

Paralympic Masculinities: Media and Self-Representation of Athletes at the
2008 Paralympic Summer Games

By

Dale Stevenson

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Abstract

This study uses content analysis of newspaper articles and athlete biographical/autobiographical sources to examine the constructions of masculinity of male and female athletes at the 2008 Paralympic Summer Games in Beijing, China. Based on the socially constructed tension between disability and masculinity and the connections between sport and masculinity, this study sought examples that support or challenge the portrayal of Paralympic athletes in hegemonic masculine terms. This study finds that in the majority of cases, both sets of data sources reflects and/or reinforces the association between sport and hegemonic masculinity. This public display of masculinity indicates the athletes' attempt to attain mainstream acceptance and legitimacy as "real" athletes as much as it does a rejection of a collective disability identity. The few instances of rejection and reformulation of masculinity come from examples in which the realities of living with impairments are insurmountable barriers to attaining hegemonic masculinity.

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Chapter I: Introduction and Theoretical Framework

September 6th marked the start of the 2008 Paralympic Summer Games in Beijing, China where athletes from around the world competed in twenty sports (Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games, 2008). Throughout the world, people read newspaper articles that, on the surface, report on these relatively unknown sports and present the personal stories of the athletes that partake in them.

Simultaneously, many Paralympic athletes updated personal websites and posted biographical profiles on various websites reflecting on their experiences through their own perspective. This study examines these two sets of data using content analysis for obvious and inadvertent messages about the masculinity of athletes with disabilities. The markers of masculinity for this study come from a review of the literature and include words and concepts pertaining to: hegemonic masculinity, the masculinity of men with disabilities, and the strategies used to reconcile the perceived tension that exists between the two. Latent content is important to this study due to the nature of the way we learn about masculinity: through powerful clues and messages from friends, family, and the media.

The relationship between masculinity and disability is interesting because the stereotypical and hegemonic characteristics of each are seen as oppositional. It is important to study this relationship because the literature shows that this relationship can have negative consequences such as marginalization (Gerschick & Miller, 1994), exclusion (Barker, 2005), and oppression (Morris, 1991). Some men with disabilities are aware of the tension between masculinity

and their disability and develop coping strategies and in some instances use sport as a mechanism for attaining hegemonic traits (Gerschick & Miller, 1994, 1995; Meekosha 2004; Taub, Blinde & Greer, 1999; Valentine, 1999). The masculinity of athletes with disabilities has been an issue since the beginning of the Paralympic movement. In order to identify messages about the masculinity of the 2008 Paralympic athletes, it is invaluable to examine the origins of the Paralympics and begin to develop an understanding of its evolving relationship with masculinity.

Background

Dr. Ludwig Guttmann of England is credited with the creation of the Paralympic games. Consistent with the medical model of disability, he envisioned sport as a tool for rehabilitating soldiers with spinal cord injuries following the Second World War. Since its inception, this international event has evolved into what we now know as the Paralympics: two international sporting events (summer and winter games) held every four years, involving elite athletes with disabilities (International Paralympic Committee, 2008a). Participation in this event continues to grow and reached a new apex at the Beijing games, at which 3,951 athletes competed from 146 countries (International Paralympic Committee, 2008). In comparison, the first official Paralympic games were held in Rome in 1960 and consisted of 400 wheelchair athletes from 23 countries. Additionally, shifting its original focus from people with spinal cord injuries, the Paralympics has expanded to include a wide range of impairment types. The

2008 Beijing Paralympics included people with visual impairments, amputations, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injuries, intellectual disabilities and *Les Autres* which includes all athletes who do not fit into any of the aforementioned groups (International Paralympic Committee, 2008a).

Since its inception, the focus of the games has moved away from a medical rehabilitation approach to emphasizing competitor's athletic achievements (International Paralympic Committee, 2008a). This may be a reflection of the critiques of rehabilitation and the medical model of disability by the larger disability movement and related anti-professional sentiments. In addition, media coverage of the Paralympic games, once very limited, is now receiving an ever increasing amount of attention (Schell & Duncan, 1999).

Assumptions

I am a disabled person who has come to this study through a personal recognition of the perceived contradictory nature of disability and masculinity. Over the years I have tried many techniques to reconcile this contradiction; I have used sports and have undertaken physical activities that are near the limit of my ability in order to build an image of masculinity. I now place little personal value on attaining traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. In most cases, I accept the perceived contradiction and feel free to express my own personal versions of masculinity. Like many others, sport has influenced my understanding of masculinity; I am a Paralympic hopeful Boccia athlete. I have chosen to look at Paralympic sport as a source for learning about masculinity because I have a

personal understanding of the connection between sport and masculinity. It is important to speculate how the aforementioned assumptions may influence this research. As a disabled athlete, some of my informal knowledge of my Paralympic sport (Boccia) may influence the way I perceive other Paralympic sports. Boccia is a sport that I, and others, generally consider not as “athletic” or physical as other Paralympic sports and the athletes are thus presumed to be of “lower” value on Deal’s (2003) hierarchy of impairment. Situating myself in this group of athletes that are perceived to be amongst the furthest from embodying hegemonic masculinity, I am very aware of the perceived masculinity of athletes in other sports.

Theoretical framework

This project is framed by the social model of disability as well as theories that attempt to reconcile the problematic nature of the impairment/disability dichotomy inherent to the model. For example, Tanya Titchkosky’s work (2003) informs this study as she suggests experiences of disability can illuminate culture and that representation of disability have “real consequences for real people” (p. 134).

The social model of disability has been foundational to disability studies and, in turn, is relevant to this study because it provides a general perspective on how the media can contribute to the creation of disabilities and masculinities. The media has the ability to reinforce/create the social understanding of the masculinity of men with disabilities.

Conducting research is one facet that allows for the implementation of the social model of disability (Barnes & Mercer, 2004). When conducting social research regarding disability it is important to include the perspective of people with disabilities both as researchers and participants. This study includes these perspectives by incorporating the voice of athletes with disabilities through examining the autobiographical material, and is, as previously mentioned, conducted by an athlete with a disability.

The social model

The social model of disability rejects the idea that disability is caused by the functional limitations of one's body; rather it locates the cause of disability in a social failure rather than the individual's biology (Oliver, 1990). Until relatively recently, disability was perceived of only in medical terms and was considered to be an individual's problem. This way of viewing disability is known as the individual or medical model of disability; this model has had and will continue to have many negative consequences for people with disabilities (Brisenden, 1986; Crow, 1996).

The social model of disability differentiates between the biological conditions (impairments) and the social restrictions (disabilities) to show that physical and attitudinal barriers in society create disability (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). Kitchin (2000) explains that impairments are physical manifestations related to the biology of the individual while disability "is to be disadvantaged or restricted by a society which takes insufficient account of

people who have physical, sensory or mental impairments and thus [are] ... excluded from mainstream social activities” (p. 7).

By viewing disability as a social construction, the social model of disability has been used as a political tool to move toward the goal of full participation and equal citizenship for all people with disabilities (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). The political nature of the social model of disability has led to increased education, political action, empowerment and self-identification of people with disabilities and our allies (McClimens, 2003; Walmsley, 1997). For example, it enabled the legal recognition of social discrimination as demonstrated by the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the British Discrimination Act of 1996 (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002; Walmsley, 1997).

Criticisms

The social model of disability has been criticized for its strict separation of disability and impairment, which excludes the contribution of impairment to the experience and construction of disability (McClimens, 2003; Shakespeare & Watson, 2002; Titchkosky, 2003). Confronting the flaws of the social model, some authors believe that it has reached a point where it is no longer useful. They argue that the “extreme” British version that denies impairment has “become a problem, and it cannot be reformed ... [and] has outlived its usefulness.” (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002, p. 9; Shakespeare, 2006).

Shakespeare and Watson (2002) make a valid point that impairment plays a role in disability. They state that disability cannot easily be split into “impairment” and “disability” and suggest that disability is a “complex dialectic of biological, psychological, cultural and socio-political factors” and conclude that the social model is outdated (p. 24). The inclusion of impairment in the definition of disability is an important factor to this study because, the physical manifestations of impairments contribute to the creation of masculinities of men with disabilities. Unlike Shakespeare and Watson’s (2002) argument, some authors have suggested revised versions of the social model instead of abandoning it completely. This study adopts one such version from Titchkosky (2003), who includes impairment in her approach to disability.

Titchkosky (2003) states that “the experience of disability [is] a significant social phenomenon that can reveal and illuminate culture” (p. 3). For this study, the masculinity of men with disabilities reveals broader social assumptions about masculinity, disability and sport. Titchkosky (2003) challenges us to consider that studying disability is more than simply studying the limitations of people with disabilities: “[D]isability highlights how things are ‘normally’ done” (p. 15). In fact, some authors note that hegemonic masculinity is strengthened by public portrayals of “non-masculine” men with disabilities (Morris, 1991; Shakespeare et al., 1996; Wilde, 2004).

Titchkosky (2003) also demonstrates “representations have real consequences for real people” (p. 134). Several authors note the influential nature of mass media on the larger social understanding of masculinity (Morris,

1991; Shakespeare et al., 1996; Stibbe, 2004; Wilde, 2004). The literature shows that media uses images/stereotypes of disability to help define hegemonic masculinity and in doing so can increase the marginalization of people with disabilities in their daily lives (Gerschick & Miller, 1994), exclusion (Barker, 2005), and oppression (Morris, 1991). Thus, Titchkosky's idea that how we are seen influences how we are treated can be directly applied to the ways in which the media is portraying the masculinity of men with disabilities.

Delimitations

This study does not include all impairment types. Due to the nature of the athletes who are eligible to compete in Paralympic sport, this study does not include all people with disabilities. Paralympic athlete classification is a complex system which works to include and exclude certain types of impairment, in order to create "equal playing fields" within each sport (International Paralympic Committee, 2008b). The types of sports athletes can compete in are determined by their classification. For instance, athletes who fit into the Paralympic classifications for Boccia have impairments that exclude us from other sports, while athletes who have more mobility and strength (e.g. wheelchair basketball and rugby athletes) cannot compete in Boccia at the Paralympic level. In sum, the complicated classification system is a tool that attempts to equalize levels of competition for the athletes, but also limits the scope of this study by excluding individuals who do not "fit".

The sources of data are limited to Paralympic coverage in Canadian newspapers and electronic sources for autobiographical/biographical material of the athletes. Canadian sources are chosen because our understanding of masculinity, as well as disabilities, varies between cultures; the literature review that supports this study is based mainly on the North American interpretation of both. Newspaper articles as data sources are selected for two reasons: The articles are easy to access via the internet making this project feasible for one student working alone. Secondly, newspaper coverage represents the most abundant source of media surrounding the Paralympics, and therefore has the greatest impact on social understanding of the masculinities of men with disabilities. The autobiographical/biographical material will be limited to those athletes who have posted this information on the internet.

Statement of purpose and research question

The purpose of this project is to address the question: In what ways is Canadian newspaper coverage of the 2008 Paralympic Summer Games and self representation by the athletes contributing to and/or reflecting a larger social understanding of the masculinity of men with disabilities? In addition, the project also addresses the following sub questions:

- How are these athletes reflecting/constructing a sense of masculinity in their own words via blogs and personal websites?
- Do the athletes' self representations align with media portrayals of their masculinity? What are the similarities? Differences?

- How are data sets portraying the gender of female Paralympic athletes?

How does this inform our understanding of masculinity?

Titchkosky's (2003) idea that representations have real consequences for real people drives the importance to study the way in which mass media represents the masculinity of men with disabilities.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This literature review is designed to support this thesis on the masculinity of men with disabilities. This project uses qualitative content analysis to uncover societal meanings and perceptions in the language surrounding Paralympic athletes and autobiographical content at the 2008 Beijing games. This literature review is divided into four sections: Section One provides background information about hegemonic masculinity and the overall importance of masculinity. Section Two considers the contradiction between masculinity and disability and looks at the ways in which men with disabilities deal with this tension. Section Three explores sport; its connection to disability and masculinity, and how it influences the masculinity of people with disabilities. Finally, Section Four explores the ways in which media influences social perception, how it can reinforce/create stereotypes, and how it can be used as a tool to strengthen hegemonic masculinity.

Section One: Masculinity

This section begins with a brief overview of hegemonic masculinity followed by a discussion of its social significance and connection to marginalization and isolation. Focusing on disability and masculinity this section concludes with an examination of the facets of masculinity for men with disabilities.

The North American version of hegemonic masculinity can be associated with negative traits, men's bodies, social behaviour, and independence (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). While Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note some serious criticisms of its original inception, they also note that it still may be useful if it is reformulated in contemporary terms. Referencing the idea that masculinity is not necessarily tied to a specific sex, they state that masculinity is not "a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting" (p. 396). Furthermore they note that the fundamental feature of hegemonic masculinity remains the same: "[C]ertain masculinities are more socially central, or more associated with authority and social power, than others. The concept of hegemonic masculinity presumes the subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 846). While this author agrees with Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) that hegemonic masculinity is not as simple as "a fixed character type, or an assemblage of toxic traits," these characteristics can be useful as markers of dialogue surrounding masculinity (p. 854).

Much of the literature on masculinity identifies negative traits associated with hegemonic masculinity such as: drinking, fighting, aggression, sexual conquest, and feelings of superiority over women (Barker, 2005; Gerschick & Miller, 1994; Valentine, 1999). Hegemonic masculinity is also linked to the celebration of strength and youth, bodily perfection including not demonstrating

vulnerability, physical displays of competence and force, and taking bodily functions for granted (Morris, 1991; Sparkes & Smith, 2002; Valentine 1999). Being masculine is also connected to how a man behaves in society; Barker (2005) found that being a man involves the ability to stand up for or prove yourself in a public way. Masculinity is often connected to independence, self reliance and financial stability (Barker, 2005; Gerschick & Miller, 1994).

Why is it important to study masculinity? Several studies demonstrate that not having these traits can lead to marginalization (Gerschick & Miller, 1994), exclusion (Barker, 2005), and oppression (Morris, 1991), and has been shown to have negative social consequences that perpetuate images of men with disabilities as “without gender, as asexual creatures, as freaks of nature, monstrous, the ‘Other’ to the social norm” (Meekosha, 2004, p. 4).

Three studies reinforce the notion that it is socially important to have hegemonic masculine traits: Gerschick and Miller (1994) suggest that men with disabilities are marginalized because they fail to meet and actually undermine hegemonic masculinity. While in Rio de Janeiro a young man experienced social exclusion for his alternative to gang masculinity (Barker, 2005). Meekosha (2004) states that society views the masculinity of men with a disability as a corrupted version; not only does this view cause educational segregation, denial of employment, victimization, and abuse, it creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that reinforces a negative social understanding about the masculinity of men with disabilities (Meekosha, 2004).

In conclusion, the literature shows that not having masculine traits can lead to serious consequences. Men with disabilities can experience marginalization, exclusion, and oppression due to their perceived inability to be “real men”.

Facets of Masculinity for Men with Disabilities

The masculinity of men with disabilities is characterized in two main ways: the supercrip and the inability to attain hegemonic masculine traits. The idea of the supercrip is analogous to hegemonic masculinity in which men with disabilities “overcome” their disability through hard work. The other version is associated with such oppositional characteristics related to feminization, physical weakness and alternative sexualities.

Supercrip

Several sources describe a similar “story” involving the creation of supercrip masculinity (Gerschick & Miller, 1994; Meekosha 2004; Riley, 2005; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001; Valentine, 1999): Following a sudden “loss” of ability, a man regains some characteristics of hegemonic masculinity through some combination of rehabilitation, will power, and often participation in sport. This narrative is successful and pervasive because it is designed to “represent a source of strength and hope for others, both with and without disabilities” (Schell & Duncan, 1999, p. 37). However, this story has negative consequences that can outweigh and counteract any positive impact.

Several authors note that triumph over tragedy, extraordinary obstacles, or insurmountable odds with the intention to become less disabled and to fit into a “normal life” are elements that make up this narrative (Barnes, 1992; Hardin, Lynn, & Walsdorf, 2001; Harden & Harden, 2004; Schell & Duncan, 1999; Valentine, 1999). Disability is seen as a tragedy that these individuals have overcome through willpower and rehabilitation. This triumph is often recognized as a major accomplishment as exemplified through the religious language such as miracle or “transcendence of physical limitations” (Schell & Duncan, 1999, p.37). In fact, overcoming one’s disability is so highly prized that individuals who do so are often ascribed super-human abilities.

The literature includes several super-human/magical adjectives used to describe the dedication and hard work it takes to overcome a disability. Language such as Larger-than-life, heroic, ability to perform feats not considered possible for people with disabilities, sixth sense (as in the case for people with visual impairments), and extraordinary ability are examples of the language that surrounds people’s efforts to overcome (Barnes, 1992; Harden & Harden, 2004; Schell and Duncan, 1999; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001). In a study by Schell and Duncan (1999), they noted that athletes with disabilities “were often compared to mythical and real superheroes, like the Tasmanian Devil or Arnold Schwarzenegger: ‘He offers up some Tarzan-like bravado’”(p. 37). Another super-human element comes from the adaptive equipment used by athletes with disabilities; Schantz and Gilbert (2001) note that Tony Volpentest received media attention during the Atlanta Paralympic games mainly because of his high tech

prosthesis which “transformed him into a bionic ‘super crip’” (p. 84). It may seem counterintuitive that this image can be negative, but on further investigation it becomes clear that supercrip ideology can result in serious negative consequences.

In the disability community, the supercrip version of masculinity is very similar to hegemonic masculinity in that there are rules and characteristics that are often unattainable to the majority of people with disabilities. Just as hegemonic masculinity can have negative consequences for individuals who are unable to attain this image, the same holds true for the supercrip ideology. This image can also be damaging to individuals who are labeled as supercrips, to people with disabilities who do not exemplify the supercrip and to a wider societal understanding of disability (Barnes, 1992; Harden & Harden, 2004; Linton, 1998; Riley, 2005; Schell & Duncan, 1999; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001; Shapiro, 1993).

Supercrip ideology has negative consequences for people who exemplify this image; media portrayals of individuals as supercrips often result in narrow representations of personal stories that are often created at the expense of reality (Schell & Rodriguez, 2001; Riley, 2005). During the 1996 Paralympics, Shell and Rodriguez (2001) followed CBS’s TV coverage of Paralympian Hope Lewellen and analyzed media construction of her as a supercrip. They found that this “intentionally crafted” representation “narrows her complex and rich story to a single focus” and, in doing so, “simultaneously valorizes Lewellen and silences her claim to self-representation as a disabled female athlete by its characterization of her as one who overcomes insurmountable odds to emerge

as an exceptional model of disability” (p. 130). The media construction of athletes with disabilities as supercrips in effect boxes them into a stereotype. Including athletes’ autobiographical/biographical material in this study provides an opportunity to compare and contrast the construction of their masculinity.

The supercrip image can be harmful to people with disabilities who cannot attain this standard. In fact, Shapiro (1993) states that this image is oppressive for people with disabilities. Supercrip imagery creates a situation in which people with disabilities feel they must over-compensate for their disabilities through extraordinary acts in order to be accepted by society (Barnes, 1992; Shapiro, 1993). In essence, it creates an often unattainable yet highly prized version of disability.

The literature demonstrates that this image of disability affects societal perception in three ways. Firstly, the portrayal of people with disabilities as superhuman perpetuates existing social barriers for those people who are unable to attain supercrip status; it sets up individuals for failure by creating the perception that all people with disabilities “should be able to accomplish at the level of disabled hero” (Harden & Harden, 2004, p. 13). Schell and Rodriguez (2001) note that the supercrip status is “rarely available to other individuals with physical disabilities” (p. 130). Secondly, the underlying goal of attaining supercrip status is to reduce disability as much as possible, thus perpetuating that idea that disability is something that people should make heroic efforts to “overcome” in order to function as closely to “normal” or as non-disabled as possible (Linton, 1998). Shapiro (1993) notes that the supercrip attribute of “overcoming” barriers

simply through hard work is problematic because it creates a situation whereby disability related accommodations can be seen as not necessary and therefore ignored.

Finally, the supercrip image can be connected to reinforcing the individualistic nature of the medical model of disability by placing the onus of creating accessibility on the person with a disability rather than on society to reduce barriers. "What makes the supercrip stereotype most egregious to critics, however, is the manner in which it emphasizes individual effort as a way to overcome societal barriers for people with disabilities" (Harden & Harden, 2004, p. 13). Following this argument through, one may conclude that there is no reason to reduce barriers through societal change if people with disabilities can overcome them through personal hard work.

Disabled Masculinity

Using the literature on disability and masculinity, a case can be made for a common version of disabled masculinity. In general, the construction of similar versions of masculinity has been shown to be connected to men who share similar experiences (Swain, 2006; Benjamin, 2001). In the case of disability, the real-world consequences related to the denial of the hegemonic version of masculinity result in shared experiences that may create this common version. The literature reveals several characteristics of disabled masculinity that are in direct opposition to the hegemonic version such as: femininity, weakness, and alternative sexualities (Meekosha, 2004; Riessman, 2003; Shakespeare et al., 1996; Valentine, 1999). When conducting the content analysis, these concepts

are the indicators that determine if the author is portraying the athlete as having aspects of this version of masculinity.

The construction of a common disabled masculinity lies in the idea that men with disabilities may have similar experiences that are tied to the denial of the hegemonic version. This possibility is strengthened by two studies that demonstrate situations in which men who experience similar social isolation and exclusion develop similar versions of masculinity (Swain, 2006; Benjamin, 2001). Gerschick and Miller (1994, 1995) demonstrate that men with disabilities experience marginalization and stigmatization that is rooted, in part, in bodily barriers to, and the social denial of, the hegemonic version of masculinity. “The bodies of men with disabilities serve as a continual reminder that they are at odds with the expectations of the dominate culture” (Gerschick & Miller, 1994, p. 35).

FEMINIZATION

Physical acts of strength and independence are often unattainable for men with disabilities and therefore physical impairment becomes a barrier to the attainment of hegemonic version. Gerschick and Miller (1994, 1995) note that men with physical disabilities whose bodies are marginalized and stigmatized often have their manliness questioned. Being perceived by others as masculine is improbable for these individuals because of the incongruence between the expectations of hegemonic masculinity and the assumed incapacities associated with physical disability (Gerschick & Miller, 1994, 1995).

In addition to the physical inability of men with disabilities to attain and display hegemonic masculinity, there are social factors which also contribute to this denial. Gerschick and Miller (1994) note that access to masculinity for men with disabilities can be blocked by social stigma; they claim that our culture has denied men with disabilities the right to masculinity (Gerschick & Miller, 1994). Within the disability community, social class can play a part in the construction of masculinities; Gerschick and Miller (1994) note that men with disabilities who can afford round-the-clock assistance develop a sense of independence which is ultimately linked to their sense of masculinity. While none of the men in the study by Gerschick and Miller (1994) experience economic hardship they state that “many people with disabilities depend on the welfare system for their care, and the amount and quality of assistance they receive would make it much more difficult to conceive of themselves as independent” (p. 38).

Meekosha (2004) notes that men with disabilities are sometimes presented as feminized and lacking masculine traits. Studies by Riessman (2003); Valentine (1999); and Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells, and Davies (1996) present specific examples of a disabled masculinity that includes the incorporation of “traditional” gender roles of women such as cooking, cleaning, listening/talking with others, and expectations when paying restaurant bills. One participant in the study by Riessman (2003) recently acquired symptoms of M.S. and states that now he feels freer to do more feminine things and has “become more comfortable . . . with [his] femininity” (p. 11). Connecting personal versions of masculinity to feminization, Shakespeare, et al. (1996) noted that one

participant does not think of himself as a man because he does not fit the stereotypes and was often mistaken to be a woman due to his physical characteristics.

Three research participants spoke about the connection between the lack of physical strength associated with having a disability and emasculation/social isolation (Gerschick & Miller, 1994; Shakespeare et al., 1996). Gerschick and Miller (1994) document that one participant feels like less of a man when he has to ask for assistance in doing physical tasks. However, he has discovered that not accepting help, even with tasks he can do himself, leads to social isolation from his peers: "They will socialize with him as long as he remains in a dependent position where they can help him" (Gerschick & Miller, 1994, p. 41). Another research participant believes that he did not conform to expected behaviour for boys and men because of being disabled, and states that "Society doesn't expect you to be physically strong if you are disabled" (Shakespeare et al., 1996, p. 66). Finally, one participant makes the connection that society sees him as weak, not having masculine traits, and therefore unable to make decisions (Shakespeare et al., 1996). He states that "in a lot of society I am treated as this rather wimpish person who can't make their own decisions. Unfortunately this means that I am unable to put over to some people the fact that I am male" (Shakespeare et al., 1996, p. 68).

Several authors note that participants have made a connection between their sexuality and the emasculating stereotypes associated with their disabilities

and note a connection to bisexuality and asexuality (Shakespeare et al., 1996; Riessman, 2003; Gerschick and Miller, 1994).

Riessman (2003) learns that a research participant with multiple sclerosis views his disability as a liberating experience through which he is free of the constraints of hegemonic masculinity and is able to explore different facets of sexuality. Similarly, Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells, and Davies (1996) note that one stereotype of disability focuses on the asexuality of individuals, which is connected to infantilization and the idea of dependency. They note that men with disabilities often have close relationships with women, however, “this enhanced communication with the opposite sex also involves denial of their sexual potential, and can be undermining” (Shakespeare et al, 1996, p. 67). Gerschick and Miller (1994) interviewed a 16-year-old participant with a keen sense of how people with disabilities are emasculated by society; he believes that girls see him as genderless and therefore non-threatening.

The literature shows that disability has a perceived and realized connection to the femininity, weakness, and sexuality of men with disabilities. These characteristics are useful signifiers when looking for messages surrounding masculinity of the athletes at the 2008 Paralympic Summer Games.

This section explores the hegemonic version of masculinity, the importance of masculinity and the facets of masculinity of men with disabilities. This literature is crucial to this study as it provides insight into the deeper meaning embedded in language used by reporters at the 2008 Paralympic games and by athletes in autobiographical material. Section Two further

develops the socially perceived contradictory nature between disability and masculinity, and explores the ways men with disabilities deal with this tension.

Section Two: Contradiction between hegemonic masculinity and physical disability

The contradiction between hegemonic masculinity and physical disability is well documented in the literature and is directly related to the conflicting nature of the definition of masculinity and the perceived incapacities of men with physical disabilities. Gerschick and Miller (1995) document that some men are aware of the contradiction and have developed strategies to cope with it. The following is a development of the contradiction and an exploration of these coping strategies.

The inability of men with disabilities to attain some hegemonic masculine traits has two sources: the impairments of these men and the stereotypes surrounding disability. Several authors have noted that disability and masculinity are contradictory by their very definitions and characteristics: Morris (1991) states that the contradiction arises because the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity are often unattainable for men with disabilities. Morris (1991) explains that “The social definition of masculinity is inextricably bound up with a celebration of strength, of perfect bodies. At the same time, to be masculine is to be not vulnerable” (p. 93). Adding to the discussion that disability and masculinity are conflicting identities, Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells, and Davies (1996)

comment that elements of masculinity involve the denial of weakness, emotions and frailty.

Gerschick and Miller (1994) go as far as to suggest that men with disabilities “undermine the typical role of the body in U.S. culture” (p. 35). In two studies, Gerschick and Miller (1994, 1995) note that it is unlikely that their research participants will be perceived as masculine due to the contradiction between expectations of hegemonic masculinity and the assumed incapacities associated with physical disability. The literature demonstrates an awareness of the contradiction between disability and hegemonic masculinity.

The following paragraphs develop the idea that some men are aware of this contradiction by exploring a study by Gerschick and Miller (1994) who investigated the clash between hegemonic masculinity and social perceptions of “disability as weakness” through interviewing ten men with disabilities. They found three dominant strategies used to cope with the contradiction: reformulation, reliance, and rejection.

Reformulation of masculinity is characterized by men with disabilities who redefine their masculinity according to their own terms. For example, a quadriplegic man redefines the concept of independence to include directing someone to do things for him in order to gain that piece of masculinity: “[W]hen I say independence can be achieved by acting through other people, I actually mean getting through life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness while utilizing high quality and dependable attendant care services” (Gerschick & Miller, 1994, p. 38). This method resonates with the findings of Benjamin (2001), Sparkes and

Smith (2002), Swain (2006) and Valentine (1999). As in the above example, men who adopt this strategy are often confident in their own abilities and values, they confront standards of masculinities and they distance themselves from the hegemonic versions (Gerschick & Miller, 1995).

Reliance is characterized by men with disabilities who depend on hegemonic masculine standards and internalize traditional meanings of masculinity such as physical strength, athleticism, independence and sexual prowess (Gerschick & Miller, 1994). Men who use this strategy are concerned with how others view their masculinity and attempt to continue to meet these expectations despite impairments. For example, Gerschick and Miller (1994) describe the experience of one research participant, Jerry, who can walk short distances but prefers to use a wheelchair. He says he “is concerned with the appearance of his awkward walking. ‘I feel like I look a little, I don’t know, more strange when I walk’” (p. 41). People who adopt this strategy locate the problem within themselves rather than the social construction of hegemonic masculinity; often this results in anger, frustration, and depression.

The final strategy is rejection: Men who use this strategy believe that the dominant conception of masculinity is damaging and is not something to strive for. Gerschick and Miller (1994) interviewed one participant who stated that the media is to blame for some part in the construction of unrealistic masculine traits: “[T]he traditional conception is that everyone has to be Arnold Schwarzenegger ... [which] probably lead[s] to some violence, unhappiness, and things like that if they [men] don’t meet the standards” (p. 48). Men who reject hegemonic

masculinity may develop new standards while others choose to deny the importance of masculinity and emphasize their status as “persons, as in ‘people first’” (Gerschick & Miller, 1994). This strategy of rejection is analogous to the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), in that men who reject hegemonic masculinity realize that the problem with these characteristics lies in the social conceptions rather than in themselves and are “able to create alternative gender practices” (Gerschick & Miller, 1994, pp. 50-51).

In conducting the content analysis of the newspaper articles and autobiographical material, these three “R’s” are useful in determining how these athletes deal with the socially perceived contradiction between their disability and their masculinity.

Section Three: Sport

Sport is an integral element in this study on disability and masculinity for two reasons. First, sport ultimately generates the data for this study in the form of newspaper articles published during the Paralympic games. Secondly, these articles contain messages about the masculinity of these athletes due to the connections between sport and masculinity (Barker, 2005; Brittain, 2004; Connell, 2005; Messner, 1992; Sparkes & Smith, 2002) sport and disability, and the documented influence of sport on the masculinity of men with disabilities (Brittain, 2004; Sparkes & Smith, 2002).

Several authors agree that there is a strong connection between sport and the reinforcement and/or creation of masculinity (Barker, 2005; Brittain, 2004;

Connell, 2005; Messner, 1992; Sparkes & Smith, 2002). Connell (2005) describes sport as a test of masculinity and states that it “is thought to proceed from men’s bodies and therefore sport, by providing a display of men’s bodies in motion, has become the leading definer of masculinity” (p. 30). Indeed, Brittain (2004) explains that “one of the key aims [of sport] is to distinguish between different levels of biological make-up and function through tests of physical strength, speed, and endurance” (p. 438). Sparkes and Smith (2002) note that contact sports such as rugby are important to the construction and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. These types of contact sports create a hierarchy of masculinity based on who can withstand the most pain, who is the strongest and who can distance themselves from feminine traits (Sparkes & Smith, 2002).

This review uncovers two connections between sport and disability; first, that they can be seen as contradictory (Brittain, 2004) and secondly that there is an interesting connection to the masculinity of people who become disabled through playing sport (Sparkes & Smith, 2002).

Brittain (2004) uncovers the same contradiction that exists between disability and masculinity; he explains that disability and sport are seen as contradictory because “in many ways, sport is designed to highlight and reverse extremes of bodily physical perfection” (p. 438).

In contact sports, such as rugby, there is a unique connection to disability in that people occasionally acquire disabilities through playing these sports. Sparkes and Smith (2002) have documented the experiences of men who have acquired spinal cord injuries through playing sports. They found that the

masculinity of men who play sport at an elite level is closely tied to their sport. If they experience spinal cord injury (SCI) through sport, they find it difficult to construct different body-self relationships (Sparkes & Smith, 2002). Regarding masculinity, they found that many of these men discover their prior sense of being a man becomes problematic in regards to their new physical reality (Sparkes & Smith, 2002). One research participant commented that “after the accident, your masculinity does tend to go,” while another said that “feeling like a man almost evaporates ... if you have been masculine in the past you forget that after a point, from a physical side, your masculinity is gone” (Sparkes & Smith, 2002, p. 269). One reason that people who are impaired as a result of playing sport have a particularly difficult time re-constructing their self-images may be connected to the perceived contradiction between sport and disability.

Sport is known to influence the masculinity of men with disabilities; several authors recognize that through sport, men with disabilities may attain hegemonic masculine traits (Gerschick & Miller, 1994, 1995; Meekosha 2004; Taub, Blinde & Greer, 1999; Valentine, 1999). Additionally, this literature shows that some men who acquire these traits see personal benefits and rewards while others consider sport as a tool for social change in regards to devaluation, stigmatization, and stereotyping.

Three studies show that men with disabilities attain masculine traits through sport. First, Meekosha (2004) notes that encouraging men with disabilities to engage in sport is a form of therapy through which men are able to assert traditional masculine identities. Secondly, Gerschick and Miller (1994)

describe how some men with disabilities value hegemonic masculine traits and are able to attain them through sexuality and athleticism. They followed the masculinity of a research participant. Five years after a spinal cord injury, one participant discovered he was unable to attain all aspects of his previous state of hegemonic masculinity, so he bought a sporting chair, became involved in wheelchair athletics, won a national championship in basketball and was ultimately able to reformulate a new personal version of masculinity (Gerschick & Miller, 1994). Finally, Valentine (1999) describes the transformation of masculinity through following the experiences of a man who was paralyzed in a work accident. This participant experienced a dramatic shift in his masculinity until he discovered wheelchair basketball. Through participation in sport he was able to create a personal version of masculinity that he was comfortable with by reconnecting with some of the hegemonic traits he possessed before the accident and retaining some oppositional traits he developed following his accident (Valentine, 1999).

Two studies show that men with disabilities can use sport as a tool for social change. First, a study by Taub, Blinde and Greer (1999) reveals that some men were aware of social stigmas and stereotypes of men with disabilities and used sport as a tool to dispel these myths. They found that their research participants believed participation in sport can increase two masculine traits: physical competence and enhanced bodily appearance. Some participant athletes with disabilities believed that they were countering these stereotypes of physical incompetence by “compensating or demonstrating an alternative image

capable of diminishing the effect of a discrediting attribute” (Taub, Blinde & Greer, 1999, p. 1482). Others believed that through the development of healthy and physically fit bodies they were challenging the stereotype of a disabled body as sick and weak. Regarding the stereotypes of a disabled body, participants believed that sport and physical activity were perceived of as ways to challenge the misconception that disabled bodies are unattractive and unable to engage in movement of an expressive nature. Ultimately they reported that “respondents perceived that accentuating their physical competence can result in a disabled body that is less stigmatized and devalued” (Taub, Blinde & Greer, 1999, p. 1477). This is an example of rejection of hegemonic masculinity as described by Gerschick and Miller (1994) where participants are actively challenging stigmas and stereotypes in a public forum.

This literature shows that disability, masculinity and sport are interconnected; sport can be considered a test of masculinity (Barker, 2005; Brittain, 2004; Connell, 2005; Sparkes & Smith, 2002), there is a perceived contradiction between disability and sport (Brittian, 2004), injury from playing sports can lead to disability (Sparkes & Smith, 2002), and men with disabilities use sport to attain masculine traits (Gerschick & Miller, 1994, 1995; Meekosha 2004; Taub, Blinde & Greer, 1999; Valentine, 1999). The final element needed for this study is to consider the relationships between media, disability and masculinity.

Section Four: Media, disability and masculinity

Newspaper articles are important to this study for two reasons; they are one of the data sets and media is known to influence societal perception and action. Several authors note the connection between disability and media in shaping/reflecting societal perception, creating/enforcing stereotypes, and influencing the perception of the masculinity of men with disabilities (Auslander & Gold, 1999; Farnall & Smith, 1999; Haller, Dorries & Rahna, 2006; Riley, 2005). In addition, these images of disability “contribute significantly to the discriminatory process” and have been shown to have negative consequences for people with disabilities (Barnes, 1992, p. 5). Finally, disability is receiving an ever-increasing amount of media coverage and several authors note that the media influences and reflects the positive and negative perceptions/stereotypes of disability (Auslander & Gold, 1999; Barnes, 1992; Farnall & Smith, 1999; Haller et al., 2006; Riley, 2005).

The literature shows that positive images of disability in the media can shape viewers’ perception of disability in such a way that they are more likely to perceive discrimination and less likely to have negative emotions towards people with disabilities (Farnall & Smith, 1999). Two authors have used content analysis on the language surrounding disability and have found that the language used by some reporters is outdated and can be used as a tool to follow society’s understanding about disability. Riley (2005) notes that the mass media portrayal of disability does not reflect the current political and medical state of disability and paints a picture that presents disability the way things were four decades

ago. Haller et al. (2006) illustrate that the language used in media news representations of disability forms, transforms and maintains the disability community. They examined the type of language used in newspaper articles regarding disability as a tool and found an overall shift in society towards a better understanding of disability issues.

The language used by some journalists and the repetition of inaccuracies can perpetuate stereotypes regarding people with disabilities and other minorities (Auslander & Gold, 1999; Barnes, 1992; Farnall & Smith, 1999; Haller et al., 2006; Riley, 2005). People with disabilities are often stereotyped as triumphant in their struggle to overcome disability (as in supercrip), lashing out against society, a burden on family/friends/society, pathetic, objects of ridicule, sexually abnormal, and incapable of participating fully in community life (Barnes, 1992; Farnall & Smith, 1999; Haller et al., 2006; Riley, 2005). The relevance to this study is how these stereotypes underpin and create the aforementioned stereotypes relating to the masculinity of men with disabilities.

The studies in this section demonstrate that the way in which people with disabilities are portrayed and the language used by the media have real consequences for people with disabilities (Titchkosky, 2003). However, it is important to remember that media messages come from antecedent conditions and therefore can be considered a snapshot of a larger social understanding of this issue (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005).

In the same way that the media affects ideas and stereotypes about disability, it also has a strong connection to the creation and maintenance of

masculinity. Connell (2005) makes the argument that masculinity can be thought of as a social construction. This view of gender (masculine and feminine) is known as social constructionism; it explains that the sex of a person is not necessarily linked to gender but is more closely related to social learning (Nelson, 2006). Related to social constructionism, several authors have noted the strong connection to media as a tool for creating masculinity (Morris, 1991; Shakespeare et al., 1996; Stibbe, 2004; Wilde, 2004). Through examining the literature, it appears that there are two ways that media can reinforce/create masculinity: firstly, by showing their audience oppositional characteristics, and secondly as a tool to expand our understanding (Morris, 1991).

Hegemonic masculinity is strengthened by media representations of what is not masculine. This is important to this study because the stereotypes surrounding disability are perceived as in direct opposition to masculinity; therefore media can use these images strengthen and reinforce characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. Wilde (2004) argues that soap operas play a part in the production of the negative perception of disabled masculinity, reinforce stereotypical ideas of asexuality and are demeaning for men with disabilities. Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells, and Davies (1996) describe a common theme in the representation of disability in movies: the experience of coming to terms with the loss of masculinity through impairment.

Morris (1991) looks at three movies in which the main character is a man with a disability: *Born on the Forth of July*, *My Left Foot* and *Coming Home*. The first two movies describe “how awful it is for a man to be dependent; both

physically and emotionally” and present ideas of impotence, heterosexuality bound to masculinity, and humiliation tied to the stereotype of people with disabilities unable to be complete men (p. 94). Morris (1991) describes all three as “not about disability but about masculinity, they are vehicles for the exploitation of stereotyped views on what it is to be a (heterosexual) man” (p. 97).

The second way media can represent masculinity is by expanding its definition through incorporating new ideas of what it is to be a man. *Coming Home* challenges stereotypical gender roles and shows disability in a positive light. Morris (1991) describes this movie as “an exceptional film in that the daily details of life with paralysis are shown as an integral part of a real, powerful and autonomous person” (pp. 96-97). The literature shows that media plays an important role in the construction, maintenance and even expansion of society’s conception of masculinity.

The literature shows that media is a very powerful tool in the construction, maintenance, and even expansion of society’s conception of masculinity (Morris, 1991; Shakespeare et al., 1996; Stibbe, 2004; Wilde, 2004). The literature shows that the language used by the media can have negative consequences for people with disabilities as well as an entire gender. Thus it is important to consider the way in which the media is portraying the masculinity of men with disabilities.

Chapter III: Methodology

This study uses content analysis to examine the data and includes combination of both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Berg (2007) defines content analysis as “a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases and meanings” (p. 303). This analysis examines the language in Canadian newspapers by reporters as well as biographical/autobiographical sources surrounding the masculinity of athletes with disabilities.

As with all research methods, there are both advantages and disadvantages to using content analysis. This study is well-suited to content analysis because it is a well-known tool for researchers to understand the way in which the subjects and authors “view their social worlds and how these views fit into the larger frame of how the social sciences view these issues and interpretations” (Berg, 2007, p. 308). This method is chosen for three reasons: it can reveal a deep understanding of social issues, it cannot influence or harm its participants, and it is a feasible methodology for the scope of this project.

This study explores society’s perception of the masculinity of athletes with disabilities, as well as the athletes’ understanding of their masculinities. Content analysis is a safe method since it represents a type of secondary analysis, whereby the data set is analyzed for a purpose other than its original intention; the very nature of this method has no effect on the participants and therefore has no capacity to do harm (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005; Jackson & Verberg, 2007). This method is also chosen due to its feasibility in terms of time and resources

(Grinnell & Unrau, 2005; Jackson & Verberg, 2007). Berg (2007) discusses the feasibility of content analysis and comments that this technique is ideal for one student working alone.

One well documented disadvantage of content analysis is the potential for an overabundance of data (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). The selection criteria of this study were developed to help avoid this problem. The data sets were limited to: all articles about the Paralympics from *The Globe and Mail* and *The Vancouver Sun* during the 2008 summer Paralympic games, as well as autobiographical/biographical sources of the athletes mentioned in the articles.

Another disadvantage of content analysis is identified by Berg (2007), who states “[it] is limited to examining already recorded messages” (p. 328). In other words, if the message the researcher is looking for is not found, there is no way to probe the participants. There is enough support in the literature around the interconnected relationships between disability, masculinity and sport to suggest that these sources contain the messages necessary to conduct this study.

Qualitative/quantitative

Content analysis is a research technique that can be either qualitative or quantitative; Berg (2007) suggests that using a combination of both is a way to ensure the benefits of both techniques. This study is designed to focus on qualitative analysis, and includes some quantitative techniques to examine the deeper messages of masculinity and disability while “grounding such messages to the data” (Berg, 2007, p. 308).

Employing the qualitative methodology as outlined by Berg (2007), the data is examined using an interpretative approach to uncover the social construction/reflection of the masculinity of men with disabilities. The data is examined for latent content to reveal the symbolism underlying the physical data and uncover the deep structural meaning conveyed by the message (Berg, 2007).

The quantitative side of this study is useful in determining frequencies of relevant categories (Berg, 2007). The words and phrases that exemplify hegemonic masculinity and “disabled masculinity” are the units of analysis used to identify the portrayal of the masculinity of these athletes with disabilities. This study found that the quantitative aspect illuminated unexplored and unanticipated avenues. The slightly higher percentage of women referred to in masculine terms, compared to male athletes, lead to the exploration of the role of women in the reinforcement/construction of masculinity.

Data sources

This study uses two distinct data sets: Canadian newspaper coverage and biographical/autobiographical sources. As noted above, newspaper coverage is from two sources; all articles from *The Globe and Mail* and *the Vancouver Sun* written during the 2008 Beijing summer Paralympic games. *The Globe and Mail* is chosen due to its national scope and *The Vancouver Sun* is selected because it is the only Canadian newspaper that sent reporters to the 2008 Paralympic

games (D. Tremblay, personal communication, June 18, 2008). Newspaper coverage is chosen for four reasons:

1. Ease of access via the internet.
2. Abundance of data – Newspaper coverage is the largest form of Canadian news coverage. Other sources such as Television Coverage in Canada are limited; CBC TV offers eight hours of coverage in English and two hours in French (International Paralympic Committee, 2008c).
3. Latent content related to masculinity is present - Other sources of video available on the web such as from the International Paralympic Committee's website showcase the sporting events and do not contain the necessary reporter's commentary.
4. Newspaper articles reach a large audience - Auslander and Gold (1999) comment that mass media has considerable potential to influence the way people with disabilities are perceived.

As already stated, the second data set is biographical/autobiographical material in the form of personal websites, blogs, and athlete profiles. These Paralympic athletes belong to the Canadian Paralympic Committee and are required to write a biography that is posted on their website. There was a slight modification to the selection of these sources as it was found that relatively few athletes have formal blogs. In addition to the proposed Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC) and personal websites/blogs of those athletes mentioned in the articles, the data source was expanded to include any

biographical/autobiographical material of these athletes available through web searches. This new source was often found in the form of athlete biographies from regional sports teams and was a rich source of data regarding masculinity.

This data set is important to the study as it is an opportunity to include the voices of these athletes. Examining these sources provides an opportunity for dialogue surrounding the masculinities of these athletes that may be missing or hidden within hegemonic masculinity (Hillyer, 1993). Similarly, Thomas (2007) discusses the importance of including the lived experience in disability research. In Hillyer's (1993) writing on the relationships between disability and feminism, she states that "Personal narratives are probably the best source of information about women's disability experience" (p. 21). However these sources must not be considered to be more accurate or truthful than data from the newspaper articles; Hillyer (1993) also points out the potential source of bias in authoring by other people and reminds us that even autobiography is subject to bias as it is a "selective retelling on one's story, reordered, retrospective, and biased by both the requirements of form and changes in the writer's understanding of the meaning of what she remembers" (p. 35).

Selection criteria

All articles from *The Globe and Mail* and *The Vancouver Sun* that pertained to the Paralympics during the time frame of the games were selected using *Google News* as the search engine. To limit the potential overabundance of data it was proposed that the study would only analyze only those articles that

were mentioned in the newspaper articles and also had autobiographical/biographical sources; this turned out to be too limiting. The final analysis included all articles from *The Globe and Mail* and *The Vancouver Sun* during the 2008 summer Paralympic games (September 6 – 18, 2008). This was done due to the lack of data that fit the original criteria and to produce statistics pertaining to the total number of articles.

Athletes mentioned in these articles were selected for exploration into their biographical/autobiographical sources. The study was originally designed to look for this data through the Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC) and personal websites/blogs. This was found to be insufficient and was therefore expanded to include all internet sources that contained biographies/autobiographies of the athletes; these sources included local/provincial clubs as well as web-pages related to specific competitions.

This study was initially designed to look at male athletes only; it was expanded to include female athletes when the data revealed that the majority of athletes who were referred to in masculine terms were women. Given the understanding that gender is socially constructed and performative, this study was expanded to include the ways in which newspaper articles portray the gender of the female athletes at the 2008 Paralympic games (Connell, 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) make the argument that masculinity is relational:

Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting (p. 836).

One criticism of masculinity studies is the tendency to dichotomize the experiences of men and women and leave out the experiences of women under the guise of irrelevance. To this Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), reply “[t]he cure lies in taking a consistently relational approach to gender—not in abandoning the concepts of gender or masculinity“(p.837).

These new selection criteria resulted in the examination of 52 articles (16 from the *Globe & Mail*, 36 from the *Vancouver Sun*) and 28 biographical/autobiographical sources.

Chapter IV: Confronting hegemonic masculinities: (un)ambiguous masculinities

As anticipated, both data sets revealed latent content regarding the masculinity of the athletes who competed at the 2008 Beijing summer Paralympics. There are three ways in which images of masculinity of Paralympic athletes are portrayed in this study: firstly through newspaper articles, secondly through biographical sources, and thirdly through autobiographical sources. Forty percent of the newspaper articles contained messages that supported hegemonic masculinity. Of these articles, 54% referred to the masculinity of men and 60% spoke of women in masculine terms. In the newspaper articles there are examples of the athletes presenting ambiguous and sometimes conflicting messages about their masculinity; this ambiguity suggests that the construction of their masculinity, as close to the hegemonic version, may not correspond with how they interpret their masculinity.

There is a dramatic difference in the styles of the articles in this study: The articles in *The Globe and Mail* reported factual information regarding the success of individual athletes while articles in *The Vancouver Sun* produced short stories of athletes mainly about “overcoming” a wide variety of obstacles including their disabilities. This type of factual reporting is also noted by Howe (2008), who argues that “The style of journalism has begun to shift away from the headlines that celebrate the triumph over adversity to a more sport-focused format” and states that “[h]eadlines are changing, which is a step in the right direction, but arguably do not go far enough” (p.98). Howe (2008) envisions this new direction

as an opportunity to “expose the distinctive culture that is a derivative of mainstream high performance sport” (p.98). This envisioned direction of reporting would be invaluable to studies, such as this one, looking for latent content regarding disability culture.

Articles in *The Globe and Mail* went to an extreme in their sport focus by presenting factual information in an “‘X’ athlete received ‘Y’ place in ‘Z’ event” format, thereby missing the potentially rich stories of Paralympic culture. A prime example of this comes from the article entitled “Grand'Maison atop podium again” in which fifteen athletes are mentioned in this short article of 490 words (The Canadian Press & The Associated Press, 2008, September 9). Articles in *The Vancouver Sun*, while providing some insight into the lives of the Paralympic athletes, mainly presented their stories as triumph over disability or in juxtaposition to the “real” athletes of the Olympics.

The majority of the messages about masculinity in the athletes’ biographies and direct quotations represented Paralympic athletes as attaining or striving to attain hegemonic masculine traits. This suggests that the media is simply responding to the way in which the athletes portray themselves as traditionally masculine or that both the media and athletes are replicating the larger social understanding of athletes with disabilities as supercrips or a combination of the two. However, while fewer than expected, messages that opposed or are ambiguous to the hegemonic version are mainly in the athletes’ own words. The following sections explore instances in the data that support and

oppose the hegemonic version of masculinity, as well as more ambiguous examples.

Supporting hegemonic masculinity

Physical and mental strength

Hegemonic masculinity is connected to displays of physical strength (Morris, 1991). This study finds that messages about strength are mainly in the newspaper sources (Kingston, 2008, September 8d; Kingston, 2008, September 16b; Lee, 2008, September 8; The Canadian Press, 2008, September 11b). Here Paralympic athletes are described as powerful and possessing strength. For example, Kingston (2008, September 16b) describes the crowd's reaction to Chantal Petitclerc winning an event when she "...captivated people with her amazingly powerful push from the seat of a high-tech racing chair." Jean Quevillon describes his strength as superior: "I gave everything I had in that match and I was a lot stronger" (The Canadian Press, 2008, September 7). In a slightly different example, Michelle Stilwell refers to sport giving her strength to "deal with" her disability: "Sport makes you a stronger person. It helps me get through those frustrating days when things about your disability might be not very happy days. Without sport, I don't know where I would be or what kind of person I would be" (Kingston, 2008, September 16e). By highlighting the strength of these Paralympic athletes, the media is reinforcing traits of hegemonic masculinity.

Aggression

From the literature, it is clear that aggression is connected to hegemonic exemplars of masculinity (Barker, 2005; Gerschick & Miller, 1994; Valentine, 1999). Connecting sports aggression to masculinity, Messner (1992) found that male athletes are comfortable with the athletic aggression that is built into specific sports and bound by rules; these athletes use this form of aggression in the development of masculine identities. The way in which aggressive language is used in the data varies between the newspaper and biographical materials. The language in the newspaper articles is aggressive when describing athletic accomplishments, victories, and defeats when connected to specific locations in time, while athlete biographies portray a more general sense of aggression and even justification.

This study finds that newspaper articles also use aggressive language to describe athletic accomplishments; for example, several athletes are said to have “smashed” and “shattered” existing athletic records (Kingston, 2008, September 11a; The Canadian Press, 2008, September 11b; The Canadian Press & The Associated Press, 2008, September 9; *The Globe and Mail*, 2008, September 9) and Earl Connor “blew away the field” in the 100 metre sprint (Kingston, 2008, September 14b). Words such as “beat,” “hammered,” “knocked out,” “killing,” and “pumping fists” are used to describe the victories over other athletes and especially other countries (Canwest News Service, 2008, September 13; Christie, 2008, September 15a; Christie, 2008, September 15b; Kingston, 2008, September 15a; Kingston, 2008, September 16d). In cases where athletes have

lost a game, they are situated as recipients of aggressive action, for example: “[I]t was a tough blow” and “well-beaten” (Kingston, 2008, September 9; Kingston, 2008, September 15a; Kingston, 2008, September 16b). The Aggressive language in the newspaper articles is mainly used symbolically to describe events at the Paralympics, however aggression in athlete biographical sources are used in other ways.

Aggressive language from athletes’ biographical material is sometimes used to describe the aggressive nature of specific athletes. This type of aggression is found in David Willsie’s *Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association* athlete biography, both in the description of his personality as “A fiery competitor, Dave’s aggressiveness has earned him a reputation,” and in the description of his game play: “Dave loves to ‘give hugs’ to the opposition in the form of muggings! He takes the ball, wallets or whatever is there for the taking and, yes, sometimes he gets called for a foul” (Willsie, 2000). At first, David Willsie’s use of “give hugs” seems out of place when describing aggressive behaviour towards his opponents, however it exemplifies the relationships between men found by Messner (1992) where athletes use aggression to develop masculine identities. In addition to influencing their masculinity Messner (1992) notes that through sports-based aggression, “young males can develop a certain kind of closeness with each other while not having to deal with the kinds of (intimate) attachments that they tend to fear” (p.68). From the biographical material there is one example of real aggression outside the realm of rule-based aggression of sports.

On his website, Patrick Anderson describes a scenario of “justified” aggression in which he punches a fellow athlete:

The thing is, as the clock was winding down, I suddenly realized that if this was my last game, it might be my last chance to punch him in the face. Believe me, there was nothing emotional in it. I wasn't angry. It's simply that he's been hiding behind the refs and the integrity of the game for a long time, and no one holds him accountable for being an idiot (Anderson, 2008b).

Aggression is a key exemplar of hegemonic masculinity in this study. It is used symbolically to describe athletic accomplishments, the nature of specific athletes, and in one case, physical aggression.

Independence

Independence is an interesting concept in the context of this study because it is connected to empowerment and progression within the disability community while it is also connected to masculinity through self reliance and financial stability (Barker; 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Gerschick and Miller (1994) make specific note of the connection between independence and the masculinity of men with disabilities. In this study, messages about the independence of these Paralympic athletes' comes in the form of reference to an athlete's occupation and education (Canwest News Service, 2008, September 13; Christie, 2008, September 15a; Kingston 2008, September 8d; Kingston, 2008, September 16a.)

A few athletes are portrayed as educated and gainfully employed. For example, Dean Bergeron's profession of actuary is mentioned in two separate articles as well as in his biographical notes (Bergeron, 2008; Canwest News

Service, 2008, September 13; The Canadian Press, 2008, September 13). In his Canadian Paralympic Committee athlete profiles it is written that Paul Tingley:

is an athlete who is considered very lucky for finding jobs which enabled him to continue his training and studies. He obtained a degree in communications and he works in a computer network support.

Similarly Paul Tingley in an autobiography writes:

I am currently in my fifth year at UBC, working toward obtaining a BA in English Literature. After completing my degree at the beginning of next summer, I hope to either attend broadcasting school or Law school. My career goal is to either work as a radio Program Director, or as a lawyer specializing in either Family or Media Law (Tildesley, 2006).

Kingston (2008, September 16a) includes a note about the career path of Canadian wheelchair basketball player Jamie Borissof who is “A biomedical engineer and the president of his own wheelchair design firm.” Additionally, throughout the data, athletes are noted as actively pursuing or having completed high levels of education. For example Janet McLachlan’s educational path is described as taking “interior design classes while also working towards a master’s degree in education” (Kingston 2008, September 8d).

These messages about the athletes’ careers and educational aspirations and accomplishments are connected to traditional masculine traits through self reliance and financial stability (Barker, 2005; Gerschick & Miller, 1994). Additionally, having navigated the barriers surrounding higher education and employment for people with disabilities, these athletes are situated higher up in the hierarchy of impairment (Deal, 2003) and closer to the hegemonic version of masculinity.

The data shows that the athletes are portrayed as possessing characteristics that support the hegemonic version of masculinity and are described as physically and mentally strong, aggressive, and independent. Female athletes are portrayed both in masculine terms and in feminized terms, thus providing the necessary opposition for the maintenance and/or construction of masculinity.

Emphasizing the gender of female athletes

In this study, a replication emerged of two gender extremes as personified by two specific female athletes: Chantal Petitclerc as hyper-masculine and Valérie Grand'Maison as emphasized-feminine. In many newspaper articles, Chantal Petitclerc is described in masculine terms. For example, her physical strength is described as “captivating” and she is aware that she intimidates her opponents (Kingston, 2008, September 10a). In one of her gold medal victories, her celebration is described as “pumping her fists in the air” (Kingston, 2008, September 16d). On her website, Petitclerc talks about her spinal cord injury and mentions her early connection to sport as a tool “to develop her physical strength and stamina” (Petitclerc, 2009).

In one quote, Petitclerc is simultaneously described as masculine while “demoting” her opponents to the status of “girls” when Kingston (2008, September 11a) states “There is not that many girls that do the five events on the track.” Additionally, Christie (2008, September 17) presents Petitclerc’s body in masculine terms by stating that in preparation for the Paralympics “[s]he lost five pounds off her already chiselled body.” Referring to another female athlete, Kingston (2008, September 8d) describes Janet McLachlan as “powerfully built,

5-11 [with] large hands and long arms [that] are hugely advantageous on the court.” Finally some athletes identify other female athletes as having masculine characteristics. Chantal Petitclerc, for example, describes her team mate as tough: “For her to make the podium in the 400 after this morning, she's a tough girl. It's been very challenging for her” (The Canadian Press, 2008, September 12).

Equally prevalent is the portrayal of female athletes as highly feminine, a position on the continuum of gender that can be used to acknowledge extreme gender roles. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) discuss the relational nature of gender and note that “[t]he concept of hegemonic masculinity was originally formulated in tandem with a concept of hegemonic femininity” (p. 837). Hegemonic masculinity is strengthened by ideas and images that are not masculine (Shakespeare et al., 1996; Wilde, 2004). The references about femininity of these athletes come only from the newspaper articles; there is no mention of gender roles in the biographical material from the CPC athlete profiles of Valérie Grand'Maison or Chantal Petitclerc (Grand'Maison, 2008; Petitclerc, 2008). From the newspaper articles, many female Paralympic athletes are portrayed as emotional, having hyper-feminine personality traits, and described as having feminine physical characteristics.

Describing her disappointment in a silver medal finish, Valérie Grand'Maison explains that her emotions played a role in not attaining gold: “For some reason, I couldn't. It's less physical and more emotional at this level” (Kingston, 2008, September 16c). In regards to having emphasized feminine

personality traits, Goalball athlete Amy Alsop is referred to as “bubbly” (Kingston, 2008, September 11e). Valérie Grand’Maison is also referred to as having a “bubbly personality” and as the “bubbly, excitable 19-year-old from Montreal” (Kingston, 2008, September 11a). In this same article, Kingston (2008, September 11a) portrays Grand’Maison as hysterical following a last-minute swimming suit change: “I was freaking out. I just ran screaming at everybody, ‘Help me get the suit on.’” While these are the direct words of an athlete, it is the author of the article who chooses which quotes to include, thereby presenting an image to the readership.

In some articles, the physical attributes of female athletes are described in feminine terms. Valérie Grand’Maison is described as having an “infectious smile” by Kingston (2008, September 8a) and Chantal Petitclerc, who is normally described in masculine terms, is referred to as “raven-haired” in two articles (Kingston, September 11a; Kingston, 2008, September 12). While not immediately obvious as gendered descriptions of these women, using a relational lens to look at gender roles makes this more apparent. This author suggests that the reader consider the appropriateness of dialogue surrounding hair colour and smile when reporting on a male athlete who is portrayed as hyper-masculine.

In this study, female athletes strengthen the hegemonic version of masculinity by attaining and displaying these masculine characteristics as well as by providing oppositional feminine characteristics. It is important to consider how the female athletes in this study are portrayed due to the relational nature of gender. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) state “Gender is always relational,

and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity” (p. 848). In this study, female athletes are portrayed in masculine terms adding to the desirability of hegemonic masculinity and to the legitimization of female athletes. In addition, referring to female athletes as hyper-feminine strengthens social understanding of masculinity by reinforcing the relational nature of gender and by showing which traits are not masculine. The next section describes the messages from the media and athletes that oppose the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity.

Opposing hegemonic masculinity

In examining the data for messages about the masculinity of the athletes, there are relatively few portrayals in opposition to hegemonic masculine characteristics; in fact only 15% of the newspaper articles contained messages that resist hegemonic masculinity. Of these articles, 15% referred to men and 46% spoke of women in opposition to masculine terms. The literature shows that part of being a man, in the traditional hegemonic sense, is to distance oneself from vulnerability, deny weakness/emotions, and in some cases spend less time with family (Barker, 2005; Morris, 1991; Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells, and Davies, 1996). In this study, some men are portrayed as emotional, lacking confidence and choosing family over sport. In many of these cases, athletes demonstrate awareness of these characteristics as undesirable or not masculine by describing these characteristics as temporary and uncommon.

Canadian swimmer Donovan Tildesley admits to being emotional as he entered the Birds Nest Stadium as Canada's flag-bearer. He says "I'm not a highly emotional guy. I can usually keep my emotions in check. For a moment there, I was choking up" (Canwest News Service, 2008, September 5). In this quote, Tildesley portrays this "lapse" as uncommon and he demonstrates an understanding that being emotional is an undesirable characteristic for a man to possess. In another uncommon display of emotion, Mark Breton talks writes openly on his website about how the separation of his parents was an emotional time for him during his adolescence (Breton, 2008b). Mark Breton also demonstrates some awareness that displaying emotions is undesirable as he justifies his emotional period by claiming it allowed him to develop an inner strength that would later benefit him in his athletic endeavours (Breton, 2008b).

Some athletes are quoted as displaying a lack of confidence in their ability to perform well at their events, for example when Dean Bergeron says, "This was the first time I competed at this venue and I was a little nervous, but I had a good start" (The Canadian Press, 2008, September 11a). Similarly, André Beaudoin says "I was afraid I would lose the world record tonight, but I'm glad to see I'm still at the top" (Canwest News Service, 2008, September 13). While both of these athletes demonstrate a lapse in confidence, they also demonstrate awareness of this characteristic as undesirable by quickly pairing it with a positive result.

The final way that athletes are portrayed as resisting hegemonic masculinity comes from an example in which, following defeat, Canadian

wheelchair basketball team captain Jamie Borisoff announces his retirement from the sport, saying it is "too bad [to be] going out on a loss, but it's time to hang it up, time for family" (Kingston, 2008, September 16a). Leaving the arena of sport that is connected to the formation and perpetuation of masculinity can be seen as a resistance to hegemonic masculinity, especially when someone like Jamie Borisoff chooses responsibility and commitment to family as the reason for leaving sport (Barker, 2005). However, ambiguity about whether Borisoff is portrayed as supporting or resisting hegemonic masculine traits appears when Kingston (2008, September 16a) adds, "A biomedical engineer and the president of his own wheelchair design firm, Borisoff and his wife are expecting their first child next March." This statement combines the hegemonic masculine trait of being a successful bread-winner with the aforementioned commitment to family over sport. The final section of this chapter explores further examples of ambiguity in messages about the masculinities of these Paralympic athletes.

Ambiguous and complex messages of masculinities?

While many messages clearly fit into the dichotomy of resisting or supporting hegemonic masculinity, more ambiguous messages are equally presented. This ambiguity supports the concept of multiple masculinities set out by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). Connell and Messerschmidt say that the hegemonic version is created through exemplars of masculinity, such as athletes, but that in reality "hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not

correspond closely to the lives of any actual men” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 838). The ambiguity of masculinity portrayed by these Paralympic athletes, as symbols of masculinity, demonstrates that these constructed masculinities do not necessarily correspond with their realities. In cases in which these Paralympic athletes provide mixed messages about their masculinity, they may exemplify Gerschick and Millers’ (1994) coping strategy of reformulation of men redefining their masculinity according to their own terms.

In this study, there are two prime examples of athletes displaying ambiguous and complex versions of masculinities. The first example comes from the displaying of hegemonic masculine traits for competitive advantage. Some athletes have attributed part of their athletic success to their ability to intimidate their opponents. David Willsie demonstrates that he uses intimidation as a tool with a scenario on his website: “[H]e’s an opposition players’ nightmare; they wake up in a cold sweat only to realize that the nightmare is real and that our Dave is on the court beside them, waiting, with a smile” (Willsie, 2000). Similarly, Chantal Petitclerc notes that intimidation plays a part in her athletic success; she says “I don’t mean to, but I know I can be a little intimidating. I have my rituals. I don’t talk to people when I warm up. ‘Maybe I scare them a little, but it works’” (Kingston, 2008, September 16b). She also notes that her previous successes are intimidating “After the fourth gold medal, you can look at some of the girls and see they’re not even going to try. It’s true. They have lost. I don’t mean to, but I know I can be a little intimidating” (Kingston, 2008, September 16d).

Willis's scenario can be seen as ambiguous by incorporating a sense of humour; he is clearly aware that intimidation is a tool for competitive advantage but hints that this is not really a true representation of his masculinity by this over-the-top portrayal. Chantal Petitclerc's example of ambiguity of masculine portrayal is clearer as she acknowledges that her perceived ability to intimidate fellow athletes is not an accurate reflection of her personality.

The second and most complex example of an ambitious representation of the masculinity of a Paralympic athlete comes from Earl Connor, who tested positive for trace amounts of male hormones and was therefore suspended in September 2004. He was successful in winning a gold medal in the T42 100-metre sprint at the 2008 Paralympic games. In an article by Kingston (2008, September 14b), Connor is portrayed as overcoming his disability, emasculated due to testicular removal, caught compensating through testosterone replacement therapy, and shown to express emotion. Kingston reports:

He was suspended for two years back in September, 2004, after an out-of-competition test showed up trace amounts of testosterone and nandralone. He said the testosterone was a result of a prescribed patch he was using secretly to treat low levels that followed surgery to remove a testicle as a result of a cancer scare. "What happened four years ago really cut the legs from underneath me so to speak. No pun intended. You have two choices. Choice No. 1 is you can lie down and take it. Choice No. 2 is you can fight through it. I hope can inspire a lot more people out there, not just amputees, as someone who's fought through a cancer scare and tried to keep it a secret. You shouldn't be ashamed of a possible disease or being scared" (Kingston, 2008, September 14b).

Connor repeats the masculine narrative of overcoming when he stated that "You have two choices. Choice No. 1 is you can lie down and take it. Choice No. 2 is you can fight through it" (Kingston, G. 2008, September 14b). This quote in

itself is layered, as the “fight” he is referring to is both one of overcoming the physical disabilities associated with amputation as well as of overcoming cancer. The shame he speaks of is related to the assumed emasculation related to the removal of his testicle, the site of production for the male hormone testosterone. It is, however, too often incorrectly associated with the development of masculinity and is in contradiction the notion of gender construction (for example, see Flieger, 1995). Connor adds to the ambiguity of his masculinity when he admits to feeling ashamed and scared of having testicular cancer.

The observed ambiguity surrounding the portrayal of the masculinity of these Paralympic athletes may be ultimately connected to the reality of impairment as a barrier to hegemonic masculine traits. Several authors note that sport is connected to the attainment of hegemonic masculine traits (Barker, 2005; Brittain, 2004; Connell, 2005; Messner, 1992). However, Sparkes and Smith (2002) identify hierarchies of masculinity based ultimately on the athletic ability of athletes. As will be discussed in chapter five, athletes with disabilities fall on the low end of this hierarchy; when these athletes attempt to compete against able-bodied athletes, they are often portrayed as cheaters and inferior (Kingston, 2008, September 8a; Kingston, 2008, September 11d; Pistorius, 2009.)

This chapter explores three main themes related to the hegemonic version of masculinity from the newspaper articles and athlete biographies. The hegemonic version is supported by portrayals of the athletes’ physical and mental strength, use of aggressive language and discourses of independence. Additionally, female athletes are portrayed as both hyper-masculine and hyper-

feminine, thus supporting the traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. Portraying these athletes as masculine emphasizes the importance of masculinity in sport and legitimates their status as “real” athletes. On the other hand, since gender is relational, portraying these women as hyper-feminine strengthens the social understanding of masculinity by defining its opposite.

The next theme explores the relatively uncommon portrayals of Paralympic athletes who oppose hegemonic masculinity. In some cases male athletes are portrayed as emotional and lacking confidence, however, these instances are quickly followed by language designed to ensure the reader that these emotions are uncommon or temporary. The messages start to become ambiguous when athletes choose to leave sports in pursuit of raising a family.

Finally ambiguous messages about masculinity align with Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) assertion that while these athletes may possess and display some traits of hegemonic masculinity they nevertheless possess a toolkit of masculinities in which the hegemonic version is only one facet. This finding also supports Gerschick and Miller's (1994) coping strategy of reformulation whereby men redefine their masculinity according to their own terms. From the data, ambiguous messages are found in scenarios in which athletes display hegemonic masculine traits for competitive advantage while admitting that this does not match their personalities. Additionally, a case study of Earl Connor reveals complex and ultimately ambiguous messages about his masculinity. The next chapter explores how the media and athletes' biographies

project ideas of masculinity beyond bodies and onto abstract concepts such as the Paralympics as a whole, categories of sports, and equipment.

Chapter V: Hierarchy, Paralympic classification, and cheetah legs: Masculine objects and practices in action.

This chapter considers how the media and athletes' biographies attribute masculine traits not only to individual athletes but also to larger concepts such as the Paralympic classification system, as well as the Paralympics in its entirety. These representations reflect, reinforce, and create hierarchies of physical ability that are connected to categories based on physical ability and ultimately to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity (Brittain, 2004; Messner, 1992). This first section looks at the way Canadian newspapers and athlete biographies portray sports and the Paralympic classification system as hierarchical based on physical ability. The final section considers the masculinization of adapted sports equipment and explores transhumanism and the implications for creating new categories of sport that go beyond our species-typical boundaries (Wolbring, 2008).

Masculinity and Paralympic classification

As reflected in Paralympic classification system and the ways in which the data values certain sports over others, a hierarchy of impairment's based on physical ability is found in the data (Deal, 2003). These hierarchies are connected to categories of physical ability and ultimately to the creation of

masculinity; Brittain (2004) states “one of the key aims [of sport] is to distinguish between different levels of biological make-up and function through tests of physical strength, speed, and endurance” (p. 438). Looking within the Paralympics, sports that require athletes to attain higher levels of physical ability also tend to be considered more masculine. In sports such as wheelchair basketball some athletes are able to attain characteristics of the hegemonic masculine body by performing acts of physical strength, speed, and endurance; these athletes are accepted as more masculine than athletes of a precision sport such as Boccia.

Peers (2009) describes classification as a highly medicalized process whereby athletes are grouped with others of similar “(dis)function” into an “appropriate category of competition” (p. 660). This system ends up dividing athletes and ultimately sports into a hierarchies associated with disability and ultimately masculinity. For example, in one article, Kingston (2008, September 15) assigns a “high” and “positive” value to Petitclerc’s sporting class, which should be a neutral attribute: “Petitclerc, a paraplegic who races in a class for those with the most upper body mobility.” On the other end of the spectrum, athletes in the “lower” more disabled classifications are described in terms that evoke pity. Kingston (2008, September 16e) describes Michelle Stilwell’s move “downwards” from wheelchair basketball to wheelchair racing following “complications” surrounding her disability: He writes “Still, she had the itch to compete again and found an outlet in the T52 class, the lowest disability class for wheelchair racing.” Kingston (2008, September 16e) also connects her

classification to a lack of media interest when he says “But in her first Games as a racer, she hasn't generated near the media attention of Canadian T54 star Chantal Petitclerc” and notes that Stilwell wishes to compete at the next Paralympic Summer Games “but it's not even a certainty her class will race in England, given that there were only eight women who qualified for Beijing”.

The data shows that portrayals of masculinity, rooted in physical ability, can go beyond individual athletes and can be projected onto the Paralympic classification system. Moving one step further away from the masculinity of athletes, the next section considers the portrayal of the Paralympics as a whole.

Masculinity of the Paralympics

The same traits of hegemonic masculinity that define Paralympic athletes as masculine or not, are also projected onto the Paralympics, therefore it is not surprising to see the same conflicting message of attaining a limited version of hegemonic masculinity. The image of the Paralympics as masculine is reflected in the newspaper articles through the display of the masculine body that overcomes disability, and through the paternalistic relationship it creates and maintains with the athletes. The contradiction in masculinity comes from portrayals of the Paralympics as inferior to the Olympics.

The opening ceremony is an ideal place to look for images of Paralympic masculinity since it reaches the most viewers and is not about specific athletic events. Without a doubt the most masculine image of the 2008 Paralympics is in the opening ceremony whereby China's Hou Bin climbs a rope to light the

Paralympic torch while strapped to a wheelchair. Describing Hou Bin's act of physical strength, *The Canadian Press* (2008, September 6) writes "His muscles strained as the one-legged track athlete slowly climbed hand-over-hand the 100 metres". The image of him overcoming disability is an obvious and intentional metaphor when one considers that he is a track athlete who uses a prosthetic leg to run in various events and most likely does not use a wheelchair in everyday life. The wheelchair is the universal symbol of disability and Hou Bin's use of it speaks volumes towards this image of overcoming disability.

The image of the Paralympics as paternalistic is another connection to its image of masculinity. Peers (2009) points out that the paternalism of the Paralympics is not new and can be traced back to the founding "father" of Paralympics and has influenced the construction of disability. "Furthermore, constructing Guttman as Father of the Paralympic Movement conceals significant social shifts that contributed to the construction of disability as sites of both tragedy and potential athletic rehabilitation" (Peers, 2009, p. 657). This paternalistic behaviour elevates the masculine status of the Paralympics and at the same time undermines the masculinity/independence of the individual athletes.

A good example of the Paralympics as paternalistic comes from the International Paralympic Committee's (IPC) decision to re-run the T54 women's 5,000 metres wheelchair race. Canada's Diane Roy came in first despite a crash involving several athletes. The race was considered invalid when non-athletes rushed onto the track to assist those who had crashed and impeded the other

athletes who were still racing. It was not until after the medal ceremony when she was presented with the gold medal that the IPC asked for the medal back:

International Paralympic Committee officials were embarrassed and apologized to Roy and the other medallists, saying there had been a miscommunication between the technical committee that was dealing with three appeals and the medal protocol people. But they also insisted that to re-run the race was the right thing to do." Kingston, G. (2008, September 11b).

Roy clearly demonstrates a reaction to the decision that is indicative of being on the subordinate side of a paternalistic relationship. She stated "They keep me in that mind [set] to have it, to keep it. I think that was very cruel to ask me [to return it] that was really not fair. I told them I put it in the trash bin. For sure they didn't believe me, but the big boss call my coach and say 'you have to'". The most telling statement is from Roy when she considers keeping the medal but ultimately gives it back; she says "I was afraid they can do something very bad." Peers (2009) describes the silencing and downplaying of athlete resistance as a part of the paternalistic milieu that pervades the Paralympics. She ties the paternalism of the Paralympics back to the goal of empowerment of the games. "Without this needy and powerless disabled population, volunteers and experts would not seem so benevolent, empowerment would not seem so necessary and the discourse of athletes being passive recipients of empowerment would not seem so rational" (p. 658).

A contradiction regarding the masculinity of the Paralympics is seen in the data. On one hand, there is an image of the Paralympics as a masculine entity that overcomes disability through brute force and makes paternalistic decisions in the name of "because we said so". On the other hand, there exists a conflicting

image of masculinity when the Paralympics are compared to the Olympics. When considering the Paralympics as a masculine entity we can use this analogy if we consider the collective bodies of the athletes as the “body” of the Paralympics. In other words, despite all efforts to embody the hegemonic version of masculinity, the Paralympics, due to the contradiction between disability and masculinity, cannot attain the same masculine status as the Olympics. From the articles there are several examples of the Paralympics being described as inferior to the Olympics.

Comparing the level of athleticism required to compete at basketball to wheelchair basketball, Kingston (2008, September 8d) writes about Janet McLachlan:

[Her] relative lack of height and quickness dashed her dream of an extended pro basketball career in Europe. Then, a serious left knee injury ended her hope of making the national women's rugby team. In fact, Janet McLachlan thought her sport playing days were over. Now, the North Vancouver native is fuelling her competitive drive from a wheelchair as a member of Canada's women's basketball team at the Paralympic Games.

Furthering the idea that wheelchair basketball is lower than basketball Janet says “I was never the greatest jumper when I played standup so that's out of the equation now, which is kind of nice” (Kingston, 2008, September 8d).

Other examples of Paralympics as traditionally inferior come from discussions of the increasing quality of competition at the games. Paralympic athlete Tildesley speaks to the recent increase in the “quality” of the Paralympics when he states “The world is stepping it up,” he says. “It's great to see Paralympic sport being brought to another level. I think this is a wake-up call for the general public that the Paralympics are no longer the black sheep of the

family, the long-distance second cousin to the Olympics” (The Canadian Press, 2008, September 11b). Similarly, Chantal Petitclerc attempts to preempt Canadian fans’ potential disappointment in Canada’s medal total. She says “Even if we don’t finish top three again, it doesn’t really mean that we are falling back. It only means the rest of the world is catching up to what is fair in terms of treatment of Paralympic athletes” (Kingston, 2008, September 5). While not initially obvious, this line of dialogue is an example of the inferiority that valorizes the idea that the Paralympics have been traditionally inferior to the Olympics, and like the criticisms of the social model of disability, denies realities of impairment that segregates them from the Olympics. Howe (2008) writes that “it is in fact the bodies of the impaired athletes that often negatively segregate them from the mainstream” (p. 37).

The athletes’ biographies convey similar messages about the inferiority and “femininity” of the Paralympics compared to the Olympics. This representation comes from athletes who have competed in both able-bodied and disabled sports and who have found an increased success in the Paralympics (Huot, 2007; Connor 2008). Earle Connor reinforces the idea that the Paralympics are inferior to the Olympics in his on-line biography which conveys the message of him struggling along in the able-bodied world and yet competitive at the Paralympic level. “Earle Conner was involved in able-bodied sports until the age of 21 ... Then there came a turning point, ‘while watching the 1996 Paralympics, I saw the finishing time of the athlete who came in eighth in a track and field event and was convinced I could beat it’” (Connor, 2008).

The final way that the Paralympics are portrayed as less-than-masculine comes from comparing “masculine” war injured Paralympic athletes to the rest of the Paralympians. One article questions the Paralympic movement’s goal away from the rehabilitation of injured “servicemen” (Lee, 2008, September 16) and suggests that with the increased global conflicts we are seeing a return of the Paralympics to its roots. Lee (2008, September 16) writes:

The return to the Paralympic roots "is something that is slowly becoming a reality," said Greg Lagacé, manager of Soldier On, a joint program of the Canadian military and the Canadian Paralympic Committee to assist injured soldiers in taking up sports. 'Our aim is really to help these injured soldiers attain and maintain their physical health and fitness sufficient to meet operational readiness standards.' If along the way the program helps identify soldiers who can become elite athletes, so much the better, he said.

While this truly is a return to the origins of the Paralympics, it ignores its evolution and dismisses the goals of the Paralympic movement of producing high performance disabled athletes.

In an attempt to re-connect the Paralympics to its roots of rehabilitation and therefore the supercrip notion of overcoming disabilities, this article separates the war injured Paralympic athletes from “the thousands of Paralympians disabled by spinal cord injuries, car accidents, cerebral palsy and a host of diseases” (Lee, 2008, September 16). Further separating the war injured athletes from the rest of the Paralympians Greg Lagacé refers to “the problem of the Paralympics” by stating “I think there is still a general misunderstanding of the Paralympic Games. I think very few people really, truly understand the history of it” (Lee, 2008, September 16). The assumption here is that these “other” athletes are not as athletic, have no hope of being rehabilitated, generally degrade the

overall “quality” of athleticism at the Paralympics, and are ultimately further away from attaining hegemonic masculinity compared to the disabled war veterans.

This section provided examples of the contradictory media portrayal of the masculinity of the Paralympics. Images of powerful athletes overcoming disability, and portraying the Paralympics as a paternalistic institution creates an image of the Paralympics as attaining characteristics associated with the hegemonic version. On the other hand there are examples that portray the Paralympics as inferior and therefore as unable to attain hegemonic masculinity. Hierarchies, based on the physical ability of athletes, ultimately “distinguish” Paralympics sports from mainstream sports, and create a barrier to hegemonic masculinity.

In the quest for greater athletic ability, what does it mean when Paralympic athletes attain or exceed the level of performance of able-bodied athletes? The next section deals with representations of masculinity that have implications that “transcend” the Paralympics.

Masculinization of adaptive equipment

From the data there are several examples of media and athletes portraying adaptive equipment in masculine terms. In these portrayals, the equipment can be assigned masculine characteristics but more often, the equipment enables the athlete to attain physical ability and therefore a sense of masculinity.

Oscar Pistorius, a double leg amputee and Paralympic track athlete, received a lot of media attention surrounding his prosthetic legs due to the fact that he successfully appealed a decision that disallowed him to compete against able-bodied athletes due to the potentially unfair advantage gained from his running legs. As the literature shows, assigning superhuman characteristics to adaptive equipment and ultimately to athletes is connected to masculinity through supercrip ideology (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001). There is no doubt that his prosthetic limbs allow him to perform athletic feats and the connection to masculinity is clearly made: The company that manufactures his artificial limbs refers to these models in superhuman terms and an article in *The Vancouver Sun* describes them as masculine unto themselves "... he got flying on his state-of-the-art J-shaped, Cheetah Flex Foot carbon-fibre running blades" (Kingston, 2008, September 11d). Another example of projecting masculinity on adaptive equipment itself comes from an article from *The Vancouver Sun* that describes Chantal Petitclerc's wheelchair "Racing in an ultra-lightweight, three-wheel chair that looks a little like a top fuel dragster" (Kingston, 2008, September 11a).

There are several examples that show the use of adaptive equipment as a tool to attain characteristics of hegemonic masculinity (Connor, 2008; Kingston, 2008, September 11d; Kingston, 2008, September 16b; Pistorius, 2009). Chantal Petitclerc "captivated people with her amazingly powerful push from the seat of a high-tech racing chair" (Kingston, 2008, September 16b). In his biography, Earl Connor exemplifies the connection between the adaptive equipment and his

athletic success whereby he credits his prosthetic technology as helping him overcome his disability and attain his goals (Connor, 2008).

In addition to his prosthetics being described in masculine terms, Oscar Pistorius himself is described in superhuman terms due to his adaptive equipment. “The International Amateur Athletics Federation initially banned him from competing, saying the explosive energy of his spring-like appendages gave him an unfair advantage over able-bodied athletes” (Kingston, 2008, September 11d). Echoed on his website is the same sentiment that his artificial limbs elevate his ability potentially beyond what is capable of the human species. “In 2007 Pistorius took part in his first international able-bodied competitions. However, his artificial lower legs, while enabling him to compete, generated claims that he has an unfair advantage over able-bodied runners” (Pistorius, 2009).

Although these pieces of adaptive equipment enable athletes to attain characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, it is the implications for the Paralympics as a whole that sets this discussion apart from the previous sections. Noting the specific case of Oscar Pistorius, Wolbring (2008) explores the potential for humans to exceed their “natural” physical ability through the use of technology. The idea to surpass our species’ physical potential through the use of technology is called transhumanism, and according to Wolbring (2008) is close to becoming a reality. Since masculinity is connected to sport through the pursuit of being the fastest, strongest, etc... (Brittain, 2004) what does this say about the masculinity of athletes who use adaptive equipment to out compete the best Olympic athletes? Are these athletes more masculine?

The language surrounding Oscar Pistorius' case to compete against able-bodied athletes suggests that an athlete surpassing or even getting to the top level of Olympic athletes by using adaptive equipment may not increase the perception of that athlete's masculinity. Articles regarding Oscar's case to compete against able-bodied athletes create a dialogue of "cheating" through the pervasive use of "unfair advantage" (Kingston, 2008, September 11d; Pistorius, 2009). In sport, cheating is connected to athletes who are unable to reach a high level of physical strength, speed, and endurance, especially if their bodies "limit" their ability to perform. Therefore Oscar Pistorius's "unfair advantage" can be considered in opposition to hegemonic masculinity because he is unable to attain sporting ability through traditional "organic" methods.

Strengthening the argument that "enhanced humans" are not more masculine than Olympic athletes is the connection between masculinity and images of the male body. Stibbe (2004) considers the influence of images of the male body in *Men's Health* magazine as a source of the social construction of masculinity. Images in the media of the masculine body mainly consist of "normal" muscular bodies with all appendages intact. By not showing "different" bodies, men with disabilities are "othered" and are therefore not included within the institution of hegemonic masculinity.

In this section, adaptive equipment is shown to allow people with disabilities to participate in sport and attain some of the traits that are normally associated with hegemonic masculinity. Paralympic athletes are able to display physical strength, speed, and endurance and their adaptive equipment is referred

to in masculine terms. However, the language in the media connecting adaptive equipment to an “unfair advantage,” as well as the mainstream image of the masculine body does not allow for access to hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, the goal of these athletes to compete against able-bodied athletes suggests that these athletes are aware of their ultimate status of “other.”

This chapter explores three main findings related to expanded masculine concepts. First, the media reflects/reinforces the idea of hierarchies between Paralympic sports by contending that those athletes who most closely approximated hegemonic masculine traits should be included in the mainstream. Additionally, the Paralympic classification system is used by the media to distinguish the masculinity of athletes by placing them on “high” and “low” ends of the hierarchies associated with disability and ultimately masculinity. Secondly, there are several contradictory examples in the articles that influence the reader’s perception of the masculinity of the Paralympics. The Paralympics is portrayed as masculine through images of physical strength, overcoming disability, and as a father-figure. The paternalistic nature of the Paralympics serves to undermine the rhetoric of “empowerment” and ultimately the athletes. On the other hand, the Paralympics are portrayed as inferior to the Olympics through the ultimate reality of the disabled bodies of its athletes. It is interesting to note that the athletes themselves often portrayed the Paralympics as inferior. Finally, the adaptive equipment used by athletes is described in masculine terms and allows them to attain the physical characteristics that are often associated with hegemonic masculinity. Even though these athletes are able to attain these

characteristics, there is still a barrier to hegemonic masculinity that comes from the idea of “unfair advantage” and the reality of their disabled bodies.

Chapter VI: Masculine Bodies

The literature shows that the appearance and ability of bodies are key exemplars of hegemonic masculinity (Morris, 1991; Sparkes & Smith, 2002; Valentine 1999). Due to the contradiction between the hegemonic version of masculinity and disability, I expected to find examples of athletes reformulating masculinity, as described by Gerschick and Miller (1994). One of my hypotheses was that there would be a difference in the portrayal of masculinity between the two sets of data. It was speculated that the newspaper articles would portray a hegemonic version of masculinity (Gerschick & Miller, 1994) while the autobiographical sources (blogs, websites, and athlete profiles), which are spaces in which athletes have more personal control over the content, would reflect versions of Gerschick & Miller's (1994) reformulated masculinity. However, as documented in the remainder of this chapter, this study finds: that the athletes equated ablebodied with masculine; that they are portrayed and portray themselves as supercrip; that some athletes use performance-enhancing drugs and that female athletes use images of masculinity to legitimate their participation in sports. The following section explores the first such example, in which Paralympic athletes strive for attainment of hegemonic masculinity through participation in mainstream sports.

The able body as masculine

One theme arising in a number of newspaper articles and autobiographical material is that many of the “most successful” Paralympic athletes/sports strive for mainstream inclusion. Even though some athletes do reach the potential of competing in mainstream sports they are met with rejection. Resistance to this form of integration takes two forms, passively by reporting their low finishing places (Kingston, 2008, September 11d; Kingston, 2008, September 8a) and actively by referring to adaptive technology such as the artificial limb of Pistorius, which was assumed to give him a clear competitive advantage over able-bodied competitors (Kingston, 2008, September 11d).

As is demonstrated in the literature, sport is a vehicle through which athletes attain masculine status (Barker, 2005; Brittain, 2004; Connell, 2005; Messner, 1992; Sparkes & Smith, 2002). In fact, Sparkes and Smith (2002) note that mainstream contact sports create and maintain a hierarchy of masculinity based on strength, ability to withstand pain, and distance from feminine traits. In the case of Paralympic athletes, as long as the Olympics are considered superior to the Paralympics, the athletes’ quest for hegemonic masculine status remains unfulfilled.

Wheelchair rugby, also referred to as murderball, is an example of a Paralympic sport that seeks mainstream recognition (York, 2008, September 15). York (2008, September 15) describes the athletes in masculine terms: “Most of its players are quadriplegics, but it is a full-contact sport, with plenty of machismo, tattoos and testosterone.” The ultimate example from the Beijing games of a Paralympic athlete who surpasses his Paralympic competitors and

attempts to compete against his able-bodied equivalents is double amputee Oscar Pistorius of South Africa. He displayed dominance during the Athens Paralympics and is often referred to as “the fastest man on no legs” (Kingston, 2008, September 11d). When the term Paralympics was developed it was intended as a play on words, whereby the prefix “para” referred to the games being parallel to mainstream sports as well as paraplegic, referring to the dominance of athletes with spinal cord injuries at the time (Howe, 2008). The goal of the Paralympics to be truly parallel to the Olympics is not easily attainable; there is a general interpretation that the Paralympics are inferior to the Olympics. This is exemplified by Kingston (2008, September 11): “[Pistorius] has transcended Paralympic sport with his brash attempt to race at an Olympics.” Additionally, the inferiority of the Paralympic games is emphasized when athletes who compete at an able-bodied level are seen to raise the profile of disability athletics. Kingston (2008, September 11d) states “[Pistorius] has done more than anyone in the current generation of athletes to raise the profile of disability athletics, mostly by challenging authorities to let him compete as an Olympian.”

In Pistorius' attempt to participate in able-bodied sport, he was met with resistance from the International Amateur Athletics Federation who banned him from competition, stating that “the explosive energy of his spring-like appendages gave him an unfair advantage over able-bodied athletes” (Kingston, 2008, September 11d). After winning a court battle he was allowed to compete with able-bodied athletes, though he did not qualify for the 400 metre race in Beijing. This reinforces the idea that even with the potentially unfair advantage of his

artificial limbs, disabled athletes are still “not as good” as their Olympian equivalents.

This same narrative of “good enough to be able-bodied” is also found in an article regarding two female athletes. Natalie du Toit receives a lot of attention as one of the few Canadian Paralympic athletes who competed in both games in Beijing (Kingston, 2008, September 8a). Kingston (2008, September 8a) implies that competing against able-bodied swimmers adds credibility to her athletic ability and elevates disability sports by stating that “her profile was enhanced when she competed against able-bodied swimmers at the Commonwealth Games.” This is quickly followed by the message that although she is good enough to compete against able-bodied athletes, she is still not able to be competitive: “[A]nd she made headlines by competing in the 10-kilometre open water swim at the Beijing Olympics, where she finished 16th in a field of 24” (Kingston, 2008, September 8a).

The idea of striving for able-bodied competition as a form of legitimacy is also apparent in the way some athletes spoke of their athletic aspirations and accomplishments (Connor, 2008; Cowdrey, 2008; Huot, 2007; Pistorius, 2009; Tildesley, 2006). Matt Cowdrey’s athlete profile states: “Born with a congenital amputation to his lower left arm, Matthew started swimming at the age of five and was determined to not just be as good as any able-bodied person, but to be better” (Cowdrey, 2008). Additionally, Lauren Barwick speaks of her dream to compete in an able-bodied event in which she would “be the first paralyzed rider to ride Grand Prix dressage” (Kingston, 2008, September 11c).

This friction between ablebodied and disabled sports comes in part from society's inability to imagine a different system of ability. There is no conceptual space for an athlete who has surpassed all competitors at the Paralympic level and has the potential to have an "unfair advantage" over ablebodied athletes. This is demonstrated by the initial rejection of Pistorius as a competitor among ablebodied athletes (Kingston, 2008, September 11d). At the same time there is an inability to accept disability sports as distinct entities and not simply aligned with and beneath the hierarchy of ablebodied sports.

Wolbring (2008) questions the scenario in which a Paralympic athlete "reverts" to participating the Paralympics after being denied access to the Olympics due to an "unfair advantage." He conceives of a "transhuman" space that "generates new sports and influences existing ones" within the Olympics in which bionic runners compete against other bionic runners and reminds us that such segregation already exists when considering the sex of athletes. While Wolbring is progressive in his imagination of a new space for "enhanced humans," he reinforces the perception that the Paralympics are innately sub-Olympic by suggesting that this space should be situated within the Olympics and not the Paralympics. To create a space that is not substandard, but parallel to and different from mainstream sports is to be released from the oppression of hegemonic masculinity and begin to explore the alternative potential of disabled masculinities.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson successfully re-imagines a transformation of femininity. Garland-Thomson (2002) presents the example of the fashion model

Aimee Mullins. Like Oscar Pistorius, Mullins is a double amputee athlete who seeks to blur the boundaries between ability and disability, and challenges the assumption that disabled women are asexual. In congruence with transhumanism, Mullins refuses to hide, and in fact draws attention to her disability by using different sets of legs to convey images of functionality, beauty, and fitness (Garland-Thomson, 2002). It has been uncommon for a person with a disability to be perceived as a beautiful, mainstream fashion model; Mullins has successfully created a new space and a new femininity within a traditionally able-bodied realm of society. Similarly, disabled athletes competing in Paralympic sports have the potential to embody new masculinities that can contribute to the creation of a transhuman and empowering space.

Spinal cord injury narratives and supercrip masculinity

People with disabilities “overcoming” their impairments is a common theme in both sets of data sources and is connected to masculinity through supercrip ideology (Gerschick & Miller, 1994; Meekosha 2004; Riley, 2005; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001; Valentine, 1999). Men with disabilities who attain, or strive to attain, the supercrip persona may be re-establishing the masculinity they “lost” following an accident. Or if born with a disability, men may overcompensate for our presumed lack of masculinity by striving to overcome our impairments through rehabilitation, individual willpower and participation in sport. Supercrips strive to be hyper-masculine, and yet can never truly embody the perfected

physicality linked to hegemonic masculinity. The majority of these instances come from biographical sources and the voices of the athletes themselves. These male athletes are not portraying their masculinity in Gerschick and Millers' (1994) categories of rejection or reformulation of masculinity, but rather internalize hegemonic masculinity and discourses of normalcy as well as the potentially damaging images of what it means to be a "real man."

From the biographical sources, several athletes echo the distinctive dialogue of athletes with disabilities who have acquired a spinal cord injury and have come to disability sports as a form of rehabilitation (Alman, 2008; Bergeron, 2008a; Bergeron, 2008b; Willsie, 2008; Anderson, 2008b). Although the reconstruction of masculinity through sport is not directly contained in the sources of this study, there are some examples that are similar to the stories of the participants from the study by Sparks and Smith (2002). This selection from Bryce Alman's autobiography from the Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association exemplifies the connections between spinal cord injuries, rehabilitation, and sport:

Bryce Alman became a quadriplegic after he broke his neck surfing with friends at Phillip Island in 1996. An apprentice engineer before he was injured, Bryce spent five months in hospital undergoing rehabilitation. In 1997, one year after his accident, Bryce discovered wheelchair rugby. Since then he has not looked back, representing Australia for the first time at the World Wheelchair Games in Christchurch in 1999 (Alman, 2008).

Triumph over tragedy is a characteristic of the supercrip persona that is well documented in the literature (Barnes, 1992; Hardin et al., 2001; Harden & Harden, 2004; Schell & Duncan, 1999; Valentine, 1999). Several athletes are portrayed or portray themselves as overcoming their disabilities and managing to

fit into “normal life” through rehabilitation and willpower (Bergeron, 2008b; Bourgault, 2008; Breton, 2008; Connor, 2008; Huot, 2009; Pistorius, 2009; Tildesley, 2006; Tingley, 2008a). The majority of the athletes suggested that competing in sports signifies their ability to overcome their disabilities, as exemplified by this statement on Benoit Huot’s website: “*Despite* his handicap, his parents enrolled him in various activities (skating, karate, baseball, etc)” (Huot, 2009, emphasis added). Similarly, Dean Bergeron “overcame” his disability through rehabilitation and subsequent academic accomplishment: “After undergoing physiotherapy and social rehabilitation treatment, Dean attended Laval University despite being confined to a wheelchair” (Bergeron, 2008b).

As anticipated from the literature on supercrips, the ability to overcome is described in super-human terms (Kingston, 2008, September 15b; Pistorius, 2009). For instance, Oscar Pistorius as noted above is referred to as the “fastest man on no legs” and is nicknamed “blade runner,” referring to a science fiction movie in which scientists create biologically-engineered humans (Kingston, 2008, September 11b). Also aligning with supercrip imagery, Kingston (2008, September 11b) describes wheelchair racer Jeff Adams’s ability to perform feats not considered possible for people with disabilities: “He famously wheeled backwards up the steps of the centuries old Parthenon to promote accessibility.”

Supercrip imagery can be connected to masculinity by considering Gerschick and Miller’s (1995) study in which some men with disabilities rely on hegemonic masculinity to cope with the contradiction between masculinity and disability. Some authors connect the construction of supercrip imagery and its

potential negative consequences directly to media (Riley, 2005; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Schell & Duncan, 1999; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001). As noted in the literature review, the most damaging impact of supercrip ideology is how this image affects societal perception of disability by perpetuating the idea that disability is something that people should make heroic efforts to “overcome”. Additionally, this perception of disability reinforces the individualistic nature of the medical model of disability by placing the onus to “fit in” on the person with a disability. What is surprising is the majority of the examples of this representation are found in the biographical material rather than the newspaper articles.

Doping

The use of performance-enhancing drugs is connected to masculinity through masculine bodies and sport; people who use these substances increase their potential to attain characteristics of the hegemonic version. The literature reveals that hegemonic masculinity is linked to characteristics of men’s bodies such as bodily perfection and physical displays of competence and force (Morris, 1991; Sparkes & Smith, 2002; Valentine 1999).

The data sets show a connection between six athletes and the use of banned substances (The Associated Press, 2008, September 11; The Canadian Press, 2008, September 11; Lee, 2008, September 11; Kingston, 2008, September 15a; Kingston, 2008, September 15b; Kingston, 2008, September 14b). Within these articles, mention of athletes and doping fall into two categories: Those athletes who were banned at the Beijing Games and those

who made a comeback to athletics after having been banned for testing positive in prior competitions.

Newspaper articles mention that during the Beijing games Ahmet Coskun (wheelchair basketball), Naveed Ahmed Butt (power lifter), Facourou Sissoko (power lifter), and Liudmyla Osmanova (power lifter) were sent home for testing positive for the use of banned substances. The types of sports in which these athletes compete require high degrees of physical strength which is linked to the hegemonic characteristics of masculinity such as the celebration of strength and physical displays of force.

Several newspaper articles inform the reader that Earle Connor and Jeff Adams had previously been disqualified for doping and portray their come-backs in supercrip language (Kingston, 2008, September 14b; Kingston, 2008, September 15a; Kingston; 2008, September 15b). The dialogue surrounding Earl Connor's positive test is that of injustice with reference to his cancer diagnosis and ultimately an unfair disqualification. For instance, even the title of this article conjures ideas of injustice: "Redemption for Canada's Earle Connor as he cruises to sprinting gold" (Kingston, 2008, September 14b). In the article, Kingston (2008, September 14b) states that:

He was suspended for two years back in September, 2004, after an out-of-competition test showed up trace amounts of testosterone and nandralone. He said the testosterone was a result of a prescribed patch he was using secretly to treat low levels that followed surgery to remove a testicle as a result of a cancer scare.

Referring to the decision to ban him from the Athens Paralympics and simultaneously to overcoming cancer/disability, Connor adds to the supercrip

narrative when he states “You have two choices. Choice No. 1 is you can lie down and take it. Choice No. 2 is you can fight through it. I hope can inspire a lot more people out there, not just amputees, as someone who's fought through a cancer scare and tried to keep it a secret. You shouldn't be ashamed of a possible disease or being scared” (Kingston 2008, September 14b).

Similarly, Adams portrays a story of overcoming with respect to previous disqualifications related to doping. On his website Adams explains that his hard work in fighting the battle to overturn the disqualification resulted in him winning:

a landmark decision from the Court of Arbitration for Sport, completely exonerating him of allegations of an anti-doping offence. The three person tribunal found him to be completely without any fault or negligence in the matter, and eliminated any sanction, noting his high character in the decision. The decision took two years to make (Adams, 2008).

The creation/reinforcement of masculinity through sport is well known; specifically Brittain (2004) notes that through sport individuals are distinguished “between different levels of biological make-up and function through tests of physical strength, speed, and endurance” (p. 438). The use of steroids can result in distinguishing athletes from each other in such tests, and thus make these men appear more masculine than those who are not using. In the pursuit of overcoming disability through sport and aspiring to become a non-disabled “normal” body it comes as no surprise that Paralympic athletes are using performance-enhancing drugs.

Assigning masculine traits to female athletes

The language of sport is so interconnected with masculinity that throughout the newspaper articles women are often portrayed as having masculine traits. In fact, as previously mentioned, Canadian Paralympic newspaper coverage favoured stories on female athletes, thus resulting in a wealth of information related to portraying female athletes in masculine terms.

The data shows that several of the categories that describe the masculinity of male athletes also appear when reporting on female Paralympics athletes. For example, women's bodies are described in masculine terms; referring to wheelchair basketball athlete Janet McLachlan, Kingston (2008, September 8d) writes, "The powerfully built, 5-11 McLachlan, whose large hands and long arms are hugely advantageous on the court." Additionally, Kingston (2008, September 16b) states that Petitclerc "captivated people with her amazingly powerful push from the seat of a high-tech racing chair."

Like the male athletes, there are several references to female athletes with spinal cord injuries as supercrips who overcome their impairments (Kingston, 2008, September 8c; Kingston, 2008, September 10b; Kingston, 2008, September 12). Also connected to masculinity, three female athletes are included in the narrative of being "good enough" to compete with able-bodied athletes (Kingston, 2008, September 8a; Kingston, 2008, September 11c; Kingston, 2008, September 16b). The categories of masculinity, when referring to female athletes, go far beyond media representations of the male athletes. Continuing the supercrip ideology, female athletes are described as overcoming pain and the physical effects of age. Kirby Cote describes the ability of her teammate

Chelsey Gotell to overcome: “She has an incredible will. If she wants something, she can dig in so deep inside of her and push through the most ridiculous amount of pain, lack of oxygen, whatever” (Kingston, 2008, September 12).

Why is it that these female athletes are portrayed, and portray themselves, in masculine terms? Schell and Rodriguez (2001) make the connection to the masculinization of female athletes through legitimizing their involvement in the traditionally male dominated arena of sport. These researchers have found that the media contributes to notions of sport as male dominated and women as “other or inferior to male athletes” (p. 128). Schell and Rodriguez (2001) draw a parallel between the female bodies and disabled bodies as having physical and/or mental limitations that are associated with inferiority. In challenging the distinction between feminine and disabled bodies as inferior, these researchers state that both female and disabled bodies “are believed to be restrictive and incapable of meaningful corporeality, including participation in sport” (p. 128).

Disabled female athletes face two barriers to “legitimate” athleticism: sex and disability. In this study female athletes aligned themselves with the social scripts of masculine and athletic in an attempt to legitimate their athletic pursuits.

There are four main findings related to the concept of masculine bodies in this chapter. First, there is a connection between able-bodiedness and masculinity; when the athletes in this study are perceived to be in some way “more” able-bodied, they are described or described themselves using terms connected to hegemonic masculinity. This trend shows an inability to imagine what Wolbring (2008) terms a “transhuman” space in which different abilities and

expressions of gender are not positioned as not simply “below” mainstream sport. A second theme from the data replicated the supercrip ideology whereby athletes overcome their impairments in an effort to align more closely with hegemonic masculinity. Many of the athletes portrayed themselves in this manner. A third theme is how some male athletes participate in doping in an effort to make their bodies appear more masculine and perform at a super-human level. Finally, female athletes are also often portrayed as having masculine traits, legitimizing their place in the traditionally male-dominated arena of sport (Schell & Rodriguez, 2001).

Chapter VII: Conclusion

In this chapter I provide summaries of the key findings of this study and examine the potential of the Paralympics as a space to explore the understanding of masculinity. The intersection of masculinity and disability, whereby the reality of impairment acts as a barrier to hegemonic masculinity, is where this study finds glimpses of reformulation and rejection of what it means to be a man. However, the majority of references to masculinity in this study align with the socially dominate form. I argue that this public display of hegemonic masculinity is as much a rejection of disability identity as it is an affinity to masculinity and that it ultimately has damaging consequences for the athletes as well as for the larger social understanding of disability.

As strong as the connection between sport and masculinity is, it is not explicitly made in the data sources. This is not surprising; it is a reflection of the way we learn about masculinity in our society through subtle clues and messages from family, friends and the media. There is no formal education process whereby we learn how to be men. Ironically, I have learned from the reaction to my thesis topic that studying and learning about masculinity is considered by some to be un-masculine. We can begin to understand the masculinity of Paralympic athletes by making links with literature that explore the connections between masculinity and sport, the themes of overcoming disability, striving for ablebodied status, supercrip ideology, doping and the implications of describing women in masculine terms.

I began this study with a preconceived notion influenced by the work of Gerschick and Miller (1994) that Paralympic athletes would be aware of the tension between the hegemonic version of masculinity and stereotypes about disability. I suspected that the biographical/autobiographical material would reveal the more progressive coping strategies of rejection and reformulation while the newspaper sources would reinforce the supercrip narrative about masculinity and disability and demonstrate the coping strategy of reliance. With this perceived discrepancy I was hoping to add to the body of literature that describes the inaccurate and potentially damaging media portrayal of people with disabilities. Although these athletes may be aware of the “contradiction”, their coping strategies mainly fit into the least progressive “reliance” strategy as defined by Gerschick and Miller (1994). In other words these athletes are portrayed by the newspaper articles as well as the biographical/autobiographical sources as possessing many of the traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. This may suggest that instead of the media creating an image of Paralympic athletes as possessing hegemonic masculine traits, this portrayal may be driven by the athletes themselves and/or both sets of data are responding to and reinforcing the larger understanding of athletes with disabilities as supercrips.

Portrayals of the athletes that support the hegemonic version of masculinity come from the dialogue surrounding physical and mental strength, aggression and independence. The majority of messages about the strength of these athletes are associated with newspaper articles. Portrayals of aggression differ between the two sets of data: The newspaper articles use aggressive

language symbolically to describe specific accomplishments and defeat, while the autobiographical/biographical sources use aggressive language more broadly and even describe physical violence. In this study some athletes are portrayed as independent in terms of self reliance and financial stability through referencing their careers and educational aspirations/accomplishments. Further, the ways in which the female athletes are portrayed also contributes to the construction/reinforcement of hegemonic version of masculinity. Female athletes are portrayed both as hyper-masculine and extremely feminine. Portraying these athletes as masculine speaks to the desirability of masculinity in sports and “legitimizes” the participation of female athletes in the male-dominated arena of sport. On the other hand, referring to female athletes as hyper-feminine plays on the relational nature of gender by describing traits that are in opposition to masculinity.

From the data there are a few examples that oppose hegemonic masculine traits while several more are ambiguous and perhaps indicate more complex masculinities. There are relatively few instances in which these male athletes are portrayed as emotional, lacking confidence, and make decisions to choose family over sport. In these cases we begin to see ambiguity arising when athletes add a caveat to emotional expressions by noting they are temporary and uncommon occurrences. The ambiguous portrayals of masculinity provide a glimpse into the potentially complex nature of these disabled athletes’ relationship with hegemonic masculinity. In these instances, the athletes acknowledge an understanding of the societal impression of what it means to be

masculine and at the same time demonstrate that this construction does not necessarily correspond with their own experiences and identities. These instances may exemplify Gerschick and Millers' (1994) coping strategy of reformulation whereby men with disabilities redefine masculinity in their own terms. Further, the ambiguous examples may highlight the reality of living with an impairment, which in many cases is interpreted as an insurmountable barrier to achieving a hegemonic masculine status.

Beyond the masculinity of Paralympic athletes, this study finds instances in which hegemonic masculine traits are assigned to ideas and objects, for example the Paralympic classification system, the Paralympics, and adaptive sports equipment. While unanticipated, these representations of masculinity reflect, reinforce, and create hierarchies of physical ability that ultimately contribute to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity (Brittain, 2004; Messner, 1992). By its very nature of grouping athletes into categories based on physical ability, the Paralympic classification system enacts Deal's (2003) notion of hierarchy of impairment. The data replicates this hierarchy by describing athletes who more closely resemble non-disabled athletes in positive and masculine terms. Athletes on the "lower" end of the classification system are often described in un-masculine, pitiful terms.

The newspaper articles paint a contradictory message about the masculinity of the Paralympics as an entity. On the one hand, imagery from the opening ceremony symbolizes the primary goal of athletes to "overcome" their disabilities. Additionally, the overall paternalistic nature of the Paralympics

strengthens a masculine, “father” image. However, in one-flick-of-the-switch these articles have the ability to significantly reduce the masculinity of the Paralympics to “inferior” by creating a comparison to the Olympics.

The data contains messages about the masculinization of adaptive equipment and how this equipment “elevates” the masculinity of the athletes through supercrip ideology and superhuman language. Wolbring (2008) uses the example of the Paralympic athlete Oscar Pistorius to explore transhumanism, that is, the ability to surpass the physical potential of our species through the use of technology. This study identifies an interesting relationship between transhumanism and masculinity; within the Paralympics, adaptive equipment is seen to enhance an athlete’s ability to compete and attain the associated traits of masculinity. It is when we enter the realm of these potentially transhuman athletes competing against able-bodied athletes that the connection between increased sporting ability and increased masculinity begins to fall apart. This study shows that it is the goal of many Paralympic athletes to compete against able-bodied athletes; at the Beijing games a handful of athletes were given permission to participate in qualifying competitions. These attempts at “integration” are damaging for the image of the Paralympics by reinforcing the idea that the perceived apex of Paralympic ability, based on Deal’s (2003) hierarchy of impairment, is aligned with and far below the apex of the Olympics. The potential for transhuman Paralympic athletes is met with language of “unfair advantage” and therefore they are barred from able-bodied masculinity even before they qualify to compete at the Olympics. The newspapers reflect an

unspoken sigh of relief by emphasizing that the “best” athletes of the Paralympics, even with potential transhuman abilities, placed low against ablebodied athletes and in some cases even “failed” to qualify.

This study also explores the relationship between masculinity and the body. The data shows that athletes and the media are aware of this connection and equated ablebodied to masculine through portrayals of supercrips, the use of performance-enhancing drugs, and the projection of masculine attributes on to female athletes. From the newspaper articles and the autobiographical/biographical sources several athletes emphasize a desire to compete against ablebodied athletes in part to legitimize their athletic ability, a known vehicle through which athletes attain masculine status (Barker, 2005; Brittain, 2004; Connell, 2005; Messner, 1992; Sparkes & Smith, 2002). These athletes reflect the message that competing against ablebodied athletes elevates the credibility of their athletic abilities as well as that of their sports; however, they are met with resistance in attempting to attain this status. There needs to be a shift towards considering the Paralympics as truly parallel yet unique in relation to the Olympics and not simply as inferior. Two authors have begun to explore “disabled” spaces in which there is potential for transhumanism (Wolbring, 2008) and we can begin to incorporate disabled bodies into our preconceived notions of gender (Garland-Thomson, 2002). To create a space that is not substandard, but parallel to and different from mainstream sports is to be released from the oppression of hegemonic masculinity; in this space, we can begin to explore the alternative potential of disabled masculinities.

As anticipated from the literature review, the data contains several examples of the spinal cord injury story in which men attempt to recreate their “lost” masculinity through participation in adapted sport, as well as narrative about people with congenital disabilities “overcoming” their disabilities and adopting the supercrip persona. The majority of these messages of overcoming disability are found in the autobiographical/biographical sources; these men embody Gerschick and Millers’ (1994) coping strategy of reliance to deal with the perceived contradiction between disability and masculinity. This strategy is ultimately damaging because the reality of living with an impairment is a barrier to hegemonic masculinity.

Another portrayal of masculinity of these Paralympic athletes comes from the unanticipated dialogue surrounding doping at the Beijing games. It is interesting to learn that athletes who test positive for banned substances are “higher” on the hierarchy of impairment and their sports (power lifting, and wheelchair basketball) require a high level of athleticism. Doping is connected to masculinity through athletes’ increased sporting ability as well as physical changes in bodily appearance towards the iconic representation of the muscular body. In addition to doping influencing the perception of the masculinity of Paralympic athletes, there may be an undertone associated with the legitimization of the Paralympics itself as one facet that is “parallel” to the Olympics.

This study would not be complete without considering the perspective of the female athletes at the Beijing games. Like the male Paralympians, the female

athletes are portrayed and portray themselves as having physical traits associated with the hegemonic version of masculinity. Schell and Rodriguez (2001) also note this in their study of able-bodied female athletes and have made the connection between masculine traits and legitimize women's position in the traditionally male dominated arena of sport. When considering the additional barriers to inclusion in legitimate sports that comes from being a disabled athlete, it comes as no surprise that female Paralympians are portrayed in masculine terms.

The Paralympics has great potential as a space in which we can expand our understanding of masculinity beyond the perceived tension with disability. It is a space that could allow for reformulation, exemplify transhumanism and expand our notions of the physical capabilities of our species. While this study finds mere glimpses of these potentials in the ambiguous examples of masculinity that may be ultimately connected to of the reality of impairment, the majority of the portrayals and self-portrayals represent overcoming disability and striving to attain some of the traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. It is important to remember that while these messages may seem counter to disability pride, they are in part, a reflection of the powerful social understanding that disability is undesirable. In fact, it could be argued that this study reveals a rejection of disability identity as much as an affinity towards masculinity. As Watson (2002) points out:

In the hierarchy of social values prevalent within British society, which accords little or no status to disabled people, describing oneself as disabled cannot be seen as a positive step. There is no social status to be gained for 'coming out' as disabled (p. 525).

The athletes may be using masculinity as a signifier to position themselves away from disability. This rejection of disability is also found in a study related to the concept of identity by Watson (2002) where the participants do not see themselves as disabled and according to the participations, their impairments are deemed to be unimportant to their sense of self. Although Watson (2002) does not articulate the connection between masculinity and disability, it can clearly be extrapolated when he states “The image of a disabled person as one who is weak and disempowered seems to be as potent an image to disabled people themselves as it is to others who purvey this image, given that many of the informants chose to distance themselves from such an identity” (p. 521). It can be interpreted that the athletes in this study are distancing themselves from this disabled identity by aligning themselves with traits of hegemonic masculinity. These athletes, like the participants in Watson’s (2002) study have separated their impairment from their self identity through the construction of a masculine narrative “as they seek to access a mainstream identity” (p. 525). The ambiguous examples in this study arise when the reality of impairment can no longer be masked by athletes’ aspiration to attain hegemonic masculine traits. It is exactly here that disability can inform our understanding of masculinity and challenge societal representations of masculinity.

Returning to Titchkosky’s idea that representations have real consequences for real people, what are the implications of the results of this study in terms of the larger social understanding of disability? The supercrip ideology is dominate in this study; it is damaging to the athletes because it comes at the expense of

their realities and is damaging to all people with disabilities who are expected to overcompensate and overcome. If the affinity towards hyper-masculinity in this study represents a rejection of self identification with disability, then these messages are as Watson (2002) states, “reinforcing a stigmatized image of disability by denying that they are part of that” (p. 521). The moments when the reality of living with impairment causes the myth of attaining hegemonic masculinity to come crashing down are rich sites for future exploration of disability and masculinity, and may provide a space for alternative reformulations and transhuman representations to emerge. It is these brief moments and tiny spaces that resonate with my own understandings of masculinity and disability, and I sincerely hope alternative representations of masculinity will be encouraged in the media coverage and personal narratives surrounding future Paralympic games.

The athletes in this study make a convincing collective argument that they can occupy physical and mental positions that align themselves with hegemonic masculinity and distance themselves from disability. While this immediately damaging position, in terms of establishing a disability pride identity, may be in response to the pressures of legitimating themselves as athletes, it may be a necessary step in challenging our understanding of masculinities. These disabled athletes who have been able to capture a piece of the power associated with acceptance to hegemonic masculinity (e.g. supercrips who engage in the hyper-masculine sports of rugby and wheelchair basketball) must use this position to transform the larger social understanding of masculinity. This inclusion must not

be viewed as an end, rather as another starting position to challenge the membership of hegemonic masculinity and to remember those who are still excluded, marginalized, and oppressed because they are not welcome. If we, as athletes with disabilities, are able to blur the social tension between disability and masculinity and are able to stake our place within masculinity, then, through the introduction of the ambiguities that arise through the reality of our impairments we can begin to add to the dialogue of individuals and groups of people who are already engaging in this work.

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