent and, importantly, "what sort of act is carried out by their formulations" (Foucault, 1972, pp. 86-87).

Despite this seemingly abstract description of the statement, Tirado and Gálvez (2007) argue that statements are relatively easy to find and analyze systematically because they are, by definition, very highly ordered and regulated things. Correspondingly, the second stage of my analysis involves mapping the ways that the identified statements are formulated, organized, repeated and (re)configured in relation to established knowledges and relations of power: that is, how they come together to (re)produce discourses (N. A. Anderson, 2003; Kendall & Wickham, 1999; Tirado & Gálvez, 2007).

My third stage of analysis involves an exploration of the productive capacity of the discourses identified in the previous stage (Graham, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 2003; Scheurich, 1997). I endeavor to reveal these discourses, and the act of enunciating them,

as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). I analyze how particular discourses within Paralympism serve to evoke or to enact, specific practices (e.g., determining the eligibility of disabled athletes). I analyze how discourses, and their resulting practices, serve to constitute differentiated subjects (e.g., Paralympians). Finally, I analyze how these discourses, practices and subjects are implicated in the perpetuation, transformation and/or rationalization of unequal relations of power.

My analysis is guided by two major principles. The first, theoretical consistency, involves using Foucault's methods without divorcing them from their theoretical and epistemological underpinnings (Kendall & Wickham, 1999; Meadmore et al., 2000). The second principle, usefulness, involves asking the kinds of questions and providing the kinds of analyses that might foster different ways of thinking about, and acting within, contemporary, unequal power relations (McRobbie, 2005).

In the following section, I present my analysis by charting some of the discursive shifts, continuities and effects that influenced and/or accompanied the emergence of four of the most celebrated Paralympic institutional formations: Stoke Mandeville (Stoke); the International Organisations of Sport for People with a Disability (IOSDs); the International Co-ordinating Committee (ICC); and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). In so-doing, I intend to disrupt dominant narratives that construct these institutions, and their experts, as the creators of Paralympism, presenting, instead, an account of how Paralympism, its experts and its various institutional formations have been discursively produced.

Stoke: Reframing Paralympic Origin Narratives

According to all of the 14 histories in my sample, the Paralympic Movement originated with the convergence of rehabilitation and sport during and after the World Wars: a convergence whose prime orchestrator was Ludwig Guttmann, "the father of the Paralympic Movement," and the head doctor at the spinal injuries unit at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in England (Stoke) (Steadward & Peterson, 1997, p. 21; see also J. Anderson, 2003; Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2009; DePauw, 2001; DePauw & Gavron, 1995; Gold & Gold, 2007; Goodman, 1986; Doll-Tepper, 1999; Howe, 2008; Labanowhich, 1989; Legg et al., 2004; Scruton, 1998; Steadward & Foster, 2003). Despite the dominance of this discourse of paternalism, many of the above authors also provide ample evidence to support an alternate explanation of Paralympic emergence. For example, J. Anderson (2003) describes how Guttmann's programs were inspired by him witnessing injured veterans inventing and organizing sporting activities in the courtyards and hallways of Stoke (p. 466). There is also ample evidence demonstrating that similar sporting programs emerged, around the same time, in various rehabilitation hospitals across Europe and North America (Bailey, 2008; Doll-Tepper, 1999). One could argue, therefore, that the injured soldiers from WWII, who were likely all exposed to the disciplinary and discursive practices of sport, both in school and in the military, brought sport to rehabilitation hospitals.

Regardless, each of these histories clearly articulates that Guttmann quickly adapted, formalized, regimented, imposed, institutionalized and claimed authority over these sporting practices in order to, in Guttmann's words, "rescue these men, women and children from the human scrapheap and return most of them… to a life worth living, as

useful and respected citizens" (Guttmann, as cited in Bailey, 2008, p. 16; see also, J. Anderson, 2003; Goodman, 1986; Scruton, 1998). The above quote illustrates some of the dominant post-war discourses that functioned, in a Foucauldian (1972) sense, both to produce and to render intelligible the practices of formalized sport at Stoke. For example, Guttmann's conceptualization of himself rescuing disabled veterans through sport is strongly grounded in bio-medical discourses of disability. Bio-medical discourses construct disability as a tragic biological *problem* situated within an individual's body (Brittain, 2004; Davis, 2002; Shogan, 1998; Tremain, 2006). This *problem* of tragic disability justifies the production of various medical experts, practices, knowledges and institutions for diagnosing and solving disability (Titchkosky, 2007). These knowledges, practices and experts, through diagnosis and treatment, serve to produce tragically disabled (diagnosed) and medically rescued (rehabilitated) subjects, which, in turn, reproduces bio-medical discourses of disability, and the authority of medical experts and their knowledges (Sullivan, 2005; Titchkosky, 2007; Tremain, 2002; 2005; 2006). By constructing disabled people as in need of rescue, therefore, Guttmann not only reproduces the tragic bio-medical disability of his patients, but also reproduces his own authority, as a doctor, to act upon the bodies and actions of these patients.

In Guttmann's above quote, sport at Stoke is constructed as an activity that not only rescues the disabled, but also produces "respected citizens": valued members of the nation who are invoked in direct contrast to the useless "human scrapheap" of disability (Guttmann, as cited in Bailey, 2008, p.16). By invoking this contrast, Guttmann reproduces dominant nationalist and capitalist discourses that ascribe value to humans, and determine the value of human life itself (i.e., "a life worth living"), based on a

person's economic productivity, political usefulness and physical and economic independence (Foucault, 1995; Campbell, 2005). These nationalist and capitalist discourses were crucial, I argue, in rendering intelligible the disability sport project at Stoke, because they represented a discursive field in which both rehabilitation and mainstream sport were already strongly grounded. Whereas disabled sporting bodies might have contradicted elite sport discourses about bodily perfection and national superiority, and whereas non-working (likely working-class) sporting bodies might not have been intelligible within classist discourses surrounding sport-as-leisure, the rehabilitating sporting body could collude with the conceptualization of sport as a useful political and economic tool for re-building a nation and its work force.

These above-discussed discourses informed not only how sport programs were spoken about, but also how they were put into practice. To put it plainly, sport was not offered as a recreational option at Stoke. Instead, Guttmann instituted compulsory, highly regimented and repetitive sport training exercises that were designed to lead to patient rehabilitation, independence, self-surveillance and employability (Bailey, 2008; Goodman, 1986; Scruton, 1998). As described by Guttmann's then-secretary, Joan Scruton: "they had to do a sport. It was part of the treatment… like taking their medicine, or doing physiotherapy. And Sir Ludwig would make sure that they did it" (as cited in Steadward & Peterson, 1997, p. 22). Compulsory disability sport, like any other rehabilitation practice, was embedded within highly unequal, bio-medically perpetuated, power relations that granted rehabilitation experts, like Guttmann, the ability and authority to demand, coerce and otherwise induce patients to participate. Sport at Stoke can be understood, in this way, as simply another practice through which rehabilitation experts

exercised power on the bodies and actions of patients, and by extension, as a means through which such experts were produced, and through which unequal power relations were reproduced.

The early sport practices at Stoke also found traction in a particular combination of normalcy discourses and spectacular practices, which the carnival-style freak show had served to popularize. At the height of their popularity in the 19th through to the mid 20th centuries, freak shows were highly profitable circuses, carnivals and dime-museums that paraded racialized, disabled, hermaphroditic or otherwise differentiated bodies in such ways as to induce regular patronage from predominantly white, able-bodied spectators, or *gawkers* (Bogdan, 1988; Thomson, 1996). In the early to mid-twentieth century, the carnival-style freak show declined in popularity at the same time as many freak show practices and many of the actual freak show *freaks* were co-opted by medical and ethnographic experts to be used in their scientific displays (Bogdan, 1988; Clare, 1999; Rothfels, 1996; Thomson, 1996). Although the freak show is not explicitly acknowledged in any of the histories that I analyzed, these histories contain many examples of how freak show practices, and their underlying discourses, were inscribed within early disability sport spectacles: spectacles as small as those which were performed in front of potential hospital funders, or as large as the 1951 Festival of Brittain, in which paraplegic archers were showcased alongside other marvels of science and various colonial curiosities (for spectacle descriptions see J. Anderson, 2003; Bailey, 2008; Steadward & Peterson, 1997).

For example, several of the histories celebrate the occurrence of regularly scheduled and well-attended exhibition games of wheelchair polo, in which well-trained patients from Stoke consistently and handily defeated groups of un-practiced able-bodied men

from the surrounding communities (J. Anderson, 2003; Bailey, 2008; Goodman, 1986; Scruton). These games conformed neither to the logic of rehabilitation, nor to the logic of spectator sport, in that they were not characterized by well-matched competitions between well-disciplined opponents. They did, however, conform, in a number of ways, to the logic of the freak show. Thomson argues (1996):

> a freak show's cultural work is to make the physical particularity of the freak into a hypervisible text against which the viewer's indistinguishable body fades into a seemingly neutral, tractable, and invulnerable instrument of the autonomous will. (p. 10)

In other words, the freak show serves to reproduce the able/disabled and normal/abnormal dichotomies by orchestrating a spectacle that draws the audience's focus to the abnormality of the freak's body, thereby rendering the audience member's body comparatively normal and able-bodied. Through this lens of the freak show, a public sporting exhibition that pits patients against non-patients (instead of playing with mixed teams, for example) can be read as producing a number of effects: it reinforces the able/disabled and normal/abnormal dichotomies; this dichotomization renders the patients' "physical peculiarities" hypervisible; this hypervisibility provides a text against which the spectators' and non-patient competitors' "indistinguishable bodies" can be reaffirmed as neutral, normal and invulnerable; and the sporting context produces a venue for gawking that allows it to be discursively re-framed as a sporting and/or charitable interest (p. 10).

Within this specific context of the wheelchair polo games, even the success of the patients was highly productive, in that it added to the acceptability of the spectator's gaze and gave credibility to the rehabilitation hospitals. The patient success posed no serious

threat to the able/disabled competence divide, because their success was contextualized by their opponents' obvious lack of training and wheelchair polo's lack of acceptance as a *real* sport. In these ways, wheelchair polo serves as a useful example of how spectacles of early disability sport, although explicitly built on the idea of re-integrating the disabled into society, served to reproduce disability by reproducing discourses and practices that further differentiated disabled subjects from *normal* citizens.

The IOSDs: Interrogating Growth, Expansion and Differentiation

The decades that followed the first events at Stoke are celebrated, in these histories, for bringing disability sport to an increasing number of athletes with an increasing range of disabilities (Doll-Tepper, 1999; Labanowich, 1989; Steadward & Foster, 2003). This is also a period, within these histories, where I found a diversification of disability sport discourses, a multiplication of disciplinary practices, the production of new disabled and expert subjects, and an expansion of the expert-patient power relationship.

During this period, the sport programs at Stoke and elsewhere emerged from under the direct control of hospitals, taking the form of a series of International Organisations of Sport for people with a Disability (IOSDs): with each IOSD claiming authoritative control over the athletes and activities of a specific, medicalized impairment group (DePauw, 2001; DePauw & Gavron, 1995; Doll-Tepper, 1999). Examples of prominent IOSDs include the *International Stoke Mandeville Games Federation* (which governed sport for those with paraplegia), the *International Blind Sport Association*, and the *Cerebral Palsy – International Sports and Recreation Association*. The shift from hospital-based governance to the IOSDs coincided with the diversification of discourses that were used to

describe, justify and enact various practices of disability sport. Although still employing

discourses of bio-medical disability, nationalist-capitalist discourses of economic

usefulness, and freak-show inspired discourses of normalcy, many of the IOSDs justified

and asserted their authority through the addition of mainstream recreational sport

discourses, most notably that of fairness (Bailey, 2008; Howe, 2008). The emergence of

the fairness discourse is notable, within these histories, because it represents an idea and a

logic that is notably absent within the discursive field of rehabilitation. The adoption of

the fairness discourse produced the problem of unfair competitions, a problem that, in

turn, produced a number of solutions that the IOSDs claimed responsibility for enacting.

These included: the worldwide standardization of rules and eligibility criteria; the

increasingly invasive surveillance of the equipment, bodies and movements of athletes (to

ensure that they meet the rules and criteria); and the increasing differentiation of athletes

into more and more specific competition classes (see Bailey, 2008; Howe, 2008;

Steadward & Peterson, 1997).

Whereas, in Guttmann's hospital, all sport participants were patients and vice

versa, under the IOSDs sport was no longer imposed upon an entire disabled population,

and therefore, there emerged new kinds of differentiated disabled subjects: Athletes with

Disabilities (AWDs). Because disability sport was governed, at this time, by a number of

disability-specific IOSDs, however, AWDs were further differentiated. Each AWD was

assigned, through medical examinations, diagnoses and sport eligibility criteria, to a

specific IOSD and thus to an even more differentiated athletic identity (e.g., blind athlete,

paraplegic athlete) (Bailey, 2008; Howe, 2008). Athletes within each IOSD were then

increasingly, in the name of fairness, differentiated from each other through the mostly

bio-medical process of classification: a process through which medical-sport experts examine, objectify and numerically code the functional capacity (i.e., degree of impairment) of each athlete, assigning her/him to compete only against athletes who have been given the same hierarchical numeric designation (Howe & Jones, 2008; Jones & Howe 2005; DePauw & Gavron, 1995). Through the collusion of bio-medical discourses of disability and sporting discourses of fairness, therefore, the IOSDs further objectified the disabilities/impairments of their athletes, further differentiated these athletes from each other, and created a large number of new disabled subjects including, for example, the class 3.5 paraplegic.

The creation and growth of the IOSDs, and the growing number of practices and responsibilities induced by the discourse of fairness, led to the increased production of disability sport experts, including officers, administrators, classifiers, coaches, trainers and referees (Bailey, 2008). Although the need for many of these experts was often produced through sport participation discourses, like that of fairness, the vast majority of these new sport experts were bio-medically trained, able-bodied practitioners who "still viewed and treated their athletes as patients," and who still embraced, "an authoritarian, paternalistic - and possibly patronising - approach" (Bailey, 2008, p. 19, 20).[4] In other words, the IOSDs' increased distance from the hospitals and their adoption of sport-based discourses of fairness did not, in any significant way, challenge the unequal power relations that had been established within the original bio-medical rehabilitation environment. By leaving the umbrella of the hospital, in fact, the IOSDs were not only able to diversify the discourses and practices through which they could exercise power in relation to disabled subjects, but they were also able to expand the reach of the expert-patient power

relationship, encompassing not only current patients, but also disabled subjects who were no longer (or who had never been) hospitalized.

<div align="center">The ICC: Integration and Differentiation</div>

Another celebrated chapter in Paralympic history is the creation of the International Coordinating Committee (ICC), an umbrella organization made up of the officers from the most influential IOSDs (Bailey, 2008; Gold & Gold, 2007; Steadward & Foster, 2003). The ICC emerged largely out of the efforts of various IOSDs to structurally, financially and symbolically align themselves with the much more influential and affluent Olympic Movement (Brittain, 2009; Steadward & Peterson, 1997). There is evidence to suggest that the International Olympic Committee (IOC), on the other hand, was not as eager to align itself with the disability sport movement (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2009). By the early 1980s, however, the IOC offered minimal financial and administrative support for the IOSDs, provided that they met with a number of conditions that would serve to further distance and differentiate disability sport from the Olympic Movement. The most obvious example was the condition that the IOSDs, and their athletes, discontinue the use of any symbols, slogans or terminology that could, in any way, be construed as associated with those of the Olympics, including the term Paralympics (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2009; Steadward & Foster, 1997).

A second, less obviously differentiating, example was the condition that all IOSDs must negotiate as one international disability sports entity: the condition that catalyzed the formation of the ICC (Bailey, 2008). Before the creation of the ICC, disability sport had been structured according to the medical model of differentiation: a model that involves increasingly objectifying, differentiating, categorizing and segregating all bodies from

each other and from the (impossible to embody) statistical norm (Davis, 1995; Foucault, 2003c; Shogan, 1998; Tremain, 2005). Although the medical model distinguishes some differentiated bodies (such as the disabled) as particularly abnormal, all bodies - even Olympian ones- are potentially subject to the differentiating and pathologizing gaze of medicine (Davis, 1995; 2002). In opposition to this medical model, the IOC supported a disability sport structure that was more in line with the ways that freak shows differentiated bodies. As Thomson (1997) argues: "the freak show's most remarkable effect was to eradicate distinctions among a wide variety of bodies, conflating them under a single sign of the freak-as-other" (p. 62). The consolidation of all of the different IOSDs and their athletes functioned, not unlike the freak show, to conflate a wide variety of human variation into two dichotomous sporting bodies: the normal able-bodied Olympian, and the abnormal, AWD-as-other. It produced a hypervisible binary through which Olympians and their fans could confidently and comfortably recognize their shared normalcy. At the same time, the creation of the ICC also secured the ability of the IOC to act more efficiently upon the actions of disability sport experts and AWDs. By leveraging minimal funding against one administrative body, the IOC could induce this body to police each of the IOSDs and all of their athletes, ensuring that everyone (even those not profiting from funding) complied with IOC demands. In other words, the creation of the ICC further increased the number and types of experts who were in a position to act upon the actions of AWDs.

As soon as the ICC claimed that "every handicap is ours!!," it began distancing itself from the less "aesthetically performed sports" and their athletes (ICC official correspondence, as cited in Bailey, 2008, p. 75, 48). Through the examples used by ICC

delegates (as cited in Bailey, 2008), the less aesthetically performed sports can be

understood as events that were performed by athletes who appeared and moved in ways

that least resembled the ideal able-bodied athlete: that is, events that included athletes

whose bodily difference was easily rendered hypervisible (Thomson, 1996; 1997). Some

ICC officials were explicit in their hope that, if they could align their image with that of

Paralympians who looked and moved more like able-bodied athletes, it would quell the

discomforts of those in the IOC and lead to a more closely aligned relationship between

the IOC and the ICC (Bailey, 2008; Howe, 2008). When theorized through the framework

of the freak show, it becomes clear as to why this strategic move did not initially lead to

greater IOC co-operation. The freak show, after all, is built upon dichotomizing discourses

(Clare, 1999; Thomson, 1996; 1997). Thus, a clearly differentiated sporting freak show

with hypervisible disabled bodies, when placed in proximity to and juxtaposition with

Olympism, serves (like the wheelchair polo games at Stoke) to reproduce a dichotomy

through which the normalcy of both the spectator and the Olympian are reproduced. This

dynamic, however, only works when the dichotomy is clearly reinforced and orchestrated.

A Paralympic spectacle with uncomfortably Olympic-like athletes (or an Olympic

spectacle with undistinguishable Paralympic athletes) could serve to implicate the

Olympians, and Olympism as a whole, in the sporting spectacle of hypervisible human

abnormality: it could turn both Paralympians *and* Olympians into freaks, against which

the normalcy of the spectator could be reinforced.

   This Olympic-Paralympic struggle over the terrain of normalcy and enfreakment is

best exemplified by the dynamics that followed the IOC's agreement, in the mid-1980s, to

include a few disability sports as exhibition events in the Olympic Games (Bailey, 2008):

a move that both clearly juxtaposed and differentiated, through exhibition status, Paralympic and Olympic sports. The ICC's role was to suggest appropriate exhibition events, and they responded, in keeping with their above-described strategies, by suggesting events for well-muscled athletes with low-level paraplegia, and for athletes with visual impairments (Bailey, 2008). The IOC responded, in keeping with their above-described strategies, by accepting the inclusion of athletes with paraplegia, but rejecting events for those with visual impairments (Bailey, 2008). Whereas the ICC tried to align itself with the Olympics by suggesting athletes who most resembled their able-bodied counterparts, the IOC accepted only those athletes whose equipment (wheelchairs) would, like the freak show, make the AWDs disabilities hyper-visible, and would therefore clearly differentiate AWDs from their Olympic counterparts. The rejection of blind sport fits well into this strategy because these athletes could too easily be mistaken as able-bodied, and their results could too easily be compared to those of *normal* Olympians. This distancing move by the IOC, as well as their refusal to grant full medal status to disability sports, induced some ICC members to argue that, "demonstration events were demeaning and provided curiosity value rather than empowering those people with disabilities striving for excellence in sport" (Bailey, 2008, p. 86). In other words, some ICC members recognized the non-empowering patterns of the freak show in the Olympic spectacle, but there is no evidence to suggest that they were able to see similar patterns in their own representations and treatments of AWDs.

The IPC: The Cutting Edge of the Modern Paralympic Movement

Less than a decade after the emergence of the ICC, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) emerged to take its place, declaring itself to be "the supreme authority of

the international sports movement for the disabled" (IPC constitution, as cited in Bailey, 2008, p. 102). This institutional shift was justified and produced through a further diversification in the discursive field of Paralympism. In particular, nationalist, capitalist, elitist and neo-liberal discourses all colluded to produce an explicit disavowal of the IOSD's and ICC's disability-specific structure of Paralympism, celebrating instead, a more profitable and *empowering* sport-centred model. This proclaimed discursive shift justified the creation of a new governing body, the IPC, which was to have a more sport-centred and democratized voting structure: one in which every participating nation and every participating international sporting body would be able to vote, thereby significantly reducing the voting control formerly enjoyed by the disability-specific IOSDs (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2009; Howe, 2008; Legg et al., 2004; Steadward & Peterson, 1997). It is worthy of note that one of the promised, yet unfulfilled, outcomes of this *democratization* of Paralympic governance was the establishment of voting representation for athletes (Bailey, 2008; Howe, 2008).

This declared discursive shift away from bio-medical models of disability did not, however, mean that disability sport experts stopped medically differentiating disabled subjects, conducting procedures of bodily examination, and exercising power within expert-patient-style power relationships. This discursive shift *did,* however*,* justify the official focal shift of the IPC from the growth and development of disability sport and its athletes, to the promotion of an increasingly palatable, profitable and efficiently administered Paralympic Movement and spectacle (Bailey, 2008; Howe, 2008). The production of this spectacle often involved the explicit use of corporate and elite sport discourses to reshape and further justify practices that remained grounded in the discursive

logic of bio-medical disability and freak show normalcy.

One example of collusion between bio-medical and elite sport discourses is the shift towards integrated classification. Classification had hitherto involved the increasing differentiation of athletes in the name of creating increasingly fair competitions for increasing numbers of participants (Bailey, 2008; DePauw & Gavron, 1995; Howe 2008). The IPC, in contrast, began integrating and cutting classification categories and events. In the words of Michael Riding, the IPC's chief *medical* officer:

> integrated classification should not lead to a multiplication of events or individuals competing, nor should the process reduce the competitive or aesthetic impact of the Paralympic Games for the spectators… the 'pursuit of excellence cannot always be fair, or equitable.' (as cited in Bailey 2008, p. 106)

In other words, the discourses and practices of bio-medical disability, capitalism and elite spectator sport came together in such a way, within the IPC, as to justify the cutting of events that were deemed the least competitive and aesthetically appealing, and to integrate the athletes from these events into events for other classification groups. The effects of this discursive and administrative shift were at least threefold. First, the appropriateness of classification categories and of sporting events were increasingly judged through economic criteria: the degree to which (the cutting of) the event contributed to a less expensive, more efficiently administered, and more spectator and sponsor friendly (i.e., profitable) spectacle. Second, the criteria of *competitiveness*, determined by the number of qualifying competitors and the breadth of their performances, consistently served to *objectively* eliminate events for athletes that did not conform as well to the aesthetics of the ideal athlete. That is, these cuts almost always affected women and athletes in lower

classification groups (those deemed to have *more severe* disabilities), whose *reduced*

competitiveness can easily be traced to their systemic lack of athletic opportunities: a lack

perpetuated by the IPC cutting their events (Bailey, 2008; DePauw & Gavron, 1995;

Howe, 2008). Third, the cutting of these events often led to the systemic exclusion of their

athletes, because their only remaining opportunities (if such opportunities were not also

cut) were to compete against athletes in a higher classification group, a group for which

they were unlikely to meet the qualification standards. In this way, the explicitly

celebrated shift from bio-medical disability discourses to those of elite sport competition,

profit and spectatorship (as, ironically, explained above by the chief *medical* officer)

served to obfuscate how these new discourses colluded with bio-medical discourses and

practices in ways that further reproduced and marginalized disabled subjects.

Despite the above-described efforts at normalizing the Paralympic spectacle,

Paralympism, within the era of the IPC, still gains significant traction through the

dichotomizing discourses and practices that were characteristic of the freak show. The

IPC's promotion of a single Paralympic spectacle, and their focus on increasingly cutting

and integrating events within this spectacle, have served to produce a more appealing,

comfortable and palatable experience for the Paralympic spectator: an experience that

aligns with the discourses, practices and effects of the freak show. The modern

Paralympics, in collapsing a wide range of human variation into a single spectacle, and

single integrated events, serves to "eradicate distinctions among a wide variety of bodies,

conflating them under a single sign of the freak-as-other" (Thomson, 1997, p. 62). This

enfreakment is furthered by the temporal, phonetic and organizational proximity of, yet

clear demarcation between, the Paralympics and the Olympics. This juxtaposition, like

wheelchair polo at Stoke, serves to reproduce the disabled-able dichotomy, to render the "physical particularity" of Paralympians "hypervisible," and to create a distinguishable and categorically defined Other against which Olympians, spectators' and experts' bodies can all be confidently constructed as "neutral, tractable, invulnerable" and, importantly, able-bodied (Thomson, 1996, p.10).

Concluding Thoughts

In this paper, I used Foucauldian discourse analysis to trace the most salient discursive shifts, continuities and effects that were evidenced within 14 texts about Paralympic history. I have presented my analysis within the context of four widely celebrated institutional shifts of Paralympism (Stoke, IOSDs, ICC and IPC): shifts that are often characterized, within these histories, as representing a progression from rehabilitation, to participation, to empowering elite sport. I have demonstrated how these shifts can be alternatively characterized by the adoption, adaptation and interweaving of a series of discourses that were previously embedded within sport, rehabilitation and the freak show: discourses that have served to produce disabling practices, to reproduce (and produce new) disabled, able-bodied, and expert subjects, and to perpetuate the ability of Paralympic experts to limit the possible field of actions of those experiencing disability. In this way, I have demonstrated how Paralympic discourses and practices, in contrast to the claim of empowerment, are implicated in the perpetuation of the practices and unequal power relations in and through which disability is experienced and sustained.

One of the greatest limitations of this study is that I had neither the space, nor the appropriate sources, to properly engage with Foucault's (1978) notion of resistance: that is, I was not able to trace how the practices and discourses taken up by athletes were

integral to (rather than external to, or irrelevant to) the power relations of Paralympism. In other words, my analysis does not provide adequate insight into how athletes strategically colluded with, vehemently resisted, and creatively transformed expert discourses and practices, likely in varying and contradicting ways. Like most of the histories upon which this analysis is based, therefore, my study does not adequately account for how athletes actively contributed to the complex relationship of forces out of which contemporary Paralympic subjects, practices and discourses emerged. The socio-cultural study of elite disability sport would profit greatly from more archival, or perhaps interview-based, studies about the ways that Paralympians strategically act(ed) upon their sporting surroundings and upon their own bodies and subjectivities. Such studies might open up new understandings of Paralympic power relations, and new ways of imagining what resistance and/or practices of freedom[5] might look like within a disability sport context.

While not dealing extensively with the dynamics of resistance, my research does challenge the dominant scholarly trend of characterizing elite disability sport as a form of resistance, in and of itself (see Ashton-Shaeffer et al., 2001; Bailey, 2008; Berger, 2009; Hardin, 2007; Huang & Brittain, 2006; Page et al., 2001; Steadward & Peterson, 1997). I demonstrate how Foucault's concepts of discourse and power can be useful for examining not only how disabling power relations are embedded within disability sport, but also how disability sport, and its claims of empowerment, might serve to reproduce disabling relations of power. One of the important contributions that Foucauldian theory can make to this field, I contend, is to introduce skepticism about sporting institutions and practices that claim to unequivocally resist disabling societies and/or empower the disabled individuals that they govern.

A Foucauldian skepticism about both empowerment and impairment could have a significant impact on the ways that scholars undertake, for example, the two common types of elite disability sport research outlined in my literature review: media analyses, and sport-as-empowerment research. What might we learn from media analyses that compared, for example, disabling media discourses about Paralympians to official disability sport discourses from media releases and marketing campaigns (not to mention discourses inscribed in disability sport structures and practices)? What conclusions might we draw from interviews with Paralympians, if we did not assume that they had impairments? What experiences might we learn about if we asked them how their bodies are policed through sport, and how they negotiate their lives in the context of these practices? Approaching disability sport with increased skepticism might help to further align socio-cultural research on elite disability sport with important post-structuralist and neo-marxist research about both mainstream sport and disability. In this way, disability sport research could more easily avail itself of the many important insights developed in these areas, and more importantly, could use the crucial intersection of disability and sport to explore and share new insights into how bodily difference is enacted, reproduced and, potentially, transformed.

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NOTES

[1] I use the term *disabled* in order to signal the social construction of these subjects, that is, to imply that subjects are *disabled* by their social and political contexts. I use a wide variety of disability terminology herein, including the term *person experiencing disability.* In my lack of consistency, as in my use of this last term, I intend to highlight the contextual, constructed, disparate and fluctuating conglomeration of bodily and social interactions that form contemporary notions of disability.

[2] Classification is a process whereby experts examine athletes and assign them to a hierarchical, numeric (or alpha-numeric) category of competition, based on their assessed level of deviation from *normal* physical, intellectual or sensory function (see DePauw & Gavron, 1995).

[3] The term adapted physical activity can be used to refer to the academic field, the professional area, and/or the practices concerned with providing sport and other physical activities for participants that are deemed to have disabilities and/or *special needs* (see Reid, 2003).

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[4] Exceptions to the rule of able-bodied, medically trained disability sport experts were most often administrators and coaches of the Comité International des Sports des Sourds, who were almost entirely drawn from the Deaf community (Bailey, 2008).

[5] Foucault's later works on ethics, technologies of the self and practices of freedom offer insight into how subjects might strategically and ethically act within ever-present relationships of power (see, for example, Foucault, 2003a; 2003b; 2003d).