1 **Abstract**

2 This article draws on the theoretical concepts of Pierre Bourdieu to provide a critical analysis

3 of the social construction of disability in high-performance sport coaching. Data were

4 generated using a qualitative cross-case comparative methodology, comprising eighteen

5 months of ethnographic fieldwork in high-performance disability sport, and interviews with

6 coaches and athletes from a cross-section of Paralympic sports. We discuss how in both cases

7 'disability' was assimilated into the 'performance logic' of the sporting field as a means of

8 maximising symbolic capital. Furthermore, coaches were socialised into a prevailing legitimate

9 culture in elite disability sport that was reflective of ableist, performance-focused and

10 normative ideologies about disability. In this article we unpack the assumptions that underpin

11 coaching in disability sport, and by extension use sport as a lens to problematise the

12 construction of disability in specific social formations across coaching cultures. In so doing we

13 raise critical questions about the interrelation of disability and sport.

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

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25   It has been suggested that sport provides a context that can challenge and influence the social

26   and cultural perceptions of disability and disabled people (Howe and Silva, 2016). This is

27   reinforced by binaries that often frame discussions about Paralympic and disability sport.

28   Examples of such dualisms include debates about 'ability-disability' (e.g. Purdue and Howe,

29   2012a), 'empowerment-disempowerment' (e.g., Howe and Silva, 2016; Peers, 2009; Purdue

30   and Howe, 2012b), and 'elite sport-disability sport' (e.g. DePauw and Gavron, 2005).

31   Interrogating the space between these polarisations offers opportunities to establish a dialogue

32   on the way disability is positioned in social spaces. Indeed, sometime ago DePauw (1997)

33   alerted us to the disruptive potential of sport due to its stratified social relations. These social

34   relations 'construct, produce, institutionalise, enact and perform disability' (Smith and Perrier,

35   2014: 12).

36   Naturally, such discussions concern the ontological position of disability in sport. In

37   this study, we locate our theorising of 'disability' within a social relational framework (Thomas,

38   1999, 2004, 2007). The social relational model offers a subjective, internalised understanding

39   of disability in relation to social structure and cultural discourses about disability.

40   Understanding 'disability' as socially constructed, culturally fashioned, and lived (Smith and

41   Perrier, 2014; Thomas, 1999), in relation to sport provides a powerful lens (Townsend *et al.,*

42   2016) through which to examine the discursive principles that organise fields and structure

43   individual practices (Bourdieu, 1990). Understanding the construction of disability particularly

44   important when coaches' perceptions of disability are often framed in medical model

45   discourses (cf. Townsend *et al.,* 2017) and in high-performance sport, disability occupies a

46   tenuous, hierarchical and often contradictory position (cf. Purdue and Howe, 2012a). However,

47   debate about the social construction of disability in sport coaching has been noticeably absent

48   within the literature.

49   Coaching is characterised by its own taken-for-granted logic (Cushion and Jones, 2006),

50   with a hierarchy of species of capital, and orthodox practices (Denison *et al.,* 2015). As such,

51   it can be usefully conceptualised as a field located within the broader field of – in the context

52   of this research – disability sport. The centrality of coaches in maintaining the structure and

53   ideals of high-performance sport is recognised (Cushion and Jones, 2006) but often overlooked

54   in disability sport. Furthermore, coaching was identified as a priority for research in disability

55   sport over 30 years ago (DePauw, 1986), and literature has begun discovering something of the

56   complexity of coaching in disability sport (e.g. Taylor *et al.,* 2014). It is important to note that

57   most of the established research tends to distance itself from discussions about impairment

58   (Townsend *et al.,* 2016), with the construction of disability being forced into the background,

59   or ignored. Only recently has work looking at coaching in disability sport engaged with models

60   of disability (e.g. Wareham *et al.,* 2017; Townsend *et al.,* 2016) as a means of examining the

61   interrelationships between disabled people and practices in sporting contexts. Interrogating

62   elite disability sport through a critical lens is an important step as coaching is a de-limited field

63   of practice that is "imbued with dominant values and common beliefs that appear natural and

64   are therefore taken-for-granted" (Cushion and Jones, 2014: 276). Research has demonstrated

65   that the relationship between coaches, athletes and the context in which practice unfolds is

66   permeable to the influence of other constructed discourses within society, such as gender (e.g.

67   Norman and Rankin-Wright, 2016), race (e.g. Rankin-Wright *et al.,* 2016) or in the case of this

68   paper, disability (Townsend *et al.,* 2017). However, coaches are generally not trained in the

69   specifics of disability sport and recent evidence suggests coaching is organised and constrained

70   by medical model discourses reflecting largely ableist attitudes (cf. Townsend *et al.* 2017).

71   Therefore, if sport is to function as a platform for empowerment (Purdue and Howe, 2012b), it

72   is crucial to examine how the social practices of coaching are "generated and sustained within

73   social systems and cultural formations" (Thomas, 1999: 44) such as disability sport. To do so

74   it is important to discuss critically the productive forces – the social relations of production and

75   reproduction – and the ideological constructions of disability found across disability sport (cf.

76   Thomas, 1999).

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78   The aim of this paper was to examine how disability was constructed in high-

79   performance sport coaching contexts. Specifically, we explored the intersecting fields of high-

80   performance coaching, within Paralympic sport and disability sport. Paralympic sport refers to

81   sports that compete in the Paralympic Games, a quadrennial multi-sports competition organised

82   by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). Disability sport is a broad term used to

83   describe sports that accommodate people with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities

84   (DePauw and Gavron, 2005). Given the developmental goals of the IPC, 'Parasport' is often

85   used as an umbrella term to accommodate both Paralympic and Disability sport. This

86   intersection provided shared understandings across the multi-sport Paralympic context and a

87   single elite sport positioned separately to the Paralympic games. The significance of this

88   research is in extending discourse on the social construction of disability in sport and through

89   coaching, extending debate on 'empowerment' in sport, and highlighting the unintended

90   consequences of well-intended actions. In this sense, our critical tradition was focused on

91   deconstructing taken-for-granted conditions that disabled people face, which can be

92   exacerbated in social formations such as sport where power relations mediate who has voice,

93   autonomy and identity, and who does not.

94   **Bourdieu and high-performance coaching**

95   The relevance of Bourdieu's theory to this research is that it has at its very centre a "concern

96   with the body as a bearer of symbolic value" (Shilling, 2004: 111). Bourdieu's view of the

97   social world as a "collective work of construction of social reality" (Bourdieu and Wacquant,

98   1992: 239) and his conceptual tools of *habitus, field* and *capital* together help to explain how

99   cultural settings function according to an internal logic, and can be used to highlight and

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100   challenge the conditions under which ideologies are formed. This shares concerns with

101   disability studies in its "interrogation of cultural categories, discourses, language, and practices"

102   (Thomas, 2004: 36) that constitute disability[1]. In sport, the disabled body is, as Edwards and

103   Imrie (2003) argued, a "site of contestation" (p. 240) where impairment and its effects (physical

104   and intellectual) can "function as distinctive signs and as signs of distinction, positive or

105   negative" (Bourdieu, 1989: 20). These distinctions can be shaped by the structures of the field,

106   and thus the use of Bourdieu can highlight the cultural resources and frameworks drawn upon

107   in practice and the meanings attributed to disability within coaching in disability sport.

108   In sport coaching a Bourdieusian approach provides an understanding of the two-way

109   relationship between objective structures of the coaching context and the dispositions of

110   individual agents to provide a reciprocal view of the way disability is constructed. With coaches

111   engaging in a role and process that is neither benign nor neutral, Bourdieu allows for the

112   deconstruction of the power relations and interactions that shape social practice. Such analyses

113   of disability focus on the power that social categories have in constructing subjectivities and

114   identities of self and others (Thomas, 2004), enabling the examination of the social conditions

115   of coaching that constitute and legitimise ways of thinking about disability (Bourdieu, 1977).

116   Indeed, Purdue and Howe (2015) argued that Paralympic and disability sport are inherently

117   shaped by such power struggles, with coaching further characterised by a struggle for the

118   legitimacy of disability. Thus, coaching research requires the application of sociology to reveal

119   and to challenge dominant values and ideologies that influence disability sport and by extension

120   the way disability can be understood and reconstructed in society.

121   **Methodology**

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[1] In particular, Bourdieu's work can be understood as a philosophy of the relational (Bourdieu, 1998), which aligns with the central tenets of the social relational model, especially his attempt at addressing the issue of agency and structure, and "articulating the relations of production between the individual, their body and society" (Brown, 2005: 4; Thomas, 1999).

122　Following institutional ethical approval, data were generated within a cross-case comparative

123　research design over two phases of data collection (Miles *et al.,* 2014). The first and second

124　authors were both coaches within these fields, enabling the production of a contextually-

125　informed picture of coaching in disability and Paralympic sport. This enabled immersion *within*

126　"real activity as such" (Bourdieu, 1977: 96), and in practical relation to the world of inquiry.

127　The first author conducted an 18-month ethnographic case-study in a specific high-

128　performance disability sport context. Data were generated through participant observation,

129　interviewing with coaches, and focus groups with four athletes and twelve parents within a

130　national learning disability sports team (see table 1 and 2). Participant observation meant full

131　participation in the setting with a formal coaching role working with the players and the

132　management team. Immersion in this context provided sustained access to an institutionally-

133　supported and integrated coaching process within a specific national governing body (NGB)

134　and generated data that had both temporal and spatial meaning (Thomas, 2004).

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

136　　　To add a layer of theoretical breadth in developing a shared understanding of coaching,

137　the second author employed comparative in-depth semi-structured interviews with five

138　Paralympic medal-winning coaches and five Paralympic athletes (see tables 3 and 4) alongside

139　the ethnographic fieldwork. The in-depth semi-structured approach to interviewing allowed

140　particpants to express and elaborate on their experinces and perceptions in relation to a

141　common guide covering: development in sport and coaching, perceptions of the Paralympic

142　games and effective coaching in this conext. Participants for the comparative interviews were

143　sampled theoretically to enable analysis (Ritchie *et al.,* 2003) across sports and across coaching

144　cultures. Importantly, none of the coaches across either study had impairments, perhaps

145　reflecting the relative lack of disabled coaches within the coaching workforce (Fitzgerald,

146　2013). The process was iterative in nature, and enabled the generation of themes according to

147   comparative analysis of two distinct and meaningful coaching populations across a particular

148   field (Ritchie *et al.,* 2003). Together, data were captured through comprehensive written field

149   notes whilst as a coach immersed within the Paralympic field and transcripts of audio-taped

150   interviews and audio data captured *in situ*. All field notes were dated and included contextual

151   information such as location, those present, physical setting, type of social interactions and

152   who composed them, and activities. The fusion of these methods provided focused data on

153   coaching disabled athletes across the fields of elite disability sport and Paralympic sport.

154   **Insert tables 3 and 4 about here**

155   *Data Analysis*

156   The purpose of the analysis was to build a "critical and defamiliarising" (Alvesson and Solberg,

157   2009: 172) view on coaching in disability sport. Data were therefore analysed inductively to

158   build a system of organising categories about coaching in disability sport from the unstructured

159   data. This inductive process enabled categories, themes and narrative to be built from the

160   'bottom up', by organising the data into increasingly more abstract meaning units (Creswell,

161   2013). As Creswell (2013) describes, the inductive process involved working back and forth

162   between the analysis and the dataset until a comprehensive set of themes was established. Next,

163   theory was used in an deductive manner against the empirical material which resulted in the

164   generation of three inter-related themes related to "*Disability, high performance and symbolic*

165   *capital*", "*Empowerment, Misrecognition and (Dis)ability Identity*" and "*Acceptance and*

166   *Symbolic Violence*". Importantly, though maintaining degrees of abstraction the process was

167   always grounded in the data and used to inform the analytical process.These themes are

168   necessarily discussed separately, however they should be understood as layered, interconnected

169   and mutually reinforcing.

170   **Analysis and Discussion**

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171 *Disability, high-performance and symbolic capital*

172 A field is defined as networks of social relations, structured systems of social positions within

173 which struggles or manoeuvres take place over resources, stakes and access (Bourdieu, 1990).

174 Fields are organised both horizontally and vertically. At the 'top', and thus working across all

175 others is the field of power. The field of power exists 'horizontally' through all fields and

176 mediates the struggles within each through the control of the 'exchange rate' of the forms of

177 cultural and social capital between fields. For Bourdieu, power is an active property and

178 presents itself in three fundamental species of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992); cultural,

179 economic and social, and importantly, can be both material and embodied. Each field values

180 certain species of capital that are recognised as symbolic, where those with symbolic capital

181 are better placed to control the specific logic of the field.

182 Fields (and capital) therefore have a critical role in generating social practice. Rather

183 than having clearly demarcated boundaries, fields are symbolic insofar as they are determined

184 by the limits of that which people feel is at stake in the field and are worthy of contest (*illusio*),

185 and that activities within are guided by an underpinning logic of practice. A specific example

186 of *illusio* and the tensions caused at the boundaries of a field is shown by the way elite

187 'performance' values and practices held symbolic capital:

188 The element that I'm involved in is a performance programme. To the point where as
189 far as possible disabilities are left at the door when they come in. Actually, this has
190 grown so much now and the national squads have come on so much that there is a need
191 for a performance element to this. I felt you know *if we're gonna have credibility in*
192 *this game* there needs to be a (performance) pathway structure because otherwise it
193 devalues disability sport. (Brian, Performance Director – interview; emphasis added).

194 Fields operate semi-autonomously and are responsible for the production of values and beliefs

195 which rationalise the 'rules' of behaviour or logic of practice for its occupants, which in this

196 case related to coaching disabled athletes. As a result, coaches commonly articulated their roles

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197 in relation to high-performance sport, thus subsuming 'disability' within a powerful high-

198 performance logic:

> 199 It's my first coaching role in a performance environment and the opportunity to work
> 200 in a performance environment was too good an opportunity to miss, so work with the
> 201 physio, the head coach, the manager, an SandC coach. (Steve, Coach – interview).
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> 202 This squad has become more high-performance, as in the environment we're creating.
> 203 I see it as a performance environment. It's all about performance mate - I don't give a
> 204 shit (about anything else). I think, really, if you can coach disability, then you can
> 205 almost coach anybody. (Theo, Strength and Conditioning Coach - field notes).

206 These data are illustrative of coaches who understood the 'rules of the game', where aligning

207 with a high-performance logic had more symbolic capital than disability. This process was

208 reinforced by the concept of doxa - the conditions of existence or the order of things - where

209 coaches embodied a socially and culturally constituted way of perceiving, evaluating and

210 behaving, that was accepted as unquestioned and self-evident, i.e. 'natural' (Bourdieu, 1977).

211 In working to the doxa, the coaches and athletes were able to generate symbolic capital by

212 means of recognising competencies associated with high-performance sport, minimising the

213 distance between *disability sport* and *high-performance sport*, while at the same time

214 maximising the distance between *disability* and *disability sport*:

> 215 Sport is that unique environment where they're seen as sportsmen first, people with a
> 216 disability second. And for the people we work with and coach in this particular squad
> 217 it's refreshing for them because they're treated like adults, like..."normal", not only are
> 218 they being treated with respect as an athlete, because they're at the peak of where any
> 219 sportsperson wants to be, which is representing their country, they're given that respect,
> 220 they're given that respect as an adult. (Bert, Team Manager – interview).
> 221
222 These binaries, or relations of homology (Bourdieu, 1998), were part of a conscious struggle

223 for the coaches to consecrate their own symbolic attributes within the 'performance'

224 environment. In so doing, the coaches attempted to maximise their symbolic capital and secure

225 their positions within the high-performance field by subverting attention away from 'negative'

226 disability-specific associations:

> 227 I don't want to pigeon hole myself as a disability sport coach, I'm a coach. It doesn't
> 228 interest me...this is just a stepping stone for me". (Steve, Coach – field notes).

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229   In this sense, there was a tension between 'disability sport' and 'high-performance sport'

230   which acted in opposition and were used to "lend meaning to the world" (Everett, 2002: 66)

231   forming the basis for a hierarchy of power within coaching practice:

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

236   Thus, 'disability' was assimilated into the logic of high-performance sporting practices, and

237   coaching was shaped by a doxic structure where disability identity was closely related to

238   performance and athletic bodies. In this way coaching practice was shaped by binaries (i.e.

239   disabled/non-disabled; high-performance/disability sport), that functioned to provide, what

240   Bourdieu (1977) described as, a *sense of limits* of practice. These limits served to frame the

241   'right' or 'correct' way of coaching:

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

247   "The players seem to be working well".

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

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

253   "Well, it's simple. Otherwise I'm changing my beliefs as a coach, aren't I? Which
254   would mean I'm coaching the disability not the (athlete)".

255   (Field notes)

256   There was a clear attempt by the coaches to impose the "legitimate definition of a particular

257   class of body" (Bourdieu, 1991: 362) through the reconstruction of disability according to able-

258 bodied norms. This was in contrast to the athletes, where impairment and its effects were an

259 legitimate part of their athletic identity:

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

265 Together this discourse illustrates the relationship between sport and society in the social

266 construction of disability (cf. Bourdieu, 1984) and highlight how these constructions

267 influenced coaching practice. The interest and subsequent influence demonstrated by these

268 discourses framing the coaching process can be understood as "part of the larger field of

269 struggles over the definition of the legitimate body and the legitimate uses of the body"

270 (Bourdieu, 1993: 122), where disability represents a form of negative symbolic capital when

271 defined in relation to a field framed by high-performance sport discourses. Indeed, it can be

272 argued that the reconstruction of disability was an exercise of consecration, as Bourdieu (2000:

273 97) argued, "once one has accepted the viewpoint that is constitutive of a field, one can no

274 longer take an external viewpoint on it".

275 *'Empowerment', Misrecognition and (Dis)ability Identity*

276 For the coaches, the logic of the field described above was characterised by an opposition

277 between labels of 'disability' and 'athlete'. This binary created a situation where coaches

278 rejected notions of 'disability' in their practice, instead affording distinction to high-

279 performance and elite 'athletic' identities, which were used as 'sense-making' frames to direct

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

281 coaching:

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

284 In this instance, disabled athletes were subject to assumptions about their abilities framed by

285 normalisation and judgement against ableist standards (Townsend *et al.,* 2016). Importantly,

286 such a position created a hierarchy of power where the athletes were assigned aspects of

287 identity that were viewed as antagonistic to notions of disability, constituting a form of

288 'empowerment'. This runs counter to an often taken-for-granted humanistic discourse that

289 frames identity (Groff and Kleiber, 2001), where primacy is given to agency and individual

290 psychology. Instead, the analysis illustrates how identity was imposed upon the athletes

291 through a hierarchy of power where their agency was constrained within the structural

292 conditions of 'elite' sport coaching and governed by the coaching discourse:

293   I: Can you describe your role as a coach?

294   Trevor: Giving athletes a sense of ownership...not...avoiding the word empower, erm,
295   because of its association with me having the power to empower, me having the right
296   or I'm the only one that can allow this person to be empowered, but more giving or
297   creating environments, creating scope and opportunities for athletes to shape something
298   themselves. I think if we are looking at somebody being the best in the world, then I
299   think that freedom to explore, that freedom to have some ownership and control that
300   the athlete has themselves is important (Paralympic Coach - interview).

301   Empowering people and getting the best hidden talent from them… and they need
302   empowering…they should be able to perform everything without me (Phil,
303   Paralympic Coach – interview).

304 These data highlight the way in which notions of 'empowerment' were entrenched within the

305 coaching discourse as a result of exposure to doxic social conditions. 'Empowerment' in this

306 sense was constructed by the high-performance field which referred to the rejection of disabled

307 identities and the superimposition of 'athletic' identity (Purdue and Howe, 2012b) as a frame

308 of reference for coaches and athletes. As such the coaching process provided an illusion of

309 empowerment whereby athlete 'control and mastery' (Wallerstein, 1992: 1998) was in fact

310 shaped by the coaches through a legitmised performance coaching process. Thus, coaching was

311 based on value-judgements about disability where athletes had to align to a coaching

312 environment permeated by high-performance logic, values and practices:

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

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

319 Here, 'effective' coaching in disability sport was defined in relation to symbolic competencies

320 involving a rejection of disability and the inscribing of distinctive dispositions ('athletic'

321 identity) into coaching practice, a process that Bourdieu (1990) called the institutionalisation

322 of distinction. Importantly, the rejection of disability fulfilled an important practical function

323 (Bourdieu, 1998). For the coaches in the study, empowerment was conflated with performance

324 ideals providing a sense of structure and practical mastery (Townsend *et al.,* 2016) to direct

325 coaching:

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

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

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

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

338 Hence, coaches sought to reframe disability identity according to what DePauw (1997)

339 described as the 'invisibility of disability' whereby disability was forced into the background

340 of the collective coaching consciousness and the reality of impairment disregarded:

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

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

352 In this sense, the coaches, from their position of power, subverted what they considered a

353 'disabling gaze', thus distancing themselves from discussions about disability:

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

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

362 Here, the data shows how the coaches and athletes were engaged in a symbolic struggle of

363 classifications (Bourdieu, 1998) about the position of disability. In direct contrast however,

364 was the athletes' attempt to reconcile labels of 'athlete' and 'disability' within the Paralympic

365 field:

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

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

377 Here the construction of disability had a number of effects. The coaches monopolised the

378 discourse regarding the construction of disability. This provided a sense of structure to their

379 coaching reality and brought with it the most amount of symbolic capital. This clear alignment

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380 to the doxic structure further reinforced the social divisions between 'ability-disability' (Howe

381 and Silva, 2016). That is, for the athletes social structure and power were determining of

382 identity and not individual autonomy. Hence, for these athletes, the coaching conditions

383 influenced by a rejection of disability limited the range of agentic choices and strategies

384 available to shape their experiences:

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

389 Thus, it was in the *interests* of the athletes to conform, "such is the paradox of the dominated"

390 (Bourdieu, 1987: 184).

391 *Acceptance and Symbolic Violence*

392 The athletes, in assessing their position within the coaching culture, applied "a system of

393 schemes of perception and appreciation which is the embodiment of the objective laws whereby

394 their value is objectively constituted" and attributed "to themselves what the distribution

395 attributes to them" (Bourdieu, 1984: 473). This was not always an 'empowering' position:

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

402 Attributing an 'athletic' identity to the players had associated symbolic capital and a pre-

403 defined set of valued expectations and dispositions, as the imposition of a recognised name i.e.

404 'athlete' was an act of recognition of "full social existence" (Bourdieu, 1984: 482):

405 One of my key observations when I first came into the environment was that we were
406 wrapping these boys up a little bit, which I think can be, can be done, in a performance
407 environment because you've got the SandC here, you've got the physio, you've got the
408 coach, you've got the nutritionist, you've got all these roles, and people will feel they

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409 need to justify roles, and I think that there's a danger with that, that we can molly-
410 coddle these boys and wrap them up...We need to push these boys more, we need to
411 give them more, a bit more respect maybe...what...they can achieve *if we allow them to*.
412 I felt we protected the boys too much and were very quick to state 'ah well that's
413 because of their disability'...so I think that there's a danger that...we attribute everything
414 negative to a disability. There has to be an element of allowing these guys to fail. Since
415 I came into the environment we've had tears, we've had sweat, we've had bleeding,
416 you know we've had all of that, a lot of tears from different players, because they've
417 never been challenged and so to me that's bollocks. I'd rather them fail, or be in tears,
418 or be frustrated around us, because we can help them with the strategies and tools
419 required to bounce back from it. The bottom line is that, like any performance squad,
420 or any team, you change your culture, you change an ethos, you challenge people.
421 (Steve, Coach – interview; emphasis added).

422 Symbolic violence is the imposition of meaning experienced as legitimate (Bourdieu and

423 Passeron, 1977) that when applied to coaching positions coaches and athletes according to

424 dominant and dominated groups. In this example, coaching practice functioned as an

425 instrument of domination that was justified as an exercise of empowerment and disability-

426 specific resistance *by the coaches* (cf. Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu, 1984; Thomas, 1999). In this

427 case, reconstructing disability was seen as empowering as it was linked with the development

428 of athletes' embodied cultural capital related to elite performance.

429 Symbolic violence is achieved through pedagogic action; "a process of inculcation

430 which must last long enough to produce habitus reflective of a "cultural arbitrary capable of

431 perpetuating itself after pedagogic action has ceased and thereby of perpetuating in practices

432 the principles of internalised arbitrary" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 31). Symbolic violence

433 was related to the methods used to coach disabled athletes in elite sport:

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

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

441 By subsuming disability into high-performance ideals, and reconstructing 'disability' through

442 the rhetoric of empowerment, the doxic nature of the field constrained and influenced practice

443 to the extent that it was illustrative of the process of symbolic violence. That is, the coaching

444 practices were so 'accepted' that they were unquestioned. This had a more subversive effect,

445 where impairment effects could be positioned as the dominant barrier to achieving the coaches'

446 outcomes:

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

452 Coaching practice therefore functioned as a direct method of symbolic violence insofar as it

453 was "the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power" (Bourdieu and Passeron

454 (1977: 5). The coaching environment and methods were, for the most part, left unchallenged

455 and coaches constructed objects for intervention (disabled *athletes*) and drew on normative

456 ideology to coach (cf. Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2012). Such was its influence and power

457 that the athletes recognised, accepted and conformed to the pedagogic action of the coaches

458 through the acquisition and internalisation of dispositions that had symbolic capital (Dumais,

459 2002):

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

476   PJ: Know we'll do it.

477   (Athlete focus group).

478 Symbolic violence is "violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her

479 complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 167). Here, the data illustrates the relations of

480 symbolic violence, specifically how the athletes strengthened the power relations that

481 contributed to the "legitimacy of domination" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 5). That is not to

482 suggest that dominated necessarily meant passive (De Certeau, 1984). For the athletes in this

483 research, the focus was on the reinforcement and refinement of a particular athletic habitus,

484 embodying symbolic capital, as it was valued by the coaches and legitimised through the social

485 structures in which they were immersed. The athletes were therefore constrained by the

486 powerful high-performance logic underpinning coaching that served particular interests which

487 were presented "as universal interests, common to the whole group" (Bourdieu, 1979: 80).

488 **Conclusion**

489 This research found that coaching in both Paralympic and disability sport constructed a logic

490 of practice which acted as the the "principal locus" (Bourdieu 1990: 89) for the production of

491 generative schemes, hierarchies and classifying systems about disability. This logic was based

492 on the production and maintenance of high-performance values. Exposing the logic of practice

493 had important implications for the social construction of disability as a process of

494 misrecognition equated the assimilation of disability into more valued high-performance

495 discourses with 'empowerment'. This had a dual function. On the one hand coaches were

encouraged to look beyond the 'disability' in order to challenge and develop the players. On the other hand, there were tensions whereby the distance between disability and sport was maximised as it brought with it the most amount of symbolic capital. We argue that within these conditions coaching was a method of symbolic violence where coaches had the "power to impose the legitimate mode of thought" (Bourdieu, 1977: 170; Swartz, 2012) about coaching disabled athletes. For the athletes, the power to challenge these coaching discourses was not located in individual autonomy but constrained within stratified social configurations which had all the appearances of being a liberating structure. In this sense, we contribute to the discourse on empowerment in coaching, suggesting that under certain conditions 'empowerment' is a largely taken-for-granted term that is fundamentally linked to issues of power, ideology and domination.

Importantly, the way that disability was positioned through the structures of coaching formed an orthodox discourse that was difficult to displace. In this respect, whilst the disability sport field may be understood as a site of resistance, whereby disabled athletes can be 'empowered', it may be further conceptualised as a site of domination whereby coaches and coaching position disability in opposition to high-performance sport. These understandings were accepted and unquestioned within the structural conditions, constituting a taken-for-granted view of coaching that "flows from practical sense" (Bourdieu, 1990: 68). More concerning is that these conditions, secured by doxa, form the basis for cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1990). On this matter, we call for further research to inform coach education, otherwise disabled people will continue to be subject to the methods and practices of symbolic violence in Paralympic and disability sport. Our findings further highlight the hierarchical tension between disability and high-performance sport, where disability was reconstructed according to the volume and efficacy of the different forms of capital available.

520   In this research, our critical tradition focused on deconstructing doxic or taken-for-

521   granted conditions that disabled people encounter. Such socially and culturally accepted

522   conditions can be exacerbated in social formations such as sport where power relations mediate

523   who has 'voice' and autonomy, and who does not. This research contributes to current

524   sociological debates, within and beyond the sociology of sport, in theorising the

525   interrelatedness of disability and distinctive cultural formations. It is an important first step in

526   shedding light on, and challenging, the social construction of disability and its effects on social

527   practice.

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613 **Table 1 – Ethnographic Study Participant Demographics**

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

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

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

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629   **Table 3 – Paralympic Coach Demographics**

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

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Table 4 – Paralympic Athlete Demographics

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

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

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