

The Socialization Process for Women with Physical Disabilities: The Impact of Agents and Agencies in the Introduction to an Elite Sport

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The sources of people's leisure interests have been a topic of interest for many years. Many of the attitudes people develop towards leisure are the result of social learning and social agents. However, the leisure socialization process can be different for people with disabilities in that many of their social agents may be unaware of the leisure opportunities available to those with disabilities. The purpose of the study was to examine the socialization process of women with physical disabilities into elite wheelchair basketball. The study was guided by the social learning paradigm (Kenyon & McPherson, 1973). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with women who were members of the USA National Wheelchair Basketball Team. Major themes found in the research included that multiple agents can be influential in the socialization process, peers with disabilities are often considered important socializing agents, and agents and agencies often coexist in socializing roles. Another noteworthy finding was that many of the women indicated their social agents' unfamiliarity with disability sports, and the ramifications this had on their lives.

KEYWORDS: *Socialization, leisure, disability sport, wheelchair basketball, women.*

Introduction

Socialization is an active process of learning and social development, which occurs as we interact with one another and become acquainted with the social world in which we live. It involves the formation of ideas about who we are and what is important in our lives. We are not simply passive learners in the socialization process. We actively participate in our socialization as we influence those who influence us. We actively interpret what we see and hear, and we accept, resist, or revise the messages we receive about who we are, about the world, and about what we should do as we make our way in the world. Therefore, socialization is not a one-way process of social influence through which we are molded and shaped. Instead, it is an interactive process through which we actively connect with others, synthesize in-

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formation, and make decisions that shape our own lives and the social world around us (Coakley, 2004, p. 98)

Leisure Socialization

As with other life spheres, the attitudes people develop toward leisure and leisure interests are, in large part, the result of social learning (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Much of the variability in people's leisure behavior can be attributed to how their leisure interests and participation patterns are responded to and/or reinforced by their immediate social group and by society at large. When describing the social context of leisure, Mannell and Kleiber (1997) made the distinction between socialization "into" and "through" leisure. More specifically, they noted that the process by which people acquire attitudes, values, and skills that affect leisure choices and behavior is referred to as socialization *into* leisure. There are many agents of socialization who play a role in this process, including parents, siblings, teachers, and coaches. As stated by Mannell and Kleiber (1997), "there is a 'climate' beyond the weather that is more or less favorable to the development and continuation of various activity patterns and interests" (p. 226). This "climate" includes available leisure services, programs in the community, natural resources in the area, and the accepted norms of behavior.

Socialization *through* leisure suggests that leisure plays a role in the preparation for future roles and responsibilities. In other words, leisure is recognized as a valuable resource for "cultural innovation, social solidarity and personal development" (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997, p. 226). The two are linked in that socialization *into* leisure occurs to some extent due to an appreciation of the potential for socialization *through* leisure. For example, play is encouraged among children because it encourages creativity in children, and is connected to social and cognitive development. Sport is encouraged because it contributes to the ability to work with others in the achievement of shared goals, encourages discipline, and promotes many of the qualities recognized as being important in society.

Many researchers do not differentiate between leisure and sport socialization, and refer to leisure, sport, recreation, and physical activity socialization almost interchangeably (Brasile & Hedrick, 1991; Durstine, Franklin, Morgan, Pitetti, & Roberts, 2000; Greendorfer, Lewko, & Rosengren, 1996; Henderson & Bedini, 1995; Kelly, 1980; Kenyon & McPherson, 1973; Page, O'Connor, & Peterson, 2001; Promis, Erevelles, & Matthews, 2001). However, the actual leisure and sport socialization process can be different for people with disabilities because many of their agents (parents, teachers, peers) may be unaware of the opportunities available to people with disabilities. In order to gain a greater understanding of people with disabilities and their sport and leisure opportunities, the current study examined the socialization process for women with physical disabilities as it relates specifically to their introduction into elite wheelchair basketball. This research provides insights into women with physical disabilities who have succeeded at the highest level of

their sport, and shares their stories so that others can better understand the socialization process for people with disabilities. The study was guided by the social learning paradigm developed by Kenyon and McPherson (1973), in which personal attributes (actors), significant others (agents), and socializing situations (agencies) work together in the socialization process. Although it is often difficult to separate actors, agents, and agencies, this paper focuses primarily on socializing agents and agencies and their influence on the women's introduction into wheelchair basketball. Many of the women noted these two components worked together, in the sense that agents and agencies were often related to one another, and thus we have chosen to focus on these two factors of the framework.

Sport Socialization

Wu and Williams (2001) supported the sociological perspective that participation in sport is constructed, shaped, and transferred through social interactions. Others have also supported the sociological perspective, noting the importance of studying sociological ramifications of sport (Coakley, 2004; Fishwick & Greendorfer, 1987; Leonard II & Schmitt, 1987). Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton (2000) defined sport socialization as how an individual acquires attitudes, values, knowledge, and behaviors associated with the consumption of sport.

The sport socialization process is traditionally examined to understand how an individual is introduced into sport or how behaviors and values are attached to sport (see Figure 1). As noted in leisure socialization earlier, distinguishing between socialization *into* sport as opposed to *through* sport allows for a greater understanding of sport participation (Greendorfer & Lewko, 1988). Leonard II (1980) used a concept model to demonstrate the difference between socialization *into* sport and socialization *via* (through) sport (Figure 1). Consistent with leisure socialization, socialization *into* sport refers to one's introduction into sports, often through various socializing

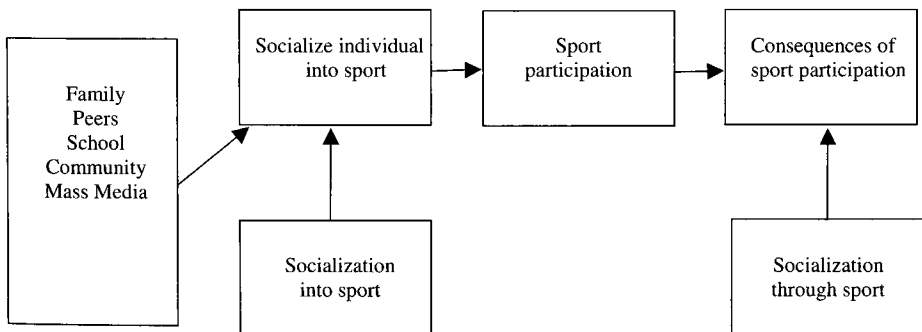


Figure 1. Differences in socialization into sport and through sport (Leonard II, 1980, p. 83).

agents, agencies, and actors, but often does not take into account the values, attitudes, and beliefs associated with the continuation of sports participation (Bryant & McElroy, 1997; Greendorfer, 2002; Hopper, 1986; Kenyon & McPherson, 1973; Leonard II, 1980; McPherson, 1983; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1978). Socialization *through* sport, on the other hand, "produces desirable consequences and outcomes, that is, it is presumed to build character, teach discipline, prepare one for the competition of life, facilitate moral development and good citizenship, and cultivate desirable personality traits" (Leonard II, 1980, p. 93). Together, socialization *into* sport and *through* sport comprises the sport socialization process, though they are typically examined separately.

A framework for studying socialization *into* sport was developed through a social learning paradigm, in which Kenyon and McPherson (1973, 1974, 1981) noted that actors (personal attributes), socializing agents (significant others), and agencies (socializing situations) are integral in the development of a learned role (see Figure 2). This paradigm was developed from Bandura's discussion of social learning theory (Gregson & Colley, 1986) and is similar to studies noting the importance of socializing agents in leisure (e.g., Hoff & Ellis, 1992; Iso-Ahola, 1980).

This social learning approach is a useful framework for studying socialization into sport (Claeys, 1985; Kenyon & McPherson, 1973, 1974) in that it "focuses on the acquisition and performance of social behaviors" (Leonard II, 1980, p. 84). More specifically, the socialization *into* sport roles is accomplished through the three main elements of the socialization process as included in the social learning theory. These variables are socializing agents (significant others such as parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, or referees who model or teach behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, interests, and values) who exert influence within socializing agencies (social situations, settings or opportunities often encountered within family, schools, military, or sport) upon role learners who are characterized by a wide variety of personal attributes.

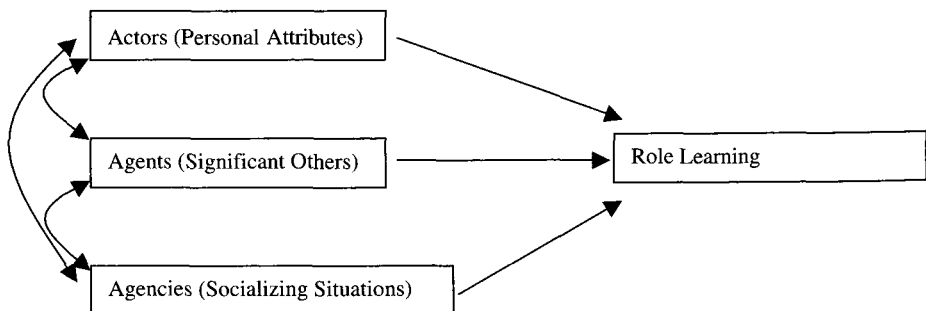


Figure 2. The elements of socialization into a sport role identified by the social learning paradigm (Kenyon & McPherson, 1973, p. 305).

butes (actors defined by an individual's characteristics) (Figler & Whitaker, 1995; Kenyon & McPherson, 1973; Sherill, Rainbolt, Montelione, & Pope, 1986). The three main elements of the social learning paradigm interact to lead to a learned role. This role learning affects an individual's participation, in that he or she may become a participant, spectator, and/or consumer of sport (Kenyon & McPherson, 1973). This research focuses on the agents' and agencies' roles in developing the learned role of participation.

Sport Socialization for Persons with Disabilities

It is helpful to employ this sociological perspective to the study of sports (Coakley, 1998). This perspective allows not only for a systematic study of social features of sport, but is useful for understanding sport socialization for persons with disabilities as well (Williams & Kolkka, 1998, p. 357). It is important to recognize that athletes with disabilities have different experiences within the socialization process, just as athletes in general have unique experiences due to different sports and situations (Horne, Tomlinson & Whannel, 1999). It is certainly possible athletes will interpret the same experiences in different ways due to their various relationships with significant others. Moreover, many other factors can influence the socialization experiences. Mullin et al. (2000) indicated that both environmental (e.g., geographic conditions, culture norms and values, and sport opportunity) and individual influences (self-concept, stage in life cycle, learning, perception, motivation, attitude, and physical characteristics) affect the socialization process.

Hedrick (1979) cautioned that when considering the socialization of persons with disabilities, there are several barriers that could potentially restrict participation. He noted that this restriction can hinder the attainment of necessary proficiencies, interests, attitudes, and experiences needed in order to participate. Further, if socialization occurs mostly through learning roles (McPherson, 1983), then it is probable that individuals with disabilities have learned the stigmas that society often places on them, and have learned to play the roles associated with those stigmas. Henderson, Bedini, Hecht, and Schuler (1995) found in their study of women with physical disabilities that the women's leisure was constrained not necessarily due to the disability itself, but to the inability of the environment to make appropriate accommodations for the persons with the disabilities.

Studies have identified some of the primary agents and agencies thought to influence the socialization of individuals with disabilities into sports, including family, school, peer group, and community (Hedrick, 1979; Hopper, 1986; Vogler & Schwartz, 1993). However, there may be additional agents, such as therapists or peers with disabilities that introduce them to sports. These types of agents are unique to persons with disabilities because of the nature of disability sports and the system in which disability operates in society. Due to the general lack of knowledge about disability activities and

sports, those who come in direct contact with persons with disabilities, namely others with disabilities or those working with persons with disabilities, become increasingly important social agents.

Findings vary regarding the roles of different agents and agencies for persons with disabilities (Coakley, 2004). Taub and Greer (2000) identified unstructured play with peers as a significant socializing agent for children with disabilities into sports. Hedrick (1979) noted peers and parents were the most influential socializing agents, and organized groups were the second most influential agents. Many studies have found that peers and friends were the most influential agents into wheelchair sports (Dickinson & Perkins, 1985; Hopper, 1986; Williams, 1994; Zoerink, 1992), followed by community non-school settings (Williams, 1994). Watanabe, Cooper, Vosse, Baldini, and Robertson (1992) found primary socialization agents for athletes with disabilities to be coaches, other athletes, the individual, training camps, sports scientists, and conferences. Williams and Taylor (1994) identified seven sources of information that introduced or enabled continued participation in wheelchair racing: peers (other athletes with disabilities), *Sports 'n Spokes* (a wheelchair sports magazine), cycling magazines, physiotherapists, coaches, running magazines, and scientific journals. Wang and DePauw (1995) completed similar research in China and found socialization occurred through many of the same channels, including family, coaches, and friends with disabilities. Sherrill et al., (1986) found that among athletes with visual impairments the physical education teacher was the most influential agent, whereas for ambulatory athletes with cerebral palsy it was their family, and for athletes with cerebral palsy who used a wheelchair it was their peers. Williams and Kolkka (1998) found differences between wheelchair basketball athletes and wheelchair racers and their socialization experiences. For example, they found that for wheelchair basketball players friends who played wheelchair basketball and coaches were important socializing agents. Social interaction with other persons with disabilities was also important because their introduction to the sport often came through sport clubs and hospitals. However, the experiences of the wheelchair racers were quite different, and thus they concluded that the socialization experiences of wheelchair athletes must be considered individually.

In contrast to more traditional sports, disability sports rely on oral traditions to produce and reproduce its subculture (Williams & Taylor, 1994). This can be done through communication, witnessing an athletic event, or interactions within the group. Hedrick, Morse, and Fioni (1988) found that other athletes and specialized magazines (i.e., *Sports 'n Spokes*) were the primary information sources for wheelchair racers. Sharing knowledge through face-to-face contact is especially important in the early stages of disability sport socialization (Williams & Taylor, 1994). Wu and Williams (2001) supported this argument. Their research found peers with disabilities and coaches to be the most important sources of information. In contrast, typically in the other sport arenas, the media plays an important role in the socializing process. However, due to limited exposure and negative stereo-

typing, the media does not typically play a large role, and may even hinder socialization into a wheelchair specific sport. On the other hand, certain print media (i.e., Sports 'n Spokes) does seem to play a more positive role (Hedrick et al., 1988; Williams & Taylor, 1994; Wu & Williams, 2001).

Williams (1994) noted that persons with disabilities are often constrained by a world that focuses on their impairments. Further, they are constrained by society's general lack of knowledge regarding the leisure and sport opportunities available to persons with disabilities. In the education system, teachers and coaches can be important socializing agents if they use inclusive practices and allow children with disabilities to be socialized into sports along with the other children. School settings are situations that include multiple agents (teachers, students, coaches, administrators) and agencies (classroom settings) all contributing to the overall socialization process. Unfortunately, the difficulty with teachers and schools serving as socializing agents and agencies for these potential athletes is that they are often unfamiliar with the different disabilities, and the sport opportunities that are available to children with disabilities (Downs & Williams, 1994). Therefore, physical education teachers are often unable to determine students' capabilities, and consequently limit their participation based on misconceptions and misinformation. This lack of exposure to leisure and sport opportunities in schools can be constraining for students with disabilities.

It is also important to consider the variability that can occur within different socializing agents. For example, Longmuir and Bar-Or (2000) found in their study of children and adolescents with disabilities that physical therapists typically did not encourage their clients with cerebral palsy to participate in wheelchair sports because of a fear that it would lead to a decreased gait. Conversely, Wu and Williams (2001) found physical therapists to be significant introductory agents for athletes with spinal chord injuries. This variability is also evident with teachers. Some teachers have the training and education to appropriately direct students with disabilities into desirable leisure and sport activities. Unfortunately, many do not, and this lack of knowledge limits the recreational opportunities made available to persons with disabilities.

Purpose of Study

In order to better understand the socialization process, it is important to study athletes with disabilities who are at different levels of competition. This study focused on elite female athletes who play wheelchair basketball. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine the socialization process experienced by women with physical disabilities as it relates to their introduction into elite wheelchair basketball. The qualitative research was guided by Kenyon and McPherson's (1973) socialization framework. This paper seeks to provide insights to recreation and leisure professionals by sharing the stories of female athletes who devote much of their leisure time to their sport.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of the 11 female athletes who were members of the 2003 USA Wheelchair Basketball Team. All of the athletes on the team participated in the study. The 11 athletes varied in age from 20 to 38 and came from various regions of the United States: Illinois (5), Wisconsin (1), Arizona (1), Texas (1), Washington, DC (1), Georgia (1), and Florida (1). In order to compete on the team, athletes must have some form of physical disability. The severity, type, and onset of disability varied greatly among the participants. A description of the women's disabilities is displayed in Table 1. The "severity" classification refers to an international classification system that rates the athletes' level of disability. Most countries follow the international classification system because it is reliable and accounts for differences among disabilities. There are four classification separations, including half-point increments to account for disabilities that do not fit exactly into one class or another. For example, the classes range from 1.0 to 4.5 and increase within that range at .5 increments. A 1.0 is considered the most severe disability, while a 4.5 is the most minimal disability. Non-disabled athletes are not eligible to participate in sanctioned international competition.

Data Collection

Face-to-face interviewing was used as the primary method of collecting information (Denzin, 1970a, 1970b, 1978; Kvale, 1996). This technique was deemed appropriate given the purpose of the study and the desire to share the women's stories. Furthermore, the development of disabled sports relies on the empowerment of the participants' experiences. This empowerment allows greater education and development of athletes, and evolved from the women sharing their experiences. Interview questions were developed based on the social learning paradigm (see Figure 2). This framework allowed for a consistency of main questions across the interviews. The questions were developed in a semi-structured format, allowing for deviation in order for the women to discuss pertinent themes. For example, if an athlete alluded to a future question in her response, more inquiry was made on that topic and then questions skipped were returned to after the respondent completed her thoughts. The main purpose in these interviews was to identify personal attributes, significant others, and socializing situations that contributed to their involvement in wheelchair basketball. The actual format for the interview questions is listed in Appendix 1.

Athletes were interviewed in no particular order. Each athlete participated in one interview lasting 30-60 minutes. After one interview was conducted with each of the athletes, it was determined that sufficient information had been gathered to address the research questions. The interviews were tape-recorded with two recorders to ensure sound quality. The inter-

TABLE 1
Personal Attributes of Wheelchair Basketball Athletes

Athlete	Disability type	Onset-Age	Severity (classification)**
Chris	Spina Bifida	Congenital	2.5
Nipa	Spina Bifida	Congenital	1.5
Susan	Spina Bifida	Congenital	2.5
Emily	Paraplegia (tumor)	Congenital	1.0
Renée	Quadriplegia (CIDP)	Acquired—7 and 19	1.5
Steph	Paraplegia	Acquired—6	2.0
Jana	Paraplegia	Acquired—15	1.5
Patty	Paraplegia	Acquired—19	2.0
Teresa	Paraplegia	Acquired—19	1.5
Janna	Orthopedic (knee)	Acquired—18-20	4.5
Sarah*	Orthopedic (hips/back)	Acquired—19-21	4.5

*Indicates name was changed. Only one of the female athletes interviewed requested her name be changed. Other participants wanted their experiences to be identified as their own. Any mention of a name other than their own was changed to protect the identity of that individual.

**An international classification system that rates athletes' level of disability. Range is from 1.0 (most severe disability) to 4.5 (most minimal disability).

views took place at a national team camp in Whitewater, Wisconsin, and were conducted in a room in one of the housing units. One of the women did not attend this training camp, and her interview took place at the next training camp in Warm Springs, Georgia.

The researcher (one of the authors) who conducted the interviews was a member of the wheelchair basketball team, and was familiar to the women. The researcher's knowledge of relevant terminology, and her shared experiences with the team, aided in the research process in that her familiarity was useful in obtaining a thorough understanding of the women's experiences. The interviewer has been a member of the team for over two years, and thus previous encounters, conversations, and comments made by the women aided in her understanding of the disability culture. She had a strong rapport with her fellow athletes, and they understood her interest in research and her commitment to wheelchair basketball. Further, initial informal conversations with women on the team about their introduction into the sport were instrumental in the development of interview questions. For example, questions regarding the actual rules of the game, or terminology regarding disability, were learned through these informal conversations and shared experiences and proved to be useful in the actual interview process. Not only did it allow the researcher to show a familiarity with the topic, often shared only by those in the sport, but it allowed for follow-up questions regarding aspects of disability in a non-obtrusive manner. Sands (2002) recognized the attempt ethnography makes to elicit knowledge in everyday interaction. A positive outcome of such a relationship comes in the form of understanding

the disability culture better than an "outsider," and the ability to clarify misunderstandings about the researched group. In order to understand the women's experiences within disability sports and the terminology used by athletes, it is useful to be both an individual with a disability and a sport participant. In turn, access to the group was unlimited because each individual was interested in participating in the study so that others may better understand their experiences and their sport.

Olesen (2000) acknowledged that each researcher comes to the table with many different characteristics that interact with the research process. This might include the researcher's race, gender, disability, or history. In noting this, it is important to consider the history the interviewer had with the women in the study when interpreting the results. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) suggested, building strong relationships with study participants is important. Consequently, the insider role was crucial in this study and allowed for insights in the data interpretation process.

Data Analysis

Throughout the process of developing questions, interviewing, and transcribing the interviews, Kvale's (1996) interview analysis was used as a guiding framework. This included four of Kvale's (1996) suggested steps: subject description, subject discovery, interpreting and condensing the information during the interview, and interpreting the transcription. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for deviations so that the interview could be an interaction between the respondents and the researcher. Following Kvale's (1996) first step, the interviewee was allowed to explain her experiences of socialization into wheelchair basketball. Throughout the interview the women's comments and responses to themes on socialization prompted additional inquiries about such topics such as stereotypes, awareness of the sport, and growth of wheelchair basketball. This is the second portion of Kvale's (1996) analysis, allowing the interviewees to expand on related topics based on interview questions. The third step in analyzing interviews occurs after the discovery stage of the interview process. Familiarity with socialization theory allowed for the creation of a dialogue with the women, and this enabled clarification of questions, interpretation of responses, and granted the women the opportunity to reply to probing questions.

Afterwards, the interviews were downloaded onto the computer and transcribed by the researcher. This was the last analysis step used from Kvale's (1996) framework. In the transcription stage of the process he suggested three steps: structuring, clarification, and analysis proper. The first, structuring, was the actual transcription of the interview. The second step, clarification, called for the elimination of repetitious and non-essential material. Essential versus non-essential material was determined based on the purpose of the study. The final step included analysis proper, which is where the subjects' experiences were analyzed. The interviews produced insights into the socialization of the women into wheelchair basketball. Additionally, many

themes developed from their experiences. In this final step, each individual's transcript was reviewed and highlighted to establish themes important to that woman. Then a separate list was developed with all of the themes mentioned by all the women. This was useful in determining which themes were applicable to more than one woman and how these themes fit into the sport socialization experiences of the women. An example of a consistent theme was the influence of multiple agents. After the majority of the women indicated that more than one person was influential in their socialization process, it was determined that the concept of multiple agents was a pertinent theme in the study.

Traditional member checking was not employed in the study. Schwandt (2001) noted that it is not clear epistemologically how member checking helps establish truth. Moreover, he concluded that member checking assumes researcher effects must be minimized, and is done more as an ethical act rather than for epistemological reasons. Consequently, a method was used that has been adopted by sociologists where outside researchers read and assess the interviews (Janesick, 2000). This was accomplished by having four researchers, familiar with the fields of disability, sport and leisure, examine the transcripts. All researchers confirmed that the themes were represented in the transcripts and that the quotes accurately supported the findings. This process was guided by the concept that while there is no single correct interpretation of the women's experiences, it is important to ask "solid, meaningful, textured questions" (Janesick, 2000, p. 391) to understand the inquiry.

Results

A significant portion of the socialization process for the women included agents (significant others) who were influential in their introduction into wheelchair basketball. This process occurred through the relationships they built with other persons in their lives. Significant others often included such individuals as a mother, father, sibling, therapist, coach, or friend. Furthermore, some athletes noted that they themselves were influential in their introduction to the sport. Many of the women mentioned more than one "most influential" person. This is valuable information, and different from the quantitative studies that often asked athletes to only mention one significant other as being most influential. Additionally, agents can be influential when they are situated within socializing agencies, such as communities, classes, or teams. Therefore, while many of the women may have mentioned a common agent, it is important to examine additional details regarding the contexts for the agents in the women's situation. Therefore, the major themes that surfaced during the study included the concept that there could be more than one influential agent (i.e. multiple agents). Also, peers with disabilities served as important introductory agents in the recruitment process, and in the education of their sport. Finally, the connection between agents and agencies was identified by some of the women as they

explained that the coexistence of the two helped introduce them to the sport.

The Influence of Multiple Agents

Multiple agents seemed to play a role in the athlete's introduction to the sport. It was evident that more than one person was influential, and at times there was no specific order to their influence. In fact, it appeared that they worked simultaneously, with each agent unaware of others' influence. For example, Patty noted that three people introduced her to the sport of wheelchair basketball. Significant in her introduction to wheelchair basketball was her physical therapist Debbie.¹

My physical therapist, Debbie looked at my records and saw I was actively involved in sport as an able-bodied person. She mentioned to me about wheelchair basketball and I kind of thought it was a big joke at first. I was just learning to sit up and I couldn't even sit up 90 degrees yet. She said if I was interested she would bring somebody in to come and show me some moves, so that's how it all started.

Debbie thought basketball might be a good outlet for Patty since prior to her injury she had been active in sports. Patty also mentioned her mom as significant, because she felt her mom saw that she enjoyed wheelchair basketball and continued to support her. Additionally, there was a teammate, Nipa, who encouraged Patty at practice and asked her to join the team. "Nipa came in, a teammate of mine, and she just kind of showed me stuff to do with a wheelchair and that's when I really started enjoying it." These three influences worked jointly to provide the opportunity and support for Patty to begin wheelchair basketball.

Jana was also introduced to the sport by a recreational therapist while she was still in the hospital, but it was a woman who used a wheelchair who had the biggest influence in Jana's introduction to the sport. "This lady was an aerobics instructor, she was in a wheelchair, she had a lower disability but she would come to the hospital and we would do aerobics. She to this day is probably my role model, I loved everything about her, I wanted to be her." She also mentioned her collegiate wheelchair basketball coach, who was a male with a disability, as an important part of her socialization experience. Teresa described a similar experience. Her occupational therapist was the one who physically took her to Illinois to meet different athletes and to see the wheelchair sports program, but she credited herself with her introduction to the sport, "The occupational therapist took me to rehab at Illinois because she found out I was in sports prior [to my accident] . . . but I wanted to get back into sports anyway." She was very self-motivated in sports and sought sports out before her injury, and felt it was really no different in wheelchair basketball.

¹See note at bottom of Table 1.

Renee had two different socialization experiences. Her first introduction to wheelchair basketball came through playing wheelchair rugby. Through “the director of sports, the director of athletics, and disabled sports at the disabled student center,” she was then exposed to wheelchair basketball. Renee was introduced a second time, more specifically to women’s wheelchair basketball, through reading a magazine that led her to a camp. Once at the camp Renee felt three non-disabled male coaches played a significant role in introducing her to the sport:

I read in a magazine about the NWBA or PVA camps and then I went to the first one that was here up at University of Wisconsin in Whitewater. The three coaches were there and I was sucked into the whole thing with everybody [at the camp].

Renee chose to focus on other aspects of her life after playing women’s wheelchair basketball for a few years. Then, after her five-year hiatus, a woman on the team introduced Renee to her teammates at a fund raising event, and Renee began playing the sport again. Renee was quick to mention that in her earlier years there were not any other women that introduced her to the sport.

Chris primarily described agencies as influential, but also mentioned her parents, both collectively and individually, as equally important in her starting the sport. Her stepfather drove her to her first wheelchair basketball practice:

I was a really shy kid so I didn’t want to go [to practice] at all and my mom and my step dad were like “let’s just go to a practice lets see what it’s like. If you don’t like it you don’t have to go back.” So my step dad took me and I liked it right away.

Both parents have also supported her financially throughout her wheelchair basketball career. Also, when she first went to practice, Chris believes that if it had not been for the coach being a female, she may have been too shy at that time in her childhood to play around boys on the team.

Nipa was midway through high school when she was introduced to the sport by a social worker. Nipa had a social worker monitor her throughout her junior high and high school years.

Finally, junior or senior year I had a new social worker and she was just telling me about wheelchair basketball and this opportunity’s going on in Indiana, which is like 30-40 minutes away from me. So I gave it a try and that’s how I started playing wheelchair basketball.

Nipa also credits her junior’s coach, a male with a disability, as the one who helped her by motivating and encouraging her to participate. Her introduction to collegiate wheelchair basketball was also a male coach with a disability.

Sarah² was in college when she was introduced to the sport through a disability class (agency). As an adaptive physical education major, the class

²Indicates name has been changed.

required the students to observe and interview women from a local wheelchair basketball team. After speaking with women on the team she learned she could play wheelchair basketball. "My professor for one really pushed me to play and so that I would be able to play and also do research in that area. One of the girls on the team really pushed for me to play just because of my size." Along with her future teammates, this professor was an important agent in introducing her to the sport.

Susan, Steph, and Emily had similar experiences because for them strangers, as well as other social agents, were influential in introducing them to wheelchair basketball. The mother of a future teammate first introduced Susan to the sport, but Susan also felt her mother was influential because she took her to all the various athletic events. And she believed that the Illinois coach, a man with a disability, was also an important introductory agent. Steph was introduced to wheelchair basketball by a mother of a wheelchair basketball athlete while waiting in her doctor's office. This woman, as in the case with Susan, also had a child with a disability that played on a local team. Steph also mentioned that a coach with a disability was influential in her beginning collegiate wheelchair basketball. In Emily's situation the strangers were friends of her parents. Through a mutual friend, Emily's parents met another couple during a skiing vacation. Their newfound friends nonchalantly mentioned to her parents that they knew of a man who had a disability and skied. Emily's parents listened in amazement:

My parents went on a ski trip with these people they didn't really know, it was like a friend of a friend, and they mentioned, "Oh we have a friend who's in a wheelchair and he snow skis." So my parents were like, "What, our daughter is in a wheelchair, maybe she could do that." So I went out to this place in St. Louis to go snow skiing not knowing that any other wheelchair sports existed.

Her parents then discovered opportunities for basketball near their community and Emily began participating immediately. Also, the man they knew who had a disability was eventually able to meet Emily and described other disability sports, including wheelchair basketball.

Susan, Steph, and Emily also mentioned that although they had been in physical therapy for most of their lives, they had never been told about sports for people who use wheelchairs. This was also the case for the two athletes, Janna and Sarah, who do not use a wheelchair everyday. Renee and Chris had similar experiences. Therefore, in the case of this team, most did not find out about wheelchair basketball from their therapists. Once again, understanding the diversity of experiences and opportunities through various agents and situations is helpful in understanding the sport socialization process for people with disabilities.

Peers with Disabilities as Socializing Agents

Oftentimes in recruiting, other athletes are the primary socializing agents. Introduction through other athletes continues to be significant in the growth and development of wheelchair basketball. All of the national team athletes in this study mentioned teammates or people with disabilities

as significant agents. Without players as advocates for the sports, many people with physical disabilities would not know about wheelchair basketball. Interestingly, this is often true regardless of how the athlete was personally introduced to the sport. Her physical therapist, her mother, and a teammate, for example, introduced Patty to wheelchair basketball. However, Patty recalled being instrumental in exposing a peer with a disability to the sport:

I introduced my friend Mike, and he was newly injured and at the same university going to school. Somebody knew me and contacted me saying this person was newly injured. I talked to him on the phone a couple times and then I asked him if he'd be interested in playing wheelchair basketball. I took him to a couple of practices and then we ended up playing together for two years.

Janna also described other athletes with disabilities as being extremely important. An athlete recruited her while they worked for the same organization. In the 1996 Paralympics she saw her co-worker and the other women on the team play wheelchair basketball. Now Janna introduces other people with disabilities into the sport. Sarah recently met two women with disabilities who never knew of the sport but were interested in starting a team. In these cases, Janna and Patty were instrumental in introducing others to wheelchair basketball.

Sometimes athletes make great efforts to recruit a potential wheelchair basketball player. Although Jana knew she was lucky having been introduced by her therapist in the hospital, she felt it would have helped to have another athlete with a disability to "take me under their wing." Now Jana attempts to recruit whenever she has the chance, even doing so while shopping in the mall, despite it being hard for her to break out of her shell in order to bring people to the team. "I feel like in Orlando I've helped a lot of people in a round about way, like I said I feel like a lot of times I don't try to tell them or pull them aside, but I just try to live by example." She believes that if athletes spread out and try to be better role models for people with disabilities then this may help the recruiting process.

Susan was already an established player and remembers being influential in one boy's introduction to the sport. Susan does not know for sure, but would like to think that it was because of her that he was able to develop his skills and play wheelchair basketball at the collegiate level:

I was coming from a background of having been involved already for you know six or seven years and having competed at nationals and was training for the Paralympics at that point. So I guess a lot of the kids and even some of the people who were learning how to run the program looked at me like someone who had experience in it. I just shared my experiences. Like I said, for me it's sharing more about the life experiences and the social experience of it at that point, and then really encouraging them to go with it.

Renee also introduced someone to collegiate basketball. She found a woman to play for the University of Arizona. That woman eventually ended up on a national team for two years.

If the athlete is not the first contact, Teresa believes athletes with disabilities can still be influential in the socialization process. Children with disabilities sometimes attend sports camps. Typically someone has arranged for them to get there, but they may have never met other athletes with disabilities. Athletes at the camp can provide valuable information and be strong agents in introducing the child to the sport. Steph commented that other children with disabilities can see her success in wheelchair basketball. This can inspire them to participate in the sport at the next level of competition. She was the first one from her junior team to go to college and play:

I was the first person from my junior's team to ever continue playing basketball after high school at a college or to play at a higher level. Now one of the kids might be coming to Illinois in a couple of years, one is going to University of Texas Arlington for tennis, it's not basketball, it's tennis. I don't know if I had an influence on them. I don't know of anyone directly I've influenced. I mean with all the kids camps we have in the summer at Illinois I hope maybe some of the kids see us and see how good our team is and what you can achieve if you work hard. Hopefully that pushes them a little bit more to work harder.

The Connection of Agencies to Agents

Agencies are also an important part of the socialization process. In previous research not focused on people with disabilities, agencies have included families, schools, communities, teams, programs, politics, and many other institutional influences. Research on persons with disabilities has shown that families and schools are typically not viewed as influential in a person's introduction to wheelchair sport (Sherrill et al., 1986; Williams, 1994). The women in this study mentioned several different types of agencies, such as disability sports programs, universities, and sport camps as influential in their socialization process

It is often difficult to separate the influence of these agencies with the agents or attributes of the women. It is common for studies to determine one most important agent or agency or note a hierarchy of agents and agencies (e.g. Greendorfer et al, 1996; Hopper 1986; Taub and Greer, 2000). However, it is evident that this fails to consider the impact these agents and agencies have on one another and the influence of their coexistence. As the women explained their introduction to the sport, it became evident that their agencies were sometimes inseparable from influential agents, and were often mentioned simultaneously. For example, Patty mentioned the support of her family as being influential, but then specifically spoke of her "mom" (a socializing agent) as the most influential component of that agency.

Likewise, Renee had a similar situation. She liked that wheelchair basketball was an organized sport and was not just a recreational activity. However, Renee credits her introduction to the disability student service center, which she noted was influential, though the director was the actual agent that introduced her to the sport. Again, this is an example of the blending of agents and agencies. She could not say one was more important, just that they were different, because without the center there may not have been the

team or director, so she felt it was important to mention both aspects simultaneously.

Susan was the only athlete to mention an agency, the junior outreach program, as the most influential. When Susan began collegiate wheelchair basketball, she said the University of Illinois was most significant. In Susan's experience, she focused extensively on track and field throughout her juniors. Basketball in college was a very new experience to her, and she credited the University in influencing her to begin wheelchair basketball the second time.

Wheelchair basketball camp was very important in introducing many new or different aspects of the game to the women. Five of the women (Steph, Emily, Chris, Nipa, and Jana) mentioned a basketball camp as influential. This is unique, because in able-bodied basketball, children are not generally sent to a camp unless they are already familiar with the game. Camps are used to teach new skills and fundamentals, but the difference is that in the case of wheelchair athletes, without previously having attended a camp, there is little or no expectation as to what a basketball camp will entail, or even how the game of wheelchair basketball is to be played. Steph commented on this phenomenon, "I just think there is a lack of knowledge about the sport, the lack of exposure of the sport so not a lot of people know about it [wheelchair basketball]."

Teams were also mentioned as a socializing agency. In their interviews, Renee, Sarah, Jana, Janna, Patty, Teresa, and Susan mentioned teams, other groups of athletes with disabilities, or women on the team as important. Teresa mentioned her "team and the women with physical disabilities" on her team as influential. Jana mentioned her "teammates" as influential in her beginning collegiate wheelchair basketball. For Janna, teammates were the only method of introduction, but for others it was in combination with other agents or agencies. For example, Sarah mentioned her "university class on disability, her professor, and the women on the team" as important. A class is a unique introductory agent, especially at a later age and Sarah was the only one to mention a class at school as an important agency. Susan and Emily mentioned a school, "the University of Illinois", because they had heard of the athletic reputation before attending. Sarah attended a university and then found out about the sport.

Chris and Steph specifically mentioned their schools' physical education teachers and classes and how they tried to adapt activities, but still did not expose them to the sports that were available to them. Chris commented on her elementary school experience: "My gym teacher at school wanted me to get into a sport somehow, but just didn't know how." This lack of knowledge among agents and agencies, such as schools and physical education teachers, is not uncommon for children with disabilities.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the socialization process women with physical disabilities experience as it relates to their introduction

to elite wheelchair basketball. The social learning paradigm was a useful framework to approach the sport socialization process of these women. It allowed agents and agencies and their impact in the socialization process to be considered in the lives of the team members. The findings were consistent with previous research that used the socialization framework and identified family, school, peer groups, and community (Hedrick, 1979; Hopper, 1982; Volger & Schwartz, 1993) as important socialization agents and agencies in the lives of persons with disabilities. While the findings of this study were similar, a major difference is that this study found that each can be important to an individual, yet oftentimes one is not necessarily more significant than the other. For example, the social learning paradigm was designed from a non-disabled sporting perspective, which noted the importance of sport in our schools and families. In this study family members were important, as were individuals in schools, but not in the traditional way. Able-bodied respondents often note physical education teachers and coaches in schools as significant, while those were not the agents mentioned by the women in this study. As Williams (1994) explained, it is possible to infer why the dissimilarity between influential agencies of able-bodied individuals (schools and families) and persons with disabilities exists, as children with disabilities are often not offered sport opportunities in school.

Williams (1994) noted that research has focused on determining which factors are significant and which are not in the socialization process into wheelchair sports. In the interviews with the women, it became evident that every person or agency mentioned played a significant role in their socialization into sport. Instead of past research claiming one significant attribute (e.g. Dickinson & Perkins, 1985; Hopper, 1982; Williams, 1994b; Zoerink, 1992), future research should consider all as instrumental in the introduction into sport.

The findings clearly indicated that multiple agents influence an individual's socializing experience. For example, Patty mentioned that her mom and a therapist were instrumental in her introduction, neither necessarily more important than the other, but each playing a significant role in her introduction to wheelchair basketball. Thus, it is important to consider how agents, and sometimes agencies, can work together rather than independently of one another, to provide opportunities for persons with disability to participate in sports. As with the women in this study, often it was not just one significant person or place, but a combination of agents and agencies that facilitated their sporting opportunities. Agencies can even employ agents, as was the case with Renee, when the athletic director (agent) at the disability center (agency) introduced her to basketball. These components do not work independent of one another, but rather work cooperatively to provide the opportunities and means to be involved with the sport.

The study was guided by the social learning paradigm that focuses on personal attributes (actors), significant others (agents), and socializing situations (agencies), and this paper focused primarily on socializing agents and agencies. Consistent with the literature, the women described peers with dis-

abilities (Dickinson & Perkins, 1985; Hopper, 1986; Williams, 1994; Zoerink, 1992), coaches and camps (Wantanabe et al., 1992), outreach community teams and centers (Williams, 1994), magazines and therapists (Williams & Taylor, 1994), and family members (Wang & DePauw, 1995) as important influences. The women described a few additional agents not typically noted in the literature, such as a social worker, a university sports program, a class, and parents of children with disabilities. The women mentioned some people (i.e., physical education teachers) who could have *potentially* socialized them into sports, but did not due to a lack of awareness and education. Others noted the lack of awareness and education in agencies, including schools and hospitals, and how this negatively affects the growth of the sport.

This lack of awareness of disability sports was a consistent finding throughout the women's stories. Many people are not aware of the leisure and sport opportunities available to persons with disabilities. Wheelchair basketball plays a big role in the lives of these women, and many were frustrated that this opportunity was not made available to them earlier, and that this opportunity is not made available to others who might be interested. For example, Emily stated, "I was a freshman in high school before I started playing. I could have been playing since I was five. That's crazy. I feel really cheated that nobody ever told me about it . . ." Similarly, Sarah said, ". . . when I first found out that I could play and that there was an elite level, I was very frustrated that somebody didn't find me eight years ago, ten years ago . . . so that was very frustrating to me." Clearly, a greater awareness of leisure and sport opportunities is needed.

The findings of this study should be interpreted through the limitations imposed by the methods used and the women studied. This study was limited to one national team, and more specifically, the women's national wheelchair basketball team. Thus, the investigation cannot be generalized to the overall population of wheelchair athletes. However, the results may be transferable to other women in similar positions. Women who have disabilities and are interested in sporting opportunities may find similarities between their situations and those of the women in this study. Another limitation of the study was the role of the interviewer. There are limitations associated with an insider's perspective. Creswell (1998) noted such issues as respondents withholding information and/or slanting information in the manner in which they believe the researcher wants.

Despite these limitations, the findings suggest a number of areas for future research that considers the cultural and situational context of persons with disabilities. This study provided a positive outlook on the sport experiences of the women. Additional research is needed regarding those who have withdrawn from the sport, or who have had negative experiences through their participation. This would allow for additional insight, and may potentially provide information relevant to the socialization *through* sport aspect. Comparisons could also be made between males and females, and their socialization patterns. This would provide additional information regarding the socialization differences among young girls and the role of gender in the

introduction to specific sports, an area that has been largely ignored in the disability sport literature. Further research is also needed on the impact society's stigma toward persons with disabilities has on the recruitment process. This is important in considering the socialization process of non-disabled athletes who encounter career-ending injuries.

For example, it would be useful to investigate those athletes who do not participate in disability sports, yet who are eligible, to gain a greater understanding of the impact of stigmas and stereotypes. Future research is also needed on the influence of peers with disabilities in the recruitment process. The women in this study were often introduced to the sport by friends with disabilities, and then became agents themselves to others with disabilities. This process recognizes the importance of the socializing situation to the individual, and their ability to transfer their experience to the next potential athlete. Finally, it is important to better understand the link between therapeutic models in rehabilitation, leisure, and sport. More specifically, leisure experiences are often introduced to persons with disabilities through therapeutic models in rehabilitation. This was evident in many of the women's stories. Some of the women were in the hospital when they found out about disability sports and began using sports as rehabilitation, and then it developed into a leisure experience. However, a number of the women noted that their rehabilitation experiences did not include any leisure or sport, and they felt this was a missed opportunity for them.

The sport and recreational opportunities for people with disabilities will improve with increased awareness and education. As was evident in this study, many different agents and agencies have the potential to be influence in the leisure and sport socialization process. Also, it is important to note that agents and agencies can work together to introduce sports to interested individuals. It is our hope that by telling these women's stories, and how they were introduced, or not introduced, to a sport they have come to love, we will make others more aware and knowledgeable about these important leisure and sport opportunities for persons with disabilities.

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APPENDIX 1
Interview Questions

Category	Questions
Demographic	<p>What is your name?</p> <p>What is your age?</p> <p>When did you first start wheelchair basketball?</p> <p>How long have you been playing wheelchair basketball?</p>
General Disability	<p>What is the name of your disability?</p> <p>What is the age of onset of your disability?</p> <p>If not congenital, would you mind sharing briefly how your disability occurred?</p> <p>How long was your rehabilitation process?</p> <p>What does having a disability mean to you?</p> <p>What does playing a disabled sport mean to you?</p>
Wheelchair Basketball Knowledge	<p>(If acquired) Did you know about wheelchair basketball before you acquired a disability?</p> <p>At what age did you first find out about wheelchair basketball?</p> <p>(If a gap exists between age of discovery and actual playing) What happened in this time period that made you decide to play wheelchair basketball?</p> <p>At any point did a rehabilitation person encourage participation in wheelchair basketball?</p> <p>If yes, what was your reaction to this encouragement?</p> <p>How long were you in rehabilitation before you found out about wheelchair basketball?</p> <p>If no, why do you think this was the case/Do you wish he/she had introduced the sport?</p>
Socialization	<p>Please describe how you came to find out about wheelchair basketball (Who/what/where/when/situation behind discovery)</p> <p>Please describe how you came to play wheelchair basketball (Who/what/where/when/situation behind discovery)</p> <p>Was it your decision to play wheelchair basketball?</p> <p>If no, who's decision was it? Please describe/give examples.</p>

Socialization*(continued)*

Did you have any say in the matter? Please describe/give examples.

Who or what would you say was the primary agent in your decision to play wheelchair basketball?

Please describe the situation in which you discussed or encountered wheelchair basketball or give examples.

Please list in order the agents that you felt had an impact in your decision to play wheelchair basketball.

To the best of your knowledge, have you ever introduced someone with a disability to the sport? Please describe.

Please list agents you feel would be able to assist someone with a disability in playing wheelchair basketball?

Why do you feel they would be able to assist in the sport?

Future Research

Please describe why you feel more people do not play wheelchair basketball.

What do you feel could be done to remedy this?

Is there anything you would like to add about your experience in wheelchair basketball?

Socioeconomic

What type of occupation do you have?

What is your current marital status?

Where do you live?

How long have you lived there?
