LJMU Research Online

Townsend, R, Huntley, TD, Cushion, C and Fitzgerald, H

'It's not about disability, I want to win as many medals as possible': The social construction of disability in high-performance coaching.

http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/9245/

Article

Citation (please note it is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work)

Townsend, R, Huntley, TD, Cushion, C and Fitzgerald, H (2018) 'It's not about disability, I want to win as many medals as possible': The social construction of disability in high-performance coaching. International Review for the Sociology of Sport. ISSN 1012-6902

LJMU has developed **LJMU Research Online** for users to access the research output of the University more effectively. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LJMU Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain.

The version presented here may differ from the published version or from the version of the record. Please see the repository URL above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information please contact researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk

http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/

'It's not about disability, I want to win as many medals as possible': The social construction of disability in high-performance coaching.

Robert C. Townsend[a], Tabo Huntley[b], Christopher J. Cushion[c] and Hayley Fitzgerald[d]

[a] Te Huataki Waiora Faculty of Health, Sport and Human Performance, University of Waikato, New Zealand.

[b]School of Sport Studies, Leisure and Nutrition, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK.

[c]School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK.

[d] Carnegie School of Sport, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK.

Corresponding author: Robert Townsend, Te Huataki Waiora Faculty of Health, Sport and Human Performance, University of Waikato, New Zealand.

robert.townsend@waikato.ac.nz

Abstract

This article draws on the theoretical concepts of Pierre Bourdieu to provide a critical analysis of the social construction of disability in high-performance sport coaching. Data were generated using a qualitative cross-case comparative methodology, comprising eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in high-performance disability sport, and interviews with coaches and athletes from a cross-section of Paralympic sports. We discuss how in both cases 'disability' was assimilated into the 'performance logic' of the sporting field as a means of maximising symbolic capital. Furthermore, coaches were socialised into a prevailing legitimate culture in elite disability sport that was reflective of ableist, performance-focused and normative ideologies about disability. In this article we unpack the assumptions that underpin coaching in disability sport, and by extension use sport as a lens to problematise the construction of disability in specific social formations across coaching cultures. In so doing we raise critical questions about the interrelation of disability and sport.

Keywords: disability, high-performance sport, paralympic athletes, coaching, symbolic capital.

It has been suggested that sport provides a context that can challenge and influence the social and cultural perceptions of disability and disabled people (Howe and Silva, 2016). This is reinforced by binaries that often frame discussions about Paralympic and disability sport. Examples of such dualisms include debates about 'ability-disability' (e.g. Purdue and Howe, 2012a), 'empowerment-disempowerment' (e.g., Howe and Silva, 2016; Peers, 2009; Purdue and Howe, 2012b), and 'elite sport-disability sport' (e.g. DePauw and Gavron, 2005). Interrogating the space between these polarisations offers opportunities to establish a dialogue on the way disability is positioned in social spaces. Indeed, sometime ago DePauw (1997) alerted us to the disruptive potential of sport due to its stratified social relations. These social relations 'construct, produce, institutionalise, enact and perform disability' (Smith and Perrier, 2014: 12).

Naturally, such discussions concern the ontological position of disability in sport. In this study, we locate our theorising of 'disability' within a social relational framework (Thomas, 1999, 2004, 2007). The social relational model offers a subjective, internalised understanding of disability in relation to social structure and cultural discourses about disability. Understanding 'disability' as socially constructed, culturally fashioned, and lived (Smith and Perrier, 2014; Thomas, 1999), in relation to sport provides a powerful lens (Townsend *et al.*, 2016) through which to examine the discursive principles that organise fields and structure individual practices (Bourdieu, 1990). Understanding the construction of disability particularly important when coaches' perceptions of disability are often framed in medical model discourses (cf. Townsend *et al.,* 2017) and in high-performance sport, disability occupies a tenuous, hierarchical and often contradictory position (cf. Purdue and Howe, 2012a). However, debate about the social construction of disability in sport coaching has been noticeably absent within the literature.

78 Coaching is characterised by its own taken-for-granted logic (Cushion and Jones, 2006),
79 with a hierarchy of species of capital, and orthodox practices (Denison *et al.,* 2015). As such,
80 it can be usefully conceptualised as a field located within the broader field of – in the context
81 of this research – disability sport. The centrality of coaches in maintaining the structure and
82 ideals of high-performance sport is recognised (Cushion and Jones, 2006) but often overlooked
83 in disability sport. Furthermore, coaching was identified as a priority for research in disability
84 sport over 30 years ago (DePauw, 1986), and literature has begun discovering something of the
85 complexity of coaching in disability sport (e.g. Taylor *et al.,* 2014). It is important to note that
86 most of the established research tends to distance itself from discussions about impairment
87 (Townsend *et al.,* 2016), with the construction of disability being forced into the background,
88 or ignored. Only recently has work looking at coaching in disability sport engaged with models
89 of disability (e.g. Wareham *et al.,* 2017; Townsend *et al.,* 2016) as a means of examining the
90 interrelationships between disabled people and practices in sporting contexts. Interrogating
91 elite disability sport through a critical lens is an important step as coaching is a de-limited field
92 of practice that is "imbued with dominant values and common beliefs that appear natural and
93 are therefore taken-for-granted" (Cushion and Jones, 2014: 276). Research has demonstrated
94 that the relationship between coaches, athletes and the context in which practice unfolds is
95 permeable to the influence of other constructed discourses within society, such as gender (e.g.
96 Norman and Rankin-Wright, 2016), race (e.g. Rankin-Wright *et al.,* 2016) or in the case of this
97 paper, disability (Townsend *et al.,* 2017). However, coaches are generally not trained in the
98 specifics of disability sport and recent evidence suggests coaching is organised and constrained
99 by medical model discourses reflecting largely ableist attitudes (cf. Townsend *et al.* 2017).
100 Therefore, if sport is to function as a platform for empowerment (Purdue and Howe, 2012b), it
101 is crucial to examine how the social practices of coaching are "generated and sustained within
102 social systems and cultural formations" (Thomas, 1999: 44) such as disability sport. To do so

103 it is important to discuss critically the productive forces – the social relations of production and
104 reproduction – and the ideological constructions of disability found across disability sport (cf.
105 Thomas, 1999).
106
107 The aim of this paper was to examine how disability was constructed in high-
108 performance sport coaching contexts. Specifically, we explored the intersecting fields of high-
109 performance coaching, within Paralympic sport and disability sport. Paralympic sport refers to
110 sports that compete in the Paralympic Games, a quadrennial multi-sports competition organised
111 by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). Disability sport is a broad term used to
112 describe sports that accommodate people with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities
113 (DePauw and Gavron, 2005). Given the developmental goals of the IPC, 'Parasport' is often
114 used as an umbrella term to accommodate both Paralympic and Disability sport. This
115 intersection provided shared understandings across the multi-sport Paralympic context and a
116 single elite sport positioned separately to the Paralympic games. The significance of this
117 research is in extending discourse on the social construction of disability in sport and through
118 coaching, extending debate on 'empowerment' in sport, and highlighting the unintended
119 consequences of well-intended actions. In this sense, our critical tradition was focused on
120 deconstructing taken-for-granted conditions that disabled people face, which can be
121 exacerbated in social formations such as sport where power relations mediate who has voice,
122 autonomy and identity, and who does not.

123 **Bourdieu and high-performance coaching**

124 The relevance of Bourdieu's theory to this research is that it has at its very centre a "concern
125 with the body as a bearer of symbolic value" (Shilling, 2004: 111). Bourdieu's view of the
126 social world as a "collective work of construction of social reality" (Bourdieu and Wacquant,
127 1992: 239) and his conceptual tools of *habitus, field* and *capital* together help to explain how
128 cultural settings function according to an internal logic, and can be used to highlight and

challenge the conditions under which ideologies are formed. This shares concerns with disability studies in its "interrogation of cultural categories, discourses, language, and practices" (Thomas, 2004: 36) that constitute disability. In particular, Bourdieu's work can be understood as a philosophy of the relational (Bourdieu, 1998), which aligns with the central tenets of the social relational model, especially his attempt at addressing the issue of agency and structure, and "articulating the relations of production between the individual, their body and society" (Brown, 2005: 4; Thomas, 1999).

In sport, the disabled body is, as Edwards and Imrie (2003) argued, a "site of contestation" (p. 240) where impairment and its effects (physical and intellectual) can "function as distinctive signs and as signs of distinction, positive or negative" (Bourdieu, 1989: 20). These distinctions can be shaped by the structures of the field, and thus the use of Bourdieu can highlight the cultural resources and frameworks drawn upon in practice and the meanings attributed to disability within coaching in disability sport.

In sport coaching a Bourdieusian approach provides an understanding of the two-way relationship between objective structures of the coaching context and the dispositions of individual agents to provide a reciprocal view of the way disability is constructed. With coaches engaging in a role and process that is neither benign nor neutral, Bourdieu allows for the deconstruction of the power relations and interactions that shape social practice. Such analyses of disability focus on the power that social categories have in constructing subjectivities and identities of self and others (Thomas, 2004), enabling the examination of the social conditions of coaching that constitute and legitimise ways of thinking about disability (Bourdieu, 1977). Indeed, Purdue and Howe (2015) argued that Paralympic and disability sport are inherently shaped by such power struggles, with coaching further characterised by a struggle for the legitimacy of disability. Thus, coaching research requires the application of sociology to reveal

153 and to challenge dominant values and ideologies that influence disability sport and by extension
154 the way disability can be understood and reconstructed in society.

155 Methodology

156 Following institutional ethical approval, data were generated within a cross-case comparative
157 research design over two phases of data collection (Miles *et al.,* 2014). The first and second
158 authors were both coaches within these fields, enabling the production of a contextually-
159 informed picture of coaching in disability and Paralympic sport. This enabled immersion *within*
160 "real activity as such" (Bourdieu, 1977: 96), and in practical relation to the world of inquiry.
161 The first author conducted an 18-month ethnographic case-study in a specific high-
162 performance disability sport context. Data were generated through participant observation,
163 interviewing with coaches, and focus groups with four athletes and twelve parents within a
164 national learning disability sports team (see table 1 and 2). Participant observation meant full
165 participation in the setting with a formal coaching role working with the players and the
166 management team. Immersion in this context provided sustained access to an institutionally-
167 supported and integrated coaching process within a specific national governing body (NGB)
168 and generated data that had both temporal and spatial meaning (Thomas, 2004).

169 **Insert tables 1 and 2 about here**

170 To add a layer of theoretical breadth in developing a shared understanding of coaching,
171 the second author employed comparative in-depth semi-structured interviews with five
172 Paralympic medal-winning coaches and five Paralympic athletes (see tables 3 and 4) alongside
173 the ethnographic fieldwork. The in-depth semi-structured approach to interviewing allowed
174 particpants to express and elaborate on their experinces and perceptions in relation to a
175 common guide covering: development in sport and coaching, perceptions of the Paralympic
176 games and effective coaching in this conext. Participants for the comparative interviews were

sampled theoretically to enable analysis (Ritchie *et al.,* 2003) across sports and across coaching cultures. Importantly, none of the coaches across either study had impairments, perhaps reflecting the relative lack of disabled coaches within the coaching workforce (Fitzgerald, 2013). The process was iterative in nature, and enabled the generation of themes according to comparative analysis of two distinct and meaningful coaching populations across a particular field (Ritchie *et al.,* 2003). Together, data were captured through comprehensive written field notes whilst as a coach immersed within the Paralympic field and transcripts of audio-taped interviews and audio data captured *in situ*. All field notes were dated and included contextual information such as location, those present, physical setting, type of social interactions and who composed them, and activities. The fusion of these methods provided focused data on coaching disabled athletes across the fields of elite disability sport and Paralympic sport.

Insert tables 3 and 4 about here

Data Analysis

The purpose of the analysis was to build a "critical and defamiliarising" (Alvesson and Solberg, 2009: 172) view on coaching in disability sport. Data were therefore analysed inductively to build a system of organising categories about coaching in disability sport from the unstructured data. This inductive process enabled categories, themes and narrative to be built from the 'bottom up', by organising the data into increasingly more abstract meaning units (Creswell, 2013). As Creswell (2013) describes, the inductive process involved working back and forth between the analysis and the dataset until a comprehensive set of themes was established. Next, theory was used in a deductive manner against the empirical material which resulted in the generation of three inter-related themes related to "*Disability, high performance and symbolic capital*", "*Empowerment, Misrecognition and (Dis)ability Identity*" and "*Acceptance and Symbolic Violence*". Importantly, though maintaining degrees of abstraction the process was

always grounded in the data and used to inform the analytical process.These themes are necessarily discussed separately, however they should be understood as layered, interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Analysis and Discussion

Disability, high-performance and symbolic capital

A field is defined as networks of social relations, structured systems of social positions within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over resources, stakes and access (Bourdieu, 1990). Fields are organised both horizontally and vertically. At the 'top', and thus working across all others is the field of power. The field of power exists 'horizontally' through all fields and mediates the struggles within each through the control of the 'exchange rate' of the forms of cultural and social capital between fields. For Bourdieu, power is an active property and presents itself in three fundamental species of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992); cultural, economic and social, and importantly, can be both material and embodied. Each field values certain species of capital that are recognised as symbolic, where those with symbolic capital are better placed to control the specific logic of the field.

Fields (and capital) therefore have a critical role in generating social practice. Rather than having clearly demarcated boundaries, fields are symbolic insofar as they are determined by the limits of that which people feel is at stake in the field and are worthy of contest (*illusio*), and that activities within are guided by an underpinning logic of practice. A specific example of *illusio* and the tensions caused at the boundaries of a field is shown by the way elite 'performance' values and practices held symbolic capital:

> The element that I'm involved in is a performance programme. To the point where as far as possible disabilities are left at the door when they come in. Actually, this has grown so much now and the national squads have come on so much that there is a need for a performance element to this. I felt you know *if we're gonna have credibility in*

226 *this game* there needs to be a (performance) pathway structure because otherwise it
227 devalues disability sport. (Brian, Performance Director – interview; emphasis added).

228 Fields operate semi-autonomously and are responsible for the production of values and beliefs
229 which rationalise the 'rules' of behaviour or logic of practice for its occupants, which in this
230 case related to coaching disabled athletes. As a result, coaches commonly articulated their roles
231 in relation to high-performance sport, thus subsuming 'disability' within a powerful high-
232 performance logic:

233 It's my first coaching role in a performance environment and the opportunity to work
234 in a performance environment was too good an opportunity to miss, so work with the
235 physio, the head coach, the manager, an SandC coach. (Steve, Coach – interview).

236 This squad has become more high-performance, as in the environment we're creating.
237 I see it as a performance environment. It's all about performance mate - I don't give a
238 shit (about anything else). I think, really, if you can coach disability, then you can
239 almost coach anybody. (Theo, Strength and Conditioning Coach - field notes).

240 These data are illustrative of coaches who understood the 'rules of the game', where aligning
241 with a high-performance logic had more symbolic capital than disability. This process was
242 reinforced by the concept of doxa - the conditions of existence or the order of things - where
243 coaches embodied a socially and culturally constituted way of perceiving, evaluating and
244 behaving, that was accepted as unquestioned and self-evident, i.e. 'natural' (Bourdieu, 1977).
245 In working to the doxa, the coaches and athletes were able to generate symbolic capital by
246 means of recognising competencies associated with high-performance sport, minimising the
247 distance between *disability sport* and *high-performance sport*, while at the same time
248 maximising the distance between *disability* and *disability sport*:

249 Sport is that unique environment where they're seen as sportsmen first, people with a
250 disability second. And for the people we work with and coach in this particular squad
251 it's refreshing for them because they're treated like adults, like..."normal", not only are
252 they being treated with respect as an athlete, because they're at the peak of where any
253 sportsperson wants to be, which is representing their country, they're given that respect,
254 they're given that respect as an adult. (Bert, Team Manager – interview).
255

256 These binaries, or relations of homology (Bourdieu, 1998), were part of a conscious struggle
257 for the coaches to consecrate their own symbolic attributes within the 'performance'

258 environment. In so doing, the coaches attempted to maximise their symbolic capital and secure
259 their positions within the high-performance field by subverting attention away from 'negative'
260 disability-specific associations:

261 I don't want to pigeon hole myself as a disability sport coach, I'm a coach. It doesn't
262 interest me...this is just a stepping stone for me". (Steve, Coach – field notes).

263 In this sense, there was a tension between 'disability sport' and 'high-performance sport'
264 which acted in opposition and were used to "lend meaning to the world" (Everett, 2002: 66)
265 forming the basis for a hierarchy of power within coaching practice:

266 I see it as equal (Olympic and Paralympic sport). I think that gives a reassurance and a
267 power to when I say that isn't good enough (training and competition). So I do know
268 what world class able-bodied looks like, I do know what world class 'para' looks like.
269 (Charles, Paralympic coach - interview).

270 Thus, 'disability' was assimilated into the logic of high-performance sporting practices, and
271 coaching was shaped by a doxic structure where disability identity was closely related to
272 performance and athletic bodies. In this way coaching practice was shaped by binaries (i.e.
273 disabled/non-disabled; high-performance/disability sport), that functioned to provide, what
274 Bourdieu (1977) described as, a *sense of limits* of practice. These limits served to frame the
275 'right' or 'correct' way of coaching:

276 *Players were often given 'individual' time in which they would go and work in small*
277 *groups on different aspects of the sport. Commonly, the players would receive direction*
278 *from members of the coaching staff or were encouraged to work off their 'action plans'*
279 *which defined areas for improvement. During this particular session, the coaches were*
280 *observing a group of players.*

281 "The players seem to be working well".

282 *Steve (coach) laughed.* "These drills are great for them. I can go an entire weekend
283 without thinking these boys have a disability- I forget about their disabilities. I coach
284 these boys like I would a 13-year-old boy, in the same way. It's true!"

285 *Later, I questioned Steve* "What did you mean earlier, when you said you forget about
286 disability?"

287 “Well, it’s simple. Otherwise I’m changing my beliefs as a coach, aren’t I? Which
288 would mean I’m coaching the disability not the (athlete)”.

289 (Field notes)

290 There was a clear attempt by the coaches to impose the “legitimate definition of a particular
291 class of body” (Bourdieu, 1991: 362) through the reconstruction of disability according to able-
292 bodied norms. This was in contrast to the athletes, where impairment and its effects were an
293 legitimate part of their athletic identity:

294 It's just sport to me. I don't see anybody as disabled, I've never known them (team mates)
295 not be in a wheelchair so, I just treat them as that's how it is. They treat me as I am. If
296 they want help, like everyone needs help at some stage but I don't treat them any
297 differently, I never think about it. I completely forget. It's normal. (Jeffrey, Paralympic
298 Athlete, interview).

299 Together this discourse illustrates the relationship between sport and society in the social
300 construction of disability (cf. Bourdieu, 1984) and highlight how these constructions
301 influenced coaching practice. The interest and subsequent influence demonstrated by these
302 discourses framing the coaching process can be understood as “part of the larger field of
303 struggles over the definition of the legitimate body and the legitimate uses of the body”
304 (Bourdieu, 1993: 122), where disability represents a form of negative symbolic capital when
305 defined in relation to a field framed by high-performance sport discourses. Indeed, it can be
306 argued that the reconstruction of disability was an exercise of consecration, as Bourdieu (2000:
307 97) argued, “once one has accepted the viewpoint that is constitutive of a field, one can no
308 longer take an external viewpoint on it”.

309 *‘Empowerment’, Misrecognition and (Dis)ability Identity*

310 For the coaches, the logic of the field described above was characterised by an opposition
311 between labels of ‘disability’ and ‘athlete’. This binary created a situation where coaches
312 rejected notions of ‘disability’ in their practice, instead affording distinction to high-
313 performance and elite ‘athletic’ identities, which were used as ‘sense-making’ frames to direct

the coaching process. This was evident, for instance, in the discourse Judy used to shape her coaching:

> I don't think of them as being disabled, I think of them as being athletes - so an athlete who uses a wheelchair. (Judy, Paralympic Coach –interview).

In this instance, disabled athletes were subject to assumptions about their abilities framed by normalisation and judgement against ableist standards (Townsend *et al.,* 2016). Importantly, such a position created a hierarchy of power where the athletes were assigned aspects of identity that were viewed as antagonistic to notions of disability, constituting a form of 'empowerment'. This runs counter to an often taken-for-granted humanistic discourse that frames identity (Groff and Kleiber, 2001), where primacy is given to agency and individual psychology. Instead, the analysis illustrates how identity was imposed upon the athletes through a hierarchy of power where their agency was constrained within the structural conditions of 'elite' sport coaching and governed by the coaching discourse:

> I: Can you describe your role as a coach?
>
> Trevor: Giving athletes a sense of ownership...not...avoiding the word empower, erm, because of its association with me having the power to empower, me having the right or I'm the only one that can allow this person to be empowered, but more giving or creating environments, creating scope and opportunities for athletes to shape something themselves. I think if we are looking at somebody being the best in the world, then I think that freedom to explore, that freedom to have some ownership and control that the athlete has themselves is important (Paralympic Coach - interview).
>
> Empowering people and getting the best hidden talent from them… and they need empowering…they should be able to perform everything without me (Phil, Paralympic Coach – interview).

These data highlight the way in which notions of 'empowerment' were entrenched within the coaching discourse as a result of exposure to doxic social conditions. 'Empowerment' in this sense was constructed by the high-performance field which referred to the rejection of disabled identities and the superimposition of 'athletic' identity (Purdue and Howe, 2012b) as a frame of reference for coaches and athletes. As such the coaching process provided an illusion of

343 empowerment whereby athlete 'control and mastery' (Wallerstein, 1992: 1998) was in fact
344 shaped by the coaches through a legitmised performance coaching process. Thus, coaching was
345 based on value-judgements about disability where athletes had to align to a coaching
346 environment permeated by high-performance logic, values and practices:

347 I treat them just like I do any able-bodied player, I'm going to drive them hard, I'm
348 going to push them hard. I don't allow them to give up, I'm not going to allow them to
349 tell me that they can't do something'. (Benjamin, Paralympic Coach – interview).

350 What's my attitude towards disability? 'Disability'? It's just a fucking label. It doesn't
351 exist. I've not once approached the environment here as a disability environment.
352 (Steve, Coach – interview).

353 Here, 'effective' coaching in disability sport was defined in relation to symbolic competencies
354 involving a rejection of disability and the inscribing of distinctive dispositions ('athletic'
355 identity) into coaching practice, a process that Bourdieu (1990) called the institutionalisation
356 of distinction. Importantly, the rejection of disability fulfilled an important practical function
357 (Bourdieu, 1998). For the coaches in the study, empowerment was conflated with performance
358 ideals providing a sense of structure and practical mastery (Townsend *et al.,* 2016) to direct
359 coaching:

360 I: How do you view the athletes you coach?

361 Stephanie: They are the same as any able bodied athlete, the same needs. It is, and the
362 need is going to depend on the phase they are in. There are certain needs that are more
363 highlighted due to the complexity of the disability, erm, and that might change but they
364 are still humans... A lot of the athletes know a lot about their disabilities and they can
365 teach you a lot and guide you to become an expert on the disability and how to manage
366 the disability. (Paralympic Coach – interview).

367 I: How do you understand the difference between disability and impairment?

368 Bert: There's no difference between disability and impairment, because actually we
369 should be looking at it going, actually, they're athletes first – people first, athletes
370 second, someone with a disability impairment third. Not the other way around like some
371 people say it. (Bert, Team manager - interview).

Hence, coaches sought to reframe disability identity according to what DePauw (1997) described as the 'invisibility of disability' whereby disability was forced into the background of the collective coaching consciousness and the reality of impairment disregarded:

> What's the difference between impairment and disability? [11 second pause]. Crikey, to be honest I go through my little world not even thinking about either. If I'm honest I genuinely, never consider or look at it as anything different from training a different population. (Trevor, Paralympic Coach - interview)

> When I first started out with this squad it took me a while to understand what they actually need, but the more I coach them I actually understood that they just need what everyone else needs. For me (disability) it's irrelevant I'm dealing with people with impairment, disability whatever you want to put it, they're just a *group of players* which just have slightly different needs to another group of players; you're just coaching a group of people, just an athlete who wants to be coached. (Oscar, Strength and Conditioning Coach – interview; emphasis added).

In this sense, the coaches, from their position of power, subverted what they considered a 'disabling gaze', thus distancing themselves from discussions about disability:

> I: Given the context that you work in, how do you understand the difference between disability and impairment?

> Steve: No, I don't want to know, I'm not – to me I don't overthink it that much, I don't, disability, impairment, you know, whatever you want to call it, it doesn't interest me, I've got no interest in that. To me that question is, I don't know, I'm not being blasé, but it doesn't affect, disability, impairment or the difference between it, would not affect how I run a session, would not affect how I deliver the session, how I deliver a team talk, it just doesn't even affect me mate, so I don't know. (Coach - interview).

Here, the data shows how the coaches and athletes were engaged in a symbolic struggle of classifications (Bourdieu, 1998) about the position of disability. In direct contrast however, was the athletes' attempt to reconcile labels of 'athlete' and 'disability' within the Paralympic field:

> I am an elite athlete and I'm a Paralympic champion, double Paralympic champion, because that seems to be, that's the thing people are impressed by. If you haven't got the gold then no one really cares, but a Paralympian is a proud title to own. Even though we call all disabled athletes Paralympians and it annoys the hell out of me, I know that I earned that name. It has the same, to me, it means the same as if I was an Olympian. It's the same level. I have reached the top, like the absolute top of my sporting prowess. (Zoe, Paralympic Athlete – interview).

407 It's good because of my disability it's (sport) pushed me a long way through. That's a
408 good thing I guess, I think there's nothing wrong with having a disability, everyone can
409 be the same. Just don't treat, treat us differently. I mean, I'm proud of my disability
410 really, shouldn't be ashamed of it. (R, Player – focus group)

411 Here the construction of disability had a number of effects. The coaches monopolised the
412 discourse regarding the construction of disability. This provided a sense of structure to their
413 coaching reality and brought with it the most amount of symbolic capital. This clear alignment
414 to the doxic structure further reinforced the social divisions between 'ability-disability' (Howe
415 and Silva, 2016). That is, for the athletes social structure and power were determining of
416 identity and not individual autonomy. Hence, for these athletes, the coaching conditions
417 influenced by a rejection of disability limited the range of agentic choices and strategies
418 available to shape their experiences:

419 Okay we're labelled as having a disability but that shouldn't be a reason for us to be
420 belittled by the title, we have the same opportunities to compete as the professional
421 players do. You have that little bit more of a challenge to take responsibility which
422 obviously helps us as individuals with our life skills. (J, Player – focus group)

423 Thus, it was in the *interests* of the athletes to conform, "such is the paradox of the dominated"
424 (Bourdieu, 1987: 184).

425 *Acceptance and Symbolic Violence*

426 The athletes, in assessing their position within the coaching culture, applied "a system of
427 schemes of perception and appreciation which is the embodiment of the objective laws whereby
428 their value is objectively constituted" and attributed "to themselves what the distribution
429 attributes to them" (Bourdieu, 1984: 473). This was not always an 'empowering' position:

430 (The coach) is super competitive and he is always right. I feel like I can't make mistakes,
431 you know, like, I'm not allotted mistakes the way other people are. So that definitely
432 puts more pressure on me. In practice…you kind of almost forget about, you know,
433 people's limitations. You don't really give people like much leeway or excuses for their
434 limitations. We don't really cut people much slack. (Nia, Paralympic Athlete -
435 interview).

436 Attributing an 'athletic' identity to the players had associated symbolic capital and a pre-
437 defined set of valued expectations and dispositions, as the imposition of a recognised name i.e.
438 'athlete' was an act of recognition of "full social existence" (Bourdieu, 1984: 482):

439 One of my key observations when I first came into the environment was that we were
440 wrapping these boys up a little bit, which I think can be, can be done, in a performance
441 environment because you've got the SandC here, you've got the physio, you've got the
442 coach, you've got the nutritionist, you've got all these roles, and people will feel they
443 need to justify roles, and I think that there's a danger with that, that we can molly-
444 coddle these boys and wrap them up...We need to push these boys more, we need to
445 give them more, a bit more respect maybe...what...they can achieve *if we allow them to*.
446 I felt we protected the boys too much and were very quick to state 'ah well that's
447 because of their disability'...so I think that there's a danger that...we attribute everything
448 negative to a disability. There has to be an element of allowing these guys to fail. Since
449 I came into the environment we've had tears, we've had sweat, we've had bleeding,
450 you know we've had all of that, a lot of tears from different players, because they've
451 never been challenged and so to me that's bollocks. I'd rather them fail, or be in tears,
452 or be frustrated around us, because we can help them with the strategies and tools
453 required to bounce back from it. The bottom line is that, like any performance squad,
454 or any team, you change your culture, you change an ethos, you challenge people.
455 (Steve, Coach – interview; emphasis added).

456 Symbolic violence is the imposition of meaning experienced as legitimate (Bourdieu and
457 Passeron, 1977) that when applied to coaching positions coaches and athletes according to
458 dominant and dominated groups. In this example, coaching practice functioned as an
459 instrument of domination that was justified as an exercise of empowerment and disability-
460 specific resistance *by the coaches* (cf. Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu, 1984; Thomas, 1999). In this
461 case, reconstructing disability was seen as empowering as it was linked with the development
462 of athletes' embodied cultural capital related to elite performance.

463 Symbolic violence is achieved through pedagogic action; "a process of inculcation
464 which must last long enough to produce habitus reflective of a "cultural arbitrary capable of
465 perpetuating itself after pedagogic action has ceased and thereby of perpetuating in practices
466 the principles of intemalised arbitrary" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 31). Symbolic violence
467 was related to the methods used to coach disabled athletes in elite sport:

> I'm constantly looking for me to challenge the guys... I think that they value people having raised expectations of them. I think...that's one of the stereotypes they've probably encountered quite a little bit is that people have reduced expectations. (David, Head Coach – Interview).

> I want to win as many medals as possible and I want to kick everybody's ass and dominate. That's why I am there and that's what it's about. It's not about challenging people's perception of disability. (Charles, Paralympic Coach - interview).

By subsuming disability into high-performance ideals, and reconstructing 'disability' through the rhetoric of empowerment, the doxic nature of the field constrained and influenced practice to the extent that it was illustrative of the process of symbolic violence. That is, the coaching practices were so 'accepted' that they were unquestioned. This had a more subversive effect, where impairment effects could be positioned as the dominant barrier to achieving the coaches' outcomes:

> Their spectrum of disability, it's probably the hardest one to coach to get the desired quality and improvement I want. The fact that these guys aren't going to be able to do everything perfectly at the same time and do they necessarily understand what they're doing, where they want to get to. They don't understand. It sounds bad but you realise at this camp actually how dumb they are. (Theo, SandC Coach - field notes).

Coaching practice therefore functioned as a direct method of symbolic violence insofar as it was "the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power" (Bourdieu and Passeron (1977: 5). The coaching environment and methods were, for the most part, left unchallenged and coaches constructed objects for intervention (disabled *athletes*) and drew on normative ideology to coach (cf. Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2012). Such was its influence and power that the athletes recognised, accepted and conformed to the pedagogic action of the coaches through the acquisition and internalisation of dispositions that had symbolic capital (Dumais, 2002):

> I went from a normal job, a nine-to-five job every day to then after one year I equalled world record. Now we've got a contract. Now coach owns me and I have to do what coach wants. (The sport) isn't fun anymore, it's now a job. (Jeffrey, Paralympic athlete - interview).

498 I'm going to work hard, challenge myself and you know, see where I can end up and
499 to push myself (Esther, Paralympic Athlete - interview).

500 J: The [coaching] stuff is high intensity, I enjoy that.

501 A: Making a player cry in a way is…no I don't think it is taking it too far because
502 you've got to break people from time to time, but I think what you can do is get it too
503 far, I think getting them out of their comfort zone is good.

504 R: I wanna get pushed to the limit, that's just the way I go, I would never cry because
505 I want to improve my game and I want as high intensity as possible I don't care if the
506 coach screams at me if I'm doing something wrong I'll still push to the limit until I
507 physically can't do it, that's the way I am.

508 J: Yeah, I mean we're up for it as well.

509 A: We're up for it and the coaching staff.

510 PJ: Know we'll do it.

511 (Athlete focus group).

512 Symbolic violence is "violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her
513 complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 167). Here, the data illustrates the relations of
514 symbolic violence, specifically how the athletes strengthened the power relations that
515 contributed to the "legitimacy of domination" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 5). That is not to
516 suggest that dominated necessarily meant passive (De Certeau, 1984). For the athletes in this
517 research, the focus was on the reinforcement and refinement of a particular athletic habitus,
518 embodying symbolic capital, as it was valued by the coaches and legitimised through the social
519 structures in which they were immersed. The athletes were therefore constrained by the
520 powerful high-performance logic underpinning coaching that served particular interests which
521 were presented "as universal interests, common to the whole group" (Bourdieu, 1979: 80).

522 **Conclusion**

523 This research found that coaching in both Paralympic and disability sport constructed a logic
524 of practice which acted as the the "principal locus" (Bourdieu 1990: 89) for the production of
525 generative schemes, hierarchies and classifying systems about disability. This logic was based

526 on the production and maintenance of high-performance values. Exposing the logic of practice
527 had important implications for the social construction of disability as a process of
528 misrecognition equated the assimilation of disability into more valued high-performance
529 discourses with 'empowerment'. This had a dual function. On the one hand coaches were
530 encouraged to look beyond the 'disability' in order to challenge and develop the players. On
531 the other hand, there were tensions whereby the distance between disability and sport was
532 maximised as it brought with it the most amount of symbolic capital. We argue that within
533 these conditions coaching was a method of symbolic violence where coaches had the "power
534 to impose the legitimate mode of thought" (Bourdieu, 1977: 170; Swartz, 2012) about coaching
535 disabled athletes. For the athletes, the power to challenge these coaching discourses was not
536 located in individual autonomy but constrained within stratified social configurations which
537 had all the appearances of being a liberating structure. In this sense, we contribute to the
538 discourse on empowerment in coaching, suggesting that under certain conditions
539 'empowerment' is a largely taken-for-granted term that is fundamentally linked to issues of
540 power, ideology and domination.

541 Importantly, the way that disability was positioned through the structures of coaching
542 formed an orthodox discourse that was difficult to displace. In this respect, whilst the disability
543 sport field may be understood as a site of resistance, whereby disabled athletes can be
544 'empowered', it may be further conceptualised as a site of domination whereby coaches and
545 coaching position disability in opposition to high-performance sport. These understandings
546 were accepted and unquestioned within the structural conditions, constituting a taken-for-
547 granted view of coaching that "flows from practical sense" (Bourdieu, 1990: 68). More
548 concerning is that these conditions, secured by doxa, form the basis for cultural reproduction
549 (Bourdieu, 1990). On this matter, we call for further research to inform coach education,
550 otherwise disabled people will continue to be subject to the methods and practices of symbolic

551 violence in Paralympic and disability sport. Our findings further highlight the hierarchical
552 tension between disability and high-performance sport, where disability was reconstructed
553 according to the volume and efficacy of the different forms of capital available.

554 In this research, our critical tradition focused on deconstructing doxic or taken-for-
555 granted conditions that disabled people encounter. Such socially and culturally accepted
556 conditions can be exacerbated in social formations such as sport where power relations mediate
557 who has 'voice' and autonomy, and who does not. This research contributes to current
558 sociological debates, within and beyond the sociology of sport, in theorising the
559 interrelatedness of disability and distinctive cultural formations. It is an important first step in
560 shedding light on, and challenging, the social construction of disability and its effects on social
561 practice.

562 **References**

563 Alvesson M and Solberg K (2009) *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative*
564 *Research*. (2nd Ed.), London: Sage Publications.

565 Bourdieu P (1979) Symbolic Power. *Critique of Anthropology*, 4(77): 77-85.

566 Bourdieu P (1984) *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. London:
567 Routledge.

568 Bourdieu P (1990) *The logic of practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

569 Bourdieu P (1991) Sport and social class. In: C. Mukerji and M. Schudson (eds) *Rethinking*
570 *Popular Culture: Contemporary Perpectives in Cultural Studies.* Oxford: Univerity of
571 Califorina Press, pp. 357-373

572 Bourdieu P (1993) *Sociology in question*. London: Sage

573 Bourdieu P (1998) *Practical Reason*. Cambridge: Polity.

574 Bourdieu P (1977) *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

575 Bourdieu P and Passeron J.-C. (1977) *Reproduction in education, society and culture.*
576 London: Sage.

577 Bourdieu P and Wacquant LJD (1992) *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Cambridge: Polity
578 Press.

579 Brown D (2005) An economy of gendered practices? Learning to teach physical education
580 from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's embodied sociology. *Sport, Education and*
581 *Society* 10(1): 3–23.

582 Cushion CJ and Jones RL (2006) Power, discourse and symbolic violence in professional youth
583 soccer: The case of Albion Football Club. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 23(2): 142–161.

584 Cushion CJ and Jones RL (2014) A Bourdieusian analysis of cultural reproduction:
585 socialisation and the 'hidden curriculum' in professional football. *Sport, Education and*
586 *Society* 19(3): 276-298.

587 De Certeau M (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press

588 Denison J, Mills JP and Konoval T (2015) Sports' disciplinary legacy and the challenge of
589 'coaching differently'. *Sport, Education and Society* 22(6): 772-783.

590 DePauw K (1986) Research on sport for athletes with disabilities. *Adapted Physical Activity*
591 *Quarterly* 3(4): 292–299.

592 DePauw KP (1997) The (In)Visibility of DisAbility: Cultural contexts and Sporting Bodies,
593 *Quest* 49(4): 416-30.

594 DePauw K and Gavron S (2005) *Disability and Sport*. Human Kinetics: Champaign, Il.

595 Edwards C and Imrie R (2003) Disability and Bodies as Bearers of Value. *Sociology* 37(2):
596 239–256.

597 Everett J (2002) Organizational Research and the Praxeology of Pierre Bourdieu.
598 *Organizational Research Methods* 5(1): 56 – 80.

599 Fitzgerald H (2013) The Coaching chain: Reflections of disabled athletes and coaches. A
600 report for sports coach UK. Report, Leeds Metropolitan University, UK.

601 Goodley D and Runswick-Cole K (2012) Reading Rosie. The postmodern disabled child.
602 *Journal of Educational and Child Psychology* 29(2): 53-66.

603 Groff DG and Kleiber DA (2001) Exploring the Identity Formation of Youth Involved in an
604 Adapted Sports Program. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal* 35(4): 318-332.

605 Howe PD and Silva CF (2016) The fiddle of using the Paralympic Games as a vehicle for
606 expanding [dis]ability sport participation. *Sport in Society* 21(1): 125-136.

607 Miles MB, Huberman AM and Saldaña J (2014) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods*
608 *Sourcebook.* [3rd. Ed.]. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.

609 Norman L and Rankin-Wright A (2016) Surviving rather than thriving: Understanding the
610 experiences of women coaches using a theory of gendered social well-being.
611 *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 53(4): 424-450.

612 Peers D (2009) (Dis)empowering Paralympic histories: absent athletes and disabling
613 discourses. *Disability and Society* 24(5): 653-665.

614 Purdue DEJ and Howe PD (2012a) See the sport, not the disability: Exploring the Paralympic
615 paradox. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 4(2): 189-205.

616 Purdue DEJ and Howe PD (2012b) Empower, inspire, achieve: (dis)empowerment and the
617 Paralympic Games. *Disability and Society* 27(7): 903-916.

618 Purdue DEJ and Howe PD (2015) Plotting a Paralympic field: An elite disability sport
619 competition viewed through Bourdieu's sociological lens. *International Review for the*
620 *Sociology of Sport* 50(1): 83–97.

621 Rankin-Wright AJ, Hylton K and Norman L (2016) Off-colour landscape: Framing race
622 equality in sport coaching. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 33(4): 357-368.

623 Ritchie J, Lewis J and Elam G (2003) Designing and Selecting Samples. In: Ritchie J and
624 Lewis J (Eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and*
625 *Researchers*. London: Sage. pp. 77-109.

626 Shilling C (2004) *The Body and Social Theory*. London: Sage.

627 Smith BM and Perrier MJ (2014) Disability, sport, and impaired bodies: A critical approach.
628 In: Schinke R and McGannon KR (eds) *The Psychology of Sub-Culture in Sport and*
629 *Physical Activity: A Critical Approach*. London: Psychology Press.

630 Taylor SL, Werthner P and Culver DM (2014) A Case Study of a Parasport Coach and a Life
631 of Learning. *International Sport Coaching Journal* 1(3): 127-38.

632 Thomas C (1999) *Female forms: Experiencing and understanding disability*. Oxfordshire:
633 Open University Press.

634 Thomas C (2004) Developing the social relational in the social model of disability: a
635 theoretical agenda. In: C. Barnes and G. Mercer (eds) Implementing the social model of
636 disability. Disability Press: Leeds, pp. 32-47.

637 Townsend RC, Smith B and Cushion CJ (2016) Disability sports coaching: towards a critical
638 understanding. *Sports Coaching Review* 4(2): 80-98.

639 Townsend RC, Cushion CJ and Smith B (2017) A social relational analysis of an impairment-
640 specific mode of coach education. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health,*
641 10(3): 346-361.

642 Wallerstein N (1992) Powerlessness, empowerment and health: Implications for health

643 promotion programmes. *American Journal of Health Promotion* 6(3): 197–205.

644 Wareham Y, Burkett B, Innes P and Lovell GP (2017) Coaching athletes with disability:
645 Preconceptions and reality. *Sport in Society*, 20(9): 1185-1202.

646

Table 1 – Ethnographic Study Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Role	Years with the team	Coaching and Educational Qualifications
David	37	Coach	6+	UKCC L4 and qualified teacher.
Steve	29	Coach	3	UKCC L3 and qualified teacher.
Bert	41	Team Management	5	UKCC L2 NVQ L4 in Health and Social Care NVQ L4 Registered Managers Award
Theo	29	Coach	1	UKSCA Accreditation Educated to degree level
Oscar	27	Coach	4	UKSCA Accreditation Educated to degree level
Brian	N/A	Performance Director, Management	N/A	N/A

652 **Table 2 – Ethnographic Study Participants - Athletes**

Athlete	Age	Years with the team	Impairment(s)
A	23	6	Moderate Learning Disability Autism Spectrum Disorder
J	24	9	Moderate Learning Disability
PJ	18	2	Moderate Learning Disability Autism Spectrum Disorder
R	18	4	Moderate Learning Disability Autism Spectrum Disorder

653
654
655
656
657
658
659
660
661

662

663 **Table 3 – Paralympic Coach Demographics**

664

Coach	Age range	Years of Coaching Experience	Education level and Coach qualifications	Coaching Role	Medal Winning
Phil	45-55	10+	Postgraduate degree and highest international certification.	Head Coach of a Paralympic sport containing multiple impairment groups.	Multiple
Judy	40-50	15+	Postgraduate degree and highest national.	Head Coach within a Paralympic sport event group.	Multiple
Benjamin	50-60	20+	Postgraduate degree and highest national.	Head coach of a Paralympic sport.	Multiple
Stephanie	30-40	10+	Postgraduate degree and highest national.	Lead coach of multiple athletes.	Multiple
Trevor	30-40	8+	Undergraduate degree and highest national.	Head coach of a Paralympic sport.	Multiple
Charles	35-45	10+	Undergraduate degree and highest national.	Head coach of a Paralympic sport.	Multiple

665

666

667 **Table 4 – Paralympic Athlete Demographics**

Athlete	Age	Years competing	Impairment	Medal Winning and sport
Jeffrey	20-30	10+	Acquired Spinal Cord Injured and wheelchair user.	Multiple in individual sport
Zoe	20-30	10+	Congenital neurological and wheelchair user.	Multiple in individual sport
Nia	30-40	10+	Acquired amputation and ambulant.	Multiple in team sport
Esther	20-30	10+	Congenital sensory and ambulant.	Multiple in individual sport
Adam	20-30	10+	Congenital limb deficiency and ambulant.	Multiple in individual sport

668

669 Note: All sports have an Olympic equivalent but due to the nature of athlete impairment the rules have been adapted for the Paralympic games.

670