

**DISCOURSES OF DISABILITY SPORT:  
EXPERIENCES OF ELITE MALE AND FEMALE ATHLETES  
IN BRITAIN AND TAIWAN**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Chin-Ju Huang

Department of Sport Sciences  
Brunel University

June 2005

**Brunel University  
School of Sport and Education**

**Chin-Ju Huang**

**Discourses of Disability Sport:  
Experiences of Elite Male and Female Athletes in Britain and Taiwan**

**2005 PhD**

**Abstract**

Disability sport has been a relatively under-researched area within the fields of both sport sociology and disability studies, in particular regarding countries outside the West. This comparative research, therefore, is an attempt to rectify the situation and make sense of the experiences of elite sportsmen and sportswomen with physical disabilities in Great Britain and Taiwan, specifically those who have represented their respective countries at the Paralympic Games or the Athletics and Powerlifting World Championships. Through 21 in-depth interviews with a life history approach, the aim of the research has been to gain a greater understanding and provide as authentic an account as possible of the experiences of elite male and female athletes with disabilities – in particular, how they experience their bodies and construct, negotiate, and perform their identities in relation to their involvement in elite disability sport. This research also involves a critical analysis, set within the social model of disability and using a feminist perspective, of dominant medical model ideologies and discourses associated with disability, gender and sport in British and Taiwanese societies. It investigates how dominant ideologies and stereotypes produce disabling physical and social barriers that are manifest in various oppressive practices within social institutions and thus impinge on the lives, sporting experiences and the construction of identities of the research participants. In line with the emancipatory research framework adopted in this research, the elite disabled athletes are included in the research process as active participants who are experts in their own experiences, rather than as research objects.

**DISCOURSES OF DISABILITY SPORT:  
EXPERIENCES OF ELITE MALE AND FEMALE ATHLETES  
IN BRITAIN AND TAIWAN**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Chin-Ju Huang

Department of Sport Sciences  
Brunel University

June 2005

## **Abstract**

Disability sport has been a relatively under-researched area within the fields of both sport sociology and disability studies, in particular regarding countries outside the West. This comparative research, therefore, is an attempt to rectify the situation and make sense of the experiences of elite sportsmen and sportswomen with physical disabilities in Great Britain and Taiwan, specifically those who have represented their respective countries at the Paralympic Games or the Athletics and Powerlifting World Championships. Through 21 in-depth interviews with a life history approach, the aim of the research has been to gain a greater understanding and provide as authentic an account as possible of the experiences of elite male and female athletes with disabilities – in particular, how they experience their bodies and construct, negotiate, and perform their identities in relation to their involvement in elite disability sport. This research also involves a critical analysis, set within the social model of disability and using a feminist perspective, of dominant medical model ideologies and discourses associated with disability, gender and sport in British and Taiwanese societies. It investigates how dominant ideologies and stereotypes produce disabling physical and social barriers that are manifest in various oppressive practices within social institutions and thus impinge on the lives, sporting experiences and the construction of identities of the research participants. In line with the emancipatory research framework adopted in this research, the elite disabled athletes are included in the research process as active participants who are experts in their own experiences, rather than as research objects.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my dearest parents, Yeh-An Huang and Hei-Ping Chen, for their unconditional love and support. There are no words that can adequately express my appreciation to them.

## **Acknowledgements**

Over the course of three and half years during which time the research for this PhD thesis was done, a number of people, members of my family, and friends made valuable contributions either through moral support or direct academic input.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Jennifer Hargreaves, for her constructive guidance and constant encouragement throughout the study. She is a supervisor any student dreams of. I am also grateful to Professor Cara Aitchison and Dr. Gary Armstrong, the examiners for this thesis, for their helpful comments, valuable suggestions and the approval of the manuscript.

I am highly indebted to all the research participants for their full cooperation and assistance which made this thesis possible. Many thanks are also due to Ms. Lorna Cohen, Ms. Donna Charlton-O'Malley, Mr. Jon Amos and Dr. Ian Brittain for their help in putting me in contact with British participants. A special word of thanks goes to Ian for his continuous support, sound advice, and friendship.

I was extremely lucky to win a government scholarship which allowed me to do PhD research abroad. I would like to thank the personnel in the Cultural Division, Taipei Representative Office in the UK for their support. The financial assistance of Mr. Cheng-Chih Wang, Chairman of Dandao Culture Foundation, is hereby also acknowledged.

Lastly, I am grateful to those who in the most trying times remained on my side, smiling, laughing, and sometimes even crying with me – Pearl, Aarti, Cindy, Matt, Vasco, Montse, Ajay; and to those negative experiences – What does not kill me makes me stronger!

## Contents

	Page no.
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>List of Appendices</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>List of Acronyms</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>Chapter One – Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction	1
The current field	3
Medical model discourse and the social model of disability	5
What about ‘the body’? The need for a social model of impairment	8
Body identity and sport	11
Disability sport and the Paralympic movement	12
The challenge of ‘different’ bodies in sport	17
Research rationale	19
Overview of the thesis	20
<b>Chapter Two – Methodology</b>	<b>24</b>
Introduction	24
Evolution of the research question and my position	24
Research paradigms in disability studies	26
Non-disabled researchers in disability studies within the emancipatory research paradigm	29
Cross-national comparative case research	34
Background of Great Britain	36
Background of Taiwan	37
Data collection	41
The less-structured in-depth interview	41
The research sample and access	44
Overview of the research participants	47
Interview protocols	48

Analysing interview data	52
Documentary research	54
Beyond research	55
<b>Chapter Three – Material Conditions, and the Politics of Parenting and the Sport Involvement of Elite Disabled Athletes in Britain and Taiwan</b>	<b>56</b>
Introduction	56
The economic realities of disabled people, financial pressures and sporting careers	58
The politics of parenting in the sporting careers of disabled athletes	64
British parents’ support for sport participation	64
Parental opposition to a sporting career in Taiwan	68
Concluding remarks	72
<b>Chapter Four – Inclusion, Disability, and Physical Education: School Experiences of Elite Athletes with Disabilities</b>	<b>74</b>
Introduction	74
Setting the context	75
Getting into school: mainstream or special school?	80
Mainstream schools and physical education	83
The teachers’ role in an inclusive process	88
Special schools and physical education	94
The effect of physical education experiences on sport involvement in later life	97
Mainstream schooling leads to changes in perception?	100
Concluding remarks	101
<b>Chapter Five – The Cultural Creation of Disability and A Gendered Body Project in Elite Disability Sport</b>	<b>104</b>
Introduction	104
Cultural responses toward people with impairment in Britain and Taiwan	105
Bodily perfection and the normalising gaze on people with impairments	112
Adaptation and attitudes toward life	120
Gendered body projects in disability sport	122
Resistance to disability	123
Resistance to stereotypes associated with discrediting the male disabled body	126
Resistance to sexual stereotyping and discrimination against women in sport	131
Other perceived gender issues	140
Gendered expectations in work, family and sport careers	140
Prejudice against female sporting competitiveness and conflicts between male and female athletes	144
Concluding remarks	149
<b>Chapter Six – Power Relations in the Operation of Disability Sport</b>	<b>150</b>



Introduction	150
The organisational structures of disability sport	152
The mainstreaming of disability sport in Britain	152
The specialised structure of disability sport in Taiwan	155
Perceived problems of the training environment	161
The coach	161
Guide runners for blind athletes	162
Training venues and facilities	163
Financial issues in disability sport	165
The World Class Performance Programme and Lottery funding in Britain	166
Perceived benefits of Lottery funding	167
Perceived problems of Lottery funding	168
The reward system in Taiwan	175
Getting involved in politics?	180
Concluding remarks	183
<b>Chapter Seven – Societal Perceptions and Media Coverage of Disability Sport</b>	<b>185</b>
Introduction	185
British societal perceptions	185
Taiwanese societal perceptions	192
Media coverage and portrayal of disability sport in Taiwan	197
Media coverage and portrayal of disability sport in Britain	201
Concluding remarks	205
<b>Chapter Eight – Negotiating Identities through Disability Sport: From Negative Label to Positive Self-identification</b>	<b>208</b>
Introduction	208
Impairment and disability in the construction of self-identity	210
I am impaired and I am disabled	211
I am impaired but I am NOT disabled	213
Re-definition of normality	215
Multiple identities	216
‘Becoming’ elite athletes	217
Coming out through elite sport	222
Concluding remarks	229
<b>Chapter Nine – Conclusion</b>	<b>231</b>
Introduction	231
Problems and oppressions	232
Fighting back: transforming body identities	236
Acknowledging impairment: toward a renewed social model of disability	239

Reflections on disability sport and emancipatory research	242
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>244</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>253</b>

## **List of Tables**

Table 1	The development of the summer Paralympic Games, 1952-2004	14
Table 2	Great Britain and Taiwan teams and medals in the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games	151
Table 3	The development of rewards for Olympic medallists in Taiwan	177
Table 4	The development of rewards for Paralympic medallists in Taiwan	177

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1	School attendance and type of school attended of British participants	79
Figure 2	School attendance and type of school attended of Taiwanese participants	80

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1	Interview agenda	244
Appendix 2	Demographic information of British research participants	245
Appendix 3	Demographic information of Taiwanese research participants	246
Appendix 4	Information and examples relevant to PE and disabled students in National Curriculum Inclusion Statement	247
Appendix 5	British television coverage of the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games	250
Appendix 6	British television coverage of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games	251

## **List of Acronyms**

BWLA	British Weight Lifters' Association
CISS	International Committee of Sports for the Deaf
CP-ISRA	Cerebral Palsy International Sport and Recreation Association
CTPC	Chinese Taipei Paralympic Committee
CTSAD	Chinese Taipei Sports Association of the Deaf
CTSFD	Chinese Taipei Sports Federation for the Disabled
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DWP	Department of Work and Pension (UK)
FESPIC	Far East and South Pacific Games
IBSA	International Blind Sports Association
ICC	International Co-ordinating Committee of Sports for the Disabled in the World
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IPC	International Paralympic Committee
ISMWSF	International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sport Federation
ISOD	International Sports Organisation for the Disabled
LEA	Local education authorities
NCPFS	National Council of Physical Fitness and Sport
NDSO	National disability sports organisations
NTD	New Taiwan Dollar
ROC	Republic of China
SEN	Special educational needs
UPIAS	Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation
WCPP	World Class Performance Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### Introduction

The 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games have been praised as the best Games ever. At the time, the former President<sup>1</sup> of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), Robert Steadward, recognised their special significance in enhancing the profile of athletes with disabilities more than at any time in the short but rich history of elite disability sport (*The Paralympian* online, 2000). This momentous event illustrated the quality and excitement of elite disability sport symbolised by the athleticism, perseverance and skills of the world's Paralympians (Craft, 2001). Indeed, in recent years the Paralympic movement has increasingly brought the involvement and achievements of people with disabilities in competitive sport to the world's attention. Hahn (1984:1) indicates that "the sociological study of sports – and almost all other aspects of human life – is being affected both by a growing awareness of prior neglect of the concerns of disabled persons and by the emergence of an expanding disability rights movement". However, hitherto, very few researchers have recognised the relationship between sport and the developing social and political movement of people with disabilities (Hahn, 1984; Hargreaves, 2000; Brittain, 2002). While today there are a significant number of studies examining the exploitation and marginalisation in sport of disadvantaged groups such as women (Castelnuovo and Guthrie, 1998; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994, 2000) and black people and ethnic minority groups (Carrington and McDonald, 2001; Jarvie, 1991) as a result of the blossoming of feminist and anti-racist movements, there is no equivalent attention paid to the exploitation and marginalisation of disabled people in sport. However, the disability movement includes a wide agenda for social change which may have critical implications for the analysis of the sporting experiences of disabled people as well as the examination of dominant values associated with disability and sport that are embedded in societies.

---

<sup>1</sup> Presidency from 1989 to 2001.

The purpose of this PhD research is to explore in depth the experiences of elite sportsmen and sportswomen with disabilities in Great Britain<sup>2</sup> and Taiwan, specifically those who have represented their respective countries at the Paralympic Games or Athletics and Powerlifting World Championships. It focuses on identity politics (Hargreaves, 2000; Humphrey, 1999; Shakespeare, 1996a) - the way identities are produced, negotiated, and performed in the specific context of elite disability sport. The intention is to find out more about what is at present a relatively under-researched area within the fields of both sport sociology and disability studies. In line with the current trend for emancipatory politics in the field of disability studies (Barnes, 1998; Finkelstein, 1998), this research project is set mainly within the social model of disability theory, highlighting the ways that societal perceptions of disability within Great Britain and Taiwan shape the identity of individuals with disabilities. Since most of the current studies are from the West, this research attempts to discover if athletes with disabilities in Taiwan share similar experiences with those in the West, and more specifically, those in Great Britain. It examines the ways in which the two different cultures shape societal attitudes toward disability and the effects they have on the sporting lives of athletes with disabilities. Particular attention is given to differences between cultures.

Another focus of this research is gender. There is growing attention paid to differences between men and women with disabilities in disability research, mainly due to the criticisms and efforts made by disabled feminists (Morris, 1991, 1996a). The recognition that disablism is experienced differentially has led to calls for the interaction between different dimensions of social oppressions to be fully acknowledged and understood (Thomas, 2002). Limited researchers to date have focused specifically on the influence of gender in disability sport. Furthermore, because a long-standing male bias exists in most studies, it is not uncommon that the

---

<sup>2</sup> All the research participants are from England and Wales, so therefore Great Britain is generally used as the descriptor for the Western context. However, in some situations the United Kingdom (UK) is referred to, for example, when other authors use UK in their publications, and in relation to the work of specific sport organisations or specific legislation/documentation.



research findings of male athletes are generalized to females without questioning whether differences between the genders exist or not. A feminist perspective is used in this research to explore and understand the experiences of both sportsmen and sportswomen with disabilities, and thus, disability is regarded as the major source of oppression that interacts with gender.

### **The current field**

Research about individuals with disabilities and sport has evolved along with the development of disability sport, but it has not played a major role in its evolution. According to Reid and Prupas' (1998) analysis of research into disability sport published between 1986 and 1996, besides 232 reviews of existing literature, only 204 publications (about 20 per year) are based on original data. Most of the publications come from North America, especially the United States, and there are a negligible number from outside the West – for example, over half of the 440 authors are from the United States (281), followed with Canada (54), and the United Kingdom (18). The rest are lower than 15 in terms of frequency. The results show that there is a dearth of research in this field and insufficient academic contributions, most particularly from countries outside the West, to substantially aid a more global understanding of disability sport. Since one of the focuses of *this* research is a comparison between Western and Eastern cultural contexts – Great Britain and Taiwan - it is important that the findings and experiences detailed in research from the West are not automatically used to generalize about disability sport across the world, but rather, because of the diversity of the disabled population, interpreted cautiously. Not only are there contextual differences between the West and the East, but also within different countries in both the West and the East.

Very little research has focused on the relationship between gender and disability, let alone in the sport context. Gender seems to be a marginal subject in disability studies, and thus the experiences of men with disabilities have often been regarded as representative of the experiences of disabled people in general. It is also the case that mainstream feminist research has often ignored the experiences of women with

disabilities (Henderson and Bedini, 1995; Morris, 1993). Further, even disability feminists have been neglectful of exploring sport experiences, and, with a few exceptions (Hargreaves, 2000; DePauw, 1997, 1999), sport feminists have failed to address the concerns of the disabled.

At the same time as calling for sociological research about the way in which gender structures disability sport participation, Kolkka and Williams (1997) offer a critique of the existing research. The first and most common approach is to include gender as a variable in empirical research (Brasile, Kleiber and Hamisch, 1991; Stewart, Robinson and McCarthy, 1991; Sherrill and Rainbolt, 1986). But although sex differences are highlighted, Kolkka and Williams point out that the findings are often generalized to all women and they seem to be convincingly simply because of “an unstated claim to a causal relation” (p.11). Because in general women do not participate in sport as much as men, they are characterised as being disadvantaged simply by virtue of being women. In other words, gender has not been examined directly in relation, for example, to what it means to be men or women with disabilities and how gender structures sport participation. The second approach is to focus solely on women with disabilities and their participation in sport or physical activities to shed light on how disability sport for women may be influenced by gender (Blinde and McCallister, 1999; Guthrie and Gastelnuovo, 2001; Henderson and Bedini, 1995; Henderson, Bedini, Hecht and Schuler, 1995; Mastro, Hall and Canabal, 1988). However, Morris (1994:208) claims that such research, which is commonly presented as if disabled women are experiencing a “double disadvantage”, is oversimplified. It is, she argues, “partly because such an approach is bound to obscure the relationship between gender and disability in men’s experiences, but also because this way of describing disabled women turns them into passive victims of insurmountable oppression”. With this in mind, this research explores the interaction of gender and disability as a way of analysing the experiences of elite sportsmen and sportswomen with disabilities. In order to understand the experiences of inequality, emphasis is placed on the hegemony of masculinity in trying to explain the ways that patriarchy limits the personal responses of both men and women with disabilities,

especially the extent to which and the ways in which women's experiences differ from those of men.

### **Medical model discourse and the social model of disability**

In both Western and Eastern societies, the medical professionals are in a strong position to produce and perpetuate discourses regarding the body and mind. The power of medical professionals has played a crucial role in creating societal perceptions of disability that are embedded within a 'medical model' discourse (Brittain, 2002). They define disability solely from a biological perspective, thus, the public generally view the barriers and problems that individuals with disabilities have faced as a result of their physical or mental impairments instead of relating them to wider social contexts. And people in society, including individuals who are able-bodied as well as those with disabilities, are strongly encouraged to "internalise" many of the perceptions of disability embedded in the medical model of disability through various "legitimate" sources they encounter – e.g. Some disabled people are dependent and require medical supervision permanently in their lives. And the medical model of disability is mirrored in medical attempts to "fix" the bodily deviation, to restore normality as well as to prevent the births of defective foetuses (Thomas, 1999). As Swain, French and Cameron (2003:23) indicate, "Physical impairment represents a threat to the established notions of discipline and normality". Disability is thus perceived as undesirable, something permanently "wrong" which needs to be cured, hidden or overcome, so that cultural reactions to impaired bodies range from fear and disgust to pity. Moreover, the powerful and legitimised medical discourse with its dominant assumption that disabled people are weak, dependent and incapable so as to need extra or "special" care, support and help is then adopted by other institutions within society. In turn, it is then infused into policy or used to exert power over those with disabilities, for example, to legitimise the separate provision of disabled vis-à-vis able-bodied services in areas such as education, employment, housing, public transport and sport. The medicalisation of disability can lead to individuals with disabilities being put in a situation which is not necessarily in their best interests but is nevertheless taken for granted by most members of society which

makes it nearly impossible for disabled people to put forward an alternative discourse (Brittain, 2002). As Hargreaves (2000:177) points out, “Disabled people’s bodies and lives and experiences are thus medicalized and controlled by disability ‘professionals’”.

According to Barnes (1998), the medical model of disability is underpinned by the definition of disability put forward by the World Health Organization (WHO). Oliver (1990) argues that WHO takes a medical classification of disability regarding a disabled state as a form of disease or abnormality. He further refers to the ‘personal tragedy’ theory of disability which sees disability as entirely the problem of the individuals with disabilities. Barnes (1998:76) argues that the “personal tragedy theory of disability has, in turn, achieved ideological dominance or hegemony in that it has become translated into common-sense and everyday assumptions and beliefs”. Morris (1991) and Oliver (1993) both indicate the ways in which such taken-for-granted notions identify individual impairment as a problem residing within individuals. In this way, disability is conceived of fundamentally as a biological problem from the dominant individualist or essentialist perspective, totally independent of the wider social context. Swain, French and Cameron (2003:23) argue that, “The medical model reflects a framework of thinking about disability that has been and continues to be imposed by non-disabled people upon disabled people”.

However, many disability activists and theorists in recent years have argued against the dominance of the medical and rehabilitation paradigms that seek to ‘cure’ transform and normalize the disabled body and have challenged them with the ‘social model’ of disability arguing that it is social attitudes and environmental barriers instead of biological impairments that disable. Shakespeare and Watson (1997) claim that the root of the social model of disability was located in Britain and originated in the form of “Fundamental Principles” formulated by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (The UPIAS, 1976). UPIAS rejected the self-righteous representation of disabled people by “experts” and re-defined disability in relation to political activity, disability research and theoretical debate, as follows:

In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society. To understand this it is necessary to grasp the distinction between the physical impairment and the social situation, called “disability”, of people with such impairment. Thus we define impairment as lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body; and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities. Physical disability is therefore a particular form of social oppression.

(cited in Oliver, 1996:22)

The redefinition of disability makes a clear distinction between the concepts of impairment and disability. Impairment concerns the biological and disability is about the social – the impact of the wider social context on those impairments which result in disability and further limit the opportunities and experiences of individuals with disabilities (Hargreaves, 2000). Oliver (1996) points out further distinctions between the medical and social models of disability. From the medical perspective, disability is a problem specific to individuals and the barriers and problems they face are due to physical limitations or mental losses, which are independent of the wider social context. On the contrary, the social model of disability views the problems of disability squarely within society which fails to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities, or to address the environmental, cultural, ideological and political barriers that disable and restrict individuals with disabilities. Thomas (1999:60) further extends the debate by taking psycho-emotional well-being into account, arguing that, “Disability is a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being”. As Swain, French and Cameron (2003:23) indicate, “Disability ceases to be something that a person *has*, and becomes instead something that is done to the person”. With the social explanation, people with disabilities have turned attention to “the real problem of disability: the barriers they face; the patronising attitudes they have to deal with; the low expectations that are invested in them; and the limited options available to them”

(Swain, French and Cameron, 2003:24). Accordingly, Imrie (1997) suggests that the key solution to changing the situation of individuals with disabilities is to change the societal perceptions of disability and attitudes towards them.

### **What about ‘the body’? The need for a social model of impairment**

With the creation of a social model of disability, a strong argument about social structures and processes has developed and has proved an invaluable tool for the disability movement. However, the social model has been criticised for excluding “the body”, underplaying the importance of impairment in the lives of disabled people (Shakespeare and Watson, 1997), and failing to provide an understanding of disability which acknowledges impairment and experience (Abberley, 1987; Morris, 1991; Crow, 1996; Hughes and Paterson, 1997; Thomas, 1999; Hughes, 2000). Crow (1996) claims that the situation is a reaction to non-disabled people’s assumption about the supposed valueless lives of disabled people which in turn has led disabled people to actively downplay experiences of impairment for fear of being seen to prove them right. But Priestley (1998:85) defends the social model by citing the Northern Officer Group Report of 1996 which states:

The social model does not deny the existence of impairments and physiological differences..., rather, it addresses them without attaching value judgements such as ‘normality’ and shifts emphasis towards those aspects of our world that can be changed.

Nonetheless, some disabled people, especially disabled feminists, such as Morris (1991:10), have criticised the problematic ignorance of the significance of impairment in the social model as follows:

There is a tendency within the social model of disability to deny the experience of our own bodies, insisting that our physical differences and restrictions are entirely socially created. While environmental barriers and social attitudes are a crucial part of our experience of disability – and do indeed disable us – to suggest that this is all there is to it is to deny the personal experience of physical or intellectual restrictions, of illness, of the fear of dying. A feminist perspective can redress this, and in doing so give a voice to the experience of both disabled men and disabled women.

Furthermore, Birkenbach (1990), French (1994) and Imrie (1997) argue that the social model of disability considers bodily impairment in similar ways to the medical

model. As Hughes and Paterson (1997:329) point out, “Both treat it as a pre-social, inert, physical object, as discrete, palpable and separate from the self”. They further argue that despite its critique of the medical model, the social model of disability “actually concedes the body to medicine and understands impairment in terms of medical discourse” (p.326). Birkenbach (1990) claims that the social model must recognise that there is a physical state that prevents people with disabilities being afforded equal opportunities and treatment in that their very physical differences mean that society has to react to them and their various needs in a different way from the way it reacts to the same needs of the rest of society. Although Imrie (1997:270) admits difficulty in trying to “locate disablement in a relationship between a medical and functional problem and the social responses to it, as the concept of disability requires”, Hughes and Paterson (1997:330) strongly argue for a necessary repositioning of the sharp distinction between disability and impairment which they claim “de-medicalises disability, but simultaneously leaves the impaired body in the exclusive jurisdiction of medical hermeneutics”. And Meekosha (1998:175) also argues that:

Focusing only on the disabling affects of a prejudiced and discriminatory society with a political project geared to changing institutions, beliefs and practices leaves the impaired body as untouched, unchallenged: a taken-for-granted fixed corporeality. Changing body identities remain unexplored as do notions of ‘passing’.

Consequently, there is an increasing call for developing a social theory of impairment which puts an end to disregarding the reality of the impaired body and reclaims control of discussion of the body from the medical professionals, who have pathologised and individualised impairment, in order to ensure that a person’s impairment is an inclusive part of the construction of his or her personal identity (Hughes, 1999; Tregaskis, 2002).

Turner (1996:1) claims that bodies are not “natural”, but socially produced, reproduced and culturally inscribed. In his proposed notion of a “somatic society”, he denotes a society in which there is unprecedented attention paid to the body and within which “major political and personal problems are both problematised in the body and expressed through it”. Foucault’s concept of “technologies of power”

(Foucault, 1980; 1991) is useful in recognition of the place of the body and its consequent influence on both disabled and able-bodied people in sport. He proposes that the body is a machine subject to disciplines that shape it into a docile and normalised form, meanwhile, the body is also the site of biological processes and as such is subject to regulatory controls through self-surveillance. Constant surveillance or the oppressive gaze of others exerts power over people with disabilities within everyday social interactions. Disabled people are therefore prone to develop an awareness of how they are seen through surveillance of another and then police themselves to conform to make themselves acceptable. Reeve (2002) indicates that surveillances of the physical body are powerful forces, a form of disablism, leaving disabled people feeling worthless, unattractive and stressed.

Moreover, Price and Shildrick (1998), drawing on postmodernist and poststructuralist perspectives, argue that it is powerful discourses in medicine and other regulatory domains and practices that exercise power to construct and position some people as “impaired” or “disabled” and others as “normal”. Such social constructionist views show that the impaired body is “terrain where fixities and certainties about bodies can be strongly questioned” (Thomas, 2002:71). While the heated debate between essentialist and constructionist paradigms of impaired bodies goes on, I favour the approach of Williams and Bendelow (1998:8) who explore “their dialectical relationship to each other and the emergent properties contained therein”. Williams and Bendelow recognise that the body is a bio-social material entity which should be central to its theorisation and propose an embodied sociology that theorises *from* bodies as *lived* entities because “Social institutions and discursive practices cannot be understood apart from the real lived experiences and actions of embodied human beings across time and space” (p.209). In line with their approach to theorise bodies as bio-socially produced and culturally constructed entities at the same time, Thomas (2002:76) argues for the abandonment of both biological reductionism as well as cultural reductionism and supports the view of impairment as “real differences from the ‘usual’ body whilst simultaneously understood to be invested with meanings or representations that construct these differences in the



socio-medical language of ‘impairment’, ‘disfigurement’, and so forth”. People with disabilities actually experience impairment as well as disability as “part of a complex interpenetration of oppression and affliction” (Hughes and Paterson, 1997:335). It is thus important to understand, as Thomas (2002:76) further suggests, “the way in which the biological reality of bodies is shaped by, and impacts back upon, social and environmental processes and practices: that is, on the ways in which bodies are the effects of bio-social interaction”. In sum, as Hughes and Paterson (1997) indicate, if disabled people are to challenge effectively the political and economic structures that oppress and exclude them, they need to embrace body politics and accept the significance of the individual within the wider social-political environment.

### **Body identity and sport**

The social model of disability provides an alternative understanding of the experience and reality of disability which has given people with disabilities the basis for identity politics. When disabled activists in the West engage in the struggle for equal rights and recognition for disabled people as an oppressed group, they are playing a crucial role in facilitating a collective identity and reflecting the importance of the politicisation of disability and the striving by disabled people for autonomy of their own lives and organisations (Hargreaves, 2000). Nevertheless, acknowledgment of the body is a crucial step towards the development of identity politics. Such an approach requires a deconstruction of existing medicalised discourse and negative societal perceptions of the impaired body and a struggle to re-iterate it in a more positive way (Hughes and Paterson, 1997; Abberley, 1997).

Claiming identities for ourselves and attributing particular identities to others is essentially a matter of power. As Jenkins (1996:54) argues, “Social identities exist and are acquired and allocated within power relations. Identities are something over which struggles take place and with which stratagems are advanced”. Individuals with disabilities must continually negotiate the relationship between body, socially-constructed disability and identity. Sport is one of the arenas where the social struggle for control of the physical body occurs and processes of personal identity-

testing and formation are conducted and where multiple notions of identity are embodied. Disability sport is thus clearly an excellent context to investigate the relationship between identity and individuals with disabilities. However, as a rapidly-growing cultural phenomenon in the last decade, disability sport has received very little attention by disabled activists despite intense debates about disability. Thomas (2003:108) indicates that it is perhaps because disability sport “provides such an overt and often visual illustration of the significance of impairment”. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the expansion of the bio-social model as an embodied, rather than a disembodied, notion of disability through the in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of elite athletes with disabilities in sport from taking up their sport to becoming elite athletes and achieving their optimal performance in the international sporting arena. The development of disability sport and the Paralympic movement in the following section gives a backdrop of the sport context within which people with disabilities have been actively negotiating the meaning of their bodies.

### **Disability sport and the Paralympic movement**

The origin of disability sport has long been attributed to the pioneering work of Sir Ludwig Guttmann. He “recognised the physiological and psychological values of sport in the management of paraplegic hospital inpatients” and introduced sport as a significant part of the rehabilitation of World War II veterans with spinal cord injuries at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury, England in 1944 (McCann, 1996:279). Although his initial purpose was to provide therapeutic recreational activities, he soon recognised the wider potential of competitive sport. A milestone event took place on 28 July, 1948, when a single day’s informal competition in wheelchair archery took place between 16 spinal cord injured patients (14 men, 2 women) at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, which was the first Stoke Mandeville Games. Coinciding with the 1948 Olympic Games being held in London, this sport event held in the Stoke Mandeville Hospital was regarded as an effort to link disability sport (the Paralympics) with the Olympics (Davis, 1996). In 1952 a team of disabled war veterans from Holland joined in the Games creating the first international games

for the disabled. This small-scale bi-national competition grew to become a multi-national event, the International Stoke Mandeville Games (later renamed as the World Wheelchair Games, held annually except in the years when the Summer Paralympic Games are held). In 1956 Guttman and his colleagues were awarded the Fearnley Cup, an Olympic Award for outstanding achievement in the service of the Olympic ideal, by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) during the Melbourne Olympic Games in Australia. The award was made in recognition of “the social and human value derived from the wheelchair sports movement” (DePauw and Gavron, 1995:42) and for work in extending the spirit of Olympism to people with disabilities. After this symbolic connection in 1956 between mainstream and disability sport, a more tangible link with the Olympic movement was established when what sport historians have retrospectively labelled “the first Summer Paralympic Games” were organised and held in Rome, Italy, in 1960 (following the Olympic Games of that year), though they were actually called the International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Games at the time (Brittain, 2000). Since 1960, with only two exceptions (in 1968 and 1980)<sup>3</sup>, the country hosting the Summer Olympic Games has also organised a Summer Paralympic Games. The Paralympic Games in Athens in 2004 was the 12<sup>th</sup> Paralympiad. According to Sherrill (1993:53), the term Paralympic was previously used only by the spinal cord injured population and “represented the compounding of two worlds: paraplegia and Olympics” as the early events were for wheelchair users only. Since the 1980s, when with the Paralympic Games included athletes with a variety of disabilities and increased their link with the Olympic movement, the title Paralympics signified its “para-llel” status to the Olympics (Davis, 1996). Table 1 summarises the development and expansion of the Paralympic Games over the past 40 years.

---

<sup>3</sup> In 1968, when medical authorities advised against the Paralympic Games in Mexico City because of the high altitude and in 1980, when the Soviet Union was not prepared to host Games for disabled people. In 1984, although the Olympics were in Los Angeles and the Paralympics were to have been in Illinois and New York, the principle of hosting by the same country was honoured and it was the implementation which failed (Price, 1997).

Table 1 The development of the summer Paralympic Games, 1952-2004

Year	Olympics venue	Paralympics venue	No. of countries	No. of athletes	Disability groups
1960	Rome, Italy	Rome, Italy	23	400	SCI
1964	Tokyo, Japan	Tokyo, Japan	22	390	SCI
1968	Mexico City, Mexico	Tel Aviv, Israel	29	750	SCI
1972	Munich, Germany	Heidelberg, Germany	44	1000	SCI
1976	Montreal, Canada	Toronto, Canada	42	1600	SCI, VI, LA
1980	Moscow, USSR	Arnhem, Netherlands	42	2500	SCI, VI, AMP, CP
1984	Los Angeles, USA	New York, USA Aylesbury, GB	41 45	1700 2300	SCI, VI, AMP, CP
1988	Seoul, Korea	Seoul, Korea	61	3053	SCI, VI, AMP, CP, LA
1992	Barcelona, Spain	Barcelona, Spain	82	3020	SCI, VI, AMP, CP, LA
1996	Atlanta, USA	Atlanta, USA	103	3195	SCI, VI, AMP, CP, LA, MH
2000	Sydney, Australia	Sydney, Australia	123	3843	SCI, VI, AMP, CP, LA, MH
2004	Athens, Greece	Athens, Greece	136	3969	SCI, VI, AMP, CP, LA

Key:

SCI spinal cord injury

VI visually impaired and blind

AMP amputees

CP cerebral palsy

LA les Autres (the others)

MH mentally handicap

Although modern-day disability sport was initially underpinned by the medical model of disability, the Paralympic movement in recent years has “embodied a shift away from the medical model of disability toward a social model of disability” as the Paralympic Games has become more in line with Olympic sport with increasing competitiveness and a focus on results and records (Hargreaves, 2000:178). Moreover, such philosophical change is also mirrored in the classification system and

organisational development. The classification system is a crucial feature of competitive disability sport as it is designed to enable fair competition by grouping athletes into categories. A disability-specific classification system was initially used and athletes were classified in groups according to their impairments. For example, in the Seoul Paralympic Games in 1988, there were seven classes for wheelchair users, eight classes for athletes with cerebral palsy, nine classes for athletes with amputations, nine classes for les autres athletes, and three classes for visually impaired athletes. Since the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games, a sport-specific classification system has been implemented in which athletes are grouped according to their functional ability in the sport instead of their impairment. The new system not only decreases the number of classes and improves the standard of competition (Thomas, 2003) but also signifies the shift of the focus from the clinical impairments of athletes to their sport abilities.

According to Labanowich (1987), despite Guttmann's original belief that only people with spinal cord injury required sport as part of their rehabilitation and the International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sport Federation (ISMWSF) only allowing athletes with "spinal paralysis" to compete, he later recognised the need to serve other disability groups in a similar way but was not convinced that they should be included in the same programmes. In favour of "an unequivocal separation of participants in sport on the basis of these medically diagnosed disabilities", Guttmann's answer to this dilemma was to support the establishment of separate sports organisations catering for discrete populations of individuals defined by their impairment: athletes with amputations, blindness or visual impairment, and cerebral palsy (Labanowich, 1987:38), as follows:

- International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sports Federation (ISMWSF), formed 1945 to represent spinally paralysed athletes
- International Sports Organisation for the Disabled (ISOD), formed in 1964 to represent amputees and "les autres" (athletes with disabilities in other categories)
- Cerebral Palsy International Sport and Recreation Association (CP-ISRA),

formed in 1978 to represent athletes with cerebral palsy

- International Blind Sports Association (IBSA),

formed in 1981 to represent athletes with visual impairments

Each organization was responsible for representing its disability sport groups in matters related to sport rules, medical operations, classification of athletes, control and overall governance of the athletes<sup>4</sup>. In response to the need for co-ordinating these four international disability sports organisations for the Paralympic Games, the International Co-ordinating Committee of Sports for the Disabled in the World (ICC) was created in 1982 which was the precursor of the International Paralympic Committee, established in 1989. The IPC became the sole international organization responsible for coordinating sport for athletes with disabilities and for organising all World Championships and the Paralympic Games. According to Price (1997), the Paralympic movement's traditional reliance on disability-specific umbrella bodies rather than governing bodies of sports is a key factor politically and philosophically. These international disability sport organisations including the ICC have made an invaluable contribution to leading the Paralympics through their formative years. However, currently there is a growing recognition of the need "for this focus on disability to be subordinated to a sport-specific orientation akin to that already dominant in the 'non-disabled' sports world" (Price, 1997). Since 1989, all the athletes in the Paralympic movement, whether disability-specific or sport-specific, have been brought together under the umbrella of the IPC which endeavours to accomplish what the IOC achieves for the Olympics, in the Paralympic context. Although the IPC is not structured in quite the same way as the IOC, its aims and ambitions are virtually identical. Brittain (2002:31) indicates that the only way the IPC will "gain and maintain any semblance of power and respect within the world of

---

<sup>4</sup> Comité International Sports des Sourds (CISS), which was formed in 1924 representing deaf athletes, and the International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability (INAS-FID), which was formed in 1986, joined the ICC in 1986, although CISS still maintained its own organization and games. After the establishment of the IPC in 1989, the six existing organisations, with the exception of CISS, are all members of the IPC. The amalgamation of ISMWSF and ISOD was decided in 2003 on the occasion of the World Wheelchair Games. The new organization, ISMWSF-ISOD, commenced in January 2004 and continues to service the international needs of wheelchair, amputee and les autres athletes within a combined operation (IPC website).

professional sport is to put on high quality sports competitions organised and run in a professional manner”. The IPC has enjoyed close cooperation with the IOC to work in this direction. One significant move was that since the 1988 Seoul Paralympic Games, the Paralympic Games have taken place in the same city and at the same sporting venues and facilities as the Olympics and have been organised by the same organising committee that organised the Olympic Games (IPC website). The links between the IPC and IOC has been further formalized and reinforced when an agreement of cooperation was signed by the two organisations during the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games, which signifies a key development in the IOC’s support for disability sport and a sharing of the IOC’s experiences, knowledge and services with the IPC.

Unequivocally, the focused quest for sport excellence has been the most remarkable development within the Paralympic movement in recent years. In 1944 sport for people with disabilities was considered exclusively for its therapeutic and recreational values, whereas nowadays individuals with disabilities may choose to participate in a wide range of sports and at a level of participation that suits their personal objectives and expectations. While those who are involved in recreational sport do so are for their personal enjoyment, the objectives for highly motivated athletes are to fulfil their intensely personal desires to excel and reach their personal limits in competitive sport which may include local, regional, national and international competitions. Hence, at competitive level, sport is practised for reasons beyond those of rehabilitation, prescribed exercise and recreation and athletes are achieving high-performance standards with associated personal, physical, intellectual and emotional qualities. Sporting excellence in the present day has similar meanings for athletes with disabilities as for those without disabilities.

### **The challenge of ‘different’ bodies in sport**

Although the ethos of disability sport evolved, in line with the disability movement, from a medical model to a social model, the active participation of people with disabilities in competitive sport, where physicality is admired, appears to symbolise a

contradiction in popular consciousness (DePauw, 1997). As Blinde and McCallister (1999:309) indicate:

Sport has traditionally been constructed to accentuate virtues such as strength, independence, aggression, and physical competency. This portrayal of sport has presented a challenge for individuals with disabilities as it is perceived to be in opposition to their capabilities, where assumptions of weakness, passivity, dependency, and physical inability exist.

Dominant naturalistic and essentialist perspectives of bodies - for example, able bodies vs. disabled bodies - have provided grounds for social inequalities and therefore marginal statuses for disabled people in sport. People with disabilities who desired access into the sporting arena were initially denied or allowed limited access only partly because of the “nature” of their bodies. Individuals with disabilities in particular have been excluded or restrained from participating in sport due to their “inability” to meet the socially-constructed ideals of physicality, masculinity and sexuality. These ideals are identified by DePauw (1997) as three critical aspects that represent certain cultural norms embodied by traditional images of Western, white, able-bodied, heterosexual males whose perceived “natural” attributes are strength, aggression, independence, and physical prowess. These attributes then serve as the criteria to exclude “other” bodies that deviate from this norm. Drawing from critiques of the idealization of the “normal” sporting body (Hargreaves, 2000), the disabled body offers the most poignant critique.

But more and more men and women with disabilities reject the dominant medicalized features and stigmatised meanings assigned to disability by accepting what they are, taking pride in their bodies and presenting their *ability* in sport arenas. In recent years we have witnessed increases in the numbers and recognition of athletes with disabilities participating in disability sport, which, according to DePauw (1997: 424), signifies a shift from the “invisibility of disability in sport” to “visibility in sport as disabled athletes”.

However, although in recent years disabled people have experienced increasingly more inclusion and acceptance in sport and we celebrate their visible presence in the



sporting world despite their “different” bodies, they remain under-represented in sport, particularly at elite level. Under-representation results, at least in part, from hegemonic ideologies which construct the sporting experiences, struggles, and achievements of disabled athletes as “different” from those of non-disabled athletes. It is thus crucial to explore the dialectical relationships that exist between social structures and embodied subjects (DePauw, 1997) and in this research an attempt to do so occurs through investigating the way the identities of elite male and female athletes with disabilities are socially constructed within sport and through hegemonic discourses.

The dearth of knowledge about the experiences of elite male and female athletes with disabilities, the dominant medical discourse associated with disability which leads to their oppression and marginalisation in society, the emergence of the social model of disability in Britain as the theoretical basis for understanding the reality of disability and identity politics, the need to include impairment in the social model in order to provide full understanding of disability, and the suitability of fast-evolving disability sport as the context to explore the body experiences and identities of people with disabilities as well as the oppression and problems that they have encountered in the course of sport involvement as outlined above, all provide the rationale for this research project.

### **Research rationale**

This thesis investigates how identities of elite athletes with disabilities in Great Britain and Taiwan are constructed, negotiated and performed in and through sport. On the one hand, it is an account of how elite male and female athletes with disabilities in both countries see themselves as individuals as well as athletes with disabilities and it is also an interpretation of how they experience their bodies and construct their identities in relation to their involvement in elite disability sport. On the other hand, it is a critical analysis, within a framework of the social model of disability and using a feminist perspective, of dominant ideologies and discourses associated with disability, gender, and sport in British and Taiwanese societies. The

analysis occurs through the experiences of the disabled participants who articulate the struggle against ableism as the main mechanism of power and oppression that interacts with gender differences and the operation of patriarchal relations in the sport context, as well as the way ableism and sexism shape and construct the identities of elite sportsmen and sportswomen with disabilities.

This research is a space for the voices and perspectives of elite athletes with disabilities to be heard, which in turn, turns them into the “experts” in the field of disability studies. In-depth interviews with British and Taiwanese participants provide rich and original material covering various essential topics including their experiences of their bodies, their identities, social perceptions of disability and disability sport, and athletes’ oppressions, struggles and problems in elite sport. This comparative research of the experiences of elite athletes with disabilities in Britain and Taiwan will hopefully make a contribution to the understanding of disability sport and fill a gap in the paucity of original research in particular outside the West. Moreover, my research is also a political project that transforms stereotyped meanings attached to disability and its intersections with gender. Furthermore, documenting the lived experiences of elite athletes with disabilities can create a site of resistance to ableism and male hegemony. I hope that exploring the embodied experiences of elite male and female athletes with disabilities will lead to a potential for contesting hegemonic ideologies about disability, gender and sport as well as the very meanings of body identities.

### **Overview of the thesis**

The content of this thesis is organised into nine chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 constitutes an in-depth explanation of the methodological underpinning of the research. The first section focuses on how, as a non-disabled researcher, I position myself and come to adopt the critical emancipatory approach in investigating disability issues in sport and also discusses the character of cross-cultural comparative research. The second section outlines the data collection methods and processes, justifying the adoption of interviews with a life-history

approach as the main data source, supplemented by documentary research, followed by the analysis of the data.

The following six chapters integrate personal stories of the research participants with the theoretical analysis aiming to present a comprehensive account of the lived experiences of elite athletes with disabilities in relation to their bodies, sport, and society. In line with the social model approach, Chapter 3 explores the life circumstances of disabled people in Britain and Taiwan and how financial difficulties affect the sport participation of elite disabled athletes. The economic dependence of the participants often places their parents in a crucial role in their continuation of sport as a career, but very different pictures emerge in the British and Taiwanese contexts respectively, as discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Chapter 4 highlights schooling institutions as one vital site where dominant medicalised ideologies and perceptions of disability, especially with regard to physical education and sport for disabled students, are learned and internalised by people with and without disabilities. It draws upon the schooling experiences, in mainstream and special schools, of the research participants, in particular those relating to physical education and discusses the consequent influences on their self-identities. A discussion follows with the focus on the role of teachers in the process of shaping disabled students' socialisation into physical education and into sport participation outside school and later in life.

Chapter 5 embodies an analysis of the role of culture in creating and maintaining the exclusion of disabled people and explores cultural reactions towards impairment in Britain and Taiwan. It is followed by a discussion of the bodily perfection or the "able-bodied" ideal that is central to the cultural oppression of people with impairment of both sexes. Cultural oppression is manifest through surveillance techniques constantly experienced by research participants in daily life and affecting their self-perceptions of body image. The second section of this chapter focuses on the way male and female disabled athletes in this research actively engage in their

gendered body projects in elite sport in order to resist dominant stereotypes associated with disability and gender. It is followed by more discussion about gender issues including gendered expectations towards work, family and sport careers, as well as conflicts between male and female athletes.

Chapter 6 discusses the way in which the perceptions, attitudes and actions of key personnel in sport governing bodies towards disability sport can have a crucial influence on the success or otherwise of disabled athletes who aspire to take part in higher levels of competitive sport, or already compete at elite level. This chapter begins with a synopsis of the organization structures of disability sport in Great Britain and Taiwan and an analysis of the perceived problems with regard to the perceptions and treatment of administrators and governing sport organisations as well as difficulties faced by research participants in relation to their training. Another focus of this chapter is financial issues with a discussion of the perceived benefits and problems of supporting systems, i.e. the World Class Performance Funding in Britain and the reward system in Taiwan, as well as the power relations and discriminatory practices manifest in the way the systems work. It is concluded with the political implications of all the above relevant issues.

Chapter 7 investigates public perceptions and media coverage of disability sport in British and Taiwanese societies. The first section focuses on dominant/public views with regard to sport for people with disabilities as perceived and experienced by the research participants themselves. The media have the power to create and change public attitudes by providing information about events selectively and constructing reality from a preferred perspective (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001) and therefore, the second section of Chapter 7 includes an analysis of the media treatment of disability sport in Britain and Taiwan.

Chapter 8 presents issues that arose from the disabled athletes' accounts of their self-identity. It begins with an examination of the research participants' views of notions of identity that are not of their own making, but result from an imposed sense of

difference vis-a-vis normality. It is followed by a discussion of the participants' construction of new selves as elite athletes, highlighting the way disability sport can be a potential context for them to positively identify themselves and take pride in a disabled identity and further engage in disability identity politics through the development of alternative discourses.

I conclude in Chapter 9 by linking together the main points that emerged from each chapter in order to provide an overall picture of the oppression and experiences of elite athletes with disabilities in Britain and Taiwan, as well as reflecting on the contribution of the emancipatory approach applied to this particular piece of research.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to provide a complete account of the research process focusing on my personal reflections on the three-year PhD project. The first section starts with an introduction about how I developed my interest in disability issues in sport and how I position myself in this research. It is followed by an overview of the three research paradigms within disability research, i.e. positivist, interpretative and critical research paradigms, with emphasis on their relevance to the emancipatory research that is currently favoured by the disability community. It then provides an account of how I, as a non-disabled researcher, can adopt an emancipatory approach while conducting research about the experiences of elite athletes with disabilities in Great Britain and Taiwan. Next comes an explanation concerning my decision to conduct cross-cultural comparative research and the significance of such an approach. The second section of this chapter explores the data collection methods and processes focusing on less-structured in-depth interviews<sup>5</sup> with a life-history approach as the major source of data about the lived experiences of elite athletes with disabilities, supplemented by documentary research and critical analysis of the discriminatory treatment of elite athletes with disabilities.

#### **Evolution of the research question and my position**

My growing interest in disability sport started in 2000 after I had finished my masters degree. I was working as an executive assistant to the Vice Chairman of the National Council of Physical Fitness and Sport (NCPFS), a ministerial-level government body in charge of formulating national policies for the development and promotion of sports and the improvement of the people's health in Taiwan. I assisted with the work of two departments – namely, Sports-for-All and Sports Facilities. I also worked voluntarily for the Chinese Taipei Sports Federation for the Disabled

---

<sup>5</sup> Less-structured interview is a term used by Wilson (1996) – Please see page 42.

(CTSFD) as my boss was the former Secretary General and his wife is currently the President of CTSFD. I helped with the international affairs and the business of the Asian Wheelchair Sports Federation. I was also involved in organising the 2001 FESPIC (Far East and South Pacific Sports Federation for the Disabled) Table Tennis Tournament and the 2002 IPC World Table Tennis Championships held in Taipei. The above involvement built up my knowledge of disability sport and its organisation. At the very beginning of my involvement I was amazed to see so many disabled athletes in a table-tennis competition for the first time in my life and I was stunned to witness their endeavour, passion and enjoyment in sport competition. Being physically active and cheerful, they actually overturned my previous perceptions about people with disabilities, especially after more contact with them. Meanwhile I started to wonder why the business of disability sport, whether relating to development or elite competition, was allocated by the NCPFS to the Sport for the Disabled Committee under the Department of Public Sports which promotes sport-for-all in the country and why competitive disability sport was not supervised under the Department of Competitive Athletics, as with able-bodied sport. Such organisational arrangements appeared to suggest that sport for people with disabilities was mainly regarded and promoted as recreation downplaying the competitiveness of elite athletes with disabilities. Furthermore, in a 40-second TV-based sport-for-all government promotion, there were only able-bodied animated figures doing various sports. Disabled people were not included. There were also a couple of incidents that came to my attention when elite athletes with disabilities who were struggling with their lives petitioned for assistance from the sport governing bodies in seeking employment to enable their continued participation in elite sport.

The above involvement, contact, experiences, and reflections in the field of disability sport greatly intrigued me and led to the following questions: ‘Why were athletes with disabilities so determined and persistent in elite sport despite living difficult lives?’ ‘How do they see themselves?’ Furthermore, I discovered that there is a poverty of information and academic research about disability sport in Taiwan. So in

2001 when I won a government scholarship to do doctoral research abroad, I elected to focus on this topic.

Elias (1986) points out that the aim of research is to “make known something previously unknown to human beings. It is to advance human knowledge, to make it more certain or better fitting” (cited in Veal, 1997:2). Moreover, *Impaired and Disabled: Building on Ability*, the work of my supervisor, Professor Jennifer Hargreaves (2000, pp.174-214), which provides a comprehensive account of the struggles and successes of disabled women in sport, inspired me to avoid the “gender-blind” research which is dominant in social research and to recognise that gender structures different experiences in sport. Thus, I include gender issues in this sociological inquiry into the way elite sportsmen and sportswomen with disabilities construct their identities and experience oppression and problems in the sport context.

It is clear that this research is underpinned by my personal and political positions with regard to the issues of disablism and sexism in the field of sport. Hertz (1997) indicates that a researcher’s theoretical position, interests, and political perspective will affect the research question, the methodological approach, and the analysis and interpretation of data. I recognise that the positivist approach or medical perspectives have treated individuals with disabilities as objects. In order to acquire a more authentic understanding of disabled athletes’ oppressions, opportunities, aspirations and needs, I value their own subjective lived experiences within the social world by adopting a qualitative approach aiming to present as “true” a picture of their lives as possible. It is also part of my political commitment to the struggle of elite disabled athletes to frame this research within the emancipatory research paradigm in order to provide a space for their voices to be heard and to expose the disabling practices and ideological barriers that exist in the sport context.

### **Research paradigms in disability studies**

While the theoretical models for understanding disability have shifted from the medical model which emphasizes individual impairment to the social model which



focuses on disabling societies over the last 30 years, disability research paradigms have also evolved: namely, positivist, interpretative and emancipatory research paradigms (Ward and Flynn, 1994). These theoretical frameworks contain contrasting epistemological assumptions and rules of research.

Oliver (1992) points out that disability research has long been dominated by positivism in terms of the research undertaken and the assumptions underpinning it. The various assumptions of positivist research are that the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world; that research can be objective and value-free, that the world that can be measured quantitatively and hypotheses can be tested statistically; and that the knowledge and causal explanations obtained are independent of the methods used, the assumptions underpinning them and the beliefs of the researchers involved. In disability research the medical model is aligned to the traditional positivist paradigm with the assumption that disability is a deficit thus reinforcing it as an individual problem and ignoring the social implications. Such research intends to produce a cure or prevention solution (Bricher, 2000). The experience of disability has been profoundly distorted by excluding explanations based on social, structural and institutional factors. In the social relations of traditional research, researchers are the holders of specialized knowledge and skills who have total control over the research project (Oliver, 1992) and people with disabilities have been viewed as passive research objects alienated from the research process. Positivist research has been identified as a reinforcement of the dominant ideology about disability and a contribution to the oppression of disabled people in that it denies their subjective lived experiences in the social world and fails to improve their quality of life (Morris, 1992; Stone and Priestley, 1996)

Secondly, there has been disability research undertaken within the interpretative qualitative paradigm that challenges positivist assumptions. It suggests that all knowledge is socially constructed; that the social world differs from the natural world in that those studied are active participants; that research should try to explain the meaning of events, not just their causes; that knowledge and understanding

obtained from research are influenced by the values of researchers and are not independent of them. Felske (1994) indicates that the interpretive research paradigm has created a “story-telling” view of disability to provide the voices of individuals sharing their life experiences. However, critics have argued that “while the interpretive paradigm has changed the rules, in reality it has not changed the game” (Oliver, 1992: 106). The point is that the social relations of research production remain based on the traditional power differential between researcher and subject (Felske, 1994). Interpretive paradigm research has been carried out by relatively powerful experts on relatively powerless subjects. Moreover, despite seeking meanings from people with disabilities, such research has little influence to alter things for them. Reinharz (1985) describes the interpretive paradigm as “the rape model of research” in that “researchers have benefited by taking the experience of disability, rendering a faithful account of it and then moving on to better things while the disabled subjects remain in exactly the same social situation they did before the research began” (cited in Oliver, 1992:109).

The third paradigm, which has been variously called critical enquiry, praxis, or emancipatory research, has emerged from advocates of critical analysis and the awareness that research can be employed as a form of social action (Felske, 1994). According to Newman (2000:5), critical social science is “a process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves”. In the emancipatory paradigm disability is conceptualized as a social issue of discrimination and oppression. Research is recognised as a legitimization of knowledge and a source of power. It involves disabled people in more active roles in the research process which aims at facilitating their empowerment (Oliver, 1992; Ward and Flynn, 1994). While there is an increasing amount of disability research undertaken within the emancipatory paradigm by people with disabilities in recently years, the appropriateness of non-disabled researchers in disability research has also become an issue to debate (Barton, 1994; Branfield, 1998; Drake, 1997; Duckett, 1998; Shakespeare, 1993; Moore *et al.*, 1998).

## **Non-disabled researchers in disability studies within the emancipatory research paradigm**

Methodological criticism from people with disabilities about disability research being conducted within an oppressive theoretical paradigm and set of social relations is centred on the role of non-disabled researchers. Disabled people have come to see research about themselves by ‘outsiders’ as an exploitation or violation of their knowledge and experience and suspect that little action has been taken based on findings to improve the quality of life and increase equal opportunities for disabled people. Moreover, they argue that it would be inappropriate for non-disabled people to do research about disabled people or to speak on behalf of disabled people as the research conducted by non-disabled researchers may be misrepresentative and may not serve the best interests of disabled participants (Kitchin, 2000; Oliver, 1992; Stone and Priestley, 1996). Such awareness and challenges have paved the way for the development of the emancipatory research paradigm. However, Shakespeare (1993) raises the question about whether there is a role for non-disabled researchers within emancipatory research. Drake (1997) affirms that there is a role for non-disabled people but it is imperative to consider the status of disabled people, looking at how to empower them and not seek positions which will enhance the power of the non-disabled person. Stone and Priestley (1996) outline the following six core principles of the emancipatory research paradigm for non-disabled researchers in disability studies. As a non-disabled researcher, I have adopted the six-point framework approach in my research as it seeks to address many issues with regard to theory, research goals and practice.

1. The adoption of a social model of disablement as the epistemological basis for research production (Stone and Priestley, 1996:706)

Disability research rooted within the medical model or individualistic model has been criticized as having marginalized or exacerbated the oppressive experiences of individuals with disabilities. Researchers adopting a medical model legitimise themselves as knower and expert, discounting the lived experiences and knowledges

of individuals with disabilities implicitly or explicitly to some extent (Abberley, 1987). In response to this criticism, Felske (1994: 192) argues, “If marginalized people are to participate in research as a valued ‘way of knowing’ their experiences, and if they are to use research as a tool in the struggle for social action, the fundamental nature of the epistemology must alter”. Thus, Stone and Priestley (1996: 702) claim that there is a need for a radical epistemological shift to locate research within the framework of the social model, otherwise research which fails to expose the real reasons for the barriers experienced by individuals with disabilities could be deemed oppressive or exploitative, and researchers may be accused of making academic gain while doing little to change the situation of the group under investigation (Brittain, 2002; Kitchin, 2000). My research is set within the social model of disability in order to highlight the ideologies of disability pervasive in various social structures and institutions in British and Taiwanese societies which produce disabling physical and social barriers that impinge on the lives and sporting experiences of elite disabled sportsmen and sportswomen and the construction of their identities.

2. The surrender of claims to objectivity through overt political commitment to the struggles of disabled people for self-emancipation. (Stone and Priestley, 1996:706)

According to Stanley (1990:11), objectivity is “a set of intellectual practices for separating people from knowledge of their own subjectivity”. It is the main criticism of the positivist paradigm research conducted by predominantly white, Western, able-bodied men who claim to have expertise and to have detached objectivity, especially when a social movement itself is the subject of research (Morris, 1992). In order to make the disabled group under investigation participants in the research process instead of the objects of the research, Stone and Priestley (1996:702) argue the need for researchers’ commitment “both to a social analysis of disablement and to the development of the disabled people’s movement ...(as)... the basis of emancipatory disability research”. Stone and Priestley go on to claim the importance of accepting our expertise as researchers who can contribute to processes of change while accepting disabled people’s expertise as knowers (p.715). In this research I have

allowed research participants' views to guide the direction of the interviews as much as possible. My political commitment to the struggle of elite athletes with disabilities for self-emancipation fits with the emancipatory research paradigm.

3. The willingness only to undertake research where it will be of practical benefit to the self-empowerment of disabled people and/or the removal of disabling barriers (Stone and Priestley, 1996:706).

Due to the criticisms of positivist and interpretative research approaches, researchers are likely to be judged according to the practical relevance of their research to the lives of the disabled groups under research. In line with the emancipatory research paradigm which adopts the social model of disability, relevance refers to “the identification and removal of disabling social and physical barriers” (Stone and Priestley, 1996:703). My political position is tied to political action in exposing oppressive social and structural barriers, and challenging ideologies that are related to oppressive practices within society which deeply affect the lives of individuals with disabilities, especially in the context of disability sport. Furthermore, I hope that the research might assist in the removal of such practices and help to foster the self-empowerment of elite athletes. As Stone and Priestley (1996:703) point out, in this approach, “The researcher engages in processes of emancipation, rather than merely monitoring them from sympathetic sidelines”.

4. The evolution of control over research production to ensure full accountability to disabled people and their organisations (Stone and Priestley, 1996:706).

Although there is an increasing involvement of disabled people in disability studies, it does not necessarily challenge or change the power relations of research production. As Zarb (1992) claims, the only true kind of emancipatory research in disability research is when the research participants themselves have total control over the research process. However, Stone and Priestley (1996) argue that the participatory research method, which involves research participants as much as possible, can be of good use if conducted properly. Zarb (1992) views participatory research as a pre-requisite to emancipatory research. Stone and Priestley (1996:712) further point out that, “the decision to adopt the epistemology generated by the

disability movement is viewed as taking the first step in devolving control to the disability movement – control of the macro-research agenda”. Moreover, Oliver and Barnes (1997: 811) suggest that, “The most important has been from disabled people themselves, insisting not only that they have a voice in such research, but also that it contributes to their liberation”. I involved the participants within the research process as much as possible in the hope that they might feel less alienated from the research process. I provided them with sufficient information about the research project for them to be able to make an informed decision about whether or not to be involved. I tried my best to make them feel as comfortable as possible and to encourage them to participate fully in the process of the interview in particular. I demonstrated clearly to the participants that I considered them to be the experts/knowers about their own lives and experiences as individuals and elite athletes with disabilities, which hopefully led to more credible and authentic findings.

5. Giving voice to the personal as political whilst endeavouring to collectivise the political commonality of individual experiences (Stone and Priestley, 1996:706).

While French (1993) and Morris (1991) stress the importance of individual experiences of disability, Stone and Priestley (1996:705) point out the equal importance of “the collective nature of disablement as a form of social oppression”. By employing the social model of disability to highlight the collective oppression of social and structural barriers on individuals with disabilities, there should be a space to present individual experiences of disability within society. Disabled people are not homogeneous, so different social and structural barriers will be experienced differently. In this research I explore the diversity of the personal experiences and identities of elite athletes with disabilities based on gender and culture in particular, and locate these individual realities within a social theoretical analysis (i.e. the social model). In order to recognize the differences and commonalities in the experiences of disablement, I make manifest the ideologies and discourses of disability, gender, and sport within British and Taiwanese societies as well as the collective identity constructed through elite sport

6. The willingness to adopt a plurality of methods for data collection and analysis in

response to the changing needs of disabled people (Stone and Priestley, 1996:706). Although emancipatory research is often considered equivalent to qualitative research, Stone and Priestley (1996:705) claim that this association is problematic as “there can be no simple causal relation between the use of qualitative data and the removal of disabling barriers”. They go on to argue that the criticism of disability research based on qualitative data is the theoretical paradigm guiding the data collection and analysis instead of the qualitative nature of the data. As Abberley (1992) argues:

If a social model of disability is to be incorporated into disability research then large scale and detailed empirical work needs to be done on the material conditions of disablement, and he concludes that a plurality of approach and method is required to satisfy the need for both macro- and micro-level understanding of the oppression of disabled people and their needs.

(cited in Stone and Priestley, 1996: 705)

I conducted my research using two main methods: 1) Less-structured in-depth interviews through which the participants provide data about their lived experiences of being elite sportsmen and sportswomen with disabilities from their personal perspectives and 2) Documentary research is used in a complementary fashion in order to contextualise research participants’ first-hand subjective knowledge by analysing negative societal perceptions and discriminatory treatment toward disabled men and women in social institutions.

In line with the finding of Kitchin’s (2000) study on the opinions of disabled people about how disability research should be conducted and who should conduct such research, whether the researcher is disabled or not is not an issue as long as the researcher identifies with the disability movement, approaches the research from the perspectives of the disabled, and commits to assist in their emancipation and empowerment through research. As bell hooks (1984) argues, “those of us who are privileged have an obligation to support and facilitate those from minority groups” (cited in Hargreaves, 2000:11).

By applying these six principles I hope my research on the experiences of elite

athletes with disabilities can be characterised as emancipatory research and will lead to credible findings that not only benefit participants in my research but will also make a contribution to the field of disability sport.

### **Cross-national comparative case research**

Case study is understood as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1994). The focus is to understand its complexities. Walton (1972) also argues that “the advantages of the case study include its ability to attend to the process of change, to give an account of actions, events and people, and also to provide a sensitivity to the change process and its consequences” (cited in Baird, 2004:435). However, Stake (2000) indicates that case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be researched. As outlined earlier, there is a paucity of research in the field of disability sport in the East, but the research findings from the West and the experiences of elite athletes in the West should not be used to generalize to different Eastern countries or even within different Western countries. As Stone and Priestley (1996) indicate, the assumption of homogeneity among disabled people in the GB and world-wide commonly exists in disability studies. Wagner (1989) also points out that there is a lack of comparative descriptive data about sport in non-Western contexts. Thus, as May (2001:203) claims, there is a need for “a practical intervention enabled by research that is sensitive to differences *and* similarities in terms of the interactions between the global and local”. In spite of the general poverty of disability studies and researches about disability sport in Taiwan, a survey conducted by the Ministry of the Interior (2000) indicates that disabled people in Taiwan share a common struggle for life with low levels of the education and serious economic disadvantages. These facts make the emancipatory research paradigm entirely suitable for applying to the experiences of elite athletes with disabilities in Taiwan specifically. However, I did not choose to explore the experiences of elite athletes with disabilities in my own country only but decided to conduct cross-national research in the GB and Taiwan.

Chick (2000) indicates that cross-cultural comparative studies of recreation, leisure,



sport, and other expressive activities have immense potential for informing us about the place of such phenomena in human culture. The uniqueness of comparative research lies in its focus on diversity. As Ragin (1994:106) maintains that “The study of diversity is the study of patterns of similarities and differences within a given set of cases”. He further argues that due to the emphasis of comparative study on diversity and on familiarity with each case make this approach particular appropriate “for the goals of exploring diversity, interpreting cultural or historical significance, and advancing theory (Ragin, 1994:132). Indeed, cross-national comparative research is identified as a useful method for “generating, testing, and further developing sociological theory” (Kohn, 1989:77). Kohn (1989) indicates that finding cross-national similarities greatly extends the scope of sociological knowledge and discovering cross-national differences forces one to question generalisations made on the basis of studying only one country. Interpretations need to be revised in order to take account of cross-national differences and inconsistencies that could never be uncovered in single national research. It is a primary interest in my research to understand and compare the ways elite sportsmen and sportswomen with disabilities in two countries, namely the GB and Taiwan, experience themselves and how these views relate to social structures in the respective contexts.

NieBen (1982:96) argues that “familiarity” and “intimacy” of researcher with the societies under research are essential requirements because “the knowledge is regarded as the basis for establishing equivalent relations between the context-bound phenomena and the more general concepts and theoretical assumptions”. King et al. (1974) indicate that one approach to present the required knowledge is to include information on the context of each country which is relevant for the research. The qualitative national background information of Great Britain and Taiwan are provided in the following section.

### ***Background of Great Britain***

Great Britain, the world's first industrialised country in the late 18th and early 19th

centuries and the dominant industrial and maritime power of the 19th century, played a leading role in developing parliamentary democracy and in advancing literature and science. At its zenith, the British Empire stretched over one-fourth of the earth's surface. The first half of the 20th century saw the GB's strength seriously depleted in two World Wars. The second half witnessed the dismantling of the Empire and the GB rebuilding itself into a modern and prosperous European nation, a leading trading power and financial centre, and a welfare state (CIA World Factbook, 2004). Britain today has become a multi-cultural society. At the most recent census in 2001, white people formed the largest ethnic group in the GB, comprising 92.1 percent of the total population, whereas the size of the minority ethnic population was 7.9 percent of the entire population of Britain. Those from India were the biggest minority group, followed by Pakistanis, those of mixed ethnic backgrounds, Black Caribbeans, Black Africans and Bangladeshis (UK National Statistics website). The liberal democratic ideology prevalent in British society embodies beliefs of equality and opportunity in all aspects of life and culture, including sport (Hargreaves, 1994).

Sport in the UK is delivered through four key sectors: local government, education (schools, FE and HE), the voluntary (national sport governing bodies and clubs) and the private sectors. Government works with these partners to implement a range of policies but “through a complex set of organizations with overlapping responsibilities and unclear accountability. The situation is further complicated at the international level because some sports compete as UK/GB, some as Home Countries, and some as both” (DCMS, 2002).

The funding sources of sport in the UK are mainly government and the National Lottery. The government and lottery expenditure on sport in 1999-2000 in total was about £2.2 billion. UK Sport is responsible for managing and distributing public funding which is about £29 million annually and is a statutory distributor of funds raised by the National Lottery (9.2% of sport allocation) (UK Sport website, 2005).

### ***Background of Taiwan***

Taiwan, in contrast, has a relatively short history. In 1895, military defeat forced

China to cede Taiwan to Japan. After 50 years of Japanese colonisation, Taiwan reverted to Chinese control after World War II. Following the Communist victory in mainland China in 1949, two million Nationalist soldiers and civilians fled to Taiwan which turned the island into a frontier of the cold war, at which time the democratic government of Taiwan was established. The population of Taiwan today is composed almost entirely of Han Chinese<sup>6</sup>, making up approximately 98 percent of the population, while the 11 tribes of indigenous inhabitants comprise the other two percent. Taiwan is a society which strongly supports Confucian values, reflecting the island's predominantly Chinese heritage. In retrospect, Taiwan endured extreme hardships in the early years, moving from international assistance to self-reliance, and from colonial rule and authoritarianism to democracy and the rule of law. Over the last five decades, the ruling authorities gradually democratised and incorporated the native population within its governing structure. This culminated in 2000, when Taiwan underwent its first peaceful transfer of power from the Nationalist to the Democratic Progressive Party. Throughout this period, Taiwan has had intensive economic development, creating the world-acclaimed "economic miracle" and has become one of East Asia's economic "Tigers" and among the newly industrialised countries (CIA World Factbook, 2004; Taipei Representative Office in the UK website). Rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and modernisation over a few decades have dramatically transformed the lives of people in Taiwan. But the dominant issues continue to be the relationship between Taiwan and China, specifically the question of eventual unification, as well as domestic political and economic reform. These issues remain as major concerns of Taiwanese people.

Sport in Taiwan is dominantly modern sport organized, as traditional Chinese martial

---

<sup>6</sup> Early Han Chinese immigrants in 1630s were of two groups: the Hakka, mostly from Guangdong Province, and the Fujianese, from China's south-eastern coastal province of Fujian. These two groups comprise about 85 percent of the Han population, with the Fujianese outnumbering the Hakka by about three to one. The last group of immigrants came to Taiwan from various parts of China with the ROC government in 1949. This group is generally referred to as "mainlanders," and accounts for about 14 percent of the Han population. Intermarriage between all four groups - indigenous peoples, Hakkas, Fujianese, and mainlanders - is quite common, so the distinguishing characteristics of these groups have become fainter over time (Taipei Representative Office in the UK website).

arts have been diminished and modern sports have been taken up due to international influence. Baseball is regarded as the national sport. It was introduced to Taiwan during Japanese occupation as an instrument of Japanisation, but interestingly it has bonded Taiwanese people together and become one way of resistance against Japanese colonisation as well as recovery of national dignity when defeating Japan in 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games with a silver medal and in 2001 Baseball World Cup Tournament with the third place. Despite being in political plight, the achievement of baseball teams at all levels have enabled Taiwan step into various international sport arenas and prove its existence (Lin, 2004).

The role of sport in Taiwan has been evolved significantly along with political, social and economical changes. There are four phrases (NCPES, 1999), as follow:

1) Military-oriented sport in early martial law period (1949-1970):

The ultimate political goal was to fight back and regain mainland China from the communists. The purpose of sport was to develop militarism, cultivate patriotism and develop tough physicality of citizens through sport activities in order to protect themselves and the country. Sport then was attached to the education system.

2) Sport served as diplomatic purpose in late martial law period (1971-1986):

Department of Physical Education under Ministry of Education, the first sport governing body set up in 1973, played a crucial role to organise and plan the national sports policy and resources. It also guided two major civil sport organizations - Republic of China Sports Federation and Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee. The focus of sport then was on elite sport in order to demonstrate national power with sport achievement in official international sports competitions and attempt to transcend the formal diplomatic restrictions and seek more space for taking part in international activities.

3) Elite sport remained highly stressed after the abolishment of Martial Law (1987-1996):

With the changed consuming structure, people have higher expenditure on leisure and recreation. Sport-for-all was started to promote through local city/county governments holding sport games/competitions and was regarded as the basis for the development of competitive sport and sport talents. However, elite sport remained as the governmental focus.

#### 4) Competitive sport and Sport-for-all after the NCPFS set up (1997-present):

Since National Council on Physical Fitness & Sports established in 1997 and became the sport governing body at government level, the sport policy has included Two Axes, reinforcement of citizens' predisposition and enhancement of competitive sporting ability, and Four Strategies, improvement of facilities/equipment, resources, cultivation of sport talents, and propaganda/research & development. Sport in Taiwan is mainly delivered through national sport organisations and local government (Education Bureaus of city/county governments).

Government is the major funding source of sport in Taiwan. In 2003 the sport funding from central government was New Taiwan Dollar (NTD)<sup>7</sup> \$3260 million. The majority (84 percent) went to NCPFS which distributed to various national sport organisations, including Chinese Taipei Paralympic Committee, and 6 percent went to Department of Physical Education under Ministry of Education. And the sport funding from local government was NTD\$5171 million which went to Education Bureaus of city/county governments for sport promotion and facilities development. The fact that the public funding for sport has been reduced year by year, for example, the government budget of sport for NCPFS in the year 2005 is only about NTD\$2600 million, and the total public funding for sport being only 0.03 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Taiwan was recently confronted by lawmakers in parliament and criticized as a reflection of the government deprioritisation of sport, in comparison of the sport funding being 0.17-0.42 percent of GDP in western countries, particularly 2 percent of GDP in Great Britain (Huang, 2005).

---

<sup>7</sup> 1 pound exchanges for about 61 NTD

It was not until the implementation of the weekend two-day off-work system<sup>8</sup> in 2001 that leisure received more attention, though sport appears to remain irrelevant to most Taiwanese people's lives. NCPFS initiated the "Sports Population Doubling Plan" in 2002 with the hope of increasing to 500,000 the number of Taiwanese people who do sport and exercise regularly each year and the aim of reaching 20% of the whole population in six years (NCPFS website, 2005). Although gender issues have been given attention, the disabled population is excluded from the Plan (Lin, 2003). The neglect of equal opportunities for people with disabilities in sport partly explains the relatively small number of elite athletes with disabilities in Taiwan in comparison with those in Britain.

The above background information about the GB and Taiwan, especially in relation to sport, gender and disability, provides the basis for this comparative research. NieBen (1982:97) criticises that the subsequent comparative analysis of many cross-cultural researches are isolated from the contexts because "they are too often not guided by and designed according to theoretical perspectives from the overall investigation". As set within the social model of disability theory, the analysis and comparison of data in this research is integrated into each cultural context in the thematic chapters where literature view and additional cultural information of specific social structures, for example the economic circumstances, education and sport systems, are provided and discussed. Moreover, Kohn (1989:94) argues that, "Cross-national research is flexible, offering the advantage of making possible multiple types of comparison within one general analytic framework". This research includes the comparison of gender as it interacts with disability within and between the GB and Taiwan as well as in various social institutions, for example, sport organisations, schools, families and the media. More importantly, a focus of the research is how disability and gender impinge on the identities and experiences of male and female elite athletes with disabilities in their respective countries. My

---

<sup>8</sup> Taiwanese people used to work from Monday through Saturday noon. In 1998 the every other weekend off-work system started, so that government enterprises and schools were off on the second and fourth Saturday morning. In 2001 Taiwanese people started to have every weekend off, but some private enterprises employees still need to work every other Saturday morning.

research is expected to not only bridge a gap in the research from outside the West but also to prove the suitability of the application of the social model of disability theory to a non-Western country in the context of elite sport. I hope my research contributes to a greater understanding of disability sport and of the actual lives of elite athletes with disabilities.

## **Data collection**

### ***The less-structured in-depth interview***

Benney and Hughes (1984:215) maintain that “sociology has become the science of the interview”, and Fontana and Frey (1994:361) explain that “interviewing is interaction and sociology is the study of interaction”. Interviewing is a successful source of data and the most common and most powerful research method in qualitative studies. As McCracken (1988:9) argue:

The long interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury. For certain descriptive and analytic purposes, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing. The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the life-world of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves.

Punch (1998:174-175) also claims, “It is a very good way of accessing people’s perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality. It is also one of the most powerful ways we have of understanding others”. Although research can not provide the mirror reflection that positivists strive for, qualitative interviews provide a means for exploring the perspectives of research subjects and accessing to the meanings they attribute to their experiences and social world, also grant their point of views “the culturally honoured status of reality” (Miller and Glassner, 1997:100). As Miller and Glassner (1997:100) argue,

While the interview is itself a symbolic interaction, this does not discount the possibility that knowledge of the social world beyond the interaction can be obtained. In fact, it is only in the context of non-positivistic interviews, which recognise and build on their interactive components (rather than trying to control and reduce them), that ‘intersubjective depth’ and ‘deep-mutual understanding’ can be achieved (and, with these, the achievement of knowledge of social worlds).

Johnson (2002) describes in-depth interviewing as “a social form” because it involves a certain style of social and interpersonal interaction. He also indicates that the suitability of employing in-depth interviewing depends on the nature of the research question:

If one is interested in questions of greater depth, where the knowledge sought is often taken for granted and not readily articulated by most members, where the research question involves highly conflicted emotions, where different individuals or groups involved in the same line of activity have complicated, multiple perspectives on some phenomenon, then in-depth interviewing is likely the best approach.

As the focus of this research concerns the perceptions and lived experiences of impairment and disability of elite male and female athletes with disabilities, a less-structured in-depth interview was selected as the major data collection method. I adopt Wilson’s (1996:98) concept of interviews which view them on a continuum from highly-structured to less-structured as he states:

An interview constructed in an unstructured style still contains a degree of control of the interview process by the interviewer. The fact that the interview is more naturalistic (i.e. it reflects better the normal rules of conversation such as ‘turn-taking’) should not disguise the issue that the interviewer has a focus (or series of foci) for what is being asked and may introduce topics as she or he sees fit. Thus the term ‘less-structured’ methods of data collection of structure as a *variable*, ranging from highly to less structured methods.

May (2001) points out that the less-structured interview involves the interviewer who has a research aim in mind in the interview process but allows participants an element of flexibility to talk freely and spontaneously about various aspects of the subject within their own frames of reference. It thus provides greater information with qualitative depth and better understanding of the perspectives of participants as well as their concerns.

The suitability of employing less-structured interviews in my research can be supported by Jary & Jary (1999: 338) who indicate, “Unstructured interviews are desirable when the initial exploration of an area is being made, and hypotheses for further investigation being generated, or when the depth of the data required is more important than ease of analysis”. Due to the relative paucity of information concerning elite athletes with disabilities in the GB and especially in Taiwan, it was



important to gain rich and deep data in this manner. However, Lofland and Lofland (1995) thus stress the importance of an interview guide as follows:

a guide is *not* a tightly structured set of questions to be asked verbatim as written, accompanied by an associated range of preworded likely answers. Rather, *it is a list of things to be sure to ask about when talking to the person being interviewed...You want interviewees to speak freely in their own terms about a set of concerns you bring to the interaction, plus whatever else they might introduce (emphasis in original).*

(cited in Robinson, 2002; p.281)

My interview guide (See Appendix 1) starts with participants' demographic information. It follows with the life histories of participants' disabilities and sport involvement. The list of provisional topics in my interview guide derives from the review of literature in the areas of physical disability, sport, gender, body image, and identity politics.

Such an approach can be characterised as the life history method. Oral history is a way to reach individuals and communities who have been ignored and oppressed (Fontana and Frey, 1994). According to Bornat (1999:201), oral history has a particular political instrumental quality which comes from "an awareness of the way in which telling life experience can easily lead to some form of personal and social transformation". Richardson (1990) terms "collective stories" which take the perspectives of the research participants and "give voice to those who are silenced or marginalised in the culture". They confront popular stereotypes by "resist[ing] the cultural narratives about groups of people and tell[ing] alternative stories" (cited in Miller and Glassner, 1997:104). The strength of such approach is its capacity to access self-reflexivity among interview subjects, leading to the greater likelihood of the telling of collective stories. As Kleinman et al (1994:43) indicate:

Respondents may reveal feelings, beliefs, and private doubts that contradict or conflict with 'what everyone thinks', including sentiments that break the dominant feeling rules...In other cases, interviewers will discover the anxiety, ambivalence, and uncertainty that lie behind respondents' conformity

A life history approach has been applied to various disadvantaged groups in order to expose power inequalities in relation to gender, race, disability and sexuality. Feminists in particular argue that the use of personal narratives from diverse women

significantly enhance the examination of a range of issues such as power, equity, social structure, agency, self-definition as well as their interrelations (Smith, 1994). Smith (1994:299) further points out, “Images, models, and insights for change exist in the life-writing narratives and critical reflections upon these stories”. Thus, Brittain (2002:90-91) argues for the suitability of using such a method within an emancipatory research paradigm by citing Morrow and Brown (1994) who suggest that:

One of the distinctive characteristics of critical research is that the kinds of questions asked relate to the dynamics of power and exploitation in ways that potentially are linked to practical interventions and transformations.....Such possibilities are built into the very nature of *autobiographical* and *life history* methods, given the intimate relationship between the critical-emancipatory knowledge interest and individual development as mediated by collective awareness.

The employment of less-structured in-depth interviews with a life history approach provides accounts of the lived experiences of elite male and female athletes with disabilities about how they experience their bodies and understand themselves from their own perspectives. It provides a space in which the voices of disabled people can be heard, and important issues emerge from their personal narratives about body, identity, power, and ideologies. Importantly, the interrelations between these features of experience are examined and analysed. This research hopefully provides a ‘truer’ picture of the experiences of elite sportsmen and sportswomen with disabilities.

### ***The research sample and access***

Purposive sampling was used to determine the participants involved in this research. Maykut and Morehouse (1994:45) indicate that purposive sampling “increases the likelihood that variability common in any social phenomenon will be represented in the data”. They further point out that, “It is our working knowledge of the contexts of the individuals and settings that lead us to select them for initial inclusion in our study” (p.57).

In consideration of the accessibility of elite athletes with disabilities in the GB and Taiwan, athletes of two sports were chosen: track and field and powerlifting. Track

and field is the biggest Paralympic sport which offers the largest number of events. It includes all the disability groups (i.e. Wheelchair athletes, Cerebral Palsy, Amputees and Les Autres, Blind and Visually Impaired, Intellectual disability). The British track and field team won the majority of all the British medals at the Sydney Paralympic Games in 2000 (Brittain, 2002). Track and field is also the biggest disability sport in Taiwan, and nearly half of all the athletes with disabilities in the National Games for the Disabled are track and field athletes. Powerlifting was chosen in order to examine the gendered experiences of disabled people in sport. It is a traditionally male-dominated sport and conventionally identified as a “muscular” sport in the West (Costa and Guthrie, 1994), but powerlifting has been a fast-growing sport for disabled women in the past decade (Hargreaves, 2000). Furthermore, female powerlifters in both the GB and Taiwan have achieved excellent performances in the Paralympic Games since the sport’s first inclusion into the Paralympic programme in Sydney 2000. It is thus particularly significant to explore the aspirations and oppressions as well as differences and similarities in the experiences of male and female powerlifters from the two cultures.

Elite athletes with disabilities in this research refer to those who have competed in disability sport at the Paralympic Games, Far East and South Pacific Games (FESPIC)<sup>9</sup>, or IPC World Championships. It is noteworthy that this research focuses on exploring the experiences of athletes with physical and sensory impairments only. Due to the relatively low number of elite athletes with disabilities in Taiwan, I went back to Taiwan in July 2002 for two weeks to make initial contact with elite track and field athletes and powerlifters. I explained to each of them on the telephone the purpose and processes of this research and the possible interview time in 2003 and successfully recruited three male and four female powerlifters and two male and two female track and field athletes. The powerlifters were especially keen to take part in this research because someone was showing interest in them and their experiences and problems in sport. Such a positive response gave me a lot of encouragement and

---

<sup>9</sup> The FESPIC Games have been held basically once in four years since 1975. Disabled athletes from the South Pacific and Asia are eligible to compete. The FESPIC Games are of equal status to the Asian Games for non-disabled athletes.

confidence about the data collection. As to the participants in the GB, with the help of my supervisor initial contact was made in March 2002 with elite British athletes with disabilities via Ms. Lorna Cohen, World Class Performance Programme (WCPP) Coordinator of UK Athletics and Ms. Donna Charlton-O'Malley, WCPP Performance Coordinator of Powerlifting in UK Sport. I tried to obtain similar numbers of participants in both the GB and Taiwan in terms of gender and the two selected sports.

In accordance with the *Ethical Principles Relating to Experimentation on Human Subjects* of the Department of Sport Sciences, Brunel University and the *Statement of Ethical Practice* of the British Sociological Association (BSA website)<sup>10</sup>, it was agreed that an open letter from me introducing myself and explaining the project would be circulated to potential participants and the contact information of those elite athletes who were interested in participating would be provided by them. However, the result was not satisfactory because only three male powerlifters and one female powerlifter and one track athlete showed interest in taking part. The second attempt to access British athletes was made in May 2003 via my British friend, Dr. Ian Brittain, a former executive committee member of the International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sports Federation and his contact, Mr. Jon Amos, the Head Coach of the elite powerlifting squad. A similar letter was sent out by them to potential research participants. If they agreed to be interviewed about their experiences, they provided their name and contact information in a stamped addressed envelope that was also supplied. Following this procedure, similar numbers of British participants (three male and three female powerlifters and three male and one female track and field athletes) as Taiwanese ones were finally obtained.

### ***Overview of the research participants***

The participants in this research are 21 elite athletes with disabilities in total: 11 of

---

<sup>10</sup> Please also see page 49.

them are from Taiwan, 10 are from Britain. The Taiwanese athletes include three male powerlifters, four female powerlifters, two track and field male athletes and two female track athletes. The mean age is 32 years (ages range from 22-39 years). Ten British participants from England and Wales include three male powerlifters, three female powerlifters, three male track and field athletes and one female field athlete. They are all white people, and the mean age is 37.8 years (ages range from 24-61 years).

Of the 11 Taiwanese participants, eight contracted polio before the age of five, one has had a spinal cord injury from the age of three, and two have visual impairments. Among the 10 British participants, four have spinal bifida, two had polio, one has cerebral palsy, two have a visual impairment, and one has had a spinal cord injury since the age of 20 due to a car accident. Most of the British participants have been disabled either since birth or from childhood. The mean years of disability are 28 years for Taiwanese participants (ranging from 12-35 years) and 43 years for British participants (ranging from 22-54 years). Only one British female participant acquired a disability when she was 20. The blind participants from the GB and Taiwan both completely lost their sight in their early twenties.

All the Taiwanese participants are current athletes. In terms of the highest competitive level, all the four female powerlifters and one male field athlete have competed in the Paralympic Games. The remaining one male and two female track athletes have competed in the FESPIC Games. All the three male powerlifters have competed in world championships. Four British participants are retired athletes including two male powerlifters and one female powerlifter and one female field athlete. Most of them have competed in the Paralympic Games apart from one male powerlifter and one female powerlifter who have competed in the World Powerlifting Championships.

Brief details of the research participants are as follows: British participants - Curtis, 25-year-old male powerlifter, has spinal bifida; Ross, 40-year-old male retired

powerlifter, has spinal bifida; Paul, 52-year-old male retired powerlifter, had polio; Eva, 24-year-old female powerlifter, has spinal bifida; Elsa, 27-year-old female powerlifter, has spinal bifida; Tricia, 61-year-old female retired powerlifter; Fiona, 40-year-old female retired shot putter, has spinal cord lesion resulting from a car accident; Charles, 32-year-old male discus thrower, has cerebral palsy; Ben, 43-year-old male blind marathoner; and Steven, 44-year-old male marathoner with visual impairment. Taiwanese participants - Yi-xiou, 31-year-old male powerlifter, had polio; Gao-ming, 37-year-old male powerlifter, had polio; Xien-ge, 35-year-old male powerlifter, had polio; Yen-zi, 24-year-old female powerlifter, had polio; Xiao-shuan, 27-year-old female powerlifter, has spinal cord injury; Hui-hui, 23-year-old female powerlifter, had polio; Li-li, 33-year-old female powerlifter, had polio; Yen-wen, 39-year-old male blind marathoner; Zhong-zhe, 23-year-old male javelin thrower with visual impairment; Xiao-lien, 22-year-old female wheel-chair racer, had polio; and Juen-juen, 39-year-old female wheelchair racer, had polio. Appendix 2 and 3 provide detailed information about each Taiwanese and British participant's demographic, disability, and sport backgrounds. All research participants have been ascribed pseudonyms.

### *Interview protocols*

The interviews with the Taiwanese participants were conducted in April 2003 and those with the British participants were conducted during June to August 2003. Decisions about time and venues of interviews were made by each participant with the intention of making them feel as convenient and comfortable as possible. All the Taiwanese interviews and most of the British interviews were carried out in the participants' own homes. Of the four British exceptions, three interviews were held at Stoke Mandeville Hospital where they attended a training weekend and another interview was in the Birmingham Sports Centre where the retired powerlifter refereed in the British Powerlifting Championships.

The decision about how to dress and present oneself is important for interviewers because, as Maykut and Morehouse (1994:59) point out, "After one's presentational

self is 'cast' it leaves a profound impression on the respondents and has great influence on the success (or failure) of the study". However, Scraton and Flintoff (1992) indicate that such issues and choices are seldom included in the discussion of the research process. I did have a serious consideration: What does an interviewer look like in the perceptions of participants? Is a suit appropriate to show that I am a dedicated researcher? Can casual or even sportswear shorten the distance between myself and the research participants and make them and myself feel comfortable? In the end I decided to go for what Brittain (2002) suggests as "smart-casual style" hoping to present myself modestly. This included black shoes, black trousers, and grey short-sleeved plain polo shirt with black collar and cuffs with an IPC logo and the words in five lines under the logo, "Mind-Body-Spirit, International Paralympic Committee, IPC-Congress, Kuala Lumpur 2001"<sup>11</sup>. The logo and words symbolised my involvement and experiences in disability sport and served to convey the idea that I was not a complete "outsider" in the field. It actually attracted both British and Taiwanese participants' attention, except for those with visual impairments, and served as an ice-breaker prior to the interviews.

In adherence with the *Statement of Ethical Practice* of the British Sociological Association (BSA website), written consent for the research was obtained from participants and further consent was gained for the interviews to be audio-taped. Despite the public nature of elite disability sport, the anonymity of all participants has been protected by the use of pseudonyms. The confidentiality of personal information concerning participants was assured and a promise that the data obtained would only be studied by me and my supervisor was given. I then explained the significance of the research and stressed the importance of participants' cooperation to make this research possible. I made sure that each research participant was provided with full information about the research and the protection of their rights of

---

<sup>11</sup> I was one of the two representatives of the Chinese Taipei Paralympic Committee (CTPC) to attend the VISTA conference, which is the official name of this IPC Congress, held in Malaysia in 2001. The VISTA conference has been organised and conducted bi-yearly, since 1999, by the IPC Sport Science Committee to enhance sport sciences and research about Paralympic sport.

privacy and anonymity. As Punch (1998) points out, once the above is done properly, research participants are more likely to cooperate and the quality of the data will be enhanced. Moreover, those who could possibly be identified from the description in this thesis have been contacted and are happy with the usage of pseudonyms to protect their identities.

The interviews lasted between one and two hours. Such a long face-to-face interview allows time to build up a sense of rapport between interviewer and participants and allows for deeper interaction so as to make it possible to obtain “a rich discussion of thoughts and feelings” (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:80). In a less-structured interview the researcher is involved in an ‘informal conversation’ with the participant and thus must “maintain a tone of ‘friendly’ chat while trying to remain close to the guidelines of the topics of inquiry” (Fontana and Frey, 1998:67). In order to encourage participants to fully discuss topics most salient to their lived experiences and facilitate clarification and elaboration of responses, I probed their answers through such questions as “Why?”, “Please explain”, “Could you provide an example”, “How did this make you feel?” Brittain (2002:83) points out that such digging questions also “form part of the ‘consciousness raising’ process” because it forces participants to “think more closely about the views they hold and why they hold them”. Moreover, the guidelines for *Non-Disablist Language* of the British Sociological Association (BSA website) were followed, in order that no offence to participants was caused in the interview process. Although there were no questions that appeared to cause embarrassment, the very process of giving information might itself have touched and enlivened participants’ emotions when, for instance, very personal and sensitive body experiences were shared. I thus took additional care by applying the ethical procedures strictly in the research process and being observant to participants’ verbal and non-verbal messages and was “flexible in rephrasing and pursuing certain lines of questioning” (Thomas and Nelson, 1990:326).

Barn (1994) and May (2001) both argue that it is crucial to recognize the possibility that the match of the social characteristics (e.g. gender, age, nationality) of



interviewers and participants can affect the interactive process, although Rossi, Wright and Anderson (1983) indicate that the participants' perceptions of these characteristics does not necessarily mean that they will make them behave or respond differently. However, as a Taiwanese interviewer and non-native English speaker, I did recognize the potential for language and cultural problems when I conducted interviews with the British participants. Fontana and Frey (1998:58) point out that the interviewer may be fluent in the language of participants, but "there are different ways of saying things, and, indeed, certain things should not be said at all, linking language and cultural manifestations". I thus stated my concern at the very beginning of the interviews and asked for the consideration of the participants if I needed to keep asking them to clarify their responses until I fully understood their answers. Among all the British interviews it was particularly difficult for me when I was interviewing one female participant who had a strong accent and I tried hard to make sure I understood what she meant. Fortunately, most of the participants were very patient and understanding and a couple of participants obviously tried to speak slightly louder and slower for which I was extremely grateful.

Throughout all interviews, the research participants spoke openly to me. Besides their huge interest in the nature of my research which resulted in enthusiastic cooperation, they appeared to recognise that, even though I was not perceived as "disabled", I was a genuine researcher who humbly respected them as experts and was politically committed to their struggle in sport through my research. Moreover, as a female Taiwanese interviewer, I did recognise the influence of gender in the interviews in particular when discussing their views about their bodies. The female Taiwanese participants were more frank and forthcoming than their male counterparts in describing how they felt about their impairment and body image, whereas male British participants seemed to be relatively more open than their female counterparts in their views about their disability and its influence on their body image. British male participants particularly stressed the masculinity of their sporting bodies. There were two other topics which also required more effort to facilitate a worthwhile response. The first one was about their self-identity. Some

British participants answered “I don’t know” to my question about how they define themselves because they had never thought about it. When I asked again if the participants identified themselves as disabled, some of them still appeared to be hesitant to answer and they were advised that they could answer the question later. Fortunately, some of these participants were able to come back to the question when relevant discussion came along, for example, regarding their sense of difference and/or normality. On the other hand, when commenting on the sport governing bodies and their affects on elite athletes with disabilities, British participants, especially male participants, were comparatively more critical whereas a couple of Taiwanese participants seemed to have some reservations about the topic. However, to my surprise, other Taiwanese participants provided outspoken criticism.

### **Analysing interview data**

Verbatim transcriptions of all the tape-recorded interviews were completed in September 2003. The British interview transcripts were first sent for examination for accuracy to a native English speaker and then sent to the research participants in October 2003 in order to make sure there were no misrepresentations and to elicit additional information or comments. Taiwanese interviews were first transcribed into Chinese and then translated into English after the transcriptions were returned by participants. My supervisor provided assistance on the English translations to ensure that they correctly represent the Taiwanese participants’ opinions.

Harvey (1990:13) indicates that, “The process of assimilating and reflecting on the data and the research process is the most difficult but also the most crucial part” of the critical research process. He suggests “multiple reading of data” as one analytical approach in critical research which is in accordance with the analytic technique that Borkan (1999) describes as “immersion/crystallization”. This was the analysis strategy I adopted in this research. It involves the researcher delving into the data by repeatedly reading the material, often in a chronological way, until reaching familiarisation which includes linking the themes emerging from the data with previous reading and experiences. Then the data is segmented into different selected

themes and is subsequently copied and cross-referenced to be put under the relevant themes or sub-themes. Harvey (1990:14) points out that this process is not only guided by recurrent ideas that arise from the data but also by the sets of structural relations that appear to be significant to the field of study but are not exposed by the detailed data by itself. He further argues that critical research requires that “the researcher undertakes a broad exploration of the prevailing social, political and economic structure in which the detailed study is located” regarding how these have impinged upon the research participants. Pyett (2003:1173) also indicates that, “It is not enough to accept everything the participants say without subjecting it to more detailed examination of the circumstances, structures, and constraints that have contributed to the formation of their worldviews”. I thus applied sociological theories, i.e. the social model of disability and feminist theory, together with historical and contextual information, to discuss a range of discriminatory practices and issues stemming from political, social and economic institutions which affect athletes with disabilities and disabled people in general in both societies, in order to develop an understanding that reaches beyond the perspective of the participants. The critical tool of such an analytical approach is the researcher who requires “cognitive and emotional engagement of the self to get beyond the obvious interpretations to hear, see, and feel the data” (Borkan, 1999:180). Although it requires significant time input, I chose not to use qualitative research computer software such as NUDIST. As Brittain (2002:98) argues, “this hands-on time with the data forms an important part of both the ‘immersion/crystallisation’ and the reflexive process involved in the analysis of the data”.

Moreover, a list of the themes and sub-themes that emerged was sent to each research participant to get his or her comment on them and check if all the important issues were included. The themes were used as the basis for cross-cultural comparison. It is thus important to make sure the accounts of participants from both countries to all the issues were obtained, so that the interview data could then be compared and analysed.

## **Documentary research**

Documentary research was another source of gathering information about the way in which the lives of elite athletes with disabilities are shaped in British and Taiwanese societies. There were two phases of document research. I had extensively read not only sport- and disability-specific literature, but also literature about politics in relation to government structure, personal politics and body politics, in order to gain a comprehensive knowledge for conducting interviews. Due to the dearth of disability studies in Taiwan, especially those with a sociological perspective, there is very little information about how disabled people, let alone disabled athletes, are viewed within Taiwanese society. Since disability theories (e.g. the medical model and social model of disability) which have been developed and applied in the West are absent in Taiwan, my research in Taiwan specifically explored whether societal perceptions toward disability are embedded in the medical model or the social model of disability. A significant aspect of this process was through the analysis of original documentary evidence.

The documentary evidence used in this project was drawn from marketing and publicity material, publications, and official surveys of sport governing bodies, newspapers, periodicals and websites. But Forster (1994:149) argues that documents “should never be taken at face-value. In other words, they must be regarded as information which is context-specific and as data which must be contextualized with other forms of research”. A critical approach was employed to analyze the pervasive ideologies associated with disability, gender and sport and discriminatory practices in social institutions such as schools, sport governing bodies and the media, as well as the way they shape and construct the identities and experiences of elite disabled sportsmen and sportswomen within the two societies. Such critical analysis served to contextualise the experiences of elite male and female athletes with disabilities.

## **Beyond research**

Besides providing a clear account of data collection and analysis as well as self-

reflexivity in the research process, I hope that I have represented elite athletes with disabilities in this research in a sensitive and reflective way and that what I have written is a valid reflection on their subjective experiences. I believe the point of my research is not only to document the conditions of the sporting lives of elite athletes with disabilities; it is also a starting point for changing those conditions and improving the sport experiences of the athletes. Ward and Flynn (1994:44) indicate that, “Within an emancipatory research paradigm, good research is not just research that is done well. It is research that is shared effectively. Research, even good research, is wasted if it does not reach those who need to be reached”. While completing this doctoral thesis and hopefully attaining the qualification that will enable me to take up an academic career in the near future, I will submit articles to relevant academic journals and disability and sport magazines for publication, so that research findings can be accessed and shared not only by disability researchers, activists and organisations but also by athletes with disabilities and disabled people in general with the aim of “raising their consciousness, increasing solidarity and broadening the base of the disability movement” (Ward and Flynn, 1994:41) by integrating sport into the agenda of the disability movement. Brief reports of the research findings and suggestions will also be produced and sent to government authorities of sport, i.e. UK Sport and NCPFS, in the hope that they may take them into consideration to make changes in policy and practices that will work towards the empowerment of disabled people. As a non-disabled researcher, I feel it is my obligation to make the perspectives of elite athletes with disabilities known and understood.

## Chapter Three

### Material Conditions, the Politics of Parenting and the Sport Involvement of Elite Disabled Athletes in Britain and Taiwan

#### Introduction

Disability is a complex phenomenon to measure and relevant figures of disabled populations can be confusing. According to the WHO estimate and the United Nation world population statistics in 1998 there were 610 million disabled people worldwide, or 10 percent of the world's population. 80 percent of all the disabled people lived in Asia and the Pacific (New Internationalist 298, 1998). However, Barnes (1998:65) points out that, "Although there are significantly more disabled people in under-resourced, 'developing' nations of the world, the prevalence of disability is greatest in wealthier 'developed' societies". As of June 2004, a total of 877,946 people held Handicapped Certificates in the Taiwan area. They comprised 3.88 percent of the whole population (22,604,550) of Taiwan (Ministry of Interior, R.O.C., website). In the GB, based on the Family Resources Survey of 2003, 9.8 million or around 22 percent of the British adult population are registered disabled and can therefore be supported by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)<sup>12</sup> (Department for Work and Pension, UK, website, 2004). Although the comparison of the disabled populations of Great Britain and Taiwan appears to be consistent with Barnes' assertion, it should be noted that differing measures and definitions of disability, different data collection techniques, and different reactions to survey questions by respondents can make the rate of disability vary dramatically within one country, let alone across countries, and thus the above figures of both countries are indicative figures only. Nevertheless, the elderly constitute the largest disabled group across the world, notably in the West and statistics support the popular belief that there are growing numbers of elderly people in Western societies such as GB. In 2003 16% of the British population were aged 65 or over (UK Office of National Statistics website, 2004), in comparison to a 9% ageing population in Taiwan (Ministry of Interior, R.O.C., website, 2004). Advanced medical interventions which

---

<sup>12</sup> All adults, excluding 'dependent children' aged 16 years old and under or aged 16-18 who are single, in full-time non-advanced education and living at home (DWP, 2004).

prolong life may in part contribute to the massive disabled population difference between Great Britain and Taiwan. Such discrepancy also reveals that Taiwan has fewer registered disabled people and therefore has a small number of disabled athletes taking part in a small number of sports options, in contrast with Great Britain which has an established infrastructure of disability sport to support huge numbers of athletes with disabilities.<sup>13</sup>

Having a disability gives people a minority status, fundamentally affecting their life chances and their ability to live the kind of life they might otherwise have expected. Undoubtedly, there is a close link between disability and poverty all over the world, even in developed countries (Oliver, 1996). As Oliver (1996:115) indicates:

While in the absolute sense, the material conditions of disabled people in the developed world are vastly superior to their third world counterparts, they still experience conditions of life far inferior to the rest of the population. Thus, for example, 60 per cent of disabled people in both Britain and America currently live below the poverty line.

Despite having constitutional rights and legal protection - for example, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in Great Britain and the Protection Law for the Handicapped and Disabled 1997 in Taiwan - many disabled people in the GB and Taiwan continue to experience profound infringements to their basic human rights in areas of life, such as education and employment, and the material conditions under which disabled people in both countries live out their lives have significant implications for their social participation including in sport activities.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the effect of material disadvantages on the sport involvement of disabled people in the GB and Taiwan, from the perspectives of the elite athletes with disabilities who are participants in this research. In the first section, I explore the life circumstances of disabled people in both countries, in particular the ways in which prejudice and discrimination are manifest through the economic exclusion of disabled people in both capitalist societies as well as the way financial difficulties affect the sport careers of elite disabled athletes. It is followed by a discussion of the role of

---

<sup>13</sup> Please see Table 2 on page 146 for the numbers of Taiwanese and British athletes who participated in the Paralympic Games and the sports they took part in

parents in shaping elite disabled athletes' sporting experiences, with the focus on the relationship between their economic dependence and the decision to make a career from sport and the politics of parenting, especially in the Taiwanese context.

### **The economic realities of disabled people, financial pressure and sporting careers**

Abberley (1993) points out that inequalities between the able-bodied and disabled worlds in Western societies result from the failure of those societies to meet the "normal" needs of people with disabilities such as appropriate physical access and transportation. The inequalities of material life chances also exclude individuals with disabilities from seeking entertainment or having fun in the public world, and have a direct influence on sport participation. Lack of transport, information, inadequate equipment and facilities, or inability to afford the expenses of appropriate programmes are particularly significant. It is possible that financial limitations rather than personal preferences determine the nature of leisure participation for many individuals with disabilities. As Crawford (1989:8) states, "For most, the economics of disability determine what life at the sidelines is like".

Poverty is linked to employment, and in the GB, Smith and Twomey (2002) indicate that, based on the latest labour force survey in 2001, 3.4 million disabled people were in employment, an employment rate of 48 percent, compared with an employment rate of 81 percent of those not disabled. Approximately half of the disabled population in the GB are economically inactive, compared with only 15 percent of the non-disabled population. In Taiwan, a survey in 2004 reveals that 30 percent of disabled people are unemployed. The unemployment rate for disabled people is seven times more than the average unemployment rate of the nation (Gao and Liang, 2004).

The discourse of the economic exclusion of disabled people first emerged in the social model accounts of disability, as a characteristic of disability in UPIAS (1976). Academics working from this perspective, such as Mike Oliver and Colin Barnes, have included the role of culture along with political economy in the analysis of the oppression of disabled people (Priestley, 1998). Oliver (1990) indicates that



disability is produced through the complex interaction between the mode of production and the central values of the society concerned. Barnes (1996) argues that the oppression of disabled people is based on the material and cultural forces which accompanied the development of nineteenth century Western industrial capitalism and Fordist production methods which “required a set of social relationships that necessarily excluded most people with impairments from equal participation in the labour force” (Priestley, 1998:89). Disadvantage in employment is a common experience of the research participants in both countries. British elite athletes with disabilities suggest that being disabled was a barrier in the job market. For example, Paul, a 52-year-old retired powerlifter, describes that 30 years ago the disabled job applicant would be judged and decided on by his/her appearance with the prejudicial stereotype that people with physical disability may carry a mental impairment as well. Employers’ attitudes towards people with disabilities represent, and perhaps also play a part in disseminating societal perceptions about disability. Ross, a 40-year-old retired powerlifter, also indicates that British societal perceptions about disabled people have gradually changed. When Ross approached a couple of teacher-training colleges in 1985 (19 years ago) with the intention to find out if there was any chance he could do physical education teaching, they refused him because “They said ‘no’ because I couldn’t play rugby...They said you need to be able to play the sport you are teaching”. But things have changed nowadays because Ross has got disabled friends who are physical education teachers now. Most of the Taiwanese participants report that mistaken stereotypes about and prejudices against disabled people appear to be persistent in Taiwanese society, which perpetuates their higher unemployment rates and economic plight.

Despite more legislation against discrimination in the employment market nowadays, the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act in Great Britain still cannot guarantee that disabled applicants will not be treated less favourably because of their disabilities. A survey carried out in 1996 by the Department for Education and Skills reveals that 41 percent of disabled people have been discriminated against by an employer and/or a potential employer (Meager, Bates, Dench, Honey and Williams, 1998). The

Protection Law for the Disabled in Taiwan, revised in 1990, defines minimum quotas on the hiring of disabled employees, requiring all private enterprises with more than 100 employees to hire at least one disabled person, and all government offices, public schools, and public enterprises with 50 or more employees to have at least two percent of their workforce who are disabled employees. However, 55 percent of enterprises just do not hire disabled people, and two percent of private enterprises with more than 100 employees prefer to be fined than to hire disabled employees<sup>14</sup> (Taiwan Federation of the Disabled, 2001). In addition, jobs of disabled people who are in employment tend to be badly paid and low in status. According to a survey carried out in 2003, 63 percent of disabled people in Taiwan experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in work-related contexts. Yen-zi's following comment reveals the patronising attitude towards disabled people that is prevalent in the workplace:

When I was looking for a job and went to many interviews, some people's attitude was like I should be very grateful that they kindly gave me the opportunity of an interview, they spent their valuable time to meet me. When I worked, they treated me like a child. I didn't socialize with colleagues. Most of the people were just polite to me and didn't show much interest in talking to me or knowing more about what kind of person I am. I guess they didn't think I would have anything in common with them. I didn't feel happy at work.

According to Middleton (1999), economic exclusion is justified in many people's minds with a view that people with disabilities are non-contributing and do not merit the same equality of treatment or investment in their education since they will not grow up to take full responsibilities as citizens. Brittain (2002) further indicates that this kind of ideology strengthens the perception of disability embedded in the medical model discourse, which serves to individualise disability and in so doing obscures its social and economic determinants. People with impairments in the GB and Taiwan, both capitalist societies, are thus presented as being "in need", and as dependents and non-contributors to societies. Only 16 percent of the adult disabled

---

<sup>14</sup> Employers who do not meet the quota must pay about 262 pounds every month for each disabled person they have not yet hired into a Special Account for Handicapped Welfare set up and monitored by the Labour Affairs Department of the county or city where the employer is located. In May 2002, the Taipei City Special Account had a net balance of US\$166 million. Employers who fail to pay the fine are prosecuted.

population in Taiwan lives on his or her earned income, and the disability allowance is the major income for 38.17 percent of disabled people. Most of the disabled people depend on family and relatives (Taiwan Federation of the Disabled, 2001). Hunt (1993) indicates that in Britain, “Three-quarters of disabled adults have to rely on state benefits as their main source of income” (cited in Kew, 1997:114) and they have limited disposable income as a result of a much higher cost of living (Sharkey, 1996). The label of disability clearly has an influence not only on the distribution of material rewards but also on other areas of life such as work, education, health, housing, leisure, sport and so on (Bilton *et al.*, 1991).

Moreover, although men and women with disabilities have some common struggles for life, disabled women, whether in the West or East, suffer the worst deprivation. Women with disabilities have been found to be at a greater economic disadvantage than their male counterparts in employment and in the distribution of state benefits or other financial support (Londsdale, 1990). In 2001 44 percent of disabled men compared with 52 percent of disabled women in the GB were economically inactive in contrast with 9 percent of non-disabled men and 21 percent of non-disabled women in 2001 (Smith and Twomey, 2002). In Taiwan, 13.1 percent of disabled women compared with 22.7 percent of disabled men were in employment in contrast to 46.02 percent of women and 69.42 percent of men of the nation (Taiwan Federation of the Disabled, 2001; Kuao, 2001). The subordinate position held by disabled women in the labour market in terms of both occupations and remuneration results from the structures of power that are more supportive for men than women (Londsdale, 1990). For example, Juen-juen explains that disabled women in Taiwan being in a worse situation than their male counterparts in terms of education and employment has something to do with different societal expectations towards men and women in patriarchal Taiwanese society:

Disabled women especially are not expected to receive higher education. If there are a disabled son and a disabled daughter in one family, the parents would probably let the disabled son go to university. It's probably to do with the traditional thinking that men need a better education so that they can have a career in the future, but women belong to the family, they don't need a lot of education, but just need to find a good husband. Men are expected to keep moving upward in the career ladder, but women

only need have an ok job.

Furthermore, studies have shown that economics has been a notable barrier to participation in sport especially for women with disabilities (Grimes and French, 1987; Hargreaves, 2000; Kolkka and Williams, 1997). Grimes and French (1987) also indicate that when a woman with disabilities struggles for material resources to support herself and her family, survival would be her primary concern and, thus, she is unlikely to seek recreation activities and to afford the necessary special equipment for participation.

In this research, as discussed in Chapter Six, all the participants in both Britain and Taiwan identify finance as the main difficulty throughout their sporting careers, especially before the introduction in 1997 of the World Class Performance Funding, also known as Lottery Subsistence Grants, for British participants. Among 10 British research participants, apart from Curtis who is a college student, half of them (Charles, Steven, Paul, Ross and Elsa) have or had part-time or full-time jobs whereas one male athlete, Ben, and most of the female participants (Eva, Tricia and Fiona) are/were full-time athletes. The lottery funding does relieve some elite athletes from financial pressure who are/were fortunate enough to receive it (For the benefits and problems of World Class Performance Funding, see Chapter Six).

With the high standard of competitive sport worldwide nowadays, lottery funding allows elite British athletes to be full-time or at least part-time athletes so that they have time and energy to train hard to stay at the level required and achieve good performances. Ross, a 39-year-old retired powerlifter also shows appreciation for the support from his employers to allow him to take care of both work and sport, as follows:

I put my career on hold because my employers were excellent. They really were excellent. They allowed me an additional nine days' annual leave to use for competitions. So I used my full annual leave entitlement plus these nine days. And sometimes I did take unpaid leave to go away for competitions and things like that. They allowed me to do it. So they were very good. But at the same time because of that it was difficult for me to sort of apply for promotion and things like that.

In contrast, elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities in this research appear to receive far less support from their employers. For example, Xiao-shuan was forced to give up her job when her employer disapproved of her taking 11 days off for the FESPIC Games. Hui-hui also comments on the difficulties of combining work and sport in Taiwan:

The office hours of companies in Taiwan usually finish at about 6pm, but sometimes they will ask you to do overtime or to help with some activities. No company will allow employees to leave their work to travel abroad from time to time or to constantly refuse to do overtime in the evenings just because we need to go to training for powerlifting. Besides, disabled people's job opportunities are already very limited. See why we are here? We have nothing really. We are here for ourselves because this is our dream to perform.

Employers' attitudes above may, to some certain extent, reflect the unsupportive social system and the societal perceptions toward disability sport, which are apparently more indifferent and unaccommodating in Taiwan than in the GB. Besides, the incomplete structure for disability sport in Taiwan contributes to the fact that being an elite athlete is not a promising career. Unlike the World Class Performance Funding in the GB, the reward system in Taiwan (see Chapter Six) does not ease elite disabled athletes' financial strains in life or allow them to train without worries. This puts a dilemma in front of elite athletes with disabilities in Taiwan to choose between work and sport. It is difficult for disabled athletes who choose to work and be part-time athletes to devote enough time to training, while those who choose to concentrate on sport and be full-time athletes have to continue bearing hardship and gamble on receiving rewards by winning medals in the Paralympic Games and the FESPIC Games. Among the Taiwanese athletes in this research, apart from one male participant, Zhong-she, and one female participant, Xiao-lien, who are both university students, the rest of the male Taiwanese participants and only one female participant, Juen-juen, work full-time and train only after work and in their other free time. On the other hand, most of the female Taiwanese participants, who happen to be powerlifters in this case, choose to be full-time athletes in order to fulfil their ambitions to be medallists in the Paralympic Games. As a consequence, financial support from the families of those research participants who are students or unemployed full-time athletes with disabilities is crucial to enable their sport

participation. However, economic dependency also gives their parents a strong position to influence their sporting careers, which is particularly reflected in the experiences of elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities, as discussed in the next section.

### **The politics of parenting in the sporting careers of disabled athletes**

Current research shows that disabled children have a higher possibility of growing up in poverty (Gordon, Parker, Loughran and Heslop, 2000; Taiwan Federation of the Disabled, 2001), and according to Morris (1999), they tend to “achieve employment, economic independence, personal autonomy, independent housing and citizenship to a lesser degree and at a later stage than non-disabled adults” (cited in Pascall and Hendey, 2004: 166). Due to their disadvantage in employment, disabled young people are less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to live independently of their parents and are often not in control of their own financial and social lives (Hirst and Baldwin, 1994). As a consequence, parents play a key role in the sport participation of their young disabled children. However, the British and Taiwanese participants in this research have different experiences, as discussed in the following sections.

#### ***British parents’ support for sport participation***

Stroot (2002) indicates that the family is the first and major influence on young people’s sport participation, regardless of their ability. Virtually all the British disabled athletes perceive that their families are positive and supportive of their sport participation. Parents who themselves had a personal involvement in sport are particularly active in facilitating their children’s sport participation. For example, Paul’s mother was a swimmer when she was young so she acted as a coach when he started swimming as part of his rehabilitation programme in hospital and she encouraged him to compete up to national level. Curtis’ father, who is personally active in doing sports and currently works as a coordinator in a powerlifting organisation often gets him into sport clubs to try different sports and often gives him a push to train because of his high expectation for him to achieve in sport. Curtis

explains that:

My parents sometimes are very critical. That's only because they want to see I do my best.... I think sometimes they get frustrated when like things are not going right for me. They get more frustrated than what I do. I mean I am very laid back. You know, if I can't lift the weight in the gym, it doesn't bother me and I will try to manage it tomorrow. But my dad certainly gets into a panic situation and starts to swear. You know, but I am it is like nothing to worry about. Sometimes they are more enthusiastic about it.

Although parents of some British athletes may not be able to provide instruction in sport or initiate opportunities for them to take part in formal or informal sport and physical activity, they have provided emotional support to encourage their sport involvement. Charles comments that though most of his family members do not really understand his sport except the results of competitions, they are supportive about his involvement because they believe that it is good for him. Elsa's parents are really pleased about her competitive involvement in powerlifting as she didn't do a lot of sport at school. They are very encouraging and surprised at how well she has done. Fiona's parents consider her sport involvement in field events to be "really great" and they are very proud of her achievements. Ben, a blind marathoner, says that his parents do not give him a lot of support in terms of sport, but always try their best to help, as follows:

As long as it has no ill affect and it's a good idea. I don't really think they harbour any aspiration or not for me in the running. I can't really say that they would really be able to be terribly supportive sport-wise but they didn't hinder me....I was self-motivated really to a large extent. My mom and dad helped me as much as they could. Small things like my mom kept the dinner warm for me for instance. You know these sorts of little things and looking after my dog when I was going running or going away running for a weekend, training or whatever.

That athletes' families also offer support by travelling to see them compete in events is reported by Ross, Fiona, Eva, and Curtis. Apart from emotional support, some parents also play a practical role in enabling their son's or daughter's participation. For example, Ross' parents committed time to take him to training three times a week before he could drive. In addition, financial support is an essential factor for many elite athletes in both countries to enable them to continue their sporting careers. For instance, Eva's following comment points out the importance of her parents' financial contribution for her to get to the elite level before the WCPP came along:

I think that's very important in getting to where I have got in the sport. If I didn't have the support of my parents, I would have struggled to get as far as I have in sport. Obviously in the beginning of my career my parents funded everything, you know, they funded my training and the travel. We didn't have the funding then. They had a lot to do with it.

Hui-hui is also grateful that her parents have financially sustained her sport participation even though they are in bad circumstances, otherwise she would not have been able to make it in competitive sport. As she states:

My parents struggled with their lives, but they provided me with rent and some living expenses even after my graduation. But I haven't been able to repay them as I don't have a full-time job. Compared with some able-bodied athletes who even won prize money from national championships, we disabled athletes didn't always get prize money when winning international competitions! So if my parents couldn't or wouldn't support me, there is no way for me to carry on doing sport.

While British participants mainly remark on how their parents support them throughout the whole of their sporting careers, with some exceptions; their Taiwanese counterparts' comments on parental attitudes predominantly focus on the parents' approval during their school years and their more negative influences on the continuation of their sporting careers after they left school.

As the majority of the Taiwanese elite athletes with disabilities are introduced into sport through school (see Chapter Four), most of the Taiwanese participants indicate that their family approved of their competitive sport participation when they were at school. The physical benefit of health or fitness was the primary and fundamental reason that many parents of Taiwanese athletes held positive attitudes toward their participation in school sport. As Xien-ge elaborates:

They were supportive as doing physical activity would do me good physically. That's the very first idea in their minds. They thought that I was physically fragile because I had polio. Since my legs were not working, it was important to keep healthy and fit, especially the useful parts of my body. So they considered sport a proper thing for me to do.

Although parents of Taiwanese participants are positive about their disabled children's sport involvement, their support and encouragement are mainly based on the medical perspective. The major focus of their opinion is on the health and fitness



benefits of sport with common approval of sport as recreation. However, when it comes to involvement in elite sport, a concern on the part of parents about possible damage from competitive sport is reported by some athletes in both countries. Paul's mother used to be very worried that he would damage himself doing powerlifting, especially when she saw a lifter drop a bar on himself on TV. She felt quite relieved when he retired and became a referee instead. Xiao-lien talks about her mother's attitude toward her engagement in competitive sport, as follows:

In the beginning my mom was nervous and worried that doing competitive sport might be too intense for my physical condition. She just didn't want me to get further injury from doing sport. She thought it's good to do exercise as a hobby. Training on a regular basis as an athlete seemed to be too much, well, for her, but not for me.

Ben points out that a family's over-protection can be the greatest obstacle to the independence of people with disabilities. But despite the family's concern about the possibility of injury caused by competitive sport, some athletes with disabilities still pursue their sport up to elite level. Indeed, one important reason is that they are not held back by the over-protection of the people around them. Gao-ming's following comment explains why his impairment has never prevented him from doing sport:

It's probably because I have been quite lucky. Since I was a child, the people I met didn't say that, "Oh your legs are not functional, don't run around, do sport or anything which may damage yourself further". That is why I always have the attitude that I am like normal people. Others can do it, I can do it. I never thought that I couldn't or wouldn't like to do anything just because I have this impairment.

Kristen, Patriksson and Fridlund (2003) argue that parental support is vital to disabled children's sport success. Sport participation and the continuation of a sporting career to elite level for athletes with disabilities in both countries depend on their parents' emotional support as well as practical support for finance, transport, equipment, and other general assistance. In other words, parents are in large part in control of their disabled children's access to sport involvement. Power relations between disabled athletes and their parents are mirrored in the comments of Taiwanese athletes with the emphasis on their parents' permission for or opposition to their sporting careers.

### *Parental opposition to a sporting career in Taiwan*

Half of the Taiwanese participants, especially the female ones (Hui-hui, Li-li, Xiao-lien, Yen-zi, Xiao-shuan), have faced the problem that their family disapprove of a sporting career. Li-li describes the change in parental attitude toward her competitive sport involvement after she graduated from school, as follows:

My parents left it up to me when I started taking up powerlifting at high school. They were OK that I was an elite athlete while I was studying. But they were against my sporting career after graduation. They think it's very stupid that I have no job and think that I should have found myself a job and earned money, so that I wouldn't have to worry about life. With the little money we [athletes] make from part-time jobs, our lives are indeed difficult. So my family were against it for the past few years.

Well-intentioned parental interference causes tension between parents and their disabled children, and even results in dropouts from sporting careers. In response to her parents' concerns, Yen-zi had even dropped out of training and gone to work for half a year, but later she came back to training as an athlete. She talked about why she made these decisions:

I didn't have any financial support and I felt embarrassed to ask my parents to support me that way. Besides, I was not very satisfied with my performance although I always got selected for international competitions. My hands were injured and have needed rest to recover. They [my parents] kept persuading me to find a good job instead of wasting any more time in sport. So I thought I might as well just go to work. But after I worked, I always felt like coming back to training. My parents then just left it up to me.

Xiao-shuan's parents are also against her resumed sporting career as she travels between work, home, and training by motorcycle for two hours each way. They disapproved when she decided to quit her job in order to attend international competitions. She describes the pressure her parents placed on her:

Another reason they [my parents] were very against my sport career was that sport in our country has no assurances, incentives or encouragement for athletes. My parents wish that I had practical considerations, so they were very against my decision to go back to training. They also thought it's just an impulse that I felt like taking up sport again. But when my company didn't approve of 11 days off for the FESPIC Games, I quit my job and became unemployed. Then my parents were really angry and against it. They always forced me to look for jobs. They said going abroad for competitions once was enough and all that. I even left home for this.

Xiao-shuan came to an agreement with her parents that they would not financially

support her if she chose to be a full-time athlete. Their intention was to force her to be independent and able to take care of herself in the future. Although later they were proud and happy that she won prize money, they still had concerns, as she states:

She [Mother] still prefers that I have a job. She used to say that she would approve and support me if my performance is as good as two other female powerlifters who always won either gold or silver medals in international competitions. She doesn't think what I achieved was commensurate with the time and effort I invested.

Xiao-shuan further explains that the sense of achievement and self-worth experienced in sport could not be found at work. That is why she chose to give up her job and focus on training, although her parents did not understand how important sport is to her:

When I was working, I used to think why I was working there. I didn't want to live the rest of my life like that. I felt very sorry for myself. I didn't know why I worked so hard. That was not what I wanted. My parents don't understand.... I have never been this happy in my life. I felt I am actually living my life now. My mom used to tell me that as long as I have money, I can do anything I want. But that's different. You know it's inconvenient for us to travel abroad. But whenever we go abroad for competitions, everything is taken care of by the organising country and we are respected as we represent our own country. This is totally different from spending your money to go on a holiday abroad. I know my parents care about me, but they don't know what I really want and what's more important to me.

Xiao-shuan's case presents a negotiation between parental expectations and her sport aspiration resulting in her insistence on continuing her powerlifting career without relying on any financial support from her family. For athletes like Li-li and Hui-hui, there seems to be an agreement between both parties that parents provide necessary support as long as these elite powerlifters keep succeeding. Achieving sporting excellence may not be the main reason why some Taiwanese athletes' parents are supportive and approving. In some cases, winning prize money and having the chance to travel abroad appear to be requisites for parental support. For instance, Zhong-zhe mentions that the financial award for winning major international competitions<sup>15</sup> is incredibly helpful to his family's economic plight. He perceives it to be very important to him as well as to his mother who has long supported the

---

<sup>15</sup> According to the current rewarding system in Taiwan, the prize money for gold, silver, and bronze medallists in the Paralympic Games is NTD1.5 million, NTD900,000 and NTD530,000. (1 pound exchanges for about 61 NTD). For details of the rewarding system in Taiwan, see Chapter Six.

family alone. He reveals that the desire to win the prize money was the major motivation which also made him determined to win the gold medal in the Sydney and Athens Paralympic Games. Yen-zi also points out that her family are supportive because she has opportunities to travel around the world and possibly get prize money from winning international competitions. Yi-xiou states that his parents become a bit more supportive only when his performance is good enough to be selected for international competitions and he has the chance to travel abroad. Hui-hui's following comment provides a more detailed explanation:

They [my parents] were very glad about my sport participation although they didn't really know what powerlifting is. They were also very happy that I could travel abroad. You know I was from the countryside. Anyone who goes to university was big news there. So my parents are very proud of me. I used to think that they were ashamed of me...After I took up powerlifting, my father would tell everyone that I represented my country to compete abroad and won medals. My relatives or neighbours all envied me and said that I am more excellent than some able-bodied people as I have the opportunities to travel abroad, win medals and prize money.

The possible sport success and the accompanying material gains such as financial rewards and foreign travel all provide a great deal of social kudos and actually contribute to the valued social identity of elite athletes in the perceptions of parents as well as elite Taiwanese athletes themselves. Parents are proud that their disabled children represent the country to compete abroad in international competitions which is an achievement that not many able-bodied people could attain. Participants also perceive that being elite athletes seems to upgrade their positions in the hierarchies of people with disabilities. As Xiao-shuan describes:

Whenever people heard that I am an elite powerlifter competing internationally for the country, they were all very surprised and impressed because they didn't expect that disabled people can achieve in sport. I think it makes me different from those disabled people who sell lottery tickets in the market or live a poor and miserable life.

However, parents tend to neglect the importance of the sense of achievement and self-worth experienced by their disabled children and the positive influence on their identity and self-image, which in turn make them determined and persistent in their sporting careers instead of fulfilling the parental expectation about leading a 'normal' life by taking a stable job and working for the rest of their lives.

Stroot (2002:131) indicates that, “The beliefs, attitudes, and values parents place on sporting experiences for themselves and for their children will directly impact the opportunities and experiences of the young child”. From the experiences of British elite disabled athletes in this research, their parents fully support their sport involvement, at rehabilitation, recreation or elite level, as their parents recognise the value of sport and physical activity to their children’s overall development. Some of the parents, especially those who are personally sporty or interested in sport, involve themselves more in their children’s sport participation and have high expectations of their sport achievements. British participants’ decisions to take up elite sport as a career tend to be fully respected. In contrast, in Taiwan which is a fiercely paternalistic society, parents have great authority and young adults are expected to consult their parents’ opinions before making major decisions. It is not rare that parents have a propensity to plan for the future, especially for their disabled children. For example, Yen-wen, a 38-year-old marathoner who became blind while at high school, indicates that his parents imposed their views on him by persuading him to give up the dream of studying in the university and to learn some skills instead which he can earn from in his future life. Xiao-lien, a 21-year-old wheelchair racer, also points out that, “They [my parents] don’t expect too much from me. They have been surprised about how well my sport has gone. But they just want me to finish the university and get the degree like everyone else and then have a job. So if no man wants to marry me, I can take care of myself at least”. Although Taiwanese parents are also aware of the sport value which is mainly based on the medical perspective and approve of sport as a feature of the curriculum or as recreation, but they tend to look upon sport as an unpromising career and assertions that their disabled children should have found themselves jobs so that they could be independent rather than devoting their lives to sport are cited by Taiwanese participants as preferable to their participation in elite sport after graduation.

Nonetheless, I would like to argue that the protective nature of parental opposition to their children’s sporting careers stems from the unsupportive social system. Personal

attitudes are developed in response to negative and stereotyped perceptions associated with disability often characterising disabled people as useless and unintelligent, as well as in response to discriminatory social networks relating to teachers, friends, employers, and sports organisations. The deprioritisation of sport in Taiwan is mirrored in the inadequate sport structures and the failure of the sport governing bodies and organisations to support the training of both disabled and non-disabled athletes, thus making elite sport an unpromising and devalued career (see Chapter Six). Friends and teachers of Taiwanese participants also hold negative perceptions and attitudes toward the continuation of their sporting careers after graduation. “Wasting time” and “fooling around” are the comments that Taiwanese disabled athletes in this research used to get about their sport involvement from people around them. As Morris (1996b) indicates, family and friends all conspire from the kindest and highest intentions to make sure that disabled people do not make the choice they (family and friends) think is wrong. The family, as the focal operating unit in Taiwan, has a huge responsibility for their disabled children to achieve independence, so that parents are under great pressure to stop their disabled children from taking up unhopeful sporting careers and prolonging their dependence.

### **Concluding remarks**

Life chances can offer opportunities for individuals to actively participate in various spheres of social life, but they can also create obstacles to an individual’s development. Poverty is a common experience for individuals with disabilities. Gaining paid employment is often regarded as the socially-prescribed expression of achieving full adulthood within contemporary industrialised societies (Barnes, 1991). It is not only perceived to be the means to independence but also the public demonstration of individual social usefulness. The first part of this chapter, however, shows the complex relationship between disability, poverty, low education and unemployment that remains untangled in capitalist societies like the GB and Taiwan. The prejudices and discrimination against disability in the job market is the common oppression experienced by many British and Taiwanese elite disabled athletes in this research which strengthens the pervasive individualised/medical perceptions of

disability that are associated with incapability and put people with disabilities at a considerable economic disadvantage. Restriction of their social participation consequent upon financial difficulty includes sport involvement at recreational and elite level. Therefore, as revealed in the second part of this chapter, parental support is crucial to enable elite disabled athletes in both countries from taking up sport to reaching elite level.

However, the experiences of Taiwanese participants provide a very different picture from those of British participants. Although the Taiwanese parents, in common with those of British athletes, provided emotional and financial support to enable and encourage initial sport involvement, they were identified by Taiwanese elite athletes with disabilities as a key factor in prohibiting them from carrying on their sport as a career after their graduation from school. Powerlifters especially have been fighting a battle regarding their aspirations in sport and for their free choice to take up sport as their profession. Parental attitudes reveal that, on one hand, Taiwanese societal perceptions of sport, in relation to disability, are deeply embedded within the medical model of disability. Sport and physical activity as rehabilitation, recreation, and as part of the curriculum at school are extensively accepted and agreed to be of benefit to disabled people, placing a heavy emphasis on health and fitness. On the other hand, being an elite athlete is not considered as a valued, respected and promising profession in Taiwan mainly due to the deprioritisation of sport and lack of a sound sport system to support elite athletes. This may in part explain the under-representation of elite disabled athletes in Taiwan. While parents draw the attention of their young children to life in the 'real' world and the importance of achieving independence, elite disabled athletes are still persistent and determined in their dreams and ambitions in sport which is, to them, the way of obtaining self-worth and enhancing self-identity.

## Chapter Four

### **Inclusion, Disability, and Physical Education: School Experiences of Elite Athletes with Disabilities**

#### **Introduction**

Inclusion has been the most important global issue with regard to the education of children with disabilities over the last thirty years. The movement for inclusive education has supported the broader goal of the disability movement to promote social integration and equality for people with disabilities. Indeed, more and more students with disabilities have been educated in mainstream classrooms. But are they fully included in all aspects of school life like their non-disabled counterparts? Do all children learn that disability is a natural element of human diversity?

The aim of this chapter is to examine the schooling institution which is one essential site where dominant ideologies and perceptions entrenched in the medical model of disability discourse, especially in relation to physical education and sport of people with disabilities, are absorbed by people, disabled or non-disabled, within Taiwanese and British societies respectively. Simeonsson *et al.* (2001:49) point out that, “Schools constitute a primary environment for the education and socialisation of children and youth”. Brittain (2002:159) further contends that, “Part of this socialisation process within schools will inevitably involve the internalisation of representations and discourses of a myriad of subjects including disability”. Children spend years of their lives in school absorbing a wide range of knowledge and assumptions and teachers are one of the major socialising agents exerting significant influence over attitudes and behaviours regarding disabled people. Meanwhile, disabled children typically have separate and different schooling experiences, from their able-bodied counterparts, including in physical education, which in turn influence their physical and emotional identities. Furthermore, schools inevitably affect the ways that able-bodied children perceive and interact with people with disabilities that will be carried with them into their adult lives. This is how schools, associated with other institutions, play a part in creating and maintaining social



inequalities (Barton, 1993).

This chapter, therefore, draws upon the schooling experiences of the elite athletes with disabilities in this research in order to demonstrate the way the medical model discourse is manifest in educational settings and underpins the attitudes of teachers in different mainstream and special schools toward students with disabilities. Physical education in particular constitutes specialised practices to school the body and thus contributes to the social construction and normalisation of the body (Kirk, 2002). The experiences of physical education have played a significant role in shaping the self-identities of the research participants and have had effects on their involvement in physical activity and sport, as shown in the focus in this chapter.

The chapter starts with an overview of the evolvement of an educational ethos and policies regarding disability, specifically regarding inclusive or segregated education, in Britain and Taiwan respectively. This not only provides relevant background knowledge of the education system in both countries but also serves to contextualise the research participants' comments in relation to the time each participant attended school and the type of schooling they received. It is followed by an examination of the effects of differing schooling experiences, especially the research participants' experiences of physical education on the sense of self. Lastly, a discussion focuses on the influence of physical education teachers on the perceptions of children both with and without disabilities, their socialisation into physical education at school as well as sport involvement outside school and later in life through the experiences and perspectives of elite athletes with disabilities in this research.

### **Setting the context**

The legislative changes of a country often reflect its collective values in a certain era. The historical and legal backgrounds with regard to education for children with special needs in Britain and Taiwan have been associated with changes in the underlying philosophical views of disability, i.e. the medical or social model, as discussed in the following section.

In Britain, children with disabilities had been assigned to medical categories outlined in the 1944 Education Act, including physically handicapped, blind, deaf, epileptic, speech defective, maladjusted or educationally subnormal. Placement was based on a medical or psychological assessment which identified students with disabilities according to the categories listed above instead of taking individual needs and competences into consideration (Halliday, 1993; Thomas, 2003). While the social model of disability emerged in Great Britain around 1976 (Shakespeare and Watson, 1997), the Warnock Report<sup>16</sup>, issued in 1978, recognised the labelling effect of medical categories and thus introduced the concept of special educational needs (SEN). The concept of SEN was accepted in the 1981 Education Act which abolished the previous medical classifications and adopted the notion of a continuum of needs instead (Warnock, 1978). In the Warnock Report, it is laid down that children have special educational needs if they “have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority” (DES, 1981, cited in Thomas, 2003:110). This definition avoids the distinct dichotomy between the disabled and non-disabled groups of children (Warnock, 1978). The Education Act 1981 acknowledges that some children having a special need in several academic subjects may not have such a need in physical education, whereas some children who do not have special needs in many curricular subjects may have a special need in physical education. The local education authorities (LEAs) and members of staff at schools have been ascribed legal duty

---

<sup>16</sup> Publications by the Warnock Committee (1978) entitled *Special Education Needs: Reports of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People*, for the Department of Education and Science. It provides the groundwork for innovative change in thinking about the educational needs of children with special needs. Labels such as “handicap”, “educationally subnormal” are removed and replaced with “special educational needs”. It also emphasises that as many children as possible should be educated in mainstream classes and that provision should be put in place to ensure this. These recommendations of the report were put into effect in the 1981 Education Act.

under the Education Act 1981 to ensure that students' special educational needs are identified and met. Importantly, the Act also stresses that students should be educated with their needs to be met in the most normative setting (i.e. mainstream school). Currently almost two-thirds of children with special educational needs in England and around three-quarters of those in Wales are educated in mainstream schools (Audit commission, 2002). Moreover, the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 laid essential legal duties on schools not to treat students with disabilities "less favourably" than their peers and to make "reasonable adjustments" to make sure that they are not disadvantaged in education and other activities (Audit Commission, 2002: 26). New duties came into effect in September 2002 under Part IV of the DDA amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, which made it unlawful to discriminate against disabled students in the provision of education and associated services in schools. From September 2003 education providers were also required to provide auxiliary aids and services which would help to prevent substantial disadvantage. From September 2005 responsible bodies are required to make adjustments to physical features which would help to prevent substantial disadvantage (Disability Rights Commission website).

Compared with the GB, the legal entitlement of disabled children to receive education came much later in Taiwan. The Special Education Act of 1984 was the first official legislation which offered legal status to the actual implementation of special education (Sheu and Wu, 1999). It specified that citizens with physical or mental disabilities should all have equal opportunities to receive education suitable to their ability. Disabled students were assessed and assigned to 11 medical categories. Although children with visual impairment have been mainstreamed in compulsory schooling since 1967, which is the earliest inclusive placement in Taiwan, the concept of inclusive education was first advocated in the Special Education Act which was amended in 1987 (Niu, 2000). The Act resulted largely from American influences and other international trends under the premises of equity in education and human rights (Liu, 2000). The philosophy of inclusion was accepted officially in the Special Education Act of 1997. Government support for inclusive education in

Taiwan through legislation tends to be an indication of modernisation, along with the development of social welfare for underprivileged groups. But it does not mean that the Western concept of mainstreaming has been overwhelmingly taken on in Taiwan and a shift from the medical to the social view of special education has not been systematically implemented. For example, the medical categorisation of disability remains in the Special Education Act of 1997. In order to achieve “zero refusal” educational placement, a variety of placement options, including mainstream schools, special classes or resource classes in mainstream schools, and special schools, have been provided in primary and secondary schooling during the 9-year period of compulsory education. The concept of inclusive education in Taiwan means that students with disabilities should be educated and their educational needs should be met in the “least restrictive environment” (Ministry of Education, R.O.C., 1995). While welcoming more disabled students into mainstream schools, developing a professional approach to education provision in special schools and classes is equally valued in the process of gradual movement toward inclusion (Sheu and Wu, 1999).

According to a national survey in Taiwan in 1986, 84.44 percent of students with disabilities receive education in mainstream schools which includes the special classes, whereas 15.44 percent receive special educational placements (Ministry of Education, R.O.C., 1995). Although disabled children in Taiwan are largely educated in mainstream schools which appear to be inclusive, specialised educational provision has not been adequately infused into the mainstream environment to meet the students’ needs (Niu, 2000). Moreover, medical and segregated notions still exist in the educational policy, such as the extensive establishment of schools for the mentally disabled, government funding for large educational and care institutions, and the implementation of home education for people with severe disabilities, which all depart from the trend of inclusive education (Hu, 1997). Furthermore, it is worth noting that special schools and classes in Taiwan are mostly for children with mental disabilities, and secondly for those with hearing impairments. But although it is not rare that children who are physically disabled are educated in mainstream schools, a lack of barrier-free facilities has long been a problem (The LWOD, 2001).

In this research, half of the 10 British athletes (Paul, Eva, Elsa, Christian, and Fiona) attended mainstream schools. The onset of Fiona's disability occurred when she was 20, so she was considered able-bodied during her school years. Among the other half of the British participants, four of the five athletes had experience in both mainstream and special school environments. Chris, Ross, and Tricia attended special school at primary-age before transferring to mainstream school, whereas Ben attended mainstream school first and then transferred to schools for the visually impaired as his vision got worse. The other participant with a visual impairment, Steven, is the only one who spent all his school years in special schools. Three out of the four participants who attended special schools had all finished their education by the time of the Education Act of 1981.

Name	Sex	1952	54	56	58	60	62	64	66	68	70	72	74	76	78	80	82	84	86	88	90	92	94	96	98	00	02	04
Tricia	F		S	M																								
Steven	M		S																									
Ben	M		M				S																					
Paul	M		M																									
Ross	M										S				M													
Fiona	F										M																	
Charles	M													M														
Lisa	F																	M										
Curtis	M																		S			M						M
Eva	F																	M										

(M=Male, F=Female, M=Mainstream school, S=Special school)

Figure 1. School attendance and type of school attended by British participants

In comparison, seven out of the 11 Taiwanese athletes (Yen-zi, Xiao-shuan, Hui-hui, Li-li, Yen-wen, Zhong-zhe, and Juen-juen) had the experience of both types of schooling as they all attended mainstream schools at primary-age and then transferred to special schools at junior and/or senior high school level. Zhong-zhe is currently attending university which means he went back to mainstream education from a high school for the visually impaired. Of the remaining four athletes, Yi-xiou, Gao-ming and Xiao-lien attended or attend mainstream schools from primary school onwards up to university. Only one participant, Xien-ge, had studied in a school for the physically disabled up to senior high school.

Name	Sex	1972	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1980	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1990	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	2000	1	2	3	4
Juen-juen	F	M				S																												
Gao-ming	M		M																															
Yen-wen	M		M																															
Xien-ge	M		M																															
Li-li	F		M																															
Yi-xiou	M		M																															
Xiao-shuan	F																																	
Yen-zi	F																																	
Hui-hui	F																																	
Xiao-lien	F																																	
Zhong-zhe	M																																	

(M=Male, F=Female, M=Mainstream school, S=Special school)

Figure 2. School attendance and type of school attended by Taiwanese participants

### Getting into school: mainstream or special school?

Whether disabled children should be educated in mainstream settings or in special schools has been an issue of debate in Britain since the nineteen seventies (Brittain, 2002). Although Paul, Tricia, and Ben started their schooling before inclusive education was recommended in the 1978 Warnock Report, they had attended mainstream schools because of parental preference. Paul talked about his mother insisting he should study in a mainstream school despite other members of his family wanting to send him to a special school. Paul reported that she said, “Well, he’s got to live his life in an able-bodied world, so therefore he’s got to take the knocks of normal life. So he will have to get stronger and bigger. So mainstream school it was”. Similarly in Taiwan, Xiao-lien, who is currently a university student, considers that her parents made the practical decision to let her study in mainstream school all the way:

My parents thought it was better that I study in mainstream school because I am the same as other children except I am sitting in a wheelchair. There was no reason that I should study in a special school. They thought even though disabled people are more accepted in our society nowadays, it was better to let me grow up and study in the able-bodied environment, so that I would adapt quicker and have the ability to compete with able-bodied people in the future. Their decision has been very practical.

Barton (1993) indicates that parents’ intentions for their disabled children to be as ‘normal’ as possible comes from the huge pressure to conform to able-bodied norms. Some parents insist on placements in mainstream schools for their children against

the advice of the 'professionals'. Even though parents have the right to express a preference for which school their children should attend, their choice is often limited due to a dearth of appropriate local provision and refusal in some schools to admit disabled pupils. According to a national report regarding students with SEN, British children with physical disabilities often experience admission problems (Audit commission, 2002). Such problems are reported by many of the British research participants. For example, Christian's parents fought very hard to get him into a mainstream school even though he started his primary education around the time that the Warnock Report was issued. Even Curtis, a wheelchair participant, who started schooling after the Warnock Report was issued, was once placed in a school largely for children with learning difficulties which made him struggle to catch up with the level of study in mainstream school afterwards. The British participants' experiences demonstrate that their equal right to access education was often denied as a result of the unwelcoming attitude of some schools towards children with disabilities and the problematic assessment and placement of some LEAs. Despite legislative changes in response to the political/educational trend of inclusion, mainstream education is still not generally recognised as a natural element for people with disabilities, but rather as a privilege granted to them conditionally. Their entry into mainstream schools is thus limited, strictly regulated, often medicalised, and always on approval and subject to withdrawal.

While none of the Taiwanese participants report any experiences of admission problems to a mainstream school, it is noteworthy that most of them had transferred to special schools, which shows that inclusive education mostly takes place at primary age in Taiwan. Although the transfer may be due to a lack of suitable provision locally, it often came as a result of parental choice. Li-li, whose parents drove her to and from the mainstream primary school on a motorcycle everyday for six years, indicates the difficulty for parents who are both employed: "It is easier for parents to send their disabled children to special schools because the teachers there will take good care of them. They just need to bring them home during summer and winter vacations". Yen-zi's and Hui-hui's parents sent them to live in care institutions

where they were looked after by specialised staff and where there were shuttle buses provided to and from a mainstream primary school nearby. The parental preference for special schools or residential schools may result from concerns that their disabled children's needs may be overlooked in mainstream schools and that there may also be a paucity of barrier-free facilities and medical care in mainstream settings. If children are studying in a special school or a residential school, it can relieve the management burdens of the parents. So some parents in Taiwan may not always consider mainstream school a better option and prefer to leave their children in the professionals' hands. This trend also reveals the tendency of Taiwanese people to have faith in the specialist knowledge of professionals such as doctors and teachers who are thus in a powerful position to develop and reinforce medical philosophies, values and systems in relation to disability.

Although the benefits of inclusive education have been well-documented (Simeonsson *et al.*, 2001), disempowering experiences exist in the mainstream schooling setting as well. One such experience for disabled children is being bullied and/or teased which was reported by participants in both countries. Gao-ming had been taunted about his "long-short legs" and the way he walked. Ben describes his school days as "very hard" because he got bullied in mainstream school before transferring to the school for the visually impaired when he was 13. Paul had rows and fights against other kids over their bullying and teasing. None of the female Taiwanese or British participants reported such a problem in mainstream school. However, Xiao-lien talks about other students' curious looks: "I have been lucky that I didn't get any bullying. Sometimes it is just other students' staring. I didn't like people staring at me, at my feet or wheelchair. It's just like I am an alien. I felt very uncomfortable, but I got used to it in the end". Siann *et al.* (1993:320) point out that most disabled people share "a common characteristic of perceived vulnerability lying largely in their deviation from some social norm".

Disability is a major cause of bullying (Sweeting and West, 2001). These cases do not simply highlight the socially isolating nature of disability and the stigma attached



to being 'different' from the majority of students. Rather, these are a consequence of the negative social constructions of such difference. School may be one site in which people with disabilities experience the most evident prejudice and outright victimization. Juen-juen states that disabled students, being the minority in mainstream schools, have to be strong and independent, because the environment will force them to adapt to the able-bodied world. Li-li feels lucky that her parents sent her to mainstream school so that she "grew up just like able-bodied students". As Taub and Greer (2000:405) indicate, having interaction with able-bodied children and even being accepted by them enhance disabled children's feeling of being "normal" and thus "legitimize their social identity as children". Several research participants struggled against negative social perceptions of difference in mainstream schools. In order to fit in, gain approval or acceptance in an essentially hostile environment, they had to spend much academic and physical effort trying to be perceived as competent, to pass as non-disabled, or to blend in with their non-disabled counterparts, often at great personal cost and through minimising their own needs.

In spite of the government policies of both countries concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream settings, how inclusive can such arrangements really be? Physical inclusion does not automatically promise full participation in all aspects of school life and the benefits of educational and social integration (Simeonsson et al, 2001). Curtis, Yen-zi, and Li-li all report that the education in mainstream school did not cater for all their needs and Elsa's parents had a fight with the school to truly integrate her into mainstream schooling. What really occurs in the mainstream educational environment is clearly a vital issue.

### **Mainstream schools and physical education**

Physical education classes are clearly the context which may accentuate difference, but in the meantime, provide opportunities for children or young people with physical disabilities to challenge the negative perceptions associated with disability. Since the Education Reform Act of 1988, all British students have a curriculum

entitlement including physical education (Halliday, 1993). However, the right of children with disabilities to access physical activities in mainstream school has been denied on a regular basis. A survey funded by the Sports Council in 1987 found that 96 percent of 51 mainstream schools in the North East of England excluded students with disabilities from specific activities (Thomas, 2003). The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice explicitly states that “Children with SEN should be offered full access to a broad, balanced and relevant education”. In light of this statement, the National Curriculum for Physical Education in 1992 brought the issue of special educational needs to the agenda of the physical education departments of schools (Halliday, 1993). Conversely, the findings of Penny and Evans (1995) show that although 79 percent of the Heads of physical education departments in 38 mainstream schools claimed to provide physical education to students with SEN, disabled students did not have access to the full range of activities. For instance, only 42 percent of schools provided dance and 56 percent provided games for students with physical disabilities. In April 2000, the British Government published its strategy for the development of sport over the coming decade, *A Sporting Future for All* (DCMS, 2000), stating that physical education and sport are important elements to the education of all young people and should promote social inclusion. The issue of social inclusion was further specified in *Physical Education: the National Curriculum for England* (DfEE, 1999:28), “Schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for *all* (emphasis added) pupils. The National Curriculum is the starting point for planning a school curriculum that meets the specific needs of individuals and groups of pupils”. Nonetheless, a recent national survey funded by Sport England revealed that 53 percent of primary-aged disabled children and 41 percent of 11-16 years old disabled children spent less than an hour per week in physical education lessons and only 20 percent of them spent two or more hours in physical education lessons (Sport England, 2001). Apparently, disabled students’ participation in physical education is significantly less than that of the able-bodied population of school children.

Most of the British participants in this research were not banned from taking part in

physical education in mainstream schools except the three wheelchair users. Although 61-year-old Tricia often took part in physical education classes when she was at school many years before the discourse of inclusion became topical, it was as a referee in ball games and not as a team member. 25-year-old Curtis was not allowed to attend physical education in mainstream school or take the GCSE physical education exam because he was regarded as not able to do the physical activities even if he could do the theory. Ironically, he has recently been accepted by a further education college to do a national diploma in sport sciences. 24-year-old Eva was also excluded from physical education classes as teachers were not willing to adapt the format of the lessons in order to integrate her into the activities. The two British participants with visual impairments, Steven and Ben, were both allowed to attend physical education in mainstream school, but they did not seem to enjoy the experience very much. 43-year-old Ben was basically excused from attending physical education and 44-year-old Steven states that sport was not his speciality in school as he used to suffer a bit with asthma and school days were particularly strenuous for him.

A survey commissioned by the Taiwanese Ministry of Education on the provision of special physical education in primary schools in Taiwan shows that students with disabilities are placed in mainstream classes (25.95%), special classes (63.66%) or physical education classes for all disabled students in the school (5.01%), but only 4.89 percent of the students with disabilities actually take part in physical education classes (Hsu, 1997). The low level of participation of disabled students in mainstream primary schools is mirrored in the experiences of the Taiwanese participants in this research. All the Taiwanese female participants who all happen to be wheelchair users were not allowed to attend physical education when they studied in mainstream schools. Yen-zi (24-years-old), Xiao-shuan (27-years-old), Li-li (33-years-old), Hui-hui (23-years-old), Xiao-lien (22-years-old) and Juen-juen (39-years-old) all explain that physical education teachers did not know what to do with them, so what they did in physical education classes was to sit aside watching or reading books or basically doing whatever they wanted to do. As for the male Taiwanese

participants, Gao-ming (37-years-old) and Yi-xiou (31-years-old) were not discouraged from joining in physical education classes. Probably it was because they both had only slight differences between their legs caused by polio, so that they could walk on their own. The physical education teachers asked them whether they would like to take part in the sports they could do physically. As for the male participants with visual impairments, Yen-wen and Zhong-zhe, they were very physically active at school. When Yen-wen, 39-year-old, studied in mainstream school, he was allowed to play sport with his 0.03 vision although the physical education teacher was a bit concerned. Yen-wen especially enjoyed running and kept doing it until he became completely blind at high school. Zhong-zhe, 23-year-old, has been very active in sport since childhood, even after his eyes turned bad when he was 10, although the physical education teacher in mainstream school did not know about his eye condition then.

These cases illustrate that the attitudes of the physical education teachers and staff of the schools confirm the disablist view and discourse which lead to students with disabilities in mainstream schools stopping at the gym door. Disabled children are still often downgraded as spectators instead of being encouraged to be active participants in physical education and sport activities. Physical activity is a common childhood experience and could provide an opportunity for students with disabilities to socialize with their able-bodied peers. Being spectators only rather than active participants in physical education and sport activities makes them feel excluded from their peers. Participants in both countries (Ross, Tricia, Xiao-lien, and Juen-juen) all said they wanted to join in with their classmates in sport games. Xiao-lien especially describes her complex feelings when she sat at the side watching other students playing sport:

Sometimes I really wanted to join them, to be part of them, but I was afraid I would be a hindrance to them. Even if they let me join in their sport game, I didn't think anyone would want me to be in their team because I would just be a burden to them. I didn't want to be blamed as the one who made them lose the game. And I would feel sad and embarrassed if I got rejected. So it's better that I just watched them.

According to Taub and Greer (2000:396), physical activity can be an important

normalizing experience for students with disabilities. They further point out the consequence of failed inclusion:

Being excluded from typical childhood play, children with physical disabilities may have their status as children questioned. Instead of a child with a disability being viewed as just another child, the child's disability can become the master status or salient social identity.

Participation in sport and physical activities has the potential to facilitate legitimation of the social identities of disabled students as children and also to increase social integration and provide a significant opportunity to demonstrate physical competence to able-bodied peers (Brittain, 2002; Taub and Greer, 2000). The yearning for such an opportunity is reported by the research participants. For example, Ross talks about how he would have liked to prove himself in sport after transferring to a mainstream school:

Before I went there, I had the spark about doing sport. I always wanted to do sport. I always wanted to prove myself, especially we had one or two kids in our year that were playing rugby for Wales at the schoolboy level and they were being looked at as the icons of the school. And I was thinking "I'd love to do that"...I always wanted to do things like that, but I didn't have the opportunity to do that.

Ross and the other two disabled students in his school could only hang around or do some homework in physical education classes. In the summer he could only do some athletics against disabled children but not against his able-bodied classmates. Ross's limited and restricted involvement provides an example of the failure of implementing the policy of inclusion of disabled students in mainstream physical education. It reinforces the perceptions of able-bodied children towards children with disabilities as pathological, lacking ability, physically limited, and poor at sport, as they are deprived of their chances to prove to their able-bodied peers their capabilities in an integrated context and to reverse the stereotype of disabled children's physical limitations.

Participation in physical activities can act as a means of empowerment for disabled children through increased social interaction, the construction of perceptions of competence, and the creation of a sense of self-enhancement which in turn contribute to the beliefs of disabled children as well as able-bodied peers that they are not

simply ‘children with disabilities’ but first and foremost, children. Some participants in both countries point out that participation in sport and physical activities facilitated acceptance of them by their able-bodied classmates. For example, despite Gao-ming being teased about the way he walked, his active engagement in physical education classes made him accepted better by able-bodied students as they realised that he was as physically active as them and had always taken part in physical activities with them rather than being singled out for his mild impairment. Sweeting and West (2001) find that children who achieve in sport are associated with low levels of, or no experiences of, bullying/teasing and might be treated more favourably than those who achieve academically. Yen-wen and Paul also report that when they were playing sport with other classmates, their able-bodied peers often forgot they had disabilities. The physical competency and sport success of children with disabilities appear to obscure their disabilities to some extent and redefine their abilities. Physical competency decreases the salience of disability as the major description of identity and facilitates the attention being placed on other aspects of their ability. The discussion in the following section focuses on the physical education teacher who is the key person to enable disabled students to empower themselves through physical activities and sport as well as to challenge the negative perceptions about their impairments.

### **The teachers’ role in an inclusive process**

In the process of educational inclusion, physical education teachers especially play a crucial role in enabling students with disabilities to fully benefit from the curriculum and a variety of other social and educational activities. But as Thomas and Green (1994) indicate, negative attitudes towards disability still prevail among teachers and education providers. Although various environmental barriers, such as inaccessible sport facilities and ill-arranged playgrounds, significantly restrict disabled children’s access to the physical activity context, however, it is argued that these disadvantageous circumstances often entail an essential attitudinal element (Jambor and Gargiulo, 1987; Wilkinson, 1984). Thomas and Green (1994:27) further contend that unchanging attitudes of physical education teachers towards students with

disabilities have evidently hindered developments in special educational needs provision “by acting as some kind of ‘de facto’ brake on integration” and this is because:

Physical Education teachers lean heavily upon assumptions. Assumptions about what ‘normal’ individuals can be expected to do, usually based upon their own sporting experiences. They, like most of us, hold stereotypical views about the nature of sport and also, more invidiously, about the nature of disability.

Assumptions about ability are also mentioned in Christian’s following comment. He talks about how to enhance understandings of disability:

I think it is better for someone to come and ask them [people with disabilities] what’s wrong with them than it is to make an assumption. If you are too educated, you make an assumption which is not always right.

Physical education teachers in the GB receive their specialist teaching training based on the medical model discourse of disability and have often worked with this taken-for-granted perception of disability in the educational settings. It was not until 1984, following acceptance of the philosophy of special educational needs recommended in the Warnock Report of 1978, that it started to be adopted by all teacher training institutions (Thomas and Green, 1994). Nevertheless, in the Final Report of the National Curriculum for physical education (Department of Education and Science, 1991:55) which recognised the dangers of labelling children as “problems”, the medical definition of disability as “the loss or reduction of functional ability” remained in the same paragraph. This delivered the implicit message emphasising “personal loss, inability and thus difference in essentially negative terms” (Barton, 1993:50). As a result, Taub and Greer (2000:396) indicate that “Physical education teachers frequently exhibit minimal interest in teaching children with physical disabilities and often hold stereotypical perceptions about their abilities”. Moreover, many physical education teachers express concerns that they are not sufficiently trained to teach children with disabilities in inclusive settings and schools provide little support in terms of personnel and resources to meet the needs of all students in their classes (Lienert, Sherrill and Myers, 2001)<sup>17</sup>. Nonetheless, the national curriculum of 2004 includes for the first time a detailed statutory statement on

---

<sup>17</sup> Please also see page 91.

inclusion which describes the responsibilities of schools in their teaching right across the curriculum, to design and provide effective learning opportunities for all students, and sets out three principles that are essential to developing an inclusive curriculum: setting suitable learning challenges; responding to pupils' diverse learning needs; and overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils (National Curriculum Online website, 2004)<sup>18</sup>. Hence, physical education teachers can no longer excuse themselves from making sure that no students are disadvantaged in physical education classes and that "All pupils, whatever their circumstances or abilities, are able to participate in and enjoy PE" (Department for Education and Skills, 2003:1) and have the chance to succeed.

Similar problems exist in Taiwan. In a survey on special physical education in primary schools in middle Taiwan, Chen (2002) finds out that the physical education of disabled students is mostly taught by teachers of special classes (57%), followed by physical education teachers (14%), and only 51.9 percent of these teachers have received special physical education training. Consistent with another similar survey focusing on junior high schools in Taiwan (Shu, 1996), around 50 percent of the teachers consider physical education for disabled students could be hard to implement in mainstream settings and it is better to provide physical education in special classes. The reasons for this position relate to the worry that disabled students may get hurt in the process of integration and concern about disabled students being unable to "fit into" physical education mainstream settings and then ending up having no physical education at all (Chen, 2002). Indeed, Yen-zi talks about the physical education teachers' attitude towards her and two other disabled students and why they were not allowed to attend physical education classes, as follows:

They didn't think we could play sport because we were in wheelchairs. They were concerned that disabled students might get hurt when playing sport with able-bodied students or cause inconvenience for them and thus affect the proceedings of the class.

Some participants, like Eva and Juen-juen, report that physical education teachers were not willing to adapt the format to integrate disabled students into mainstream

---

<sup>18</sup> The statement provides examples and information specifically relevant to physical education and students with disabilities. Please see Appendix 4.



physical education. Those participants who were allowed to, or not discouraged from attending physical education lessons, basically involved themselves in the sports or activities they could do physically as much as possible. For example, Yi-xiou did the horizontal bar and rested when others played ball games. In Ross's school there were very limited options in physical education as students either played rugby in the winter or athletics in the summer, which he played only against disabled peers. Elsa and the other disabled students had to decide themselves what to do in physical education classes. She didn't enjoy them and only attended them when she had to because "sometimes you are singled out and told to do something else, that makes more of an issue of it". It is reflected in the finding of Shu's (1996) research that most Taiwanese disabled students would love to attend physical education with able-bodied students, but the physical education classes for disabled children in mainstream school mainly take the form of special classes separate from mainstream classes. Ben was excused from attending physical education and he describes what it was like:

In the summer they [physical education teachers] feel that like javelins being thrown around would be too dangerous, both with me being hit and me throwing the javelin at other people I suppose. I used to do anything I could to get out of playing sport purely because of my low self-esteem and high self-consciousness. Apart from playing football, a bit of kicking around, I didn't do anything really. Sometimes when you played ball sports indoors, I found it even harder to see the ball. I don't think I excelled at sport when I was at school at all. I can't think of, apart from during the summer, ok, that was the only time I did anything half decent sport-wise.

According to the research findings of Chen (2002), when there are one or two disabled students in mainstream classes, teachers consider they bring more "problems" to their teaching because they need to have extra care or different treatment. Most teachers, thus, do not wish to have disabled students in their classes. physical education teachers in mainstream schools in particular do not believe that it will work for disabled students to do physical education in mainstream classes as they do not really understand the individual students' impairments and have no confidence to offer them suitable instruction and assistance. The above cases demonstrate a lack of understanding of disability on the part of physical education teachers, a disablist attitude which places the problem squarely on the shoulder of

students with disabilities, and a reluctance to make adjustments to meet the needs of disabled students. Although most of the relevant research show that the difficulties reported by teachers relate mainly to the lack of training for special or adapted physical education; the lack of special physical education curricular materials; and lack of information about prevention and disposal of injury or other special circumstances that happen to disabled students when doing sport (Chen, 2002; Shu, 1996; Sung and Keh, 2002), I would like to argue that these difficulties could be overcome eventually if teachers abandon the disablist views embedded in the medical discourse about students with disabilities. As Meek (1991) contends, a teacher's attitude toward disability is crucial to the success or failure of teaching children with disabilities. Teachers who hold positive attitudes towards disability are more likely to succeed in helping students with disabilities to be included in mainstream settings. Sung and Keh (2002) also indicate that physical education teachers in primary schools in Taiwan have negative attitudes towards disabled students. They also suggest that teachers' and school staffs' positive attitudes towards and belief in disabled students, along with adapted physical education training for both special education teachers and physical education teachers, are essential elements for the successful inclusion of disabled students into mainstream physical education. Paul comments on how teachers' attitudes would affect disabled children:

I think a lot of people recognise that. In schools now they have started to educate teachers on embracing disability, how to nurture it, how to promote it. I think it gives a child also a sense of purpose and shows they can achieve. It's quite labelling if you tell a person that they can't achieve, they began to believe it and they carry it through, not just in sport but in academics. They just feel they are losers from the start and they don't achieve. Whereas if they know they are good at sport, they know they could do the other things. It is inserting this assertiveness that they are an equal with an impairment. Once they know that, they recognise their impairment, they know what their limitations are in regard to their impairment. They can move on and they can achieve.

Physical education programmes in mainstream schools often reveal the negative view of disability. As Barton (1993) points out, when attempting to include disabled students, the physical education curriculum for students with disabilities in Britain is often simply an adaptation of what was initially designed for able-bodied students without taking consideration of individual circumstances or involving the

participation of disabled children in the decision-making. It appears to be the case in primary schools in Taiwan, revealed in the survey findings of Chen (2002), that both teachers in resource classes and physical education teachers in mainstream schools use simplified versions of the physical education curriculum originally planned for non-disabled students (69.2% and 77.8%) whereas teachers in special classes in mainstream schools and teachers in special schools tend to design individual educational programmes to meet the unique physical education needs of individual students with disabilities (60% and 71.4%). In addition, the emphasis in the physical education curriculum on games and performance make it less flexible for accommodating students with physical disabilities. Coupled with the physical education teachers' unwillingness to alter the highly competitive nature of games results in more difficulty in providing students with special educational needs with a broad and balanced curriculum (Thomas, 2003). Nixon (1989:30) elaborates that this is a world where "the accommodation typically is intended to enable them (disabled students) to overcome disabilities so that they can meet normal expectations and values". This is why there is an important need for physical education teachers to take on board the social model of disability emphasising the ways society imposes barriers on the full participation of people with disabilities. Thus, inclusion for students with disabilities should be recognised "as a process that is responsive and flexible to pupil needs, and moves beyond traditional concepts of integration and mainstreaming in which additional or separate practices are often bolted on to existing provision" (Vickerman, Hayes, and Whetherly, 2003: 50). However, Thomas and Green (1994) point out that integrating the social construction model of disability into teachers' education and acquiring knowledge and awareness of disability issues does not necessarily lead to attitudinal change toward disabled people. They further suggest that it is only when teachers work together with people with disabilities, especially their disabled peers, and observe for themselves what disabled people can actually achieve that attitudinal change toward disability is more likely to take place. Involving students in the curriculum planning can be an effective starting point for physical education teachers. The opinion of disabled students should be consulted and taken into consideration.

## **Special schools and physical education**

Despite the criticism that attendance at special schools causes isolation and restrains the sharing of social opportunities for children with disabilities with their able-bodied peers (Barton, 1993; Taub and Greer, 2000), not every participant who attended special school regards it as a disappointing choice. This is especially reported by some Taiwanese participants. For example, Xien-ge, who had attended a school for the physically disabled all the way to high school, describes how lucky he was to study in a special school:

No one was a minority at school. I had developed very good friendships with other students. We encouraged and helped each other because we shared the same experience in life. I think I was happy that I didn't go to mainstream school and became the minority there. We used to hear some stories from students who transferred from mainstream school. They got bullying and they were on their own there. Maybe some disabled students would become stronger mentally than us with those experiences, but some might feel isolated and shut themselves away because of that. I don't know. I had never felt lonely here. If I was treated badly outside, I could always talk to my friends here who would understand how I truly felt.

As Murdie (1993) points out, no one is "special" in a special school because students have similar impairments and there is thus a strong sense of comradeship formed among disabled students and a common desire to prove themselves. Students with disabilities in special school share experiences and form ties which allow them the chance to acknowledge impairment positively and rebuild their own identities proactively, in particular through sport and physical activities.

The disability survey (2000) commissioned by Sport England reveals that disabled students in special schools are more likely to participate in sport than those in mainstream schools. None of the British participants who had schooling experience in special schools report any barrier to them attending physical education classes. For example, Ross was encouraged to do physical education as part of the whole curriculum in special school and thus became highly involved in sport and physical activities, but he was not allowed to attend physical education after transferring to mainstream school. Such a sharp distinction is particularly evident for Taiwanese participants, especially for female participants, as most of them (Juen-juen, Li-li,

Yen-zi, Xiao-shuan, and Hui-hui) received mainstream education at primary and secondary school levels without doing any physical activity until they studied in special school. Juen-juen comments that her desire of joining in with her classmates to play sport was not satisfied until she went to the school for the physically disabled where physical education was one of the crucial curriculum lessons and sport was highly promoted. She was then involved in various sports and became especially good at table tennis. Xien-ge, who had always been in special schooling, talks about his long involvement in sports since childhood so that he has had a strong interest in sport and has never thought he could not do it. He is aware that his life would be very different if he had studied in a mainstream school. Li-li claims that studying in a special school was the turning point of her life from never attending any physical education classes in a mainstream school to becoming an elite powerlifter. She elaborates on why the two schooling systems lead to different lives in Taiwan:

If I went to mainstream school, I would focus on studying in order to go to university. But in special school my life was not just study from day to night. The school also pays attention to other development such as moral education, physical education and so on. Unlike the mainstream schools which place great emphasis on the academic curriculum, and PE class were often borrowed to study other subjects. So the study pressure in special schools is relatively lower. That's why I could study while I took part in various sports.

Indeed, special school has been the cradle for elite athletes with disabilities in Taiwan. Nonetheless, the physical education in special schools is not without criticism. As Halliday (1993:211) argues, "Perhaps it is the opportunity to be good models for their able-bodied peers, as well as to work with others who are good models of competence for themselves which is often missing in the education of young people with special educational needs who attend special schools". Such valuable learning opportunities stimulated by diverse standards of performance and levels of competence are often more accessible for students with disabilities in academic subjects which are deemed to be of better use for them to compete in the job market. Students in special schools may have limited opportunity to evaluate their competency with a universal point of reference in all aspects of development including physical performance as a result of a partial world view which may be developed in the segregated educational environment.

Separate education has significant effects on the way students with disabilities in sports and games see themselves. Separate education raises difficult questions about the evaluation of physical competence, both for able-bodied professionals, as well as for disabled students. For example: A young man who can run 12 seconds as a blind athlete may be the best blind athlete at his age group in the country, but how good would he be in a mainstream school? If a young woman is a fantastic powerlifter who has a disability, is she a fantastic powerlifter *per se* or a fantastic powerlifter with a disability? In some sports events like powerlifting, disability does not interfere with participation and the performance can be compared with that of able-bodied athletes (Halliday, 1993). Moreover, Brittain (2002:179) points out that “the confidence gained from being the best in your school can make the difference between an individual, disabled or otherwise, making the decision to pursue a sport on more than a recreational level”. But if disabled students, especially those in mainstream schools, have no reference point, apart from able-bodied students, to compare their sporting performance against, they may be given a falsely low viewpoint of their own capability and made to feel inferior about their athletic ability. Many disabled students who have outstanding sporting potential can miss out on elite disability sport because they are unaware of their own potential and in particular when physical education teachers have no knowledge of what constitutes a good performance in disability sport (Brittain, 2002). On the other hand, Halliday (1993:213) argues that the very existence of a segregated provision of physical education may “lead to a restricted world view which denies opportunities for testing oneself against the world, to take risks and to learn about pacing oneself”. Her view stresses the importance of the reference point of able-bodied athletes, but a more fundamental question is about why such differences in sport performances between disabled and able-bodied people are taken as so important in popular consciousness. The prevalent ideology, that of people with disabilities being physically inferior, is deeply rooted in the commonsense views of disabled people in sport so that the public in general do not have enough recognition of the innate ability of disabled athletes which further reinforces societal perceptions or prejudices about disability.

It appears that disabled students' opportunities in sport and physical activities can be limited in both mainstream and special settings. As Halliday (1993: 212) contends, "One sector can open avenues to wide opportunity whilst perhaps restricting access to specialist opportunities. The other offers expertise in accessing specialist events but has limitations in offering breadth of opportunity and access to opportunities where a disabling condition is no handicap to a sporting opportunity". The next section provides an insight into how the physical education experiences of the research participants in differing schools could affect their sport participation after leaving school.

### **The effect of physical education experiences on sport involvement in later life**

Referring to Great Britain, Thomas (2003) indicates that the experiences of children with disabilities in physical education in school will have a far-reaching influence on their sporting careers. Similarly, a survey commissioned by the NCPFS (Chen, 2001) on disabled athletes in the past four national games for the disabled in Taiwan shows that the school is the major channel (48%) for people with disabilities to go into disability sport. In this research all the Taiwanese participants who attended special schools for the physically disabled as their last education level, no matter if they went to mainstream school earlier, were given plenty of opportunities to play sports. Most of them (Xien-ge, Yen-zi, Xiao-shuan, Hui-hui, Li-li, Zhong-zhe, and Juen-juen) just took up their sports in the sport club at school and started their sporting career straight away. They competed at national and international levels and thus became elite athletes while they were still students.

In contrast, those three (Yi-xiou, Gao-ming, and Yen-wen) who attended physical education in mainstream schools tended to take up sport as a leisure activity after leaving school when they tried various sports. For example, Yi-xiou did aikido and kendo whereas Gao-ming played badminton to national level before they took up powerlifting. Their involvement at recreational level lasted for a considerable time before they got to elite level with their chosen sport. They did so through local sport

associations or committees for the disabled, which is the second main channel (37%) for disabled people to gain entry into disability sport in Taiwan (Chen, 2001). It seems that though students with disabilities receiving mainstream schooling are not guided to disability sport through school directly, as long as they have had positive experiences in early physical education, it is more likely that they will have an interest in, and be willing to involve themselves in sport in post-school life at leisure level or even up to competitive level.

Those British participants who were not allowed to take part in physical education in mainstream schools, Curtis, Ross, Eva and Tricia, all did sport outside school. Curtis did wheelchair basketball and racing at leisure level. Eva did swimming from the age of 10 and then athletics when she competed in the junior games before realising her talent in powerlifting at age 14. Ross joined in a local sport club at age 16 and went into powerlifting after that. The two British participants with visual impairments, who both attended physical education but did not enjoy it very much, surprisingly resumed sport several years after leaving school. Steven started running after work on a leisure basis for the sake of health and fitness. Ben took up goalball at college for the visually impaired and competed at Paralympic level before changing to running when he was 21. It appears remarkable that the female British participants, except Eva, did sport only very occasionally after they graduated from school. Tricia joined in sports days held by the local authority but did nothing serious until taking up powerlifting at the age of 47. Elsa, who was allowed to attend physical education classes, had little interest in sport immediately after her school days. Fiona, who was able-bodied at school age, did a bit of tennis and swimming irregularly before becoming disabled at 20. The gender differences in sport participation will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Most of the British participants (Curtis, Ross, Paul, Eva, Charles, and Steven) went into disability sport through local sports club. Tricia and Fiona were informed about and invited to have a try at disability sport by Stoke Mandeville Hospital. Though Paul took up powerlifting through a sports club, he actually started swimming at 8



years old as part of his rehabilitation in hospital and continued competing at national level until he was 20. Only Ben and Elsa got into disability sport through colleges.

Brittain (2002:177) indicates that the inclusive movement from special school to mainstream education in the GB “although advantageous in many respects, has had a relatively negative effect on sporting opportunities for people with disabilities” due to a range of reasons “such as lack of time, training and resources for teachers, physical education being squeezed from the curriculum and the problems of integrating children with disabilities into an able-bodied sporting lesson carried out in a limited time span”. The repercussions of mainstreaming go beyond the level of individuals with disabilities as Fisher (1988) points out: “The British Paraplegic Sports have noted a decline in entrants to specialist events since the upswing in integration” (cited in Halliday, 1993: 210). This is mirrored by Tricia’s concern about the difficulty of recruiting new powerlifters nowadays because of the move toward integration into mainstream schooling and the failure of teachers to include students with disabilities into mainstream physical education.

Physical education teachers are in a key position for recognising sport talent among students with disabilities, especially in mainstream schools. But they need to be equipped with the knowledge of what constitutes a good performance in disability sport (Brittain, 2002), be able to help students with disabilities, whether in mainstream or special schools, and to know how to compare their performances against realistic reference points so that disabled students can realise their potential and build up confidence and interest in sport. Mainstreaming places responsibility on teachers to discover and nurture possible Paralympic athletes. Xiao-lien is an excellent example. Although she had never played any sport in mainstream school, fortunately a physical education teacher at the university she is studying at who has been promoting wheelchair racing discovered her talent. She has been training since then and is the gold medallist of the 2002 FESPIC Games. She talks about the unexpected transition as follows:

I had never thought that I could compete in sport...I was surprised when Coach Li

suggested I should have a go. But I was very happy that I could try something I wasn't allowed to do before. I enjoyed it and he kept encouraging me. He said that I have longer arms which are very suitable to do wheelchair racing. And it's true as I did well...It changed my status from being one of the audience to an elite athlete on the sporting stage.

Zhong-zhe also indicates that when he played judo and field events at school for the visually impaired, his current coach who is a university physical education teacher and promotes disability sport discovered his sport talent in a national competition. The coach suggested that he should focus on training for the javelin, and he subsequently became a gold medallist in both the 2000 Sydney Paralympics and the recent 2004 Athens Paralympics. In addition, in order to help Zhong-zhe concentrate on training without worries, the coach recommended him, with his excellent performances in the Paralympics, to study in the Physical Education Department at his current university with an exemption from tuition fees.

### **Mainstream schooling leads to changes in perception?**

Many Taiwanese and British participants indicate that mainstream education helps able-bodied people understand disability through contact and interaction. Yen-zi suggests that the public's false perceptions or reactions toward disabled people usually stem from lack of knowledge, so that disabled children studying in mainstream schools can help non-disabled people gain a better understanding of disability at an early age. As a consequence, Tricia explains that non-disabled people "are not frightened of it (disability). They are not wary of it if you like. They may accept it as a normal thing that can happen to everybody". Eva claims that there were 50 disabled children in her school and non-disabled children grew up with them and did not see them as different. Paul also speaks of his experience:

Those people in my class or in my year at school have grown up and been aware of those kinds of things because they learn to come through with disability using me as a role model. Some of them have gone to business and some other things and they have taken that knowledge from school into the workplace.

Contact has long been the key medium for changing the beliefs and perceptions of minority groups (Roper, 1990; Stephan and Brigham, 1985). Mainstream schools may create a contact environment for non-disabled children to enhance their level of

knowledge about disability, and physical education is an ideal context for this to take place. However, it is the content of the contact that determines the success of changing perceptions. As Roper (1990:246) points out, the five components crucial to perception changes in a positive direction are “equal status, co-operative interdependence, support by an authority figure, opportunities to interact, and opportunity to disprove stereotypic assumptions”. According to the schooling experiences of participants outlined in this chapter, examination of each component within the context of mainstream physical education gives a picture of the possibility for changes to occur: Physical education teachers tend to exclude or restrict disabled children from participation in physical activities. They thus prevent opportunities for students with disabilities to socially interact with non-disabled children in an integrated context, let alone opportunities to dispel negative perceptions of physical competence. Partial inclusion such as participating in selective activities or only competing with other disabled children does not allow chances for disabled students to cooperate with able-bodied students in order to attain common goals in games, for example. Consequently, disabled students are often rendered unequal in status as spectators whereas non-disabled students may assume superiority in the belief that disabled children are not good enough to play with them. Evidently little positive changes in the perceptions of disability can be expected at present in mainstream schooling and there is a great likelihood that negative perceptions will be reinforced in the context of physical education, unless “schools and teachers move beyond the level of merely getting on the inclusion bandwagon, paying lip-service to superficial changes such as policy statements but backed up by no real action in practice” (Vickerman, Hayes, and Whetherly, 2003: 51). Physical education teachers should be encouraged to adopt the social model of disability, recognising that disability is socially constructed, and thus to help students to learn that diverse forms of embodiment are acceptable.

### **Concluding remarks**

This chapter has examined schooling experiences with a focus on the physical education experiences of elite athletes with disabilities in this research. Critical

attention has been paid to the structural and institutional factors of the education process and to normative values surrounding the body and ways in which existing notions associated with disability which are predominantly embedded within the medical model discourse are sustained and therefore, shape experience and perceptions of disability.

Although inclusive education has been supported through legislation in both countries, the philosophical basis of the policy in the GB appears to move away from the medical towards the social model of disability whereas the medical model discourse remains most influential in the inclusive policy in Taiwan. Despite more disabled students than ever before being educated within mainstream settings, apparently there is still a considerable way for full inclusion to take place. Finkelstein and Stuart (1996) argue that in the GB the use of the terms “special” and “special needs” are themselves examples of a “disabling culture” generating and maintaining a distance between disabled people and their non-disabled peers. Special classes in mainstream schools continue the culture of separate special education in another form. Students with disabilities or “special educational needs” in mainstream schooling are constantly distinguished from their non-disabled peers by formal and informal discursive practices such as statementing procedures<sup>19</sup> and monitoring systems, and through institutional arrangements which make them “different” from other students, for example, going to separate classes for physical education or being excused from mainstream classes. As Priestley (1999) contends, this kind of public and “othering” practice reinforces powerful discursive messages in the minds of students. They learn to build discursive categories of “disability” or “special needs” based on small incidents that they experience accumulatively in educational settings.

The very presence of students with physical disabilities in mainstream physical education is often perceived as disruptive. Consequently, it has been customary practice to educate disabled students in separate settings from their non-disabled

---

<sup>19</sup> Statementing is an established system for education authorities by which students with the most significant special educational needs are identified.

counterparts or even dismiss them from any physical activities and sport. Mainstream school physical education especially provides negative experiences for disabled children in the GB and Taiwan and perpetuates negative perceptions of disabled people in sport and society through the socialisation process, thus having long-lasting effects on disabled students' involvement in sport and physical activity later in life. The key to change depends, to a large extent, on the willingness of schools and teachers to undertake the provision of inclusive programmes and practices through the social model of disability which recognises that disabilities should not be a barrier to participation in physical activity.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Cultural Creation of Disability and A Gendered Body Project in Elite Disability Sport**

#### **Introduction**

Increasing criticism has been made of the field of disability studies from a predominantly feminist perspective. The focus of the criticism is the economic-based materialist approaches of such writers as Finkelstein (1980) and Oliver (1990) for their neglect of the individual experiences of people with disabilities, particularly with reference to gender (Morris, 1991) and impairment (French, 1993; 1994; Wendell, 1996). In Western culture people with impairments are discriminated against not only by economic/practical discrimination but also by ideological and symbolic prejudices associated with the “flawed body” (Shakespeare, 1994). This has led to growing advocacy that the social model of disability needs to be re-conceptualised to include the personal experiences of impairment. Shakespeare (1994) maintains that this might be achieved by a more rigorous analysis of the role of culture in the oppression of disabled people. This chapter thus starts with the exploration of cultural reaction towards impairment in British and Taiwanese societies including a brief historical review as well as contemporary social responses perceived and experienced by the elite athletes with disabilities in this research. It is followed by a discussion focusing on the obsession with bodily perfection that operates as the centre of the cultural oppression of both men and women with impairments. Reference is made to “surveillance” techniques encountered by the research participants in their everyday interaction with the able-bodied influencing their self-perceptions of body image and the ways in which they manage the pressure to conform to the dominant ideals of able-bodiedness.

The body is also a potential site of resistance to externally-imposed ideologies and practices. Hughes and Paterson (1997) argue that impairment can be reclaimed from its association with the grotesque and made a feature of pride. Pride in their bodies is achieved by an increasing number of elite athletes with disabilities who transform

disability from a spoilt to a positive identity in the context of sport where physicality is admired. In the second section of this chapter is an examination of the way the male and female research participants become active agents devotedly engaging their gendered body projects in elite sport to resist dominant stereotypes of disability and gender and to reconstruct and negotiate their gender identities through their bodies in the sport context. Lastly, there is more discussion about gender issues perceived by research participants to be important with regard to their sport participation including gendered expectations towards work, family and sport careers, as well as the conflicts between male and female athletes.

### **Cultural responses towards people with impairment in Britain and Taiwan**

It is argued that people with impairments challenge able-bodied values with “different” bodies which represent everything that the “normal” world most fears, i.e. loss, tragedy and the unknown. Impairments act as a reminder of able-bodied people’s own frailty, their own susceptibility to morbidity and mortality (Shakespeare, 1994). Furthermore, the fear of contamination of physical and psychic damage results in the creation of attitudinal barriers. Thomas argues that in response to deep-rooted psychological fears of the abnormal and the unknown, in earlier societies in the West at different times and in different cultures reactions to anomalies such as impairment varied from “reverence, pity, mockery, torture or death” (Thomas, 2003:105). With reference to Britain, Barnes (1997) provides a full detailed discussion of the cultural responses to people with impairments in Western society before the onset of industrialisation. It was not until the emergence of welfare and caring social policies in the eighteenth century that disabled people were treated with more dignity. The systematic exclusion of people with impairments from mainstream life and culture, considered as the stimulus for the emergence of disability politics in its present form in Britain, is rooted in industrialisation and the medicalisation of disability in the nineteenth century (Barnes, 1997). People with impairments have been constructed as the “other”, “flawed”, “invalid” and are regarded as unable to live up to and cope with the demands of a “normal life”, consequently they have been dispatched to segregated institutions and excluded from mainstream social

participation. Barnes (1997) argues that negative public attitudes, ranging from overt prejudice and hostility, condescension and pity, to ignorance and indifference, are the biggest obstacles to disabled people's meaningful inclusion into mainstream community life. The oppression of people with disabilities finds expression in institutional discrimination against them in education, employment, the welfare system, the built environment and the leisure industry, as well as through the proliferation of able-bodied values and the misrepresentation of disabled people in the mass media (Barnes, 1996). In Britain, it is only within the past twenty years that this cultural or ideological hegemony has started to be seriously challenged.

Indeed, the majority of British participants in this research comment that British society has changed in the last 15 years with regard to the perception of and treatment towards people with disabilities. Paul, a 52-year-old retired powerlifter was aware of generational differences in attitudes towards disabled people. For example, in the era of his mother, families would keep disabled children at home and people in wheelchairs going down the street would be stared at. Charles suggests that the older generation are not used to seeing disabled people so that they feel concerned and thus threatened by them, whereas the younger generation nowadays is much more open-minded about disability. Disabled people are also more included in social and leisure aspects of life. For example, Ross indicates that 20 years ago he seemed to be the only disabled person going out with friends to night clubs in Cardiff, but nowadays it is not rare to see some people in wheelchairs having a night out and disabled people will not be refused entry into places like night clubs. Paul points out that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 gives British disabled people the right of access to facilities and services which includes those in sport areas. He explains that "the gyms have to adapt and the staff need to understand and be aware of disability. In the last 10 years it has gone from really lip service to actually implementing, making sure that it is taking place".

Disabled people in general seem to be more socially integrated into British society than in previous times, but many British participants argue that negative public



perceptions do not and will not disappear altogether even though they perceive that prejudice has decreased gradually. Charles claims that British people's perceptions of disability are "no worse than any other country really. You always have your minority to get singled out". And Eva explains, "You always will get some prejudice where there is 'race', or about your sexuality or gender. So you always will come up against one or two". Morris (1993) indicates that prejudice can occur in very subtle ways and "hidden assumptions form the bedrock to most of our interaction with the non-disabled world". One of the biggest misleading assumptions about disability is that people with physical impairments all have a mental problem as well. Tricia, a 61-year-old retired powerlifter, points out that 20 years ago British people did not know how to react to disabled people due to such prevalent misconceptions:

My father had a friend, and this is only going back 20 years, who the first time he met myself and my husband said, "How do I talk to you?" They had never been involved with disability full stop. They just didn't have a clue...I answered, "Same as anybody else!!" I suppose it is the old adage, isn't it? You see someone in the wheelchair and you automatically assume that the brain doesn't work. Because you are in a wheelchair and your leg doesn't work, your head doesn't work either!

Steven argues that nowadays some people who are either naïve or discriminatory still hold such stereotypes. As he explains, "It doesn't matter whether it really does affect them or not...I think anyone who has a disability is in their eyes under the same umbrella – you are a moron and you are probably a severe mental problem. That's how I think they see disabled people". The assumption that people with physical impairments are incapable or incompetent still persists in British society. As a result, nowadays it remains common to find that people take the "Does he take sugar attitude" towards disabled people in public situations. As Fiona explains:

...Say someone enters the pub in a wheelchair with a friend who is walking, and then the bar man will look at the walking person. "What does he want? What does she want?" They won't look at the person in the wheelchair...They don't ask the person "What would you like?" They ask the able-bodied person with them.

For participants with visual impairments, a better social interaction can be facilitated if people's anxiety about blind people's no eye-contact in talking is overcome. As Ben indicates:

I think the worst thing is when people are scared; I often find people are scared to

talk to you because their attitude is well, “How would he know I am talking to him? Because you don’t make eye contact, how would I know that you were talking to me?” But I think once people get over their initial nervousness; it’s not a problem for them.

Despite the seemingly evolving acceptance of disability in British society, it appears that the misconception of disability underpinned by the medical perspective is still manifest in public attitudes toward and interaction with disabled people. In Taiwanese society, before Western medicine was introduced through missionary activity in the nineteenth century, cultural perceptions of people with impairments were predominantly entrenched in religious discourses<sup>20</sup>. Disabled people were often regarded as having offended god or ghost, and impairments were a consequence of wrongdoing. Thus, it was believed, they must give their bodies to the gods in order to be “reborn” through various rituals. With such religious perspectives, many disabled people, especially psychiatric patients, were usually worshipped as super-natural beings (Chen, 2003). But religious causality and reincarnation are not the exclusive explanation or “truth” of impairment. During the Japanese occupation (1895-1945) Western medicine was systematically promoted by the Japanese colonial government and established its professional autonomy and powerful status through policy implementations. Western medicine has provided the major rationale for the diagnosis and treatment of impairment. “Rational” Western medicine has systematically characterised people with physical and mental disabilities purely as pathological problems. Disability is nowadays perceived to be a result of illness and the disabled body is automatically in the power of medical professionals. With the endorsement of a government policy utilising the Western medical system, rational and scientific medical knowledge has become the mainstream and authoritative perspective about the body in contemporary Taiwanese society. However, according to Chen (2003), religious retribution is not completely replaced by Western medical discourse. Although at a legal level, the medical discourse has a decisive effect and plays a key role in the construction of the contemporary disabled body, traditional

---

<sup>20</sup> In terms of religion, 93 percent of Taiwanese people believe in a mixture of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism (CIA The World Factbook, 2004).

religious beliefs have not totally disappeared in the process of rationalisation, but appear to co-exist with medical disability discourse. Gao-ming, a 37-year-old disabled powerlifter, comments that, “30 years ago when I was a child, disability was repellent to society. It’s mainly because people lacked knowledge. They thought it is an illness. Some people even asked if the disability is transmittable. Some other people even think it’s their ancestor doing bad things in a previous life”. But Xien-ge believes that, “At least now very few people have those superstitious thoughts about disability”.

Most of the Taiwanese participants indicate that Taiwanese society has improved in respect to the perception and treatment of disabled people over the past 10 years. Generally speaking, younger generations accept disabled people better than older generations. Juen-juen indicates that people who are in older generations or live in the countryside may still have false perceptions about disability:

In December 1992 we were in a fund-raising activity for attending competitions abroad. It was 12 athletes travelling from Kenting, the very south part of Taiwan, to Taipei by wheelchairs. It happened to be during a cold wave. When we stopped in a gas station to go to the toilet and get some drinks. There were old people there complaining to the able-bodied people who accompanied us that “You are so cruel! Their legs are not functional, but you make them do this kind of difficult thing in such bad weather”. They looked very sad and were about to cry...

People with impairments used to be hidden at home or in specialised institutions as they were often regarded as an embarrassment to their families and needing to be in care. But with government advocacy in response to the global influence of the disability rights movement, disabled people in Taiwan nowadays are encouraged to go out and take part in society. Disability sport is thus developed and promoted to meet the leisure needs of people with disabilities. As Gao-ming states:

Disability sport really started 10 years ago. How about before when there was no disability sport? Weren’t there any disabled people? There were. But they didn’t think disabled people should go out to do sport, but better to stay home. It’s been changing during the last 10 years and there are more activities held now.

Increased global awareness of disability issues has also resulted in a change in the language of impairment and disability. The government has made an attempt to

challenge disabling language and to redefine disability in order to be in tune with the Western disability movement. For example, in earlier times “Tsan fei” which means “useless” or “worthless” was a common and derogatory Chinese term to refer to people with impairments. It seemed to sum up the prevalent hostility and disregard for disabled people in Taiwan. But after the Protection Law for the Handicapped and Disabled took effect in 1980, the term was changed to “Tsan jang”, which means disability. The term switch has been combined into a Taiwanese government slogan “Tsan er bu fei”, which means disabled but not useless, and “Fei er you yong”, which means people with impairments can be good for something through legislation and re-education. The government is working to spread the ideology that disabled people can be contributors in a capitalist society and that government policy to develop and promote the labour value of disabled people should be supported.

In 1997 an even more radical expression was incorporated into the discourse of disability sport. “Shen shin jang ai” which emphasises that physical and mental disabilities may not necessarily result from physical or mental impairment but are more likely to be caused by factors beyond individual control such as environmental or attitudinal barriers. The evolution of the term suggests that the official perspective of disability in Taiwan is gradually moving away from the individual imagery of impairment to a social connotation of wider environmental restriction. Moreover, the shift from “welfare law” to “protection law” also signifies that the government services provided to people with disabilities appear to broaden from passive charity and welfare-giving to maintaining the right of disabled people in all aspects of life. Transcending the conventional practices of almsgiving and sympathy relief, the needs of disabled people in Taiwan today are answered by policies and practices linked to the ideologies of equity, opportunity and human rights. Furthermore, the anti-disablist language advocated by organisations of people with disabilities for the first time extended to the field of sport in 2004 before the Athens Paralympics. “Tsan jang au yun”, translated as Olympic Games for disabled people, was prevalently used to refer to the Paralympic Games in media coverage. In a further move away from the medicalisation of disability, and in order to emphasise

ability, it has been suggested that the term “Pa la lin pi ke yun dung huei” be used. This term is the direct translation from the pronunciation of “Paralympic” and the last three words translate as Games.

With the governmental effort to raise public awareness of disability, overt hostility appears to be rarely experienced by disabled people in Taiwanese society today. Instead, it is patronising and seemingly benevolent attitudes that most of the Taiwanese participants in this study experience. As Xien-ge elaborates:

Most of the people feel sorry for disabled people and they don't know how to talk or react to us. They sometimes talk to us like children. They are nice people, but they just think disabled people are very needy or helpless. We are capable of doing a lot of things, but sometimes what we need is just very simple things. People think we need them to do everything for us. Like barrier-free facilities are still not very prevalent in Taiwan. If there are ramps everywhere, we can also go wherever we want without others' help. So it's not really fair for us.

People with disabilities remain objects of pity. Zhong-zhe points out that the public impose their assumptions on disabled people. He argues that the ideas that blind and visually impaired people are weak and miserable, and disabled people are usually not very clever or even have mental problem are still common. The lack of knowledge about disability and the self-righteous assumptions and stereotypes not only bring disabled people huge burdens but also widen the distance between disabled and non-disabled people. Underlying the cover of sympathy is fear and dislike, so that able-bodied people are afraid and indifferent to get to know disabled people or to interact with them. Yi-xiou does not consider that societal perceptions or attitudes towards disabled people in Taiwan have changed much, despite the laws against discrimination in recent years. He stresses that their difficult circumstances in life are a result of negative societal perceptions and attitudes toward disabled people. As he explains:

There are still many people in our society who regard disability as a shame or hopeless disease or see disabled people as untrustworthy, troublesome people. People would try not to have anything to do with them. When it comes to disabled people, the words in their minds are “poor”, “uneducated”, and “miserable”. Yes, that may be the case for many disabled people, but why would they be in that kind of situation? Is it their fault that they don't have job opportunities and have a lower education? Who really cares about the life of disabled people? There may be more laws against discrimination in the last 10 years, but if the public do not change their

attitudes toward disabled people, if the company wouldn't like to hire disabled people, disabled people's lives won't be much improved.

The prejudices that people with disabilities experience often result from physical difference instead of physical limitations. The exclusion they commonly face in societies often stems from the widespread notion that they are not normal due to the physically different 'incomplete' bodies.

### **Bodily perfection and the normalising gaze on people with impairments**

Barnes (1996) indicates that the core of the cultural oppression of people with impairments lies in the myth of bodily perfection or the "able-bodied" ideal that pervaded the dominant culture of late 20<sup>th</sup> century Western society and continues today. He also points out that the importance and desirability of bodily perfection is endemic to Western cultures. However, it also permeates contemporary Taiwanese culture. After Taiwan developed as a capitalist industrialised country and moved to become a consumer society, a commodity culture focusing on the body with the media constantly bombarding the public with images of young, slim, sexy, Western, able-bodied figures was promoted as the "norm" to which everyone should all aspire. These forceful but narrow messages emphasising unreachable Western standards of physical perfection and beauty are often commercialised with the ideology that modern and independent women should have the autonomy and perseverance to strive to achieve perfect bodies (Liao, 1999; Lin, 2000). Thus a massive pressure is produced for Taiwanese women, disabled or not, to conform. Under such a cultural obsession, people with impairments are particularly likely to be devalued and marginalised. Indeed, disabled people have been often regarded or depicted as victims of defective bodies that signify difference and abnormality due to the prevalence of the able-bodied "norm". Having a disability therefore often becomes a primary identity that puts almost all other aspects of one's identity in the shade (Gastelnuovo and Guthrie, 1998; Gerschick, 1998).

But the strong link between disability and identity is always, for both men and women, inextricably tied to gender. It has been argued that defective body images are

especially detrimental to men with disabilities whose masculine identities are often called into question. Murphy (1995) points out that his status as disabled becomes his dominant public persona, spoiling his status as a white male academic and placing him in a lesser social category than that of blacks, even undermining his sexual identity. He also argues that gender expectations are more intense for men, thus men with disabilities experience a greater sense of failure because their paralyzed bodies radically contravene the American male ideal body. However, Morris (1991) and Hillyer (1993) both claim that women with disabilities are also weighed down by gender expectations because they are expected to normalize themselves in terms of a stereotyped feminine bodily appearance, physical beauty and sexual attractiveness. Pressure to conform may have a more negative effect on opportunities for success in women's lives than for their male counterparts because, compared with men, women's values more often lie in their physical beauty (Gastelnuovo and Guthrie, 1998).

It is clear that the bodies of individuals with disabilities of both genders are central to their oppression. According to Meekosha (1998:172), bodies can be regarded as "texts in which we can read the ideological assumptions of the social system: texts for understanding social institutions, social discourses and social forms". However, the body is also a major site for ideological contestation, and the "disabled" body in particular offers huge challenges to the hegemonic ideal of the body as constructed through able-bodied discourse. Individuals with disabilities have to face the reality of their physical impairment as well as the societal view that their body is "deviant" and "less than" the able-bodied, because it is argued, individuals with disabilities "are looked upon, identified, judged and represented primarily through their bodies, which are perceived in popular consciousness to be imperfect, incomplete and inadequate" (Hargreaves, 2000: 185). The visibility of physical impairment becomes the highlight of disabled people's bodies and places enormous pressure on them, especially on women with disabilities. In common with Morris and Hillyer, Stone (1995:420) argues that "Most women are more vulnerable to the myth of bodily perfection, because women even more than men are judged, and judge themselves,

by their appearance”. Without exception, all the participants in this research have experienced a sense of control over their bodies through various surveillance techniques in their interactions with able-bodied people frequently resulting in disempowering experiences. For example, bullying and teasing in mainstream school when they were children, as discussed in Chapter Four. Yen-zi points out that when she pushes her wheelchair in the streets, people in Taiwan are still curious and sometimes stare at her which makes her feel uncomfortable. She also perceives relative differences in Western countries when she goes for competitions: “No one will stare at disabled people on the street, at least it is a lot better than there”. Many research participants experience a deep sense of unease whenever they interact with the able-bodied world. Particularly when they step into the public world, they have to deal with strangers’ reactions. Juen-juen explains how uncomfortable she feels:

Looking at others and then looking at myself, I just feel, sometimes I feel I am the animal in the zoo. Even if they don’t say anything, their eyes are telling me that I am like a strange creature and they are the perfect human beings.

Juen-juen continued to tell me that she is often made to feel self-conscious of her abnormality in the presence of non-disabled people. The societal view and cultural message from imagery of idealised bodies keep reminding disabled people that they are “less than perfect”. They struggle with their imperfect bodies that transgress the ideal of body perfection that is largely emphasised in both British and Taiwanese societies. The poor body images and low self-esteem of disabled people have thus been documented in research (Blinde and McClung, 1997; Morris, 1993). Disabled people themselves often report serious concern with self-image, having been socialised to think of themselves as asexual or unattractive. Xiao-lein indicates, “I did worry about how I look like because people just form an opinion about you when they see you...A lot of people think disabled women are useless and unattractive before they get to know you. I suppose the wheelchair is off-putting”. Yen-zi also reveals dissatisfaction about being too small and slim, having atrophied thin legs, and sitting in a wheelchair makes her look even more weak and vulnerable. Hargreaves (2000:185) points out that, “Disabled people are aware of the significance of visibility and the heightened attention placed on their bodies. There is huge pressure



on them to appear as able-bodied as possible, to mask whenever possible the extent of their impairments”. Li-li indicates that she tried to avoid sitting in a wheelchair to disguise her disabled image:

I didn't like my body. I thought I looked ugly really. Sometimes I thought it's better than an amputee who has their legs cut off. That would be very horrible. So I used to comfort myself by thinking that when I sit on a chair, a normal chair, people wouldn't know that I am disabled because I have legs though they are much thinner. So I used to sit for a long time and moved only when I really had to because then I would need to use a wheelchair. Sometimes I wish I could swap my body for a fat person or anything as long as it's not disabled. But gradually I learned to accept the fact, accept how I look, accept that a wheelchair would be part of my body.

A wheelchair is such a significant identifier of a spoiled body and a symbol of weakness and dependence that some participants want to get rid of it. It is mirrored in Xiao-shuan's following comment about her desire and attempts to walk in high school, especially when seeing polio students being able to get up with a frame:

I wanted to get up so much. I just wanted to get up and walk on my own feet. I thought if I could walk with crutches, it's better than being stuck in the wheelchair. I had tried to get up a thousand times, but I failed. I had tried many traditional methods that I had heard about which might cure my impairment, but it never worked. The physiotherapist told me it's very difficult for me to walk. He said why not use the desire to walk to make your other dreams come true. So I finally gave up the idea of getting up to walk.

Surveillance appears to occur on two levels. People with impairments are not only aware of the normalising gaze of the able-bodied world, but also watch and judge each other. It is evident through the constant comparative evaluation made by many participants with other disabled people when they comment on their respective body images. For example, Yi-xiou feels lucky that he is not a wheelchair user and remarks that, “If I was in a wheelchair, I could feel very bad about being a lot shorter than most people. Being stuck in a wheelchair just would suddenly make me look more vulnerable”. The only thing he is concerned and conscious about is people looking at him walking a bit jolty. Gao-ming expresses a similar concern about the way he walks, but he says, “People won't notice my legs unless I walk, and I function perfectly well in every other way”.

Similarly, using a cane is regarded as a signifier of being blind and is sometimes

avoided by people with visual impairments. The following comment from Ben describes his unwillingness to use a cane but, instead, walking with a guide dog reduces the exposure of his blindness:

Before I had got a guide dog, I used to use a long cane. I didn't use a cane unless I absolutely had to. I hated to get it out because I felt it was like basically me saying, "Look at me I am blind". And then I got a guide dog and it didn't bother me at all. I was able to walk fast, overtook most people, walked past them, and it didn't bother me at all. Having a guide dog helped me, you know suddenly people start talking to you on the train and stuff when you've got a dog. It's a tremendous icebreaker. People would stop and say, "It's a lovely dog, is it male or female? What's his name?" You see you are talking to people. It's a good conversation opener.

Visual impairment which is often relatively invisible does not seem to undermine the self-image of participants. Yen-wen argues that apart from being blind, his bodily appearance is no different from able-bodied people's compared with people who are in a wheelchair or lose legs or arms. As Zhong-zhe explains:

It's strange that sometimes I think being a visually impaired person is worse than say like a wheelchair user because being unable to see indeed causes inconvenience in life to a great extent, especially living in Taiwan where barrier-free facilities are so limited...Compared with a lot of wheelchair users, my impairment doesn't affect my physical appearance, at least I am not that obvious to be recognised as a visually impaired person as I walk freely without sticks.

Moreover, apart from attempts to avoid identifiers such as wheelchairs or canes, another strategy employed by some participants, especially many female Taiwanese participants, is to enhance their personal appearance since they realise that their impairment cannot be "fixed" or changed. Decking themselves out with clothes is reported as the major method. Xiao-shuan explains:

I gradually realised that it's an impossible dream. Then I tried to make myself look better. I used to stay in front of the mirror for a long time trying to find out the best way to dress myself. Even if I am disabled, I want to look great. I don't want to be regarded as a miserable disabled person who dresses badly and looks awful. I always present myself well in front of others...

She also points out that disabled people with polio usually have disproportionately thin legs so they usually wear long skirts or pants to disguise their impairments. Stone (1995) argues that disabled women are particularly prone to hiding. It reveals that women are especially vulnerable to culturally-prescribed appearance norms and bodily ideals. However, Taiwanese society does not only value women's appearance

and body beauty but also their ability to take care of others. Thus Hui-hui gives up normalising herself in any way to meet the appearance norm but tries to make herself a pleasant person. She proves her ability to meet social expectations by demonstrating no functional or emotional problem which in a way challenges stereotypes about disabled people's bodily limitations. As she elaborates:

I used to think I looked very awful. I didn't look at myself in the mirror. I didn't want to. Sometimes I wished it was just a dream and the next day when I woke up I would become an able-bodied person. But I have given up now. So you see I have become so big, so fat! ...Even if I were slim, I don't think a disabled woman is attractive anyway. But it's strange that even though I am fat, sometimes people say I am rotund and cute! I worked hard on becoming a pleasing person. I try to move fast or park my motorcycle quickly when I go out with able-bodied friends because I don't want to be a trouble to them. I talk about positive things with them, not to complain about the disadvantaged life which I usually share with my close disabled friends only. I just want to be a lovely person. I hope people like me, as a person, not for my appearance.

Male participants in both countries are also affected by the pervasive bodily and appearance norms. Many British participants explain that they were self-conscious about their bodily appearance, especially when they were younger. Paul points out, "I would think like all young adolescents, aware of how you look aesthetically". Ross is not really worried about his body image in relation to his impairment because, he says, "By the time I was of an age where body image mattered I was doing sport and believed that I had developed a good physique". The only thing that has ever bothered him was his physical height though he does not use a wheelchair. Xien-ge indicates that he had less pressure about appearance when studying in special schools and being around other disabled people most of the time. And in fact he attracted attention through sport which gave him confidence in his physical ability and body appearance. The comments of research participants and the way they articulate their experiences appear to reveal that the pervasive bodily ideal has relatively less influence on the self-perceptions of male participants than their female counterparts.

However, the concern about body image is usually diminished by other more significant things in adult life. Gao-ming indicates, "I don't think the appearance is

that important to me anymore because there are more important things in life that I worry about or I want to do, like my work and family”. Gao-ming’s feelings are echoed by female participants. For example, Juen-juen states that as she gets older, she cares much less about the surface things, a shift that occurred especially after she got married and had children.

Surprisingly, most of the female British participants do not appear to be too concerned about their body image or appearance in comparison to their male counterparts. For instance, Eva also indicates, “I have never thought negatively about my body as far as my disability is concerned anyway. A bit fat really, but it has nothing to do with my disability but because I like my food too much!” She argues that people around her have treated her as an equal as she was growing up, so disability has never been a problem. Tricia claims, “Though I always said I wouldn’t have liked to become disabled when I was 20, as far as how I see myself, I still feel attractive and feminine and all female”.

It appears that female British participants, in particular, possess positive self-images. They accept their appearances and are able to feel positive about their looks for most of the time. And possibly it has something to do with the supportive environment as Eva suggests. However, in contrast with the above female participants with congenital disabilities, Fiona, the only participant with an acquired impairment, seems to have had very little confidence in herself after she became disabled and expresses serious concern about how people view her, especially her bodily appearance: “I do think that disabled women are much less attractive to the opposite sex or to the majority of the opposite sex. So it is a bit of a turn-off really”. Sexual confidence is essentially about beauty and independence and people with impairments, especially disabled women, can feel undermined as an oppressive consequence of the narrow concepts of physical beauty (Shakespeare, 1996b:193). Fiona is aware that being disabled puts her in a difficult position for finding a partner. As she elaborates:

I see myself at a disadvantage definitely when it comes to meeting a partner, finding

a partner...Most of the people, if they want a partner, they wouldn't want a disabled person, so I am always at a disadvantage. I want to have a husband but it seems to be hard and I haven't really got the confidence now to go out...People just see someone disabled and think, 'Oh I am not interested'. Not everybody, but an awful lot of people you know they just don't want someone disabled, they want someone normal.

The fact that not every participant tells the same story suggests the complexity of self-perceptions of body image. Moreover, physical self-confidence appears tied to sexual identity. The comments of both male and female research participants highlight the influence of compulsory heterosexuality, although disabled women seem to suffer more pressure than their male counterparts. Indeed, disadvantages regarding relationships and marriage are only identified by the female participants in both Britain and Taiwan. Juen-juen indicates that women with disabilities have fewer options because disabled men can marry able-bodied women, but the case about disabled women marrying able-bodied men is quite rare in Taiwan. Xiao-shuan concurs with the comment that disabled women are in a worse situation in finding a partner than their male counterparts and states pessimistically, "I always feel that I will end up being lonely. We feel inferior about ourselves and we think if somebody likes us, then we should be happy. In the end we let the person control us. This is my past experience". Through oppressive and patronising experiences in relationships women with disabilities are prone to internalise the assumption held by able-bodied people that disabled women are asexual, unlovely and undesirable. Gillespie-Sells *et al.* (1998:119) argue that disabled women's opportunities to fulfil their aspirations of having relationships, getting married and having children are much less than their non-disabled contemporaries. They argue that "Being continually regulated to lesser services, education, jobs and social opportunities all make it extremely difficult for them to develop and explore social contacts and relationships". The individual or personal tragedy view is that these problems are an inevitable outcome of impairment or physical incapacity, which is commonly applied to their sporting participation.

### *Adaptation and attitudes toward life*

The cultural obsession of bodily perfection in both British and Taiwanese societies clearly oppresses people with impairments. Disabled people themselves are seen as the problem and thus forced to adapt themselves to fit in to able-bodied societies. The Taiwanese participants in this study provide detailed comments about how they feel about their impairments and how they adapt to them in their lives. Most of them used to belittle themselves for having impairments. For example, Yen-zi states, “I did feel sorry about myself because of my disability. I knew I was different because I am in a wheelchair. I didn’t want to be disabled, but I believed it was fate and there was nothing I could do. Now I am used to it”. For many Taiwanese participants, having a disability, as Yen-zi indicates, means that “I will have to live a different life, a difficult one as well”. But most of the Taiwanese participants attempt to live a normal life like everyone else. As Li-li elaborates, “I didn’t want to be a burden to my family so I studied hard in high school with the hope that I would find myself a job and earn money to support myself so that I don’t have to rely on anyone or to be regarded as useless”. Xien-ge feels upset about discriminatory treatment as if it is his fault that he is disabled and has to suffer from difficulties in life. His following comment describes how hard he has worked to adapt himself and make his life worth living like able-bodied people:

I think no one wants to be disabled. Of course I felt sorry about myself when I was young. Later I feel frustrated that our lives are often more difficult than able-bodied people. Sometimes it’s like our fault to be disabled so that we suffer from all the inconvenience and differential treatment in life. You know it’s too hard to change the world, so you can only change yourself. I am used to my disability, using the wheelchair and so forth. We learn to live our lives like everyone else. But things are sometimes just more difficult for us like finding a job. I am fortunate to finally have a stable job, a flat and a car. I try to improve the quality of life, but sometimes it’s just there, it’s always there. There are always some things that make us feel different, second-class. Maybe it’s God wanting to train me. I have to work very hard, cherish my body and all the things I have. I try to get on with life and make the most of it.

Unlike Taiwanese participants, British participants do not stress so much how impairment affects them emotionally but tend to accept their impairments and reveal a positive attitude toward themselves and their lives. For example, Ross claims that he is a pragmatist: “I have got a disability, so what? I can get to the best. I can

achieve the best I can. That's it. So I am always quite open-minded about it...I haven't got any hang-ups about my disability". Eva argues that she is the kind of person who will not let her disability take over her life. She does her best to experience life and has hardly ever come up with a negative attitude. Although Fiona had been very depressed for the first two years after becoming disabled when she was 20, she feels lucky "because I am alive...because I can walk after a fashion. So it's better than being in a wheelchair all the time". She has adapted and got used to her new life, as she states, "This is just my life and this is what I am like. And I have made it work for me".

Moreover, having impairments appears to affect participants in this research in a positive way as it makes them determined to achieve. For example, Elsa indicates, "Sometimes that [her impairment] does make you a little more pig-headed, you know sort of wanting to do things, wanting to succeed. I don't know whether it is to compensate. It might be. I may not have taken up sport if I was able-bodied". Tricia also feels the need to prove that she is as good as anybody else. In common with their British counterparts, most of the Taiwanese participants report that having impairments and disabling life circumstances makes them determined to prove themselves and sport is their major channel for doing so. Li-li explains her mixed feelings towards her impairment:

It made me feel so terrible and useless, but it forced me to make up my mind to live a normal life like others in our society...I tried to, had been trying and hoped to live a normal life like able-bodied people as my family expected....Now it makes me an elite powerlifter. It made me achieve something in sport. It changed my life.

Indeed, the research participants choose to prove themselves in elite sport. Ben points out that running helps him cope with being blind and shows that he is as good as any sighted person. Eva indicates that her talent and achievements in powerlifting really help with her ego and self-esteem. But for Taiwanese participants a sport career is another challenging choice. As Li-li explains, "My sport career leads me to another different and difficult life. It's a difficult career yes. I think my choice is probably regarded as an abnormal one too! But I just choose to do something I am good at. It's difficult, it's different, but it's good because it makes me someone".

Similarly, Yen-wen claims, “I think being blind made me strong and determined. If I was a sighted person, my life might be very different, just a normal life. My life now is not normal, it’s extraordinary to me.”

### **Gendered body projects in disability sport**

Hargreaves (2000:188) indicates that, “The ideology of normality, at its most extreme characterised as ‘body fascism’, is a powerful form of social control”. Apart from hiding the impairments and enhancing the appearance with clothes, some disabled people, especially disabled women, actively work on their bodies, as Hargreaves further argues:

Some disabled women can, and do, in common with able-bodied women, reshape and redefine their bodies through exercise regimes, cosmetic surgery, diets, drugs, adornments and prostheses. They actively construct their own bodies and the meanings attached to them through a process of discipline and self-surveillance.

However, these rehabilitative and corrective surgeries may be, as Meekosha (1998:177) points out, “performed under the guise of indispensable medical treatment, but are in fact often designed to normalize the less than perfect body - to make it more attractive and pleasing, to fit dominant conceptions of attractiveness and desirability”. Corrective bodily practices celebrate the medical-rehabilitation norm and dominant ableist values, and the “new” body becomes the product of normalizing control.

However, some people with impairments do not seek to subject their disabled body to “corrective” medical interventions associated with professional “normalising” practices. Instead, they are not afraid and ashamed to display their bodies and come out to participate in sport when body and physical ability is at the centre. Elite athletes with disabilities such as the British and Taiwanese participants in this research transcend the ideology of physical inferiority and actively engage in their “body projects” in elite disability sport. They are representative of a new generation of disabled people as you will see later in this section.



Individuals with disabilities are a large minority group and have limitations imposed upon their participation in society. Just like the biological differences between men and women, the physical differences between the able-bodied and the disabled provide the basis for the social inequalities experienced by disabled people and further contribute to their marginalized status (DePauw, 1997). Hargreaves (2000) argues that it is the ideological, social and political structures of power that affect the lives of disabled people in fundamental ways. There is no exception in their sporting lives. Disability sport, as other spheres of life among individuals with disabilities, embodies values and beliefs about gender relations, and promotes and reproduces gender inequalities, while it is also a site for resistance to various dominant values and for change in sport as well as in society at large. Foucault (1979:95) postulates that “Where there is a power, there is resistance”. He also emphasises the body as a site of power and opens up possibilities that individuals can resist the normalising practices prevalent in societies. The research participants in this study all use sport as a means of confronting prevalent ideologies, as discussed in the following sections.

### *Resistance to disability*

One fundamental form of resistance voiced by the participants is the use of sport. Many athletes in this research indicate that their sport involvement helps them come to terms with their disability. For example, Li-li states, “My sport talent and achievement in powerlifting make me realise that I am not useless anymore and I am capable of doing many things”. Ben elaborates how running changes his perception of what disability means to him:

I mean I was very shy and self-conscious and to an extent I suppose in some senses I am still self-conscious about being blind. But running helps me come to terms with being blind and it helps me show that I was as good as any sighted person. It helped me mature, it helped me grow up. Even though people may not perceive themselves better than me because they could see, I knew within myself that [when, for example,] walking along the train platform and I just think these people probably aren't as fit as me. I can get up stairs more easily than they can. It's difficult to describe really. It gives you a kind of sense of balance. It cools things out.

Participants realise that they are not always “disabled” as a result of having impairments. Sport participation gives them a sense of control over their bodies.

They feel physically powerful and in charge of their own bodies in sport. Juen-juen used to feel that she “had been stuck in her body”, but she points out that now: “When I am doing sport, I feel I get out of this shell temporarily, my body. I can move and run. I don’t feel that I am trapped in my body anymore. I feel kind of free. I feel great”. Xiao-lien also indicates that when she is doing sport, she feels that “my body is actually alive. I feel relieved from all the stress in life. It’s like getting out of the cage...I really enjoy that feeling. I don’t regard my body as a burden anymore”. Through sport, athletes with disabilities “regain” control over and find themselves the masters of their bodies. Li-li explains the sense of control she experiences in powerlifting:

I feel I am totally in control of myself. When I lift the weights, I tell myself that I can do it as I know I can do it and I did it. When my injured left hand is hurting during training, I convince myself it’s not hurting at all and just concentrate on the lifting. It worked! Sometimes I just didn’t feel pain any more. It’s amazing. I feel my mind, my will can control my body.

The sense of control over their bodies perceived by the research participants is not simply over their bodies but also their lives. They feel empowered by the sense of control they have over their bodies which give them more mental strength and confidence to make their own decisions in life. Xiao-lien and Xiao-shuan share similar views:

I also feel a sense of control over not just my body, but also myself, my life, my future. It’s not people telling me what I can do or what I can’t do. I know what I am capable of and I know I have a lot of potential even though I am disabled. Through sport I find myself. It’s very important to me. (Xiao-lien)

But I have found myself in sport. It makes me a better person. I realise that I have some control of my body, myself, my destiny. I find the sense of self worth from my body and I myself decide what I want to do. Although the environment around me is difficult, it’s worthwhile because I make the best out of it. (Xiao-shuan)

The regaining of control over their bodies reflects the resistance among the research participants to the intervention of doctors. Some athletes have been advised against doing certain types of sports, especially those that are especially strenuous. This has been the case for several powerlifters in this study. For example, Xien-ge, Li-li, and Xiao-shuan have advice from doctors not to engage in such a sport anymore for fear

of causing further physical damage. However, the doctors' warnings are not fully accepted by them. The following comment from Li-li describes how she resists her doctors' professional advice and copes with the pain of her wrist so that she can keep training as an elite powerlifter:

My left wrist hasn't really recovered since 1994. Doctors used to tell me 'You only have two hands working. If you damage them, what can you do in the future?' They are very against it as powerlifting is bad for bones. But I didn't go to see them any more. I didn't want to give up my sport. If I felt pain, I kept training and I didn't feel pain after a while. Or I trained less. I know my own situation. I won't feel anything as long as I keep training. I told myself to forget the pain, you know, to repress the pain with my will and expectation....So I never stop training as the doctor advised. I know my own body. I know how much I can take. I know what's best for me.

Moreover, most of the athletes in both countries affirm their sense of physical competence through sport, and the experience of winning in competitions, no matter whether big or small ones, encourages them to further explore their physical potential and aim for achieving at a higher level. For instance, Ben's victory in defeating a former champion in all three events in his first championship gives him faith in his ability and makes him wonder how well he might achieve in the sports arena in the future. Gao-ming indicates that he gets addicted to powerlifting because he keeps improving. He is often amazed to find out things he couldn't do before he took up powerlifting. Sport success keeps the athletes inspired and makes them desire to exceed further. Juen-juen explains that winning gives her confidence: "It gives me something to be proud of and let people be proud of me as well. I think everyone needs that".

Another form of resistance exhibited by most of the British and Taiwanese athletes in this research is focused on confronting the pervasive stereotypes of disabled people being weak, inactive and dependent. Curtis clearly indicates that sport is "a way of challenging people's perceptions of what disabled people can do. Many people think that disabled people just sit around and watch TV. Doing sport can prove that we can do something and we can achieve like any able-bodied people". Xien-ge also points out his involvement in elite sport: "Maybe it is a kind of compensation, but I enjoy doing something that people don't always think disabled people can do". Charles'

following comment reveals that the participation of athletes with disabilities in elite sport makes them “feel equal...you train as able-bodied athletes and demonstrate what you can do as well as them”. He also points out that gaining respect from people’s recognition is the drive to strive for success in any area in life, but it may be more evident in sport for disabled people. Ben’s following comment reveals that his sport involvement at elite level is to resist the dominant societal perception of disabled people:

I think that’s why I carry on running so long because it enables me to keep showing people that I am not just some blind person who walks quickly or happens to do a job or whatever it might be. I am actually fitter than most of the people in the country. I am running much faster than they could dream of. And I am achieving.

Weiss (2001: 401) indicates that, “What makes sports stand out is the unity of action and representation, a unity that is seldom seen anywhere else”. Achievement in sport is visible and immediately recognisable. This is why the participants aim for the highest level – the Paralympic Games. For example, Curtis wants to fulfil his dream to attend the Paralympics although he has failed to qualify twice before. He explains that the reason why he persists is because, “I want to prove people wrong”. People with disabilities can demonstrate their abilities in sport and make an impression of qualities such as strength, power, courage, intelligence and self-control which are valued in sport settings as well as in societies in general. Demonstrating such qualities acts as an effective way to confront and resist negative stereotypes about disability and blur the boundaries between the disabled and the able-bodied.

However, disability and gender interact to operate as a structure of oppression in different ways for men and women with disabilities. The following two sections present an analysis of how male athletes with disabilities resist the stigma associated with the notion of inferior masculinity through elite sport and how female athletes with disabilities challenge the stereotypes associated with “invalid” disabled female sporting bodies as well as the negative perceptions of women in sport.

### ***Resistance to stereotypes associated with discrediting the male disabled body***

For men with disabilities, having a disability contravenes many beliefs associated

with being a man. Originally, they have gender privilege by virtue of being men, yet their disabilities profoundly undermine this privilege, and thus leave them subject to marginalization. Morris (1994:215) indicates that those men born with a disability or having a disability acquired at an early age often find that “the social roles which non-disabled men take for granted are not open to them”. This is because the body is central to the attainment of hegemonic masculinity defined in terms of traditional White, male, able-bodied, heterosexual images of masculinity. However, men with disabilities experience a conflict between the ideal of maleness, which connotes independence, strength and assertiveness, and the role of disability which signifies dependence, weakness, and passivity. The hegemonic forms of masculinity are predicated on particular sets of bodily performance, therefore when the performance cannot be sustained as a result of disability, for example, gender is vulnerable (Connell, 1995). The gender identity of disabled men is threatened due to the dissociation of maleness. Nonetheless, men with disabilities continue to internalise hegemonic masculine attributes as ideals and strive to demonstrate them. They also use hegemonic masculine attributes to judge themselves and other men (Gerschick, 1998). Shakespeare (1996b) points out that one strategy often employed to resist the disabled role is associated with traditional “masculine” expectations. It involves a refusal to submit to reality, and an attempt to regain or maintain what is perceived as a “normal” identity through intense competitive activity such as sport.

A crucial arena of masculine accomplishment is sport. Sport provides men with an opportunity to exhibit key characteristics of hegemonic masculinity such as endurance, strength, and competitive spirit. Consequently, even though they are regarded as unable to meet socially-constructed ideals, men with disabilities have increasingly gained access to sport participation and sought to demonstrate physical prowess through sport participation. It is evident that most of the male British and Taiwanese athletes in this research, apart from resisting the common stereotypes about disabled people being physically weak, inactive and dependent, also confirm their essential maleness through demonstrating their physical skills and muscularity. It is probably more obvious that male powerlifters strive to rebuild their masculine

image through sport than disabled males in other sports. For example, Ross indicates that he chose powerlifting because it is a sport where anyone can easily recognise how good his physical competence is. As he elaborates:

It is a thing about being able to show people I can lift 175kg and people being able to instantly realise that it's a lot of weight; whereas to say that I can push my wheelchair 100 meters in 20 seconds, that isn't fast. But there isn't any mistake there... Yes a lot of guys in their prime are doing powerlifting because you can say, "I can bench 175kg or whatever" and it's a lot of weight whether able-bodied or disabled. And people can see that. That's what I wanted about it.

Powerlifting is clearly a showman's sport. Xien-ge explains how doing powerlifting specifically facilitates an immediate masculine impression:

I think doing powerlifting cannot only build up your body shape directly but also show people how strong you are. It gives people an instant impression about the athlete's physique in the process of doing this sport. People will just have to take notice of you as all the movements show the powerful and masculine image. So yes it proves my masculinity.

Xien-ge, in common with other male athletes in this research, seeks actively to improve his bodily appearance through sport. For example, Steven claims that sport involvement for people with disabilities is a process of "re-discovering yourself". As he explains:

I think maybe if you just lose the use of your legs, if you are not able to be a tall man walking around, if you then slump down, you are only that high because you sat in a wheelchair, I think you do lose your whole distinction, don't you? I think when you put a lot of effort into whatever you do in sport, when you are pushing around because obviously you then develop your body and build up your muscle...

If a disabled male powerlifter has paralysed legs, he can compensate by building his upper-body with the insignia of masculinity. Indeed, wheelchair research participants develop their upper bodies in order to resist the stigmatisation of a disabled body lacking signs of masculinity and they demonstrate their physiques which are in line with dominant norms of the male body and male physical attractiveness. For example, Paul is aware of the change in his body which has become fit, lean with more muscle, just as he wants: "You can help your body and be as good as any bodybuilders if you like... I think a lot of people are sort of in awe of you. If you do that, you promote yourself". Yi-xiou's following comment reveals that his involvement in powerlifting

has a lot to do with the desire to possess an ideal masculine body:

I saw lots of weightlifters who are really big, with massive huge muscles. They looked so macho. I believe wherever they go, people will just have to notice them. You got to see them yourself. At that moment I knew straight away that's how I would like to be looked like. I want to impress people without saying anything, just like those guys. I want to develop my physique. So I joined a powerlifting club.

He argues that, "Powerlifting is a sport where you can see the development of your body". He further discusses the change of body he feels when doing powerlifting, "I can feel every muscle of my body is working, is alive. I feel how they work and I really enjoy the feeling of doing it. It just makes me feel good".

Male participants in both countries all voice pride and satisfaction with their bodily appearance enhanced from training either in powerlifting or running, as the following examples reveal:

I am much satisfied with my physique now. I have a big chest, wide shoulders, and muscular arms. I like to wear tops that can show my body off. I think I look far better than those fat men who have big bellies. They look disgusting to me...Of course it doesn't mean that I prefer having an impairment to being fat. No. I just feel that I have faith in my body and my physical ability. (Yi-xiou)

Powerlifting is an especially masculine sport. I am always very proud to tell people that I am an elite powerlifter and then you will see people look at my body with an admiring look. I did attract a lot of attention at school because of doing this sport. I think it satisfies my male ego. (Xien-ge)

I know that physically I have got a much better body than most blokes. I have got good muscle tone. I am tall and slim and stuff. I mean I take a lot of satisfaction from being fit...to an extent I suppose I am a bit vain about my body. I don't mind just wearing shorts and taking my top off you know. I come to this massage school. I am the model for the lecturers showing everyone else because I have got good musculature because there is no fat. You can see all the muscles. You know you get a few girls commenting and stuff you know. (Ben)

Sport is one of the few paths to men's physical capital (Bourdieu, 1978). Male participants gain the embodied capital in the form of physical attributes such as the acquisition of power and strength through powerlifting practice. Muscularity is equated with masculinity and symbolises male sexuality and what it is to be a "real" man. Maleness is therefore inscribed in the actual body – the muscles themselves. Male participants train the functioning parts of their bodies in order to "create an

image of the perfectible body and therefore to revitalise a feeling of masculinity” (Hargreaves, 2000:186). Their sport prowess and masculine body image also give participants sexual confidence which affirms their gender identity as heterosexual men. In common with able-bodied men, they perceive their sexual attraction to be derived from their muscular bodies.

Male participants also challenge the stereotype of the disabled body being weak and sick by having a healthy and active lifestyle through sport. Lifestyle as a package of values, attitudes and behaviours reveals how individuals organise their lives in specific and unique ways. Brettschneider and Heim (1997: 221) indicate that it is “an essentially Western phenomenon that provides a means of establishing and portraying one’s individuality”. However, presenting a healthy lifestyle through sport is only reported by male participants in this research. For example, Yi-xiou describes that, “I like people to know that I do sport regularly. I am healthy and fit. I am physically competitive and full of energy and strength”. Gao-ming argues that he has a healthier lifestyle than many able-bodied people, “I go to work, but I have a sport habit. I do not like to be a couch potato, sitting at home watching TV after work and gaining weight. I am not like that. I am satisfied with myself and my life”. However, it is worth noting that for male Taiwanese participants the masculine body image and healthy lifestyle appear to be supporting values associated with work which is an essential component of the constitution of maleness in Taiwanese society, discussed on pages 135. If disabled men who have good jobs participate in sport as a recreation or even become part-time athletes, they have extra credits associated with being modern men. As Yen-wen points out, “If you have a decent job and then you do well in sport, even just as a hobby, you become a very attractive man”. Apart from proving independence through work, sport involvement benefits them with the image of being healthy, physically active and manly which further affirms their gender role as “real” men in Taiwanese society.

While British and Taiwanese male athletes in this research actively resist stereotypes of the disabled male body and seek validation of themselves as being masculine in



sport, especially in the pursuit of athletic excellence in the Paralympic Games, female participants' resistance through and in sport provide a more complex picture.

*Resistance to sexual stereotyping and discrimination against women in sport*

Sexist stereotypes of women as dependent, vulnerable and frail are congruent with the dominant assumptions of disability (Morris, 1994; Shakespeare, 1996b). Disabled women, unlike their male counterparts, have to overcome various socially-constructed concepts about sport which interact with their gender as women before they seek to resist the stereotypes of a spoilt female body in the context of elite sport. Disabled women are doubly stigmatised and marginalised in that they violate the dominant assumption that sport is a domain primarily for men as well as able-bodied people (Blinde and McCallister, 1999; Henderson and Bedini, 1997).

The notion of women's biological frailty and inferiority has historically been used extensively to justify sport and movement restrictions by the male hegemony. Also the belief that certain sports masculinize the female participant or even promote lesbianism has long existed (Guthrie and Gastelnuovo, 1994). Thus, women have had to conform to feminine standards in order to perform in female sports, particularly those that emphasize the aesthetic and erotic elements of the body through costume or movement (i.e, such as figure skating, gymnastics, synchronized swimming), and present sexuality (as heterosexuality) as defined in contrast to masculinity (DePauw, 1997). However, women with disabilities suffer from more cultural and structural pressures that deprive them of the ability and opportunity to take part in sport or physical fitness. Women with disabilities not only experience the conflict between the values of sport and perceptions of disability, but the female role is often perceived to be incongruent with sport (Blinde and McCallister, 1999:309). Consequently, the atmosphere surrounding their participation may be discouraging resulting from negative perceptions and stereotypes (DePauw and Gavron, 1995; Mastro, Hall and Canabal, 1988). For example, in Taiwan, disabled women are expected to stay at home doing something static rather than playing sport which is regarded as potentially harmful to their impairment and as a context where they may

behave like men. As Xiao-lien elaborates:

I don't think it's just being a woman, I suppose being a disabled woman, people don't expect too much from me....People think that being disabled and a woman I am not supposed to be interested in sport. They think 'since your legs are not functional, you should stay at home instead of doing something which may damage yourself further, especially when you are a woman. You are supposed to learn some skills and behave like a woman, not running around getting dirty and sweaty'.

Although sport is traditionally an area for men in Taiwan, nowadays the opportunity appears to be open for people who have a sport talent whether they are men or women because, as Zhong-zhe argues, "our country does need elite athletes to help us occupy a space in international occasions". And Xiao-lien points out that disability appears to bring more difficulties than gender due to "the lack of a proper training environment, facilities, and a sport system for disabled people. And people don't think disabled people should take sport seriously". But while women with disabilities have gained increasing access into sport in recent years, structured gender inequalities persist in disability sport and are reflected in gendered relations of power even in major international competitions. Female powerlifting is the exemplar identified by participants in this research.

Female powerlifters in this research all point out that male powerlifters have been competing in the Paralympic Games for a long time, but it was not until the year 2000 in Sydney that female powerlifting first became a Paralympic event. This development is regarded as a big step towards gender equality by female powerlifters.

Eva comments on the long waiting as follows:

Well, it took a long time for the ladies to actually get into the Paralympic Games. We had to wait for the able-bodied weightlifters to be put into the Olympic Games before we could be put into the Paralympic Games. So in that respect yes because men have been competing in the Paralympic Games since 1974 and we only went in 2000.

Paul is the only male powerlifter who recognises male dominance in powerlifting and the inequality symbolised by the late development of female powerlifting. His mother-in-law who was also disabled was a powerlifter in 1987 but she was never allowed to compete in the Paralympics. He also witnessed the negative treatment of

female powerlifting in Paralympic meetings from Barcelona in 1992 to Atlanta in 1996 when the decision that female powerlifters could compete in the Sydney Paralympics in 2000 was taken. As he elaborates:

They [female powerlifters] were sort of classed as second-class citizens in so much as, although we respected them and thought they should be in the arena with us, they couldn't because of the IPC ruling that women were not included. The only time we really brought it up was every four years at these Paralympics meetings. We started off in Barcelona. I brought it up the first time. Some of the people gave me looks to kill me. 'This is a male-oriented sport. We should not let women in'. They were all against it. But surprisingly at the next one in Atlanta, they looked at it in a different way. I think they had four years to think about it. During that time, Mexico brought in a ladies' team, Kuwait brought in a ladies' team. These ladies were lifting phenomenal weights. They lifted 120kg in the same bodyweight as some of the guys. I think it frightened them to be in there. But the chairmen of powerlifting, Pol Wautermartens, he recognised the need to [bring women in]. I think there were two prongs to his fear here. Because he knew it would promote him as a sort of leading light and bringing in the gender issue also at the same time, it opened the door for ladies to get in. And they have gone from strength to strength...

Hargreaves (2000) indicates that throughout the history of disability sport there has been a variety of sport events open to men in elite competitions whereas women have been struggling to get new events on to their competing programme. The recent inclusion of female powerlifting in the Sydney Paralympics clearly suggests ongoing structured gender inequalities. Apart from the gendered structures of power in sport, the dominant images of gender have played a role in discouraging women from participating in disability sport because "in common with able-bodied women, they are influenced more by commodified anti-athletic stereotypes of femininity" (Hargreaves, 2000:187). However, Fiona does not think gender is a problem for females doing sport nowadays as she claims, "Whether you are a man or woman if you are disabled, the facilities are there and either sex can take advantage of them. So I don't really think it makes any difference". However, as a woman with an acquired disability, ironically Fiona reveals in the following comments that she does not think sport is something that able-bodied women should do:

Well there is usually more men doing sport anyway, aren't they? Even in the able-bodied world. Unless you are disabled, I don't know, it's just not the sort of the thing you normally do, I think.

Fiona obviously thinks disabled women may have more chance to get involved in

sport due to the special rehabilitation opportunities compared with their able-bodied counterparts. If she had not been disabled caused by an accident, she would not have become an elite shot-putter through her introduction to Stoke Mandeville Hospital. But she seems to internalise the negative societal perceptions of women in sport because she was hesitant to do sport seriously, at least in the first three years. She admits that her continuation in elite sport is mainly because she enjoyed the travelling, which is also the only thing she misses since retirement. As she indicates, “So I didn’t really know if I particularly wanted to do it or even if I liked it. But it’s just fairly simple, I wanted this travel and the kits. So I certainly didn’t do sport for the love of it”. In this respect, Fiona is unique among the participants in this research.

Moreover, DePauw (1997:422) argues that the inclusion of women, whether disabled or not, in sport “too often conforms to the ideals of acceptable physicality within the limits of masculinity-femininity and sexuality”. This may partly explain the late development of female powerlifting. As a sport heavily involved with power and strength, the masculine image of powerlifting does not fit with the socially-sanctioned feminine stereotype of women. There seems to be a stigma attached to powerlifting for women. Indeed, female British and Taiwanese participants who are involved with conventionally “female-inappropriate” sport such as powerlifting experience more problems associated masculine stereotyping than those participating in track and field events. For example, Yen-zi also points out, “Powerlifting is not a very glamorous sport, it is considered too masculine and not suitable for women very much...people don’t think you are elegant or feminine as women should be. You know powerlifting is not a glamorous sport, it’s a bit vulgar I suppose”. The masculine image of powerlifting is reported by many British male and female powerlifters as a major barrier to getting more women to take part in this sport. The difficulty is evident in that it is hard to reach equal numbers between male and female athletes even in other sports like athletics and swimming. As Ross argues, “Because powerlifting is supposed to be a strength sport and has got this stereotyped image and things like that, it does put a lot of women off participating. It really does”. The image of powerlifting also deters Taiwanese women with disabilities from taking

up such a sport. Gao-ming and Yen-zi also mention the difficulty of recruiting female powerlifters because they are affected by the traditional perception of femininity and they do not want to lift the heavy weights required for powerlifting.

Although women in Taiwan are getting more accepted for taking part in conventionally masculine sports, they still suffer, to some extent, from the social pressure to be feminine. As Xien-ge observes:

Nowadays men and women are encouraged to do sport. Women who play masculine sports like football or weightlifting are more accepted than they used to be, but many people still have the traditional thoughts that women shouldn't do something vulgar or make themselves muscled and unfeminine. There is still a bit of social pressure, but it's up to individuals because lots of young people do not care about conventions.

Female powerlifters, especially the Taiwanese participants, constantly encounter such surveillance. At the beginning of their sport career, their choice of taking up powerlifting is often questioned, in particular by their female friends. Yen-zi explains that, "My friends felt shocked and strange about why I would choose this sport as it looks like a very difficult sport, you know, lifting heavy weights, and well, a bit vulgar and unfeminine". A couple of female powerlifters do admit their concern at the early stage. For example, Li-li mentions that when she just started powerlifting, she did hope that she would not become too big. Female powerlifters continue to have negative perceptions towards themselves in relation to their sport, even if they are top athletes. Li-li feels that people often do not regard her as a woman because she is doing a masculine sport as her profession. The following quotation from Li-li is the typical reaction that female Taiwanese powerlifters in this research receive:

They are usually very surprised when they find out I do powerlifting. They would say, 'Wow female powerlifter!' and then look at my body, especially my arms, with that strange look, which seems to mean 'Look at those terrible arms!' When we go to competitions with other sports teams, it seems that we are the strangest ones among them. Even other sportsmen and sportswomen look at us that way.

Yi-xiou, a male powerlifter, also indicates that the stereotypical image of powerlifting causes different reactions to male and female powerlifters in Taiwanese society. In popular consciousness powerlifting is labelled as a common and macho

sport. When it comes to powerlifters, there is an image of men being big and tough which is opposite to the socially desirable image of feminine women. But powerlifting helps men, disabled or not, to build up masculine physiques, but conventionally it does not do any good to women's figures. Female powerlifters are aware of the masculine stereotypes associated with their sport and the consequent negative perceptions of them. However, they do not seem to be bothered about the stereotypical image very much even though they do report that developing big arms is the only disadvantage of doing powerlifting. They see it as the small price they have to pay and often joke about it. As Xiao-shuan describes:

Well we like this sport, so it [the hard training and heavy weights] is nothing. The only bad thing is that we become a "King-Kong Barbie"<sup>21</sup>! Our arms become very big. People think all we have is strength and they don't really see us as women. But this is the sacrifice we have to make.

These female Taiwanese powerlifters resist the conventional stereotypes associated with female athletes involved in masculine sports. Stereotypes never deter them from participating in powerlifting and continuing their sporting careers. The "unfeminine" physical development resulting from training in powerlifting is no comparison with the enjoyment and sense of achievement they gain from doing this sport.

In the GB, female athletes also perceive and experience the prevalent societal perceptions about women becoming masculine in sport. Elsa and Tricia both indicate that the public in Britain have the stereotypical belief that powerlifters (like bodybuilders) are big and muscular so that they are always surprised to find that powerlifters like them can be tiny and look feminine according to popular ideals. Similarly, Fiona, the only British female participant in an athletics field event, does not worry about the image of a shot-putter because she proves them wrong. As she explains:

They used to say to me 'You don't look like a shot-putter, you don't look like the big butch Russian female ones'. If you look at the ones on the TV in the athletics competitions, then I think they are getting a bit better. But they are big and butch,

---

<sup>21</sup> The nickname "King-Kong Barbie" combines the title of a classic American adventure-fantasy film "King-Kong" (1933) depicting the giant gorilla with "Barbie" which is the name of the famous American doll. Taiwanese female powerlifters joke about themselves as beautiful women with big arms and strong bodies.

they are not terribly feminine. I like to be feminine you know so that's why people didn't think I look like a shot-putter at all. I think they were quite pleased that there was somebody that did look feminine...I look more glamorous than the usual shot-putter you see.

Although being the opposite of the stereotyped muscular image of a powerlifter or shot-putter, British female participants are very cautious and self-reflexive about their physical development through training in order to maintain a feminine look. For example, Tricia admits that she was concerned about the effects of sport training on her body image, as follows:

I always said that I still wanted to be a woman at the end of the day. I didn't want to develop too many muscles – I still wanted to look like a woman even after training. I didn't want to look too powerful or anything like that I just didn't want that at all. As I said, if that happens, then I would stop straight away.

Fiona admits that she did get bigger because of doing lots of training. "I could have got bigger but I didn't want to. I was big enough because I had the British record for years and it still stands well". She describes that her body used to be firm and toned before she retired from sport four years ago and she has not done any exercise since. Interestingly, Fiona mentions that her conversation with her boyfriend, who is also an elite disabled athlete, makes her realise that she seemed to be too muscled in his eyes, as follows:

He said to me a little while ago, 'You look much nicer now. You are more like a woman now'. I said 'What do you mean? I am all fat and flabby'. He said 'No, you've got soft bits now. You used to be all firm', because I was all toned and muscled... Now I have a bit more fat and am more womanly.

Most of the female British and Taiwanese powerlifters claim that the stereotypical image of powerlifting is never a problem for them. Elsa argues that what matters is that she really enjoys doing the sport and she can be feminine at other times or on other occasions than doing sport, as she explains:

But I think it does not matter whether you are a man or woman, if you find the thing you are really into, you really enjoy, yeah, it's not particularly feminine, but being a powerlifter to do a bench press or lift weights doesn't mean that you can't be feminine at other times....You may not be feminine or look particularly attractive when sweating on a bench, but it's down to yourself to say, 'Yeah I am going to be a lifter in a competition. I am going to be as equal as men'. And then I can dress up tonight and look feminine you know...

Taiwanese female powerlifters develop the same strategy to cope with the stereotyped image of powerlifting and prove their femininity by the way they dress.

As Li-li and Xiao-shuan explain:

I don't wear a gym suit unless I am competing. When I wear it, people don't think I am particularly feminine because of my sport. Who says that an athlete should dress like an athlete all the time? It doesn't mean that I don't recognise my sport identity. I just like to wear something different or feminine the rest of the time. (Li-li)

But it's up to you to present what image you want to people. When I dress casually, people won't tell what sport I do. Or they would think I do swimming or table tennis...It's how we deliver our image that we are still women even though we do powerlifting. We can still be feminine and sweet. Just like we can't walk, this is a fact that we couldn't change. There is no point to bother with it...I can only cover my arms with clothes or dress feminine to show them that I am a lovely woman. (Xiao-shuan)

The above quotations reveal the diversity and fluidity of identities that female participants construct dynamically. They enthusiastically engage in elite sport and construct new identities as elite athletes which contradict and resist the dominance of disabled identities. They recognise the pervasive sex stereotyping associated with female athletes in masculine sports and the questioned sexuality, but they still enjoy their sports and achieve success. However, after they finish training and competitions, they are proud to be (heterosexual) women and perform their gender identity with feminine dress.

Moreover, female participants in both countries indicate that their ambition in sport makes the masculine image less of a problem. Eva argues that her talent and achievement in powerlifting helps with her ego and self-esteem which is more important to her. Li-li has been persistent in powerlifting for 10 years because this is what she is good at. She is proud of what she achieves though sometimes she thought of giving up as sport is a difficult career in Taiwan. Elsa claims that in a way it makes her proud that she gets involved in something that develops her body like powerlifting: "It does make you feel it's nice to be part of something that has been growing rapidly for the last four years. There have been many women involved, but I certainly don't feel it's a negative thing at all". Furthermore, their involvement in



elite sport confronts gender prejudice and stereotyping by proving to the world what disabled women can achieve in a male-oriented and predominantly able-bodied arena. Doing something challenging like sport makes the female participants distinctive. As Juen-juen, a wheelchair racer indicates:

I am doing something beyond people's expectation as it [sport] is normally played by men and able-bodied people. But I am doing it, something which not many disabled people or women do. I am proud of it in a way, as I am doing something challenging. I am doing well. It makes me feel special.

Eva strongly argues that female powerlifting can be a means to overturn stereotypes and discriminatory perceptions about women in sport, as follows:

Well, it is a masculine sport, it is dominated by men. But it is about breaking down the prejudices and showing them that we are equal. Women should be able to take part in any sport or things they choose to do. Gender shouldn't come into it really.

Eva is proud of her standing in the sport as a world champion and Paralympic champion and claims that, "They are in awe of what I can lift". She expects herself to be the role model in disability sport. Elsa also expresses her wish that "powerlifting is not just a man's sport, a masculine sport. It would be nice to look on it just as a sport. Hopefully that will happen one day. It is down to everybody to make that happen". In spite of the relatively small number of elite disabled sportswomen, they are not only the heroic symbols of those who take part in the sport and exercise community but also role models for all women with disabilities.

As Shilling (1993:7) indicates, "Investing in the body provides people with a means of self-expression and a way of potentially feeling good and increasing the control they have over their bodies. If one feels unable to exert control over the increasingly complex society, at least one can have some effect on the size, shape and appearance of one's body". Male and female athletes with disabilities regain physicality and feel empowered because they are in charge of their bodies. Meanwhile, the divide of the able-bodied/disabled body becomes obscure, and they are actually active agents in the process of constructing their body identities. As Hargreaves (2000:205) elaborates:

There is also an aesthetic component of self-representation – their bodies are

muscular, skilful, fluid, sensuous – rendering the orthodox cultural norms and medical stereotypes of disability increasingly residual. This is the essence of body agency. Elite disabled athletes use their bodies assertively and confidently and understand the nexus between body, identity, and culture.

Elite athletes battle with their bodies through rehabilitation, overcome physical and social barriers, endure hard and long training with physical and mental toughness and determination and strive toward supreme athletic achievement. Sport for them incorporates both mental and physical experiences. While Foucault indicates that resistance is an intellectual enterprise, the acts of resistance and self-transformation of elite athletes with disabilities in fact involve not only a mental but also a physical dimension. Moreover, Guthrie and Castelnovo (2001) point out that from a Foucauldian perspective, there are two types of resistance: “reverse resistance”, which involves efforts to live up to and reinforce power-knowledge discourses, whereas “resistance as freedom” refers to developing a self physically and mentally which transcends the dominant discourses. In this research male participants appear to engage in reverse resistance during which they resist ableism and strive to regain maleness through sport but at the same time they perpetuate the hegemonic masculinity that men, disabled or non-disabled, are subject to and conform to. On the other hand, female participants’ experiences and narratives seem to demonstrate “resistance as freedom” as they not merely transform the stereotypes of disabled women as passive, dependent, inactive victims into exceptional sports performers, but also free themselves from the constraints of dominant ideologies about sport as able-bodied and an essentially male arena. Female powerlifters confront the negative masculine stereotyping associated with conventionally female-inappropriate sport and thus assertively transcend opposition rooted in traditional notions of masculinity and femininity in sport.

### **Other perceived gender issues**

#### ***Gendered expectations in work, family and sport careers***

Although Taiwanese society is gradually transforming and addressing some aspects of disability discrimination, traditional Chinese gender ideology remains – men are expected to bring bread and butter to the table for the family and females are

supposed to take care of children and household duties. Such social expectations have profound implications for the gender identities of men and women with disabilities as well as for their sporting careers, as reported by Taiwanese participants in this research. Disabled men, in common with non-disabled men, are expected to be providers in Taiwanese society and thus they have the social pressure to prove themselves by having a proper job, whereas similar to non-disabled women, it is more acceptable for disabled women to be unemployed. As a consequence, Yi-xiou's job comes first and he cannot be a full-time powerlifter like his female Taiwanese counterparts who focus their efforts on training. He explains as follows:

Disabled men have the same social pressures. If we don't have a job, we would be looked down upon by people as useless and we would not be regarded as "real" men. But women are different. If they don't work, no one will say anything, though most of the young women work nowadays. It doesn't matter whether they work or not because women belong to a family at the end of the day. Getting married and taking care of the family are still regarded as their career. They are not expected to have great achievement at work. If they have a job, that's fine and it helps the family economy. But men are expected to not only have a job but also to get promotion for a better future. Disabled women can stay at home and have no job, but disabled men can't be unemployed. So I can't be like those female powerlifters who focus on training without having a job. I can't do that. I have to secure my job. Being an athlete is just not a career in Taiwan. No matter how much I love powerlifting, I wouldn't give up my job for sport.

Moreover, Xien-ge further indicates that men get more criticism than women in choosing sport as a career, as follows:

On the other hand, men may suffer from more social pressure if they choose sport as their career because it is not a promising one for men in Taiwan. If I do, I will be regarded as stupid and crazy. Men have the major responsibility to earn money. If a man has a decent job and is also a part-time athlete, then he will be considered more successful. Disabled men are expected to be like able-bodied men... So you see most of the male disabled athletes have full-time jobs and only do sport after work.

It appears that men with disabilities in Taiwan suffer great pressure to conform to the societal norms about men. They have to prove their independence and ability to support a family just like able-bodied men. That is why nothing seems to be more important than having decent jobs for disabled men in Taiwan. Whether disabled or not, they are made to feel useless when they are unemployed because they are looked down upon by family and society. Their manhood is then questioned. Unfortunately, being a full-time athlete is not a practical career choice for Taiwanese men due to the

deprioritisation of sport in Taiwanese society and the incomplete sport structures for elite athletes (see Chapter Six). As Yen-wen indicates, “A full-time athlete in Taiwan is not regarded as a role model for men or for having a high social status”. This forces disabled men who have passion and aspiration in competitive sport, like male Taiwanese participants in this research, to devote themselves to training only after work or during their free time. This unfavourably affects their training and consequently their competition results.

On the other hand, the family is women’s domain in Taiwanese society and is prevalently used to justify the structural discrimination in particular against women in education and employment. Unemployment reinforces the stereotypes of women and disability associated with dependency and inability, and in turn tends to restrict disabled women to the family. Most of the female Taiwanese participants argue about the low societal expectations towards disabled women at work, sport or anything else. Deegan (1985:49) suggests that being female and having a disability may combine to generate an “exceedingly low expectation for achievement”. Although the young female participants appear to have more freedom to participate in sport without being tied down by work like disabled Taiwanese men, they are aware of the societal expectations on women in Taiwan, which they also have to conform to and that the family is women’s priority career and responsibility so that they are expected to get married and take good care of the family in common with their non-disabled counterparts. As Yen-zi indicates, “People don’t think women should be serious about sport...They think we should behave like women, focus more on the family, otherwise no men would want to marry us”. Such attitudes are oppressive for disabled women in sport and restrict their choices in life. Moreover, disabled women are regarded by the non-disabled society as being unable to fulfil the role of homemaker, wife and mother (Morris, 1993:88). Married disabled women are thus under pressure to prove that they can perform their gender role as well as non-disabled women. Female disabled athletes may have to sacrifice their ambitions in sport and put their family in first place. Juen-juen, a 38-year-old wheelchair racer and the only married female Taiwanese participant, argues that in Taiwan married men’s

sport involvement after work is regarded as a good hobby, but married women doing sport may suffer from the criticism of neglecting the family. As she elaborates:

Most disabled people struggle with life, so how can they have the mood to do sport? At a leisure level, maybe. Young women who haven't got married have the time for themselves, so they can devote more time to sport if they have an interest and their parents encourage and support them. But for married women like me, my own family is the first priority. My free time is very limited. If married men go out playing sport, people would say it's decent leisure. If married women go to play sport leaving their family behind, we would be criticised for being irresponsible and thus not good mothers or wives. Disabled women have more pressure to prove that they can be good wife and mother like able-bodied women. It's ok to go out as a family like doing exercise with their children or husband. But I have been very lucky that my husband and I are much more equal in this matter because we are both into sport.

Juen-juen is thus very grateful for her husband's understanding and support, but she also describes how she feels about spending less time with her family:

My husband was active in sport, as I mentioned he plays wheelchair basketball. He always supports me to do sport. Otherwise, as a wife and a mother, I should have focused exclusively on my family and taken care of them. Sometimes I feel guilty that I sacrificed the time that I should have spent with them. But my husband is very understanding and shares lots of housework. Without his support, I couldn't make it. My little daughter is mature and independent. She carries her schoolbags on her own and doesn't ask me to hold her much. She runs fast and sometimes accompanies me in training. But I don't expect her to be an athlete in the future. I just hope she grows up safe and sound.

Taiwanese disabled women who are wives and mothers view their family obligations as having the highest priority and those who are employed find that they seldom have energy left over to do something for themselves. Support from athletes' spouses is crucial to the continuity of an athletes' sporting career after marriage, especially for female athletes. It is also echoed by Tricia, a 60-year-old retired powerlifter and the only married female British athlete in this research, who emphasises that she could not have done sport without her husband's support. However, she also talks about the effort to seek a balance between her sport and family commitments, even after she retired from competition in 2001 and became a powerlifting referee:

It [Sport] was part of my life, probably a big part. I tried not to let it interfere too much with family life. I mean obviously it did when I was away for a period of time. It must have interfered with family life, but I did try to keep it separate as much as possible.

Interestingly, only female athletes with partners in both countries show concern or even feel guilty that their sport training, competitions, and travelling would occupy the time they feel they should have devoted to taking care of their husbands, children, and the household. This demonstrates that the ideology of traditional gender roles has still been sustained by female athletes with disabilities. Unlike the female athletes being afraid that they might be negligent of their family duties, none of the male disabled athletes with partners in both countries expressed such concerns or appreciation of their partners' understanding and support. It seems to suggest that they take the traditional male roles for granted. As a consequence, the attitudes to traditional gender roles held by both men and women may limit the choices in life available to women with disabilities, especially in relation to their sport participation. For example, wanting to start a family was the reason for Fiona's retirement from elite sport, as she states:

I want to get married and have children. I am 39. I just want to have a life now, start a family. Because loads of other people, especially male athletes, you know, they already have a family, they don't have to take time out to bring up the children, but women do. So you know I want to have a proper life.

Fiona, who recognises that being disabled is disadvantageous for her to find a partner, clearly points out the differing family responsibilities for men and women. She gave up her sporting career in order to show a full commitment to a future family. Gender appears to transcend disability, as disabled women in this study, in common with non-disabled women, struggle between family and work or sporting career.

### ***Prejudice against female sporting competitiveness and conflicts between male and female athletes***

Across the world there is increasing visibility of women with disabilities and elite female athletes are reaching standards of physical excellence and overturning conventional stereotypes. However, the supreme athletic achievement attained by those sports heroines in the Paralympic Games seldom receive the same recognition from the public or the media as those of able-bodied sportswomen (DePauw and Gavron, 1995; Hargreaves, 2000). Ironically, the best known disabled athlete in the GB is a female athlete – Tanny Grey-Thompson but nevertheless male athletes with

disabilities do not seem to look up to their female counterparts. The problem lies in social and cultural prejudices about the disabled female body in sport.

Prejudice against disabled female sporting competitiveness is often held by male athletes, particularly those in traditional male sports. The ideology of the inferiority of the female body is reproduced in disability sport and compounds with the stereotypical assumption of the invalid disabled body. Consequently this pervasive cultural prejudice has served to exclude disabled women from sport and continues to derogate the sporting ability and achievement of female athletes with disabilities. This prejudicial notion is also held by male athletes with disabilities. Some male participants in this research admit that male disabled athletes feel that they are superior to their female counterparts. As Ross explains:

There's always been this elitism idea of men feeling that they are more elite than women because they have been around longer and they have been to more competitions. And the men's competitions are much bigger so to achieve a medal in a men's competition always appears to be much harder than in the ladies' competitions.

Although Curtis suggests that Emma Brown's achievement<sup>22</sup> outreaching some male powerlifters "makes it (women's powerlifting) more equal and shows men that women can do this as well", female British powerlifters indicate that powerlifting is a traditional male and masculine sport so that people especially have the prevailing perception that the women's team are not as good as the men's team and do not train as hard. Female powerlifting is thus not regarded as so serious as the men's sport. The Taiwanese female participants share the same opinion that people do not value disabled women's sport achievements as much as those of men. As Juen-juen, a wheelchair racer argues, "They think it is easy for us to win because female athletes are not as competitive as male athletes. It's just like that able-bodied athletes as well as people in general do not think disabled athletes are as competitive as them".

---

<sup>22</sup> Emma Brown is the most famous British female powerlifter. She won a gold medal in the 82.5kg class with 135kg in the first ever women's powerlifting competition in the 2000 Sydney Paralympics Games and successfully remained champion in the recent 2004 Athens Paralympics with a 130kg lift. She also currently holds the British, European and world titles.

The statistics of far fewer female athletes than male athletes in competitions is often used to justify the deprecation of the sport competitiveness and successes of female athletes with disabilities. Indeed, disabled women are far outnumbered by their male counterparts and this unequal gender participation exists at all levels of disability sport. Throughout the world the participation of women with disabilities from grassroots, recreational activities to elite competitive sport is relatively much lower than that of their male counterparts. The same gap of gender participation in sport exists even in some advanced developed countries in the West where gender inequality has been given attention (Hargreaves, 2000). However, the cultural prejudices that act as crucial barriers that deter disabled women from participating in sport are often ignored and dismissed by male athletes. Moreover, the numbers of participants in a specific sport is an important factor affecting its inclusion as a competition event. The numbers ruling is detrimental to the development of disabled women in sport, especially for those who have aspirations at elite level. For example, the British sport governing bodies only support elite athletes in the existing events in the Paralympic Games. As Charles explains:

If I was a female athlete in my class, it would be very unlikely that I would get the opportunity to compete at Paralympic level. Because it's just either there is not physically enough development going around the world to generate the athletes or the athletes aren't at the high up standard to make an event viable. So people like UK Athletics will only look for athletes that there are events for. You won't go out and find an athlete for an event that isn't there already. For example, we've got an athlete in Nottingham who is a CP class at 32, she is on the track and she is world record holder of her class, but she is not eligible to get lottery funding. Yes, she achieved parallel to me but gets no financial benefit from it. So it's difficult, it needs to come from the IPC, they are going to put on an event for every event, every classification or something. That's the only way the females will have a better opportunity to compete. There have to be concerted efforts, but even though there are not many women events, they squeeze in the size of the Paralympics each year anyway. I mean there are only about 194 events in Athens or something like that whereas there were 294 in Sydney. From what people are saying there will only be 150 events in Beijing.

One of the outcomes of prejudiced perceptions about female competitiveness is the conflicts between male and female athletes with disabilities. Paul suggests that, "Male athletes had great respect for female athletes as there weren't the competitions for them. But now it has changed. It is a competition for them". A couple of British



powerlifters point out that the situation stems from the sport governing body only taking medal potential into account which often sacrifices some dedicated male powerlifters' competing opportunities. As Ross explains:

I think certainly in the run up to Sydney, they cut the team down to the final squad. They took six women and 3 men and some of the men they left behind were far more committed athletes than some of the women that went. But there were less numbers of women, and the women actually stood more chance of getting medals. That's what it all comes down to at the end of the day...actually winning medals...

Moreover, Ross claims that this situation led to a slight tension between British male and female powerlifters, as he elaborates:

And that became an issue as well within powerlifting between men and women. Because I came seventh and one of the other ladies came seventh, but she came seventh out of nine and I came seventh out of 30. So it's that sort of feeling you know. There is slight animosity between men and women in the powerlifting team...For example, Emma Brown won a gold medal and a world record. It's fantastic when you win a gold medal and a world record. But she only competed against probably a dozen in her class, whereas Anthony Peddle<sup>23</sup> is against 20 or 30. So there is that animosity there. It does exist.

However, Eva argues that female powerlifting is getting more and more competitive and that the selection standard for international competitions is very high in the GB.

Women excel more than men. Obviously I think since it was put in the Paralympics in the year 2000, the sport has improved the standard and the number of competitors in the women's competitions tremendously. But the men, I think there is double the amount of men that go to championships than women, it is slightly harder. But in Britain, you've got to be in the top six women in the world to go to any championships

Ironically, Fiona considers herself fortunate to have picked the right sport to do because there are fewer female shot-putters in her disability classification. Her following comment seems to confirm what Ross argues about competitions for disabled women:

There just aren't enough females in the sport anyway. And you have got the different disabilities in different classes so in actual fact it's easier for women to get to the top than it is for men because there are fewer female athletes, especially in

---

<sup>23</sup> Anthony Peddle is the most well-known male powerlifter in Britain. He made his Paralympic Games debut at Seoul in 1988. He won the 48kg gold medal at the 2000 Sydney Paralympics with a massive 168kg lift. But he failed to defend his title at the Athens Paralympic Games in 2004, mainly because of a major operation on a shoulder injury.

paraplegics....So for me I picked the right thing because there wasn't much competition really, so I was lucky, you know more chance of a medal and travelling to represent Britain or England.

Similar conflicts between elite male and female athletes appear to exist in the Taiwan context as well, but male athletes are not as critical as their British counterparts about this issue. Most of the male Taiwanese participants indicate that in general female athletes are given more attention and taken better care of than male athletes because of their medal potential. Some male powerlifters do recognise that they have far less chance to win medals internationally, as Yi-xiou states: "The male powerlifters may do well nationally, but it is hard for us to compete with male powerlifters from other countries...So now there are only a couple of male powerlifters still training and competing". But Gao-ming argues that because there are fewer female athletes in every sport, especially powerlifting, "it is not that competitive and there is more chance to win a medal. That is why female athletes get more attention and opportunities". In common with the perceptions of British male athletes, such a comment from Gao-ming appears to downplay the standards of female athletes and blame them for the male athletes having fewer chances to go to major competitions as well as to win medals. However, female Taiwanese athletes give different accounts about this matter. Although Li-li, Hui-hui and Xiao-shuan all recognise that male events are getting more and more competitive internationally and it is harder to win medals, they also point out that male athletes, specifically powerlifters, have jobs in the daytime which means that they devote relatively less time and effort to their sport. As Xiao-shuan explains, "Male powerlifters all have proper jobs, so they don't focus on training like us [female powerlifters]. We totally focus on training. This is the full-time job that we choose. If they could train like us, they would have better performances to compete internationally". While most of the male Taiwanese powerlifters indicate that not being sent to compete internationally, whether it is because of a lack of budget or medal chances, is a discouraging blow to them, they do not think it causes conflicts or even tension between male and female powerlifters. Male powerlifters claim to still treat female team members in the same way as their male colleagues.

### **Concluding remarks**

Disability is a creation of cultural practice in both British and Taiwanese societies. The social responses to impairment constructing the disabled body as a site of oppression and prejudice have been clearly demonstrated, refusing credence to the medical model of disability and notions of deficit and abnormality. Due to the departure from able-bodied normalcy, the bodies of disabled people become a source of fear, embarrassment, or even guilt (Begum, 1992), which makes them become “the frightening other - a living symbol of frailty, failure, and de-sexualization” (Gastelnuovo and Guthrie, 1998:130). The ideal of bodily perfection, emphasised in the post-modern era, is central to the oppression of disabled people, not only in Western societies like Britain, but also in Taiwanese society.

Despite the prevalent normalising ideologies and practices, disabled men and women actively engage in body projects through sport. Sport is a multidimensional challenge for elite athletes with disabilities as a means of affirming their competence and thus helping others to focus on their abilities instead of their disabilities. Sport becomes a powerful channel to resist the notion that disabled people are weak and inactive victims and to confront the ideology that sport is an able-bodied regime. But sport is also a gendered project for disabled men and women. Disabled men regain a sense of hegemonic masculinity and defend their male status by proving physical power and creating strong and muscular bodies whereas disabled women overturn both ableism and sexism that are pervasive in sport. They reject restrictions based on traditional notions of masculinity and femininity and reclaim their equal right in sport and they are comfortable and proud to be elite female athletes. The elite disabled athletes of both sexes in this study have dynamically redefined their bodies and identities representing a new generation of disabled people in the twenty-first century.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Power Relations in the Operation of Disability Sport**

#### **Introduction**

The success of the Paralympic Games in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has led to a global recognition that they are also a site to gain national respect and prestige, evident in the rapidly growing numbers of participating countries and athletes from across the world (see Chapter One). They have become a battlefield for countries in the West - like Britain - to consolidate their positions as the leading Paralympic nations in the world. The GB team distinguished itself with a second place in the gold medal table in the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games. For countries that are boycotted or marginalised by world powers, world sport including the Paralympic Games is a unique means to gain recognition and status worldwide. This is particularly apposite to Taiwan, which suffers from political and military pressure from China due to the long-term political tension between the two countries (Jung-Jung, 2004). Since sport in Taiwan has traditionally been controlled by the government, it often serves the political purposes of the country. Sport diplomacy has always been a significant goal in the development of sport in Taiwan. Despite the limited national funds invested in sport, Taiwan has never been absent from the Paralympic Games since 1996, although the delegation has always been relatively compact.

Table 2 provides information about the GB and Taiwanese teams and their achievements in the recent Athens Paralympics.

		Great Britain	Taiwan
Number of Athletes	Male	98	16
	Female	68	10
	Total	166	26
Sport competed in		15 sports: archery, athletics, wheelchair basketball, boccia, cycling, Equestrian, fencing, judo, powerlifting, wheelchair rugby, sailing, shooting, swimming, table tennis, wheelchair tennis	8 sports: archery, athletics, judo, powerlifting, shooting, swimming, table tennis, and wheelchair tennis
Medals	Gold	35	2
	Silver	30	2
	Bronze	29	2
	Total	94	6
Rank by gold		2	44

Table 2. GB and Taiwan teams and medals in the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games (British Paralympic Association website, 2004; Chinese Taipei Sports Federation for the Disabled website, 2004)

Elite athletes with disabilities thus not only strive for personal excellence but also have a certain responsibility as national pride rests on their shoulders. Governments' sport policies, funding and systems, and in particular the sport governing bodies' administrative support and professional services are essential for helping athletes at elite level to achieve international sporting success. Brittain (2002:188) indicates that when athletes step forward to higher levels of competitive sport, the problems they encounter "become more to do with the actions of the administrators and officials responsible for organising the sport at the top levels".

This chapter explores the attitudes and actions of key personnel in sport governing bodies toward disability sport and their influence on elite athletes with disabilities. It starts with an overview of the organisational structures of disability sport in Great Britain and Taiwan, and an analysis of the perceived attitudes and actions of administrators and governing sport organisations that can have a profound impact on the success as well as sense of self of elite athletes with disabilities. It is followed by

a discussion of difficulties with regard to the training that elite athletes in this research have faced, such as problems of finding a coach, and problems to do with the suitability of training venues and facilities. The discussion in the third section focuses on financial issues, especially the perceived benefits and problems of the World Class Performance Funding in Britain and the reward system in Taiwan as well as the power relations and discriminatory practices embodied in the way the systems operate as perceived by participants in this research. The political implications of all these issues are discussed in the last section.

### **The organisational structures of disability sport**

#### ***The mainstreaming of disability sport in the GB***

In Great Britain, a policy statement entitled, *People with Disabilities and Sport*, published by the Sports Council in 1993, recommends that, “Sport for people with disabilities is now at a stage where having developed its own structures, it is appropriate that provision should move from a ‘target group’ approach to the mainstream” (Sports Council, 1993: 4). Since 1993, there has been “a gradual shift of responsibility for the organisation and provision of sport for disabled people, to move away from the NDSOs [national disability sports organisations] towards the mainstream, sports-specific national governing bodies” (Thomas, 2003: 116). Currently the NDSOs, for example, British Blind Sport, are handing over the responsibility for elite athletes with disabilities to the able-bodied national governing bodies, such as UK Athletics, and concentrating on developing and identifying sport talents of their respective disability groups. The NDSOs are retaining some responsibility for the elite athletes attending disability-specific international events.

Most of the British participants have described the impact of the new organisational structure on elite athletes with disabilities. Ross, who was first with the British Wheelchair Sport Foundation at Stoke Mandiville, explains that different disability sport organisations used to run their own separate powerlifting squads until 1992 when they came together for the Paralympic Games, and then in order to get World Class Performance Funding (see discussion in Financial issues in the third section of

this chapter) they had to attach themselves to the equivalent able-bodied sport organisation, which is the British Weight Lifters' Association (BWLA). However, Ross argues that traditionally the BWLA did not recognise disabled powerlifting and that from 1993 to 1999, their reluctance to take disabled powerlifters on board deprived disabled powerlifters of the organisational support in training and competition that they deserved:

The BWLA just had one thing in mind and that was [mainstream] Olympic weightlifting. They didn't want to take on the Paralympics at all. They didn't want anything to do with the Paralympics. So you had this massive confrontation going on and it went on from 1993 to 1999. It went on about 6 years where you had the BWLA not really wanting to take disabled lifting on board and you had all these disability organisations anyway fighting among themselves for control. And you also had the BWLA saying, "Well we are not having that lot on board", because they couldn't sort themselves out. So there is a massive struggle. So for those 6 years we really didn't get any support at all from a governing body.

Even after the BWLA finally took disabled powerlifting on board in 1999, Ross perceives that the BWLA has not truly welcomed and accepted disabled athletes from the unequal support they receive. Although elite powerlifters with disabilities had excellent performances in the Sydney Paralympic Games, compared with their able-bodied counterparts, Ross claims that disability powerlifting is still not equally recognised and valued by the able-bodied national governing body. The following quotation shows how critical Ross is about the unequal position disabled powerlifters find themselves in:

We thought it would be great we are part of the BWLA and accepted by the BWLA and things like that. But it really hasn't work out that way. Able-bodied weightlifting spend 2.5 million pounds in a four-year cycle, and at the last two Olympic Games, they had one weightlifter qualified by a wild card...We had to cope with about 60,000 pounds a year and we produced in the last Paralympics two gold medals, one bronze medal and three world records. There is just no comparison there at all.

Elite track and field athletes with disabilities seem to face similar situations. Ben indicates that disabled athletes are not looked after by UK Athletics and provides an example of the poor administration when he just missed competing in the European Athletics Championships because he was not informed about the event. Charles argues that the performance of elite British athletes in the 2004 Athens Paralympic

Games will properly reveal if the new support structure stands the test:

I just think the biggest mistake they made was letting UK Athletics run it [disabled track and field]. I just think it's doing more harm than good. I think the results we gained in Sydney were very much on the back of what was done before. I think the true level of performance, whatever happens in Athens would be a true representation of UK Athletics.

Comparing the 48 medals (16 gold, 14 silver, and 18 bronze) won by the British athletics squad in the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games and 17 medals (6 gold, 5 silver, and 6 bronze) in the 2004 Paralympic Games, the result is no doubt a worrying letdown.

British research participants expected that while being physically incorporated into the sport-specific administrative structure, elite athletes with disabilities would be fully included in all aspects of the policy and service provision with the able-bodied squad in the respective sport organisation. However, the reality proves to be disappointing since elite disability squads are experiencing unequal treatment and service. According to Charles:

Our impression of the world is how UK Athletics treat us. I think UK Athletics treat us like kids. They treat us now with less respect....I mean if I was an able-bodied athlete, I wouldn't be required to do so many things, so it's very much likely that they treat us like that. They don't treat us with respect and yet expect us to be pressured...I think as the attitude continues to be year in year out with UK Athletics saying, 'You need to improve performance', 'You need to do this', 'You need to submit training plans', 'You need to fill in this form every month', 'You can't do this', 'I don't like where you are going with your training so we are not going to fund you'. It's all going to the point where they have lost the sight. Before, I was getting the result without their intervention.

It seems that elite British disabled athletes receive worse treatment and support from the national sport governing bodies, compared with their general comment about NDSOs treating them "much nicer". In spite of the fact that they are adults as well as elite athletes, they feel strongly that the administrators treat them like children and with no respect – a condescending attitude that may further strengthen the feeling of inferiority of being disabled (Brittain, 2002).

However, despite the criticism from some of the British participants of the attitudes



and actions of national governing bodies, some other elite athletes with disabilities in this research, like Elsa, are positive about how the sport organisation works. Steven also considers that a good service is in place for athletes at elite level and holds an optimistic view about the future of disability sport in the GB.

### *The specialised structure of disability sport in Taiwan*

The structure of disability sport in Taiwan had been that generally local sports authorities (for example, Taichung City Sports Committee) were responsible for promoting sport for people with disabilities at the grassroots level, while national sport associations (for example, the Chinese Taipei Powerlifting Association) were identifying and developing new talent, organising national championships and team selection, and managing elite athletes with disabilities at international events. It was not until 1984 that the Chinese Taipei Sports Federation for the Disabled (CTSFD) was established and its name changed to the Chinese Taipei Paralympic Committee (CTPC) in 1998. It was established in response to the need for a governing body of disability sport in Taiwan dedicated to promoting and developing sport opportunities for people with all kinds of disabilities including amputees, les autres, blind, deaf, cerebral palsy and the mentally disabled. The CTSFD was previously supported and guided by the Ministry of Education, and later by the National Council on Physical Fitness and Sport (NCPFS), a ministerial-level government body of sport, which was established in 1997.

As the umbrella organisation, CTPC has the exclusive responsibility for national co-ordination for all disability groups and represents their interests in all sports as well as the liaison with international sport organisations for people with disabilities. There was no NDSO before the establishment of the CTPC. The CTPC has four disability-specific committees under its organisation currently: the sports committees for the physically disabled, mentally disabled, blind, and CP. The Chinese Taipei Sports Association of the Deaf (CTSAD) was established in 1997 in order to meet the ideal of the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (CISS) for nations to set up sport organisations *of* the deaf people, and thus CTSAD becomes the only sport

organisation in Taiwan that is under the total control of disabled people themselves. It is in charge of the promotion of deaf sports at all levels including international liaisons.

CTPC has taken over the responsibility for athletes with all disabilities (except deaf athletes) in all sports at developmental and elite levels from mainstream sports organisations since 1984, whereas local city and county sport committees retain their major responsibility for the promotion of grassroots disability sport under the supervision of CTPC. In other words, the provision of sport for people with disabilities in Taiwan has shifted from a mainstream to a segregated administrative structure, though the organisational change was necessary at the time to answer the call for a specialised governing organisation for disability sport. It could be argued that disabled people's interests in sport, especially at elite level, should be catered for better in the new administration, however, it does not seem to be the case for some participants, especially elite powerlifters. In this research, Yi-xiou, Xien-ge and Xiao-shuan all comment that they were taken better care of when disabled powerlifting was managed by the national powerlifting association. Yi-xiou particularly misses the wonderful time he had with able-bodied powerlifters:

It was a good atmosphere in the organisation, they are very helpful, and there was great interaction with able-bodied powerlifters as well. I didn't feel that I was treated like, 'Oh you are disabled, we are normal people'. No, it was sport there. That brought us together. When we went to competitions, they would initially help us, like carrying wheelchairs for some lifters. We got along so well and I did enjoy hanging around with so many able-bodied lifters.

Xien-ge also states that when they belonged to the Powerlifting Association there were usually two national competitions every year which were held as parallel events with able-bodied powerlifting. He also feels that the attitudes of administrators of the national sport organisation were "a lot more friendly". It appears that the national sport organisation focused more on their athletes, whether disabled or non-disabled, and their treatment was more inclusive, at least in the perception of the elite powerlifters interviewed for this project.

In addition, many elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities comment on the negligence of the governing body of disability sport (i.e. CTPC) regarding disabled athletes' training. The two following examples are representative of this opinion:

I think they don't care much about our training. There is no support from them. We just train on our own and attend the national championships at which they select national players. If we get selected, we go to compete abroad. That's it. If we can't find a suitable training venue or there is no proper training facility, the sport organisation is not helpful in solving the problem, let alone giving any financial support. (Xiao-lien)

They are supposed to help us. There are sport sciences groups in other countries to support their athletes, like sport psychologists, physiotherapists, nutritionists and so on. But we just train on our own. We are not provided with support which can benefit our performance. (Gao-ming)

Xien-ge indicates that the medical or physiotherapy support is very important for disabled athletes, but there is a doctor in the delegation only when they attend major competitions such as the FESPIC Games or the Paralympic Games. Li-li gives an example of the different treatment of disabled and able-bodied elite athletes:

You see the able-bodied athletes have the training camp one year before the Olympics, but disabled athletes start two months before the Paralympics. They won't care about your training before that. Only when the competition is approaching and they need us to win the medal.

Elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities in this research do not feel that they are important and valued as a result of the treatment from the governing organisation. The athletes argue that CTSFD does not provide practical support in training and preparation for competitions but nevertheless makes demands from the athletes for good performances in major competitions. Moreover, some athletes report experiences of being deprived of competing opportunities. Yi-xiou and Xien-ge got selected to compete in the FESPIC Games and went on a training trip abroad, but in the end they were informed that the male powerlifting squad would not be sent. They both feel extremely disappointed because, they explain, "We had been selected and trained so hard for the chance to prove ourselves, and they just took it away from us!" They are also very angry at the unsatisfactory reason that was given – no budget. Yi-xiou points out that athletes of other sports like table tennis got sent but, he explains:

Some of them are not good enough to compete internationally. Although table tennis has more medal chances, you have to see the winning ratio. They sent 12 players to get 4 medals, but we sent 3 players to get 3 medals. If they want to save money, who should they send?

Further, Xien-ge claims that the governing organisation put some irrelevant and unhelpful persons in the delegation instead of sending athletes:

The most important people in the delegation are supposed to be athletes, who should be the first priority. But they spend a lot of money on advisors or management groups who don't usually do anything more than sight-seeing. It's so unfair. I really felt like giving up.

These male powerlifters find it hard to accept the "no budget" excuse for cancelling their competing opportunity. Although the governing organisation claims to take into account the medal potential and the limited budget, the way they form the delegation in order to save expenses is seriously questioned by some disabled athletes. Many athletes also point out the consequences of the lack of competing opportunities. Xien-ge has witnessed the numbers of powerlifters declining greatly within four years and argues that people at developmental level have given up sport because there was no stage to perform on so they lost interest. He feels sad and pessimistic about the situation of disability sport in Taiwan. Li-li, Xiao-shuan and Yi-xiou all warn about the gap problem in powerlifting as a result of the governing organisation focusing on the elite level and neglecting the development level. As Li-li states:

Only four female powerlifters are competing and male ones are leaving because of no competing opportunity. There are no new powerlifters to fill in the gap. People nowadays have different attitudes. Females don't want to do male sports. Even if there are new talents, male or female, there are very few competing chances for them to keep them going.

Nonetheless, Yi-xiou indicates that CTPC is not aware of the problem. Xien-ge criticises the organisation for being "short-sighted". He explains, "I understand they take medal potential into account, but they can send one or two athletes at developmental level to give them a chance to experience competition and to encourage them. It is very important in the long run".

In addition, there is also a perception among powerlifters that the governing

organisation shows favouritism towards athletes of certain sports. Xiao-shuan, Yen-zi and Yi-xiou all indicate that they do not feel that powerlifters are valued by CTPC despite the fact that they often have a 100% winning ratio in competitions. According to Yen-zi:

I don't feel they value the powerlifting squad very much as they seem to be more supportive of other sports like table tennis or athletics. It may be because there are more medal chances in table tennis and more players in Taiwan, so they have got more attention. Powerlifting is a minority sport anyway. Not many people do it. Another reason could be that the powerlifting bases are in central Taiwan. The sport governing bodies, table tennis and athletics squads are all in Taipei. It's easier for them to access the resources. We are a bit like orphans. No one really cares, unless it's the Paralympics.

Xiao-shuan indicates that seven out of 10 medals would be won by table tennis players. It is not difficult to understand why the powerlifters perceive that there is such a difference in the attention and treatment given to different sports. She further expresses that, "Since they don't support or value us, how can we feel it is worth devoting time to our sport at all?" Yen-zi's comment above also reveals how geographical location can affect disabled athletes' access to resources. Elite powerlifters in this research are based in either the central or the south part of Taiwan, making it relatively harder for them to approach the governing organisation, compared with other sports that are based in north Taiwan. It is thus not surprising that in part they feel they were given better service under the national powerlifting association which is located in central Taiwan.

Apart from being neglected in their training, some powerlifters also point out that the governing organisation does not have a full understanding of the situation that the powerlifting squad are in and that sometimes they made decisions which are not conducive to high level performance in competitions. According to Gao-ming:

Sometime they just suddenly appointed one coach who knew nothing about the athletes' performances in the competitions. How can this coach instruct us in such a short time and be helpful to our performances in competitions? They don't have a clue about what they are doing to us!

When it comes to communication with the governing organisation, many participants in this research claim that, "It is impossible"! Xiao-shuan explains that if athletes

express how they feel or complain about the decision made by the CTPC, they would be regarded as complainers and may not get sent to compete internationally. Xien-ge, who is also angry at the issue about the coach-appointment, admits that he dared not talk about unfair matters as he was afraid to risk his sporting career. He explains that:

Last time when one of the directors of the National Sport Council [NCPFS] came down to visit us, I told him about this because I was really unhappy with this matter, although he couldn't really do anything about it. I used to not dare to say anything because I was afraid that they would never send me. To be honest, the person who is in charge in the CTPC is very subjective and runs it like a family business. As long as he is not happy, he would just block you completely.

Some track and field athletes, such as Xiao-lien and Zhong-zhe, also point out that the patronizing attitude of the governing organisation is one of the reasons why being an elite athlete is not a respected career and thus very few disabled people would take sport up to elite level. According to Xiao-lien:

Sometimes they have the attitude, like we should be grateful that they let us go abroad to compete so that we shouldn't complain about anything. It's very patronizing. They are not developing any athletes. There is no system, no practical support, no encouragement. This is why very few disabled people want to be athletes.

Indeed, as Jiang (2002) comments in *The Ming-shen News*, following the unparalleled success of the Taiwanese disabled squad in the 2002 FESPIC Games, "It is due to the local sport associations or committees for the disabled, special schools, voluntary coaches who have been constantly working hard with elite athletes with disabilities, but the CTPC get the credit of such good results".

Whether the organisational structures of disability sport is mainstreaming as in the GB or specialised as in Taiwan, elite athletes with disabilities in both countries in this research do not perceive that they are provided with proper organisational support which is a vital to their sport success. There are various problems that research participants experienced in relation to their training that they have to deal with themselves because the sport organisations are not very helpful in offering solutions, as discussed in the following section.

## **Perceived problems of the training environment**

### ***The coach***

Training is the key to the sporting success and excellence of athletes with disabilities, and effective coaching is a crucial element in the development of sport performance from beginner through to elite athlete level. However, Holmes (1997) argues that the most terrible barrier to disability sport has been the shortage of sports coaches capable or willing to train athletes with disabilities. This is a problem that Ross had always struggled with. He explains that, “Accessing coaches was a huge problem because it was very difficult to get a local coach. You always have to rely on one of the national coaches coming down to see you”.

It appears that with the difficulty and scarcity of finding a quality coach, many British athletes with disabilities have been mainly self-trained or even self-coached over the years. This is mirrored by Taiwanese athletes. As Yi-xiou states:

To be honest I train myself, so do other powerlifters in [county], because it is very difficult to find a coach who has an interest or knows how to train disabled powerlifters. Just like the able-bodied powerlifting coach who introduced me to powerlifting. I don't think he wants to coach me, he only gives me some advice very occasionally.

Athletes with disabilities having difficulty finding a coach is perceived by the participants in this research to be because of a lack of interest or adequate knowledge of how to train athletes with disabilities on the part of coaches. Brittain (2002:187) argues that some coaches may “perceive disability sport to be inferior to able-bodied sport, or even not sport at all”. They still find it hard to regard disabled athletes as being worthy of their attention and expertise. In addition, when a coach is equipped with expertise in sport but without sufficient knowledge of disability, it can lead to potential fear about and reluctance to take on athletes with disabilities. Brittain (2002) suggests that this problem can be overcome with a little time, patience and good communication. Indeed, in this research only the powerlifters in the county of Changhwa unanimously express that they are lucky to have a good coach. Li-li, Xiao-shuan and Xien-ge all point out that their persistence in this sport is influenced by their coach's enduring devotion to coaching the disabled powerlifting team. As

Xien-ge explains:

Our powerlifting team's great performance nationally and internationally is mainly due to our coach. He has devoted himself to coaching powerlifters here for 11 years and never gets paid as a full-time coach. He comes here to train us five days a week, even if there is only one player here. It's his personal interest in doing this. As long as we have good performances, he is happy. That's what he wants. You know, unlike able-bodied powerlifters, they can help each other to spot the bar or add the plates. But we only have the coach to do that for all of us. If you sum up the total weight of all the plates he adds for us when we have the most players here, it is over 1000kg!! But you would never see him tired. He is just like a father to us.

Their coach was himself a powerlifter and a coach for able-bodied powerlifters before he went to Chang-hua Jen-Ai School for the disabled to promote powerlifting and look for talent. He explains as follows how he first started as a novice coach for disabled powerlifting:

It is not difficult as long as you are genuinely willing to do it. As a powerlifting coach, I was already equipped with enough experience and knowledge in this sport. All I needed to do was to obtain sufficient understanding of the implications of disability on sport ability. Coaching athletes with disabilities is challenging. I have gained a great sense of achievement from training them from absolute beginners to elite powerlifters!

Attitude is the key to successful coaching. Most of all the athletes want and need a coach who values disability sport and views an athlete as an athlete first and a disabled person second and who is willing to take on athletes with disabilities.

### ***Guide runners for blind athletes***

Finding and keeping a guide runner can be a more serious problem for blind athletes who take part in track events because they are totally dependent on a sighted guide for both training and competition. Ben, a middle and long distance runner, illustrates this disability-specific problem:

When I started, I didn't have any problem because I was only running five minutes for 1500m. And you know lots of people can run at that speed relatively speaking. When I got down to 4:15 say, once you started to get down to that sort of level. First of all, fewer people can run that fast. And then the people who can run that fast are more dedicated to their own running, less willing to put themselves out to run with blind persons. So they are a lot harder to find.

Yen-wen, a blind Taiwanese marathoner in this research, points out that there is no



way he could achieve without his guide runner who is also his coach, as “it is an absolutely huge commitment to run with me everyday, rain or shine, over 40km every week, and guide me in various marathons and competitions”. Yen-wen reveals why it can be a difficult task to look for someone who is not only fast enough to keep up with him but also is committed to be a guide runner for blind athletes. Moreover, with the experience of running out of guide runners in 1991, which affected Ben’s training and performance terribly, he tries to use as many guide runners as possible in order to solve the problem of always having one available. He explains as follows:

You’ve got to have more than one guide runner because you [have to] give them a break from running with you and also if they are injured or not able to run with you for going to university, getting married, or whatever reasons, you’ve got someone else to run with because you are not totally dependent on him.

### *Training venue and facilities*

Up-to-standard training venues, facilities and equipment are also critical in order for elite athletes with disabilities to perform to capacity. Resources for training are a major concern reported by some Taiwanese athletes. Xiao-lien indicates that owing to its hilly geographical features, the track of the university where she has been practising is below standard and that somewhat affects the effectiveness of her training. Ironically, she feels that she has very few grounds for requesting amendments, because her university is proud of the fact that a top wheelchair racer like her can be cultivated in such training conditions. Gao-ming is concerned that the equipment in his sports club is not good enough for his level of powerlifting performance anymore. Sometimes he goes to the powerlifting club of a nearby university as some of the equipment there can be of some help although he is anxious about the situation. He says, “I know the budget of our club is limited. But if my performance can’t be improved because of the lack of suitable equipment, I feel extremely frustrated”. These cases show that the service providers may not be aware that accessing quality training facilities and equipment appropriate for elite athletes is a crucial requirement for further enhancing their competitive performance to the full potential.

On the other hand, part of the difficulty that some participants in this research faced

in finding and accessing training venues results from misconceptions or even a lack of understanding about disability sport. For example, Juen-juen mentions her own experiences and those of other wheelchair racers of being refused entrance to some sports grounds because the staff thought the wheelchair might cause damage. Ross talked about the problems of finding a training base where he could lift heavy weights:

A lot of gyms, certainly when I first started, were reluctant for you to train there. Not sort of reluctant to train there but to find the specialised equipment. A lot of gyms are fitness gyms you know, lots of aerobic equipment and things like that. And they don't like you going there lifting heavy weights, grunting and groaning. They don't like you using the chalk on the bar for your hands and things like that because they are all very clean and nice. So it's always very difficult to find a gym that you could go to to lift serious weights....Certainly as a beginner I found that a problem. As I got more and more knowledgeable and got more and more known around [things got better], so it was up until say 1995 it was quite a problem finding a gym.

According to Ross, the problem of resources is why some powerlifters tend to train in small groups or in a garage somewhere. However, there are always athletes like Ross who could not fit with the training schedule with others all the time because of work or family commitments, so he still had to get himself involved in a gym which is opened early and closed late. Many of the problems associated with access can actually be overcome by positive perceptions and attitudes toward disability sport and athletes as well as an inclusive approach to sport management on the part of service providers.

The performances of athletes are often further compromised, especially when difficulties with regard to training are compounded, by financial limitations. As discussed in Chapter Three, people with disabilities in the GB and Taiwan suffer from poor material conditions, and financial limitations often hinder their sport participation at any level. Finance is a crucial determinant for elite athletes with disabilities in order for them to start and continue their sport career. In the following section I explore financial issues further with the focus on the measures that the Sport Councils in both countries take and their implications on elite disabled athletes' sport careers.

### **Financial issues in disability sport**

Athletes with disabilities often incur additional costs in relation to sport participation vis-à-vis their able-bodied counterparts (Arthur and Finch, 1999; Sports Council, 1993). They need to pay for specialist equipment such as custom-made wheelchairs for track athletes or throwing frames for field athletes, which can easily cost several thousand pounds. Elite disabled athletes must frequently travel for competitions and some of them may need to pay for assistance to enable both travel and participation. For example, there are expenses for blind athletes to travel to meet and train with their guides and to attend competitions with them. And the cost of insurance for disabled athletes is higher. In the GB context, specifically, Fiona explains:

Yeah, you have to travel to the place where the coaching is going on...It does get quite expensive for me like with [the cost of] petrol going up and down to Stoke Mandeville, and getting the funds to buy equipment. And then when you go to competitions you usually have to pay a little bit or even when training at Stoke Mandeville you have to pay for the accommodation and the food....Yeah so there's always a cost involved. A lot of disabled people they probably haven't got the money to pay for all the training and stuff. If there's not much potential, then you haven't got any motivation anyway to train to be really good. But that's the only way to get to the top, to keep training and therefore enter into the competition.

Even those disabled athletes who are employed often have limited disposable income due to a much higher cost of living because of their disability (Sharkey, 1996). But the financial barrier is exacerbated for people with disabilities who are unemployed. The cost of sport participation can thus lead to a huge financial burden to athletes themselves or their families. Indeed, finance is reported to have been a major difficulty for all the British research participants since they took up their chosen sport, especially prior to the introduction of the World Class Performance Programme in 1997 (Please see details in next section). Eva had been training for years without funding and her parents supported her financially. Tricia did not take up powerlifting until the age of 46 and had always been a full-time athlete. Travel expenses were a problem for her until towards the end of her sport career when she was in the World Class Performance Programme. She explains how she had to raise money to travel to competitions:

I think the hardest thing was to be able to travel because it was before lottery

funding came in, so quite often I had to do the fund-raising for myself to be able to afford to do it. And I was fortunate that the gym didn't charge me any money for going to the gym. I think that could be quite expensive. So it was the travel expenses more than anything which...It took quite a bit of time writing letters and that sort of thing [to raise money].

Some British athletes such as Tricia, Elsa and Eva all mention that they had to raise money for training or competitions from charitable sources. Eva explains: "You know you can only rely on people's generosity and people willing to work voluntarily". As Brittain (2002:223) argues, "It is only because of their commitment to their sport, and the difference between their own financial situations and the demands of that sport, that these individuals are forced to be dependent on other sources of income such as this".

### ***The World Class Performance Programme and Lottery funding in Britain***

The World Class Performance Programme (WCPP) was initially introduced in 1997 and administered by Sport England. However, in July 1999 UK Sport became a Lottery funding distributor in its own right and assumed responsibility for elite level athletes (UK Sport, 2000). WCPP is designed to assist individuals and teams to improve their international ranking in international competitions and to win more medals in championships. Lottery funding is administered in a package of support through their respective sports. Each sport sets out in its WCPP application what it feels it needs to provide if its athletes are to achieve a set of agreed performance targets, usually based on medal placings at major competitions at European, World and Olympic/Paralympic level. World Class Performance funding consists of two parts: 1. Programme Funding which supports the governing bodies' performance plans, assisting with training and competition, sport science and medicine, and coaching programmes; and 2. Athlete Personal Awards, which are paid directly to the athletes themselves. The Athlete Personal Awards "are not salaries but a contribution to ensure that athletes can train and perform to the highest levels and, if they wish, work more flexibly, or indeed train full-time to ensure that as much time as necessary is dedicated towards training and competing" (UK Sport website, 2004). The awards contribute towards basic living costs and personal training and sports equipment

costs. Each athlete on the WCPP is categorised in an A, B or C category according to the athlete's performance level and world ranking, and the funding they receive also takes personal circumstances into account. For example, 86 top-rated track and field athletes were supported through the WCPP scheme during 2001-2004 and received subsistence funding up to £9,830 per annum for athletes in the elite categories A and B, and £4,915 per annum for those in the international category C (UK Athletics website, 2001). However, the subsistence funding is an on-going regular payment but is "seldom enough to provide a sole income, however they provide substantial help towards giving athletes the flexibility they need to concentrate on their sport" (UK Sport website, 2004). In addition, each athlete can receive awards covering sport-related costs such as personal sports travel costs, coaching costs, equipment costs. The amount varies for each category but is in the region of £6,600 and £4,000 for the elite and international categories respectively, in the case of track and field athletes. There is also warm weather training funding and a voucher scheme which worth £1,200 for physiotherapy and massage treatment. WCPP is designed to cover a set four-year period but monitored on an annual basis to ensure work towards targets is being maintained and value for money achieved.

### ***Perceived benefits of Lottery funding***

Able-bodied sports started to develop, gain Lottery funding for, and implement their World Class Performance Programmes in April 1997, whereas elite athletes with disabilities did not start to receive their funding until 1998 (UK Sport, 2000). Paul indicates that some elite disabled athletes are finally lucky enough to benefit from lottery funding and can access some of the facilities and training support available to able-bodied athletes, as follows:

After Barcelona [Paralympics in 1992], getting back to sport, we have the national lottery which provides money for the able-bodied athletes. Now we have national lottery which also incorporates disabilities. And in Australia [Sydney Paralympics in 2000] we had a very good record because of the national lottery. Athletes are able to access money in order to promote their sport. They can afford to have physiotherapists, psychologists, all sorts of necessities like able-bodied athletes used to be able to afford at the time because of sponsorship [or Lottery funding] they got, whereas disabled athletes at the time [before World Class Performance funding came along] couldn't access because of the money.

Charles also argues that disabled athletes used to “struggle to get say a £400 or £500 grant from the local county council and maybe you were lucky with something like that from sports aid or whatever”. The inclusion of disability sport into WCPP is no doubt a big step towards equality between able-bodied and disability sports and to some elite disabled athletes, the significance of receiving Lottery funding appears to be more than a simple financial aid. As Steven claims, “It means obviously we are recognised for what we do and what we achieve because there are standards to meet to receive the lottery funding”. Being selected into WCPP and awarded Lottery funding symbolises an important recognition of personal sport achievement.

Most of the elite British athletes with disabilities in this research claim that their financial problems have been largely alleviated since the introduction of World Class Performance funding. For example, now Ben is able to pay guide runners and afford to take taxis to meet them which make it easier for him to access guides.

Participants also benefit from a wide range of training support when they finally make it to elite level, as Fiona describes:

You can get a nutritionist and all that, go to various lectures and stuff...You got vouchers to have physio or massage whenever you needed them....So once you get to the elite level, they provide a lot of support for you, and financial support as well. But it's before you get to that level, that's really tough because you've got to train really hard and you have to reach certain standards to actually be able to get the elite support.

While all the British participants in this research are in agreement that the World Class Performance Funding makes a difference for elite athletes with disabilities who are fortunate enough to receive it, nevertheless, there are new problems generated.

### ***Perceived problems of Lottery funding***

Although British participants are positive that WCPP enables them to focus more on training and access to training and competition support, there are negative implications. One of them is burn-out. Charles indicates that since the World Class Performance Funding came along, everything became performance-oriented, and athletes are under huge and constant pressure to perform and to stay in the World

Class Performance Programme. Ross points out that in the end it made him lose all the enthusiasm and enjoyment:

You know I just found that I wasn't enjoying it anymore. You know I enjoyed winning, I enjoyed participating in competitions. That was the motivation I had. My own motivation to win, to improve my own standards. I just enjoyed that, I loved that. Then the World Class Performance Plan came in, and they were setting you individual targets and if you didn't achieve that particular target at a particular time, they take away the funding, and it just became too much. I found it a real pressure.

Charles argues that now athletes do the sport for the funding, which ruins the original enjoyment of participating in sport. Ben describes the pressure to stay in the WCPP and secure the funding as “just painful” which makes him feel he has had enough of running as it dominates his life too much. These participants' experiences are consistent with the research of UK Sport (2000) on WCPP leavers which reveals the problem that the programme can be pressuring, de-motivational and is argued to be having a detrimental impact on sport.

The choice between work and dependence on funding to train and compete becomes a serious consideration for elite athletes. Charles points out that, “It is maybe 10 years ago that you could be quite happy do a full-time job and train four or five times a week and still be at that level”. But with the high standard of sport around the world nowadays, elite athletes will probably always have to be full-time athletes in order to get time and energy to train and stay at the level required. Athletes on the WCPP are expected to commit themselves to a certain level of training and competition because the subsistence funding of the Athlete Personal Awards is intended to provide them with a choice, based on the level of commitment to sport required, about giving up work, remaining in work, or working part-time (UK Sport, 2000). However, many British participants do not appear to find the amount of funding they receive adequate for their needs. For example, Eva, a full-time powerlifter, indicates that the funding is not enough for her to live on and she relies on a disability allowance<sup>24</sup>:

---

<sup>24</sup> The disability allowance that Eva refers to is Disability Living Allowance, which is a weekly allowance paid to people with a disability by the Department of Work and Pension (DWP), UK. It is

Don't get me wrong. I do get funding, but not enough to live on. It covers the cost of training. It gives me freedom that way, but not enough to live on. We have allowances, disability allowances and things like that. I just rely on the funding for the training and my other allowances to live on really.

It is even hard for athletes to feel financially secure enough to give up work to be full-time athletes. Some athletes, especially older athletes with higher financial commitments, are much less able to cope on the subsistence funding awarded. UK Sport (2000) finds that a majority (76%) of older athletes on WCPP had to supplement their subsistence funding with income from employment. Indeed, most of the participants who are above 30 years old, such as Charles and Ross, work part-time in order to cope. Elsa dropped out of the WCPP and had time-off for one year, but now she finances herself with a part-time job and tries hard to get back into WCPP in order to be able to receive lottery funding again. However, she is clear that she should retain a part-time job:

It would be lovely to just train full-time and have the financial backing to do that but sport is not forever. Powerlifting is good in that you can keep going for years. You know it would be fantastic to, but it's just not possible.

It is not surprising that a couple of elite athletes insist on working full-time. Steven could be a full-time athlete with the lottery funding, but he is well-established with the company he has been working for for 16 years and really enjoys his job. There is no reason for him to give up his job and position for lottery funding. However, even if someone does not want funding but chooses to work full-time, the person still has to sign a contract to abide by certain rules to be eligible to go to events. This is why the governing organisations still have power over elite athletes, let alone when lottery funding is involved. As Charles argues:

Their attitude really is basically if you have got any problem with the contract, don't sign it, which is I mean you can't compete with that because they are quite happy 'Well don't sign it', so the way I look at it, you've got no choice. If you're working part-time, I have got a family to support so I've got to sign the contract....I think sometimes they enjoy the ability to play God to people and not upset them. They can say, 'Well I am not going to fund you anymore'.

---

available to disabled people who are aged 16 or over and under age 65. The disability must be expected to last for at least one year. Paid at different rates depending on individual circumstances (DWP website).



While the governing organisations threaten to reduce or even cut off elite athletes' funding if they fail to achieve the goals which are set for them, it becomes a lot harder for them to get back into the WCPP. Ross points out the problem that elite athletes who drop from the World Class Performance Programme have been neglected. He explains that it used to be that each disability group, such as the British Wheelchair Sports Foundation, took care of their squads and the British Paralympic Association picked the elite squad. Now the BWLA World Class Performance Programme looks after the elite squad and Stoke Mandeville is still there for the development squad, but there is nothing there for those who drop out from the elite squad to help them get back into it. As Ross explains:

There wasn't a safety net there. There was nothing. One minute I was able to access, not just to access a coach, sport science back-up, medical treatment and all that sort of things, next minute I wasn't able to access anything. But I was beyond the development squad, so I couldn't slot into the development squad and access the stuff that they are able to access. There is nothing in the middle....There is just no support.

Ross further indicates it partly has something to do with the negligent attitude and unequal treatment of the governing sport organisation toward elite athletes with disabilities. He claims that if it is able-bodied lifters who fail to meet the target, their funding would only be reduced. But "I was chucked off the World Class Performance. If I was an able-bodied lifter, that wouldn't happen". Although the governing organisation threatens to pay less money next year if athletes do not improve, Charles argues that there is no one else they are going to take as a replacement. Lots of elite athletes have no choice but to give up sport altogether. Charles speaks of the drop-off of athletes with disabilities in athletics:

I mean when I went to Birmingham in 1998 for the Worlds, there were 144 athletes. When we went to the IPC World's in France last year there was 33. So that's like 111 people wiped out. These athletes have just given up because what's the point of training without funding.

Tricia also suggests that nowadays athletes have a lot to do to get to be an elite athlete and "possibly that's why we are not getting numbers through, even the men and the ladies". Personally, Charles does not think the lottery funding will take him to any further level than what he has achieved already. He has been the world record

holder and world champion, and he would have won the gold medal in Sydney whether receiving lottery funding or not. However, he argues, “You maybe get £700 or £800 pounds a year to pay for your sport and that’s what some people are struggling to get”.

Charles also points out that unlike able-bodied sports there is no structure of disability sport to carry athletes through all the way to elite level. It can be very easy to get to national level because there are not enough numbers of athletes to compete, but then it would be very difficult to be good enough to compete internationally. This is, as Charles claims, “Just all being performance funding has dragged the elite end up and left everything else behind”. Indeed, many participants in this research point out that the gap between developmental and elite level sport is likely to widen soon. Ross argues that there is an urgent need to bridge the gap between the developmental and the elite level and suggests that the organisation should take a full team to the forthcoming European Championships instead of just taking six powerlifters as there are good powerlifters who can’t go because they are not in the WCPP with funding to go. However, Ross argues that the governing sport organisation fails to recognise the problem:

The World Class Performance should be funding the European Championships. They should be funding GB to take 10 men, 10 women. How else are they going to get international experience? How are they going to get the experience to go to the Paralympics? All the money is concentrated on the Paralympics, on preparation for the Paralympics. The only people that are in the elite squad are people who have already been to the Paralympics!

Curtis is exactly the same case. He feels he was deprived of his opportunity to attend competitions when the international powerlifting organisation recognised that he was qualified to compete but his country did not take him because the GB takes only those with medal potential. Curtis explains that, “The argument is, well, ‘You are not going to win the medal. You are not going to be in the top six’”. He wonders how athletes can become top athletes without competing experiences. Moreover, Ross argues that the demands of elite athletes are so great as to shorten their sport careers. Many powerlifters retired after the Athens Paralympic Games, but there are no

athletes there as replacements that could be ready for the Beijing Paralympics in 2008 as they are all at the developmental level. Ross explains:

There is nothing to get them from the development level to the elite level... You don't jump from the development level to elite level... And the numbers participating in powerlifting in Britain today is falling dramatically. People are just not going into it at all because there is a gap growing between the elite and development levels.

Similarly, Charles reports that there is a huge gap in CP athletics between grass roots participants and elite athletes at the other end, but there is no one in between. 85% of athletes in the current elite squad are those who have trained for 10 or 15 years since 1988. As he argues, "They will just get the last bit of them before they burnout really. So I don't think the GB athletics could do as well in Athens as in Sydney. Just purely on the way that they in the squad have been squeezed so that you are down to the bare bones". This shows that there is an essential need for the governing sport organisations to support the developmental level and provide athletes with opportunities to compete in order to help them get into elite level sport and motivate them to carry on training. In doing this, there will not be a gap problem and potential elite athletes will not be lost.

However, some powerlifters in this research point out that there is differential resourcing among sports, and powerlifting is a minority sport. Tricia argues that it is a result of medal potential - the number of athletes and the medal numbers. There are relatively fewer powerlifters and few medal chances, as there is only one medal for each bodyweight category and there are 20 medals at most, whereas with track and field there are up to about 80 medals at most. Ross argues that the performance and medals of disabled powerlifters should be more valued than sports such as athletics which have a lot of medal opportunities due to the numbers of athletes and disability classifications involved, whereas powerlifting has no disability classification but a bodyweight classification which is on a par with that of able-bodied powerlifting. However, the sport governing bodies do not see it that way. As Tricia suggests, at the end of the day the medal winners and the potential for them are what they look at. There are also many cases that despite elite athletes "achieving relative success in

their chosen sport - for example, by being ranked highly in the world and/or being a member of the GB squad – their funding was stopped because the sport was no longer regarded as priority” (UK Sport, 2000:58). According to the UK Sport website (2004), the prioritisation criteria for Olympic sports focus on: medal potential; evidence of a performance system able to produce a high number of talented athletes; track record; and significance of the sport in the eyes of the public. And the criteria for Paralympic sports is slightly different because “the majority of medals available in Paralympic competition (75%) are in swimming and athletics; and Paralympic athletes can emerge relatively quickly as a consequence of unexpected and traumatic injuries”. Athletics and swimming have been regarded as priority one sports and powerlifting has been among priority two sports. Medal potential is clearly the major criterion as stated in the UK Sport Annual Review (2002-2003:6): “With a set amount of £25 million per year to distribute via the World Class Performance Programme, UK Sport needs to ensure that the money goes to sports and individuals likely to deliver medals at the Olympics, Paralympics and world championships”.

However, UK Sport (2000) reveals that communication problems attract the greatest overall criticism of WCPP leavers in relation to the administration and management of WCPP. Between two-thirds and three quarters of them suggest that communication between athletes and WCPP officials was inadequate or poor when they were on the Programme. Disabled athletes appear to suffer more communication problems than able-bodied athletes as fewer than 10 percent of the disabled WCPP leavers agree that “Communication was frequent” (8%) or “continually giving feedback” (4%), and only 15 percent of them agree “Officials and I worked together”, while above 20 percent of their able-bodied counterparts agree the above three statements. If it is not until after athletes leave WCPP or even retire from sport that they are able to express their dissatisfaction with the lack of communication and negligence, it is not surprising that British participants in this research, in common with the situation of Taiwanese participants, dare not risk their careers to talk about the problems with their sport governing bodies while they are on the Programme. As Ross indicates:

I did try to talk about it, but it was very much a closed issue....And trying to get other lifters to talk, it was fairly easy for me because I was coming to the end of my career anyway. When you got guys who are hoping to go to Athens, they are not going to rock the boat and they try and do their best. I do think it is a real issue. It is a real bug bear I have got about the World Class Performance. There are many at the top end and there isn't the safety net.

### *The reward system in Taiwan*

Financial difficulties are also reported by almost all the elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities in this research as the major problem in the course of their sporting careers. Since most of them took up their chosen sport when they were studying at either senior high school or university, they have been financially supported by their families until their graduation. As discussed in Chapter Three, those who later chose to take up sport as their profession mostly experienced conflict with their parents and had to fight for their aspiration in elite sport against the disapproval of the family as well as other people around them. Being an elite athlete in Taiwan is not regarded as a valued and promising career. Although they are expected to have a proper and stable job in order to gain independence, currently they either remain unemployed or have a part-time job temporarily, but still rely on the financial support from the family to a certain degree. It shows that the Taiwanese social perception of sport, in relation to disability, in large part results from the unsupportive governing sport organisations and the discriminatory system of disability sport. Elite Taiwanese athletes are not funded to train and compete for the country as there is no system in Taiwan equivalent to the WCPP in the GB. Taiwanese elite athletes with disabilities do not have financial resources or benefit from any sport sciences support due to the lack of any programme to take care of them. This is a major criticism reported by most of the Taiwanese participants in this research. The only incentives are the rewards from winning competitions.

However, the sport rewarding policy and system, i.e. the National Guo-guang Sports Award, that started in 1980, and was mainly for able-bodied athletes and their coaches, started to include elite athletes with disabilities in 1994. But before NCPFS took over in 1997, there were never clear bylaws, and elite disabled athletes never

enjoyed the same treatment as their able-bodied counterparts. It was not until April 2000 that the decision was made in the fifth revision of the National Guo-guang Sports Award that the rewarding system for elite athletes with disabilities should be made apart from the mainstream one. And it actually took effect in September 2000, right before the Sydney Paralympic Games.

Many athletes with disabilities comment on the constant change of the reward system. For example, Li-li states:

In the beginning it [the prize money for gold medallist] was NTD1,200,000 in 1994. Then after the FESPIC Games in Thailand, it became NTD 400,000, and in the latest FESPIC [in 2002], it went down to NTD 380,000. And there is the rule about winning medals only if there are a minimum of 6 countries or 6 athletes in any event. But this time they allow every medal winner to receive prize money. You just won't know how long it will last. It is always changing.

The changing system makes athletes feel uncertain and frustrated, especially regarding the unequal treatment in prize money between disabled and non-disabled athletes. According to Xiao-shuan:

Since the Sydney Paralympics, it seems to have become a system, but I don't know why the prize money has been reduced. The gold medallist wins NTD 2 million this time, but next Paralympics there won't be that much. They said it's due to the lack of budget. It's unfair because an Olympic gold medallist can still win NTD 10 million, why would the Paralympics' medallist receive less and less as a reward? They always said equality, but this is not equal.

Xiao-shuan further expressed that if they do not have the aspiration in sport and the luck of their family to help them out, it is impossible to be a full-time athlete relying on the limited rewards to cover the training and living expenses:

We train so hard for four years without any support, what can two million cover? It is that we have this dream in life and everyone in the squad gets on well like a family, so that the spiritual thing exceeds the material conditions. But most importantly, our family are supporting us financially; otherwise there is no way we can make it.

But currently the prize money for an able-bodied Olympic gold medallist is nearly seven times more than that of a Paralympic counterpart. Table 3 and 4 provide the development of rewards for elite able-bodied and elite disabled medallists.

Revised year Prize money	1980-1990	1991-1999	2000-2003	2004-
Gold medallist	2,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000	12,000,000
Silver medallist	1,500,000	5,500,000	6,000,000	6,000,000
Bronze medallist	1,000,000	3,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000

Table 3 The development of rewards for Olympic medallists in Taiwan

Revised year Prize money	2000	2001-2003	2004-
Gold medallist	2,000,000	1,500,000	2,400,000
Silver medallist	1,200,000	900,000	1,440,000
Bronze medallist	700,000	530,000	840,000

Table 4 The development of rewards for Paralympic medallists in Taiwan

Many Taiwanese participants argue that elite athletes with disabilities have had better performances in the Paralympic Games than elite able-bodied athletes in the Olympic Games, but their rewards have been far less than non-disabled athletes. According to Wang (2001), the prize money for elite Taiwanese able-bodied athletes from 1983 until the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games amounted to more than NTD 220 million. However, they had not achieved in the Olympic Games as expected and had not won even one gold medal. On the contrary, elite disabled athletes won one gold medal in both the Atlanta and Sydney Paralympic Games. Finally, in the recent Athens Olympic Games in 2004, two able-bodied taekwondo athletes made Taiwan's gold-medal dream come true and made Taiwanese sport history. In recognition of their achievements, the National Guo-guang Sports Award was revised again, raising 20 percent of the prize money for the gold medallists by 20% to NTD 12,000,000. In contrast, the Paralympic Games came into the spotlight for the first time in Taiwan when the first lady, who is a wheelchair user with acquired disability, led the Taiwan delegation at the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games. The obviously huge discrepancy in prize money between elite able-bodied and disabled athletes finally came to the attention of those in power. Elite athletes with disabilities appealed to the first lady to aid in this matter. She pointed out the inequality to the President of Taiwan, and NCPFS was instructed to revise the reward system for elite disabled athletes.

The new prize money for disabled medallists was based on the amounts of the year

2000 and then raised 20 percent and therefore became NTD 2,400,000 for gold medallists, NTD 1,440,000 for silver medallists, and NTD 840,000 for bronze medallists in the Paralympics (NCPFS website, 2004). The President also promised to seek sponsorship and aimed to make the total prize money for a Paralympic gold medallist up to NTD 5,000,000. However, despite the increase of prize money for disabled athletes, it is still only one fourth of that for able-bodied athletes which reveals the discriminatory attitude that disabled people are worth less than the able-bodied. The structure of financial inequality clearly has a negative impact on the feelings of self-worth of the participants in this research. As Li-li argues:

I don't feel I am valued for what I have been working for so hard. Maybe it's because I am disabled, a disabled athlete. We are doing a lot better than them [able-bodied athletes], but we are still treated like second-rate athletes. It's like we don't deserve equal treatment in relation to them.

Moreover, although it was planned that coaches of the elite squads should receive rewards equivalent to half of their medallists' prize money, the plan was cancelled in the latest revision in November 2001. Li-li asked the question, "Who will devote themselves to coaching elite athletes with disabilities for our country"? For many years, most of the coaches have trained athletes with disabilities voluntarily. There is great recognition for their contribution in the Sydney Paralympic Games as well as encouragement and incentives for more coaches to get involved in disability sport. Although in 2001, a new policy was implemented providing full-time professional coaches for able-bodied athletes, in contrast, nothing has been suggested or done about rewarding coaches of disabled athletes.

The prize money from local city or county governments also mirrors the unequal treatment between able-bodied and disabled athletes. As Xien-ge argues:

They seem to offer NTD 30,000 to able-bodied athletes who won the National Guo-guang Award. But there was no equivalent award for disabled athletes, so that didn't apply to us. Alternatively, they make it a special case to give us 15,000 in a red envelope. There is NTD 100,000 for able-bodied athletes who win the national games for the county, but the rewards for the FESPIC Games medallists are dealt with case by case.

Some participants, mostly powerlifters, point out that there is a very limited budget



for powerlifting either from the governing body or local county government because it is a minor sport. Mainstream sports like table tennis would get more financial support due to more medal chances. According to Gao-ming:

They don't really understand what powerlifting is about. Powerlifting is not like badminton or table tennis in which there are more participants and medal chances including single and double competitions, so that they feel it's worth giving more money to promote or invest in these kind of sports rather than powerlifting.

The attitude of the local county government toward organising sport events is also identified by some athletes as a barrier to promoting disability sport. As Xien-ge indicates:

We went to the organising meeting for the [county name] games for the disabled. Their attitude was that they had this budget so they had just held the games and spent it all so that they could apply for enough budget for next year. They were not truly promoting disability sport, just holding the event, that's it.

Many athletes with disabilities comment that there is no sound system to take care of elite athletes so that they would not have to worry but be able to focus on training. Xiao-shuan points out that the CTPC does not have full knowledge about disabled athletes' circumstances. They tend to generalise between some middle-aged athletes who have stable jobs in big cities to all the disabled athletes, without acknowledging that lots of disabled athletes are unemployed and leading difficult lives. Xien-ge takes China for example, where an elite athlete's education, life, family and future career are taken care of, as long as they win medals.

Why do athletes in China achieve amazingly? Because they are given something certain. As long as they train hard, they will get it. Like one female powerlifter in China we knew from the 1994 FESPIC Games. Her education, life, family and career have been taken care of. We met her again in the World championships last year. She told us that she has got her first degree from Beijing University. There were people arranged to help her study even if she took time off from study for training or competitions. And she is now the vice chairperson in the city welfare department. Once she is retired from sport, she doesn't have to worry about a job in the future. And their reward system is a lot better than ours. Theirs keeps increasing while ours keeps decreasing.

Unlike for elite able-bodied athletes, there is no system to help or facilitate elite disabled athletes' education, employment, or post-sport careers. For example, Xien-ge would like to do coaching or refereeing in the future but the CTPC could not help

with it. He thinks he will not be valued unless he has a higher education qualification:

I want to be a coach or referee. I have got the national coach and referee certificate granted by the national powerlifting association. But CTPC doesn't have these kind of seminars. Now powerlifting is not part of the able-bodied association, so there is nothing they can do. But that certificate doesn't work because we won't be appointed as a referee in Taiwan anyway. I think unless you have a certain level of education, having a masters degree or a PhD, they won't value you.

Xiao-shuan strongly comments that she feels disabled athletes are not respected by the governing body for their achievements which is another form of oppression.

Disabled athletes have proved what they can achieve in sport. As she puts it:

We won medals for our country, but they didn't value our contribution. It is like another kind of oppression. We can only do our best. If one day we can't carry on, then we will just leave. There is a gap already, after us, there is no one there. They don't think further...We didn't ask for much. If we can receive NTD 5000 per month as subsidies, we can live with that. They never care about how we live our lives.

Some athletes indicate that their helpless situation contributes to the understanding of disability sport in Taiwan. As Xiao-shuan states:

They don't have money for development, at least for those who have contributed, they should care about their life or training...they didn't think about how others think of us. People including our teachers think we are stupid to hang on to this for nothing. They think we have no aspiration in life.

### **Getting involved in politics?**

From the political point of view, social and welfare services are the dominant agenda and leisure is given relatively little attention (Aitchison, 2003), and thus sport is not yet a part of the disability movement. As a wheelchair sportswoman who participated in the research of Hargreaves (2000:195) points out:

Sport is separated from disability politics. Disabled sportswomen are not connected with politics and disabled organisations are not interested in sport – the primary issues are jobs, health, housing, etc. So there is no support from disability organisations – I mean those run by disabled people who are tuned in to the political debates about disability and are making demands about equality in other areas.

It is even so in Taiwan where the disability issue is politically less sensitive and sport has relatively low status. Disability sport therefore has little to do with mainstream

disability politics. A major difficulty is that disability sport organisations tend to be run by non-disabled people – a situation that is similar in mainstream disability politics. After mainstreaming, British participants suggested that most of the British sport governing bodies and their disability divisions appear to be run by both disabled and able-bodied people, which according to Curtis, forms a mixed interaction. However, British participants' experiences discussed in previous sections show that the mainstream management does not cater better or provide equal service for elite athletes with disabilities. It is likely that for as long as non-disabled people who are in powerful positions of decision-making hold the purse strings to the cash that could make a difference to the lives of talented disabled athletes, disability sport will retain its minority status. As Hargreaves (2000: 208) maintains:

Unrepresentative disability sport bodies are examples of institutionalised discrimination, which is interwoven throughout sport and throughout the fabric of society. If sport organisations were controlled and run by disabled people themselves, they could more easily challenge prejudices and promote equality and anti-discriminatory practices.

Tricia stresses that disabled people should get involved as much as possible “because at the end of the day we know what we need. We all need different things when it comes to aids and adaptation”. Eva points out that disabled peoples' voices are heard relatively better nowadays:

There are disabled people in the organisation, but in the past it was dominated by able-bodied people overseeing things and telling [us what to do], but obviously it is evolving so that now we are getting control over our own place. We are getting more of voice now and they are listening to our needs. We were dictated to before really.

While it remains unclear in this research if the involvement of people with disabilities in sport organisations is moving away from an advisory to a decision-making level, Charles argues that the problem is not whether disabled people or able-bodied people should be in charge, but that there should be a better understanding of the implications of disability and disability sport on the part of the people running the sport organisations:

I think there are able-bodied people out there that understand enough of disability sport. It doesn't matter whether it's a disabled or an able-bodied person that is in

charge of it. It's just the person who's got the job doesn't understand enough about the 'delicacies' of running disabled athletics.

However, most of the British athletes in this research have no interest or intention of getting involved in the politics or administration of sport organisations. Charles indicates that many of the jobs in disability sport organisations have been given to 'friends' and he wouldn't consider working in disability sport until attitudes change. Ross also does not think he could work in disability sport because he has seen lots of people get "hammered" or sacked:

In 1999 when the BWLA was told to take us on board, I mean we had a fantastic coach and he was just replaced by two other people. And I have seen that happen to too many people. There was one guy who was a fantastic organiser and yeah people got rid of him. So I just wouldn't want to get involved there. It's too complicated. I am far too sensitive for that. So I have got ideas, but I am just completely put off getting involved in administration in sport.

Tricia would not consider working in disability sport, either, because it would take too much time. It is difficult for her to balance her family with other commitments as it is. Ben feels strongly that working in sport organisations or administration "is a hell of a hassle". It appears that the attitude of most British athletes with disabilities to the power relations in sport organisations can be summed up by Curtis' comment:

I don't talk about it really, because...I accepted it because I have to accept it and just like I accept other things I don't like but I have to accept it. I rather just get on with it. Just keep out of politics really - I don't want to get involved with politics because I like to do sport, but not sport and politics.

On the contrary, many Taiwanese athletes with disabilities seem to hold different attitudes towards their situation. Powerlifters in particular are very glad and keen to share their experiences and thoughts in this research. As Xiao-shuan states:

I am very happy that you are interested in investigating our experiences. People have always focused on table tennis and think their lives represent all of us. No one really cares about how we powerlifters feel and what we need. I am very glad that someone like you finally pays attention to us. It's comforting enough that you listen to us.

The elite Taiwanese powerlifters all express their desire to establish a sport association *of* disabled athletes because, according to Xien-ge, "We can run it better by ourselves as we know our situation". However, they are aware of their powerless

and oppressed position presently, and realise that it will be a difficult task. According to Xiao-shuan:

We are just disabled athletes, we don't have much power. We don't have high education; people won't value what we say. It's impossible to get into the sport organisation or to change people who are in charge. I am sure if one day someone comes out to sort out things, we will all cooperate with this person. This is what we want, but we are limited by our abilities and resources. If the timing is right, we will say what we want to say and do what we want to do. Hopefully we can set up our own organisation which would put athletes first and provide a service truly to meet our needs. I hope it will come true one day.

Xiao-shuan's comments highlight the importance of integrating sport into the agenda of the mainstream disability movement as the starting point for the politicisation of disability sport. Disabled athletes could then join forces with disability activists to address the discriminatory practices that disabled people experience in the sport arena and fight for autonomy and equality through collective power.

### **Concluding remarks**

It is clear in this chapter that the attitudes, perceptions, and actions toward people with disabilities of the key personnel who are in charge in disability sport, can have a profound effect on the experiences of athletes with disabilities as well as on their performances. Athletes who are progressing toward elite level and aiming for Paralympic medals rely on the services and assistance of those in the sport organisations to a great extent. However, the shift to a mainstreaming structure in Britain has not successfully achieved the full and true inclusion of elite British athletes with disabilities into their respective mainstream sport governing bodies, but neither does the specialised administrative structure in Taiwan provide a better service for elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities than when they belonged to mainstream sport organisations. The condescending and paternalistic attitudes towards athletes with disabilities and the unequal treatment between elite able-bodied and disability squads in terms of sports sciences and financial support, clearly display that the perceptions and actions toward disability as well as disability sport are deeply rooted in the medical model discourse. Although the World Class Performance funding allows British elite athletes with disabilities more flexibility in

the arrangement of work and training and lessens their financial worries, and has a positive effect on their sense of self as elite athletes, it also brings huge pressures on the athletes which is not conducive to good performances. The development of the reward system in Taiwan also highlights the inequalities in the treatment of elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities which make them feel frustrated and undervalued and confirms the minority status of disability sport. This, in turn, perpetuates negative societal perceptions of disability and disability sport in Taiwan. The problem of negligence in developing new athletes and the lack of a proper programme to help those at developmental level to get to elite level, due to the high emphasis on performance at elite level, and consequently the potential gap problem have been identified by participants in both countries in this research. Athletes with disabilities have proved their ability in sport, but it appears that it is the unsupportive sports structure and the discriminatory attitudes of those who are in positions of power and decision-making in sports organisations that prevent them from developing to their full potential and adversely affect their sporting experiences and performances. However, elite athletes with disabilities are often afraid to risk their sport careers to address the problems with those in power, though some Taiwanese athletes voice the desire to make a difference one day which reveals the potential for the politicisation of disability sport in that country. The political dimension of sport is crucial for disabled athletes to gain autonomy from non-disabled people and stand up for equality in the field of sport and physical activity for the disability community as a whole. With the heightened profile of the Paralympic Games in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, elite athletes with disabilities have the potential to politicise disability issues in sport and be a force in the disability movement both nationally and internationally.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Societal Perceptions and Media Coverage of Disability Sport**

#### **Introduction**

Following the emergence in England in 1944 of disability sport for therapy and the evolution into the Paralympic Games that signify sport excellence today (see Chapter One), the Paralympic Movement has raised public consciousness trans-nationally about human sports performance, in particular top-caliber performance, being no longer the sole privilege of able-bodied individuals. However, there is still very little empirical research about public views of disability sport in societies across the world. The question that is addressed in this chapter is, “Has the Paralympic Movement actually changed societal perceptions of sport for disabled people and possibly contributed to the equality of people with disabilities in general?” The first section of the chapter examines dominant perceptions and values concerning disability sport embedded in British and Taiwanese societies respectively as perceived and experienced by their elite athletes with disabilities.

The mass media play a significant role in the formation processes of attitudes towards disability. Media coverage of disability sport, specifically, can be an indicator of public attitudes toward and representations of sport for people with disabilities as well as a primary source used to shape and affect social perceptions of disability sport and athletes with disabilities. Hence, in the second section of this chapter the analysis focuses on the media treatment of disability sport in Britain and Taiwan and how the media reflect and influence public perceptions in the respective countries.

#### **British societal perceptions**

Many elite British athletes with disabilities in this research claim that the public’s perception of disability sport in Britain has changed, especially in the last few years. Paul indicates that when he was first involved in competitive sport 20 years ago, people could not imagine that anyone with a disability could do sport, let alone achieve at competitive levels:

A lot of my peers at the time thought, 'Oh no, it's nice to have that dream, but you would never attain anything'. Again it's the athletic thing. They look at you and think 'No, you can't'.

This case shows that 20 years ago British people's perceptions of disability were heavily influenced by medical discourse. Disabled bodies were viewed as defective and people with disabilities were frequently considered to be limited in ability. In particular, the public did not associate disabled people with sport where physical ability is at the centre. There were common doubts about the physical competence of individuals with disabilities and about their abilities to achieve sporting excellence and become elite athletes.

Even today members of the public are often shocked when they witness for themselves what disabled people are capable of doing in sport. For example, Paul describes people's reactions when seeing him train in local gyms:

Guys, obviously workers, were there training. They were quite amazed at what I could do. I am no great lifter or trainer, but it's just the fact that they could see for themselves that a person with a disability could train.

Indeed, prevailing misconceptions can be dispelled as long as the public are given opportunities to see what athletes with disabilities can achieve in elite sport and most of the people are dependent on the media to provide such opportunities. The media coverage of disability sport was reported by many of the British participants in this study to be the key to recent changes in societal perceptions of disability sport following the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games. For example, Paul elaborates as follows:

The general public at one fell swoop, because of TV, can see a world standard, can see and were astounded by what a person with a disability can do. They didn't realise that the level of their sport was so high. I had that from so many people. They had a couple minutes of conversation, watched on TV and said, 'I didn't realise what a disabled person in sport can do, especially at the elite level!'

Steven also claims that the Sydney Paralympic Games was a defining moment which put disability sport on the map:

I do think the Paralympics will always recognise those people with a disability doing extremely well having the courage and determination. I think the labels I just



mentioned [that disabled people are physically incapable and have mental problems as well] are now falling away, peeling away to extend to what people can achieve. Just off their own backs, with their own determination with some help and backup is now being clearly recognised. It got to Sydney and I think because Sydney was very well-organised, Sydney has definitely without a doubt set a trend. I think Sydney has said to the world, "We put on another Olympic Games". I think Sydney has said these people had got a few too many labels attached to them.

Without doubt, there has developed a greater-than-ever awareness of elite athletes with disabilities throughout Britain over the years. However, the national picture is built up from individual stories and connections linked to specific areas of the country. As Steven states:

I think they get recognition...when their family and friends see them off. I think most people take a genuine interest [in disability sport] and that's a huge chunk now I think of the general public. They know who these people are and what they are going for, even if it's only a few thousand people from your hometown or home area, you will be known.

Most of the British participants feel that people in their local areas, have changed their views about disability because of their athletic achievement. For instance, Ross states that, "Most definitely I think it helps people see beyond my wheelchair and crutches". But although Fiona was a familiar figure to her own town people when she was winning medals, she lost recognition after her retirement from competitive sport:

I used to be in the [local] paper a lot. People [used to] do a double take a lot and then realise who I am. They used to do that, but since I haven't done anything for 3 years, they probably have forgotten my face now...But there is no reason for anybody to even think about me now. So I am history. I am old news.

Steven also indicates that for the last three years the achievements of athletes with disabilities have been recognised at a higher level, for example, in the Queen's Birthday Honours List, the New Years Honours List and through winning certain awards. Although Steven suggests that disabled athletes are relatively well-known publicly nowadays, he points out that the acknowledgement is not sufficient and satisfactory: "They may not be quite in the same echelons as your Paula Radcliffe in athletics, David Beckham in football or sports stars in the other high profile sports". Ross argues that the British public only recognise the high-profiled athletes in both

able-bodied and disability sports without knowing that there are other athletes achieving brilliantly:

You know in the able-bodied world people think of people like Steve Redgrave. OK, he is a fantastic role model but he's not the only one. And in disability sport people tend to think of Tanny Grey-Thompson as the only person that has done anything, whereas you know there are other people that have done things. But I think you get that anyway. In able-bodied sport you get that you know it's just high profile sport.

Charles shares similar opinions but indicates that it is also a matter of the differential attention given to various sports. He does not perceive athletics to be a high priority sport in the view of the British people and views disability athletic events to be further towards the bottom of the hierarchy of sports:

If you pulled people from the street and ask them would they rather watch athletics than say football...or ask them if they know who runs the 400m for GB in able-bodied sport. It's the thing really. It's a minority sport in this country anyway...But living with that, disability [athletics] is even lower down in the scheme of things. That's why it is not high-profiled.

Fiona feels that track event athletes receive more attention and publicity than those doing field events:

You see if you do track then you raise sponsorship money as well so people get to know you. And they see you around the country, going to marathons and stuff. But field events are not really spectator sports, so people don't come along to watch, not normally. So people don't know me as much as they would somebody who does track racing. That's it.

Moreover, female powerlifters argue that powerlifting has been a minority sport receiving very little attention. Elsa also points out that the prejudice behind powerlifting about it being a masculine and muscular sport (see Chapter Five) and the drug scandals of weightlifters and powerlifters strengthen the already negative stereotyped perceptions and perpetuate the marginalised status of female powerlifting in disability sport.

Despite British people's growing awareness of disability sport, Curtis argues that the media only remind people of disability sport when the Paralympic Games comes around every four years. Ross also points out that people generally are not aware of other disability sport events such as the Powerlifting World Championships and the

European Championships held by IPC. Moreover, Tricia indicates that the public tend to think athletes with disabilities just compete for fun instead of taking sport seriously and do not train as hard as able-bodied athletes. But Ross explains that winning and losing is fundamental for athletes with disabilities, as it is for their able-bodied counterparts:

I went to Barcelona to the Paralympics in 1992 and I came 4<sup>th</sup>. I was gutted, I was absolutely gutted. Fourth is the worst position in the world. It's just so close. I came back and I had countless letters from my MP, the mayor, everybody, congratulating [me on winning a medal], everything like that. And there was just no perception about what can 4<sup>th</sup> mean for an athlete. It's an awful position. The only letter I had that acknowledged this disappointment was from the director of social services where I work. He acknowledged that 4<sup>th</sup> was a disappointment, was a disappointment for me. I said to people that I came 7<sup>th</sup> in Sydney which is great. People said "Wow", but I didn't win, I lost!!

Furthermore, some British people still mistake the Paralympic Games as the Special Olympics. As Ross explains:

There is still an attachment in people's minds that it's the Special Olympics. I mean we had a Special Olympics in Cardiff two years ago. People asked me how I did. I said I did the Paralympics not the Special Olympics. People don't realise what the difference is. I am not disparaging the Special Olympics, but the whole ethos of the Special Olympics is different to the Paralympics. They don't see that you know. When I bumped into my college friend a year ago, she said to me, 'Ah you still do the Special Olympics?' So people's perception is getting better, but it's not as good as it could be.

These quotations illustrate the general public's lack of knowledge and understanding about the competitive nature of disability sport being equal to that of able-bodied sport. However, a lot of people maintain the misconception that to a certain degree people with disabilities take part in high-level sport as rehabilitation and recreation. The prevalent perception of disability sport is still profoundly based on the medical model discourse, without acknowledging that the Paralympic Games is a true competition of elite athletes with disabilities at the highest level as opposed to the Special Olympics, which is a participatory event where all who enter are considered winners and receive medals for involvement.

On the other hand, Fiona claims that numbers of British people now would look up to elite athletes with disabilities for what they have achieved because they "overcome

or in spite of adversity all that sort of thing they say quite often". She explains that she has been told by lots of people that they enjoy watching the Paralympic Games on TV:

It's more interesting than the able-bodied Olympics because anyone can run and jump and swim and all that stuff. But disabled people have got to put more into it and they must train very hard and yet they are at a disadvantage anyway. It's really nice seeing people unfortunate enough to be disabled for whatever reason doing well....I think a lot of people admire that in disabled people because they show that they don't want to be second-class citizens. They just want to be as good as anybody else.

Fiona's comment which focuses heavily on disability appears to be rather opposed to what the rest of the British participants in this research argue for which is placing emphasis on their athletic abilities rather than their physical disabilities. Such different views can be explained by the fact that Fiona is the only elite athlete in this research with an acquired disability. She views disability sport from the perspective of a previously able-bodied person who later experienced disability. As she also points out, there are still some people who just do not take disability sport seriously in common with the way she used to think when she was able-bodied that, "It is just silly. Why do they do it? It's not real sport". Now she can appreciate better what it is like for people with disabilities in sport which possibly leads to her emphasis on disability and that disabled people's sport achievement needs to be respected. Interestingly, Fiona uses a lot of "they" instead of "we" throughout her interview when referring to athletes with disabilities like her. It is as though she talks about disabled people and athletes as if she is still an able-bodied person, which may imply that she has not totally identified herself with people with disabilities.

Although the British public gain better knowledge of disability sport today than in previous years and may respect athletes with disabilities more, many people still tend to have a patronising view of the sport achievements of elite athletes with disabilities.

As Tricia argues:

[They] make people sit up and take notice of disabled issues, [but] sometimes in a condescending way i.e. Isn't she wonderful or brave! I ask why if I wasn't disabled that wouldn't be so much of an achievement but because of a disability people tend to think you have a mental problem and not just a physical one and it's not until the

public get to know you they realise that you are a normal human being but with a disability.

Steve also points out that people may admire elite disabled sportsmen and sportswomen but in a sympathetic way because while they recognise their outstanding achievements, they still stress the overcoming of disabilities:

I think that's appreciated by more people but I think that's also a bit detrimental as well because then you are saying, 'Well these people are not really quite worth the position that you are saying that they are worth', so I would like them just to say, omit the bit about having the extra mile, the extra push, just say they are disabled people, they do exactly what able-bodied persons pushing for elite performances in the Olympics would do and just accept that, which they do, but just try to overemphasize it.

These quotations reveal that elite athletes with disabilities believe that they are still regarded as lesser than able-bodied athletes even though through media coverage the public can see how competitive disability sport is and what disabled people can achieve. Ben also argues that many people still tend to patronise blind people in sport:

A lot of people are unintentionally patronising towards blind people. I remember once talking to someone who smoked 20 cigarettes a day had a beer gut, and drank lots. He said "How fast can you run?" I said "Well I have done 4 minutes and 5 seconds for 1500m". And he said, "Oh I think I might struggle to do that". You know they just think 4 minutes for 1500m, if a blind person can do it then they can. And this is someone who doesn't run. That's the sort of demonstration of patronisation I can think of really. But I suppose there are some people just don't have any expectation of what blind people can achieve.

The following quotation from Ben seems to reveal that there is underlying sexism as well as ableism in the attitudes of British sportsmen:

When you are in a road race for instance, it's male and female running together. There is one thing would make a male run a lot harder, that is if a female is going to beat him. But if they [able-bodied athletes] think a blind person is going to beat them, they will do their best to make sure that the blind person doesn't beat them. It makes it interesting sometimes.

The above quotations reveal that disability sport is viewed in a patronising way by some British people, mirrored in the way members of the British public who watch the Paralympic Games react to the defeat of British elite athletes with disabilities. There is no criticism made, only sympathetic comments. The audience of disability sport does not engage their pride, arouse their passion or stir their blood as much as

those who watch a popular sport, such as football. The public do not tear disabled athletes off a strip for their failure because it is commonly assumed that they are “victims of tragic misfortune” and are “courageously overcoming their disabilities”. But this treatment reveals that people do not see athletes with disabilities as real athletes, in the same way as they view non-disabled athletes.

A lack of basic knowledge about disability sport appears to be a barrier reducing the public’s appreciation and enjoyment of the competitions. In particular, the complicated classification system of disability sport can be confusing making it hard for the public to follow the competitions. Ross points out this difficulty as follows:

It’s very difficult you know trying to explain a classification system to people. So they will see one guy doing 100m in a wheelchair and another guy doing 100m and the one might be quite a high level paraplegic and the other might be a tetraplegic, but people still don’t know the subtle differences. It’s a very difficult thing to show.

Elsa also indicates that many people who watch the powerlifting competitions do not understand that sometimes it is about the lifting-weight in comparison to the athletes’ bodyweights. People tend to hold a stereotypical perception that it is purely huge strength that is required for success without realising that it also takes lots of skills and strategies which are not visible as in other sports. This is why many British athletes feel that, as Elsa states, disability sport is possibly not the most exciting event in the world to watch for someone who does not really know what it is about. And they attribute a great part of responsibility to the media coverage which is discussed in more detail in the next section.

### **Taiwanese societal perceptions**

Most of the Taiwanese participants report that the public in Taiwan overall is favourable to disability sport. However, public attitudes toward the sports participation of people with disabilities seem to vary distinctly among people of different generations and educational backgrounds. As Li-li states:

Generally people are encouraging about it [disability sport], but usually when they see us win medals. Otherwise young or educated people have the idea that doing sport is good for health and fitness even if you are not at competition level. Older generations or people with little education think that we should have just stayed at

home since we are disabled and they wonder why we come out to play sport.

The above quotation suggests a change in Taiwanese people's attitudes toward disability: in earlier years a commonplace attitude was that disabled people should be cared for and monitored at home or in institutions whereas nowadays it is widely accepted that disabled people actively participate in various activities including sport. Although today the Taiwanese public in general tend to be positive about the sport involvement of people with disabilities, the major reason as reported by most Taiwanese participants appears to be because they believe in the benefits to health of exercise. As Juen-juen states, "The public, well, at least the people I meet, all think sport is good for disabled people because of the rehabilitation advantage". The implication of this observation is that the Taiwanese public still see sport for people with disabilities as a form of treatment. Indeed, as Xiao-lien points out, "They [the public] always and only think it is good for our bodies. But disability sport is more than that. It is to do with the pursuit of competitiveness and excellence as well, to do with a totally different level". The indifference of the public toward competitive disability sport is mirrored in their lack of knowledge. Zhong-zhe states, "A lot of people don't know what it is or don't realise there is disability sport". According to a survey commissioned by the Taiwanese Sports Council (NCPFS, 1999), one-third of the population (33.1%) know about the National Games for the Disabled whereas 35.4 percent of people have no idea or have never heard about them. Moreover, some misconceptions about disability sport which are identified by elite British athletes with disabilities appear to exist in Taiwanese society as well. For example, lots of people do not consider that the Paralympic Games are as highly competitive as the Olympic Games and do not recognise the difference between the Paralympic Games and the Special Olympics. As a consequence, Taiwanese participants perceive that disability sport is regarded as second class or not even true sport and their achievements are not recognised and appreciated. As Gao-ming points out:

It's as if disability sport is lesser than able-bodied sport. Our hard training is the same as for able-bodied athletes. Our achievements are not easy, but the medals we get seem to be regarded as second rate. The Paralympics are highly competitive, but people tend to think it's easy to win those medals. The Paralympic gold medal is less valued than the Olympic one. The different treatment is reflected in the prize money.

When the Olympic sports are played by disabled athletes, the lesser reward seems to tell us that our achievement is discounted.

The research participants generally feel that no one really cares about disability sport in spite of the relatively greater media coverage in recent years. Zhong-zhe claims that, "People are usually amazed at what disabled people can achieve in sport when they learn the news that I won a gold medal in the Sydney Paralympics". Nonetheless, Yen-wen argues, the public think of disability sport probably only when the National Games for the Disabled is held every two years and the Paralympic Games come every four years.

Although Gao-ming indicates that Taiwanese people appear to be more encouraging and supportive toward disability sport by going to watch the events such as the past two National Games for the Disabled in Taipei and Pingtung, whether it is out of curiosity or support of disability sport, Xien-ge argues that the public see the National Games for the Disabled as "a charity event". He considers that the organising committees and the governing organisations are to blame for giving insufficient and tenuous publicity to the Games. Gao-ming also points out that the public usually do not know about sport events until they learn about them from newspapers and he warns about the consequences:

It would become a vicious circle because when the audience is getting less and less, the future organisers may think there is no point in organising the Games well or there is no need to hold the Games at all. Then it will affect people who love sport like me, losing the stage on which we can perform.

Many elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities attribute the indifference of the public toward disability sport and sport in general to the lack of a sport culture in Taiwan. Xiao-lien indicates that, "Sport is not an important part of people's lives anyway. Only a small percentage of the people, probably young people mainly, pay attention to professional baseball and basketball, let alone disability sport". Juen-juen discusses the prevailing societal perceptions of athletes and of sport as a career:

Athletes are generally regarded as simply physically well-developed but not very intelligent. People may not consider disabled athletes clever either I think, but most people's attitude toward us tends to be more sympathetic and positive, probably because we are disabled. The most important thing is that you have to get a proper



job and then you can do whatever you want. If you are a full-time athlete, people won't look up to you. They would think you are crazy and stupid. Sport is a difficult and unpromising career in Taiwan anyway.

The seemingly positive perceptions toward athletes with disabilities appear to be on the basis that they deserve praise because they beat all the odds in order to overcome their disabilities. Female athletes such as Yen-zi, Xiao-shuan and Hui-hui all mention that they often get people's admiring comments on their achievement. As Yen-zi states, "I think we receive more praise than able-bodied athletes because we can achieve despite having impairments. At least people I meet are quite positive about that". Unlike elite British athletes with disabilities, Taiwanese athletes generally do not find the above view to be patronising or feel bad about such an opinion. Moreover, public opinion appears to be a significant source of positive self-esteem. For example, Yen-zi claims: "I am not considered to be a useless person anymore", because she has proved herself in sport and most importantly, people recognise her athletic achievement and the national pride which results from it. Moreover, nearly all the Taiwanese participants claim that their achievements in elite sport change people's views about them. For example, Li-li who is the best female powerlifter in Taiwan indicates:

I think when they see me, they won't refer to me as "that disabled woman". They would refer me as that wheelchair athlete as some people couldn't remember that I do powerlifting or confuse powerlifting with weightlifting. But most of the people remember me as a disabled powerlifter because very few disabled women are doing this sport.

Gao-ming elaborates on how the public see elite athletes with disabilities:

They may change their views about us as we are not like the disabled people that they used to think about, but they don't see us the same as able-bodied athletes...I think it's very difficult. Even though I know I am no different than any athletes, the way we are perceived and the situation we are in suggest that we are disabled athletes, still lesser than able-bodied ones.

This perception is clearly reported by some other elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities as well. The public see disabled athletes as different from the stereotypes of disabled people that non-disabled people imagine – being weak, passive and dependent, or as Xiao-shuan describes, "Those disabled people who sell lottery

tickets in the market or live a poor and miserable life” is the typical negative stereotype of disability. However, Xiao-lien claims that people view her differently and more positively:

I think they see me as an independent and active person. I study in the university and am good at sport which makes me a person with a developed mind and body. You know people tend to think of athletes or those who are good at sport are bodily developed but not very intelligent. But I am not like that.

Being the only Taiwanese participant who passed the Joint College Entrance Examination to study in university but who is also physically active and outstanding in sport makes her different from those athletes who are admitted into university for sport talent and achievement and mostly major in sport and exercise. Xiao-lien is recognised as having a sound body *and* mind. But for most of the elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities, sport achievement actually provides them with greater acceptance in Taiwanese society. As Zhong-zhe argues, “Being an elite athlete, even in disability sport, does make people accept me better, because to them I am not just a person with a visual impairment anymore”. Although some athletes acknowledge that the public in Taiwan still see them as less-than able-bodied athletes, they do not appear to be bothered by it. As Gao-ming argues, “Sometimes I don’t want to think that much. The more you care about what others think, the less you would do and achieve. As long as the people around me, the people I love, like family and friends, truly know who I really am and what I achieve, that’s enough for me”. For those “full-time” elite athletes with disabilities like Hui-hui who face the dominant perception of sport as an unsuitable career, as discussed in Chapter Three, “Most of the people regard it as a leisure thing and they think we are fooling around and doing nothing productive all day long. They don’t think it’s a profession”. But Hui-hui has learned to care less about what others think because, she explains, “Everyone has a different dream. No one should put his or her value on other people’s lives”.

The preceding quotations show how elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities negotiate their identities in sport within a society which is short of a true understanding of, and full of negative and medicalised perceptions of, disability sport. Sport is extensively viewed as of benefit to people with disabilities for its

rehabilitative value and symbolic of their integration into society. The lack of true recognition of the sport achievement of elite athletes with disabilities in Taiwanese society stems from an indifference to sport in general and to disability sport, specifically. Participants in both countries suggest that the media can be of great help in enhancing public knowledge and understanding about disability sport. The following section is an exploration of the media coverage and portrayal of disability sport of the GB and Taiwan as perceived by the research participants.

### **Media coverage and portrayal of disability sport in Taiwan**

The media have a certain power to reflect prevailing values in society and affect public perceptions. As Auslander and Gold (1999:421) indicate in their bi-national research of media reports about disability issues in Canada and Israel, which can also be applied to this research, “On the one hand, the amount of press coverage an issue receives is related to the importance placed on that issue by individuals in the society, regardless of any measure of the issue’s objective importance. On the other hand, the media play an influential role in ‘news gatekeeping’, that is, in how it covers a given issue”. In Taiwan, unfortunately, there has been very little media exposure of disability sport, as reported unanimously by all elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities in this research. For example, Xiao-shuan and Yen-zi respectively point out:

I feel sad that there is always coverage about the Olympic Games, but so little about the Paralympics or FESPIC Games. There is no TV station going there [Paralympic Games]. And it is usually just a few lines in the newspaper about the medals we won.

Take the FESPIC Games which just finished not long ago. For example, I only saw one piece of news about how many medals we won. That’s all. And not in every newspaper!

It appears that there is very limited media coverage in Taiwan of major international competitions such as the Paralympic Games. The amount of coverage is far less than that of the Olympic Games and the content is mainly news reports about the results of competitions. Only when elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities win medals are they mentioned in the newspaper, otherwise their athletic endeavours, preparation and achievements are omitted from any media coverage. And typically disability sport events

other than the Paralympics get no mention. Furthermore, the chance to receive television coverage is rare.

Moreover, some athletes indicate that coverage only happens when principle political figures are involved. As Yen-zi states, “Only when we are admitted to the presence of the President because of winning medals in the Paralympic Games would we be on TV, but that’s only once every four years”. News about the President, the prime minister, or the chairman of the National Sports Council presenting the flag to the delegation in send-off ceremonies for major international competitions are identified by many Taiwanese athletes as common themes of the limited news about disability sport in the print media. However, it appears to obscure any focus on sport because, as Juen-juen argues, “It becomes more like political news, not sport news”, although it is actually on the sport pages. Yen-wen claims that there has been a bit more news about disability sport in the past few years, partly because the President’s wife is a wheelchair user who became disabled in an accident. Indeed, the fact that the first lady led the Taiwan delegation at the Athens Paralympics in 2004 attracted the most-ever media attention for disability sport in Taiwan. Nonetheless, the spotlight remained on the first lady. No matter whether in the electronic or print media, massive coverage focused on the President presenting a flag to the first lady for the delegation, the diplomatic significance of her trip, the IPC’s rejection of her status as *chief de mission* of the Taiwan delegation and cancellation of her NPC card due to China’s intervention, the protest and negotiation with the IPC, as well as the political implications of the whole matter. There was very little attention given to the athletes’ preparation for the competitions. As Tzeng (2004) comments, it was like the first lady’s “solo” before the opening ceremony of the Athens Paralympics. Moreover, apart from one professional sport journalist who was invited by the CTPC to be the news coordinator for the delegation, the rest of the media, a group of nearly 40 reporters who were political journalists followed the first lady to Athens by arrangement with the President’s Office (Chen, 2004). Undoubtedly they would not highlight the sport competitions and as a result, the coverage of the Athens Paralympics in newspapers and on television in Taiwan was, once again, largely political news. Unlike at the Olympic Games, there was no live coverage of the Paralympic Games on Taiwanese TV.

There was little newspaper coverage about the actual competitions or athletic performances of elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities. The intention to “speak for athletes with disabilities”, as claimed by the first lady, turned into silence after she left Athens. Yen-wen comments on the poor media coverage of the Athens Paralympics:

With the President’s wife being disabled and making appearances at some disability-specific events, there has been a bit more news about disability sport for the past couple of years. But it’s no more than news about the President or his wife presenting a flag to the delegation or celebrating success in competitions. There has not been much coverage actually focusing on sport itself or performances in competitions which could enhance people’s knowledge of what disability sport is really about. Well sport is never an important part of people’s lives anyway, let alone disability sport.

The majority of the Taiwanese participants argue that there has been very little coverage featuring their sport performances or actual competitions. Hui-hui and Xiao-lien also point out that there are very few photographs along with the news in the print media. And according to Xiao-lien, the absence of active and competitive images of athletes with disabilities in the media is because “disabling” imagery is not considered appealing enough to be in the newspapers:

I seldom see any photos depicting athletes being active in competitions. Well, most of the photos are about the President or government officials presenting the flag to the head of our delegation or being with all the members of the delegation. You would only see the photo focusing on individual athletes or a squad of them in their local newspapers. Most of them would be posed. I suppose they don’t want to put disabled people’s images on the newspaper. It’s not pleasing, is it?

The media treatment described above is perceived by elite Taiwanese athletes with disabilities in this research to symbolize the relative unimportance of disability sport in public consciousness and the minority status and under-valuing of elite athletes with disabilities in Taiwan. Referring to media professionals, Gao-ming states that, “They don’t think it is worthy of reporting”. And as we have seen it appears that only when principal political figures are involved, the newsworthiness of disability sport increases, although their presence often obscures the athletes with disabilities who are supposed to be in the spotlight. The Paralympic Games symbolise the peak of attainment for elite disabled athletes, nevertheless, there is very little coverage or celebration in the Taiwanese media. Yi-xiou is pessimistic about any improvement in the future: “To be honest I think sport in Taiwan is not as important as it is in Western countries as political

and economic issues are what the Taiwanese are concerned about. Sport is not really part of people's daily life. Disability sport is even more minor. So I don't think the situation will change much". The deprioritisation and unimportance of sport in Taiwan is echoed by the following remark of Li (2004):

Politics surpasses nearly everything else in Taiwan. Sport cannot compete with it. If the first lady would have met Deng pu-fang, who is the son of Deng xiao-ping, former prime minister of China, and the Chairman of the China Disabled Persons' Federation, and created the "historical moment between Taiwan and China" in Athens, the Olympic gold medals might have become trivial by comparison.

Furthermore, Xiao-shuan indicates that even if there are few television programmes featuring outstanding people with disabilities in all fields of culture, work and life, including a couple of elite athletes with disabilities, such as table tennis and athletics players, unfortunately the airtime is always around midnight when most of the public are unlikely to watch. This once again illustrates the trivialisation of people with disabilities in general in the mainstream media and the ineffectiveness in encouraging people with disabilities to take part in sport or to promote disability sport by providing programmes and role models on prime time television.

As a consequence of minimal media coverage, the Taiwanese public generally lack knowledge and understanding of disability sport. For example, Juen-juen says, "No wonder people don't really know what disability sport is", and Xiao-shuan asks the question, "How can I expect people to be proud of me for what I am doing?" Li (2004) claims that most of the people in Taiwan did not know that the first gold medal at Olympic level in Taiwanese sport history was won by a judo athlete, Li Ching-chung, in the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, until the first lady mentioned it. Zhong-zhe goes on to argue that, "Once they [the public] truly know what it is about, they would respect us and our achievements". Many Taiwanese participants in this research recognise the important role that the media can play in enhancing people's understanding of disability sport and in breaking the stereotypes of people with disabilities. When commenting on the absence of United States broadcasters at the Athens Paralympics and the decision to show a two-hour retrospective highlight of the Games on 13 November instead, Philip Craven, President of the IPC maintains that media coverage of the Paralympic Games is

an important showcase for the progression of the Paralympic Movement, which remains a vehicle towards equality for people with disabilities (Davies, 2004). It appears to be crucial to increase the disability awareness of the “news gatekeepers” in Taiwan. Apart from providing what is of interest to the public, there is also a need for the media to supply sufficient diversity of news so that interest can be broadened. But the persistent failure of the Taiwanese media to provide live coverage of the Paralympic Games as well as sufficient quality reports about the actual competitions indicates that there is a long way for the media in Taiwan to go.

### **Media coverage and portrayal of disability sport in Britain**

In contrast to Taiwan, the British media coverage of disability sport appears to have significantly improved over the past several years, as reported by many elite British athletes with disabilities in this research. Ben, who has competed in the Paralympic Games since 1980, points out that advances in British social attitudes toward disability sport is reflected in an increase in media coverage. He claims that the coverage of the Paralympic Games in the eighties was demeaning:

I mean that in the 1984 Paralympics there was a 45-minute programme, a highlight done in this country. That was like Xmas time, a few months after the Paralympics had taken place. It was extremely patronising. It wasn't concentrating on people's sporting prowess, it was about, you know, 'despite being in wheelchair or blind or whatever they still go out and have a good time', you know. It's incredibly patronising.

But since the Barcelona Paralympics in 1992 up to the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games, Ben argues that there has been an increasing number of informative features about the Games on television.

There were two successive weekend two-hour highlight programmes about a week or two after. So that's four hours of highlights. In 1996 at Atlanta there was actually a 45-minute highlight programmes after 10 days of the action, so that was per night there were proper highlights. In Sydney there was a little bit more coverage than that.

The increasing coverage of the Paralympic Games is in response to the evolvment of the public's interest in such media coverage. As Ben indicates:

The BBC got fewer complaints initiated by people who in 1994 said, “How dare you bring images of these disabled people into our house”. You know now there are people complaining there isn't more coverage of the Paralympics, so things have

been improved a lot.

Elsa indicates that the Sydney Paralympic Games had the most coverage ever on British television, and British people as well as the media seemed to reach a summit of awareness of, and support for, disability sport. Nevertheless, an embarrassing incident took place at the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Awards in 2001, following the Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Games, when Tanni Grey–Thompson, Britain’s most successful Paralympic athlete in wheelchair racing, won the third place but could not accept her award on stage because there was no ramp put in place. Such a situation clearly reflects and reinforces the marginalisation of disabled people, including athletes. This incident received immediate attention from the public and the media, which, according to Grey–Thompson (2001, in prologue), highlights “the shift in attitudes towards disabled sport in the aftermath of Sydney”. However, Brittain (2002:155) questions the effectiveness of the media coverage of such an incident in raising public awareness of disability issues in Britain, as “It is more likely that the fact it got reported at all highlights the sensationalist and often negative nature of the media in this country in that an item is often only newsworthy if it shows someone or something up in a bad light”.

For the 2004 Athens Paralympics, there was a 90-minute live coverage of the daily competitions of the Games every evening from 18:00-19:30 on BBC2 and during Grandstand and Sunday Grandstand. There were also two programmes featuring the British wheelchair basketball team and the wheelchair rugby team. But though the total nearly 19 hours airtime was the widest coverage of the Paralympics ever on British television, it was in no way comparable to the 249 hours live coverage given to the Athens Olympics (See Appendix 5 and 6 for details). The huge discrepancy in coverage between the Athens Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games was not the only comment the viewers left on the BBC website. The Paralympic Games was broadcast at a time when most people are still travelling home from work and scheduled on BBC2. There were voices demanding to see the Paralympic Games in the same manner as the Olympic Games – broadcast on BBC1, given a prime time



evening slot and constant live coverage. The differential media treatment reveals that Paralympic sport is not perceived to be as valuable as Olympic sport in Great Britain. The unimportance of disability sport is also illustrated by the lack of media exposure of disability sport other than at the Paralympic Games which comes only every four years. Disability sport is ignored most of the rest of the time. As Charles indicates:

From the TV point of view, they [disability sport] are only really important every four years when the Paralympics come around. The BBC has tried to raise the profile over the four years. But people are only interested in the main Paralympics because it's a show case event, isn't it? It's like the main event, show case event. All the emphasis and the media is on the Paralympics, as for disability sport, for the rest of the time it's not important really.

Tricia also argues that apart from the Paralympics, there is not much publicity for disability sport. She takes as an example the European Powerlifting Championships where a team of seven powerlifters brought back five medals, but there was nothing in the national press about it:

Well it could be in local papers where the athletes live or where they are from. But that doesn't publicise [the achievement] nationally. By not seeing what disabled athletes are doing printed in national newspapers does not encourage other disabled people into sports.

The poverty of media attention of disability sport is associated with the obsession of bodily perfection in the media. Some British athletes with disabilities in this research are aware of such prejudice. For example, Tricia points out that the reason why disability sport has received relatively little media coverage is because "some of the disabilities are not attractive as such to sell papers or television". Charles also claims that the media tend to hide the athletes' impairments or choose to present those whose physical images are the most proximal to the notion of able-bodied perfection:

I think the media has gone crazy on able-bodied athletes and those who are close enough to be able-bodied anyway, so it doesn't break any stereotype really. I think it's very much the ones in the highlight are the best looking and most pleasing, I suppose in disabled sport, you don't see many people with severe disabilities. If you got somebody like a hand missing, you might see them rather than someone that is really bad using their electric wheelchair and it's that kind of thing. They [the media] like to pick athletes that have minimum disability.

The presentation of a disabled body does not correspond with the common criteria of social desirability and acceptability in Western societies (Schantz and Gilbert, 2001).

Sport is often typically associated with characteristics of bodily strength and physical wholeness which signify able-bodiedness. It is a direct opposite to the image of disability sport. As Brittain (2002:152) suggests, disability sport does not “provide images that fit within the norms that delineate sporting images within British society”. Broadcasting “crippled”, “mutilated”, and “wheelchair-bound” athletes does not accord with stereotyped sporting images and the ideal of able-bodiedness that have been reinforced in British society through the media.

Haralambos and Holborn (2000) suggest that the lack of media coverage and understanding of disability issues is partly because the people who are in key positions of message formulation in British media institutions are mainly middle-class and usually older than their subordinates. Besides, people with disabilities are extremely underrepresented within media organisations. It is usually white, able-bodied, middle-class males who compose the dominant groups within British society that are in powerful positions in media institutions and who influence the perceptions of those among the rest of society. Indeed, Paul, who worked for the Evening Mail of his region, states that he fought for 10 years to make the editor change the way news about disability sport was treated in his paper:

They always portrayed a sporting event as a human interest story and put it somewhere in the middle pages. In Britain all the sport is on the back page, you know about 3 pages in as well....I used to have many confrontations with the editor and in the end he went on a disability-awareness course. And then he trained his personnel to address disability issues correctly, not condescendingly. Not, "This guy is great. He has a disability", but concentrating on what he is doing, not on what his disability is. You have to put it in anyway, as a side issue, not a highlight, "Disability achieves" or "Sportsmen achieve but have a disability".

Other British participants also urge that the media could do a lot better if they “got the message over”. Ross argues that the media coverage still delivers messages that misrepresent athletes with disabilities:

They still tend to give this sort of image that there is triumph over disability you know and it's not the winning, it's the taking part and that sort of thing. But it's not. It's about winning and losing, you know. I think people need to know and the media can do better. The media focus on disability rather than sport. I think that's a shame....However, we don't see it that way. We are sportsmen/women and we think only of winning or losing. I think they can do a bit more.

The use of such “supercrip” stereotypes is often found in the media coverage of disability sport with the assumption that people with disabilities are “pitiful and useless until they ‘overcome’ their disabilities through rugged individualism and pull off a feat considered heroic by the mainstream” (Hardin and Hardin, 2003: 249). This kind of portrayal of athletes with disabilities places great emphasis on disability, usually to evoke readers’ emotions, and thus reflects and reinforces the pervasive medicalised perception of disability as personal tragedy and individualised agony without recognising the socio-political dimensions of disability. Moreover, the media tend to trivialise the sporting abilities and performances of athletes with disabilities. Their sport successes in the Paralympics usually serve as the inspiration in sensational heart-warming stories. The defeats of Paralympic athletes are often commented on in patronising tones while the defeats in Olympic coverage are usually regarded as catastrophes. In brief, the Paralympic Games are not taken seriously as a sporting event by the media. While there is ever increasing improvement in terms of the amount of media treatment of the Paralympic Games, the content of the coverage continues to reinforce medicalised stereotypes of disabled people in British society as “supercrips” who courageously overcome their struggles to achieve and to be “normal”. Such media portrayal is in common with the two explicit generic themes of disabled people in the popular media identified by Darke (1998:187), “first, that the state of abnormality is nothing other than tragic because of its medical implications; and, second, that the struggle for normality, or some semblance of it in normalization is unquestionably right owing to its axiomatic supremacy”. Media representations of Paralympic athletes “emotionally experiencing disability” reveal more about what disability means to the able-bodied than the lived feelings and sport experiences and achievements of elite athletes with disabilities. Media representations are an example of the oppressive social construction of disability and a barrier to the true equality of athletes with disabilities vis-à-vis able-bodied athletes. As long as disabled athletes have got a charity image, their sporting image is diminished.

### **Concluding remarks**

In conclusion, as Hardin and Hardin (2003:246) indicate, “The biggest difference

between Olympic and Paralympic Games lies in awareness and publicity for the events". Indeed, awareness and understanding of disability sport in British society seemed to make a significant step forward after the Sydney Paralympic Games while in Taiwanese society they are still in the process of gradual evolvement. Lack of interest, knowledge and recognition of Paralympic sport is perceived to be in relation to the prevalent deprioritisation of sport in Taiwanese society. Although the British public's perceptions of disability sport seem to have moved beyond the medical approach, Paralympic sport is yet to be regarded as competitive and as valuable as Olympic sport and in consequence the achievements and physical prowess of elite athletes with disabilities are still far from being fully recognised in British society. As Schell and Duncan (1999:27) argue, "The Paralympic Games are less than, not parallel to, the Olympics". And these perceptions are clearly reflected in the media coverage. Thomas (2003:119) asserts that, "Whilst recognising the sporting excellence of disabled athletes, and the potential for shifting perceptions away from a therapeutic to a recreative model, disabled people's participation in sport may still be as much about therapy as it was in the 1950s".

In accordance with the findings of Thomas and Smith (2003), the British media tend to provide token coverage or convey the success of Paralympic athletes through a medicalised conceptualization of disability. Furthermore, despite the relatively increasing amount of media coverage in recent Paralympic Games, it does not really improve either the rather marginal role of disability sport in the news media or the stereotypical societal perceptions of it. The general omission of disability sport in the Taiwanese media in terms of amount and content demonstrate not only the indifference of the public toward disability sport but also the insignificance and trivialisation of the performances and achievements of elite athletes with disabilities. The lack of media recognition of the athletic achievements of elite disabled athletes confirms that having a disability turns out to be a primary identity that obscures almost all the other identities of an individual. Inaccurate and demeaning media coverage and portrayal can seriously reinforce negative stereotypes of athletes with disabilities and present a prejudiced view that the Paralympics are not true sport

competitions. Disabled athletes and people with disabilities in general may internalise their low value and status as “outsiders” assigned by media (lack of) representations (Hardin and Hardin, 2003). Accordingly, as claimed by elite athletes with disabilities in both countries, there is a need for media coverage that values their roles as athletes, rather than the discouraging over-emphasis on disability as their dominant status and social identity.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Negotiating identities through disability sport: From Negative Label to Positive Self-identification**

#### **Introduction**

Identities are partially created and constructed through experience and intersubjectivity (Tsang, 2000). According to Jenkins (1996), identities are formed in a dialectical relationship between internal (i.e. what we think our identities are) and external factors (i.e. how others see us and react to us), which may strengthen or contradict each other. In other words, identities are social products, produced through interaction and shaped in part by others' definitions. From a Foucauldian perspective, identity is constructed in two ways. On the one hand, we are made into subjects and become known to others through a variety of external disciplines, surveillance and discourses which are often institutionally entrenched. On the other hand, we make ourselves into subjects through self-knowledge and by speaking the "truth" about ourselves. Therefore, we are both made into, and make ourselves into social subjects (Shakespeare, 1996a; Priestley, 1999). The importance of exploring disability identity, as Shakespeare (1996a) argues, is through identity construction that an understanding of the complex relations between individuals, biology and society becomes known.

The dominant discourse of disability defines a person's identity in terms of what he/she "cannot" do. Hughes (2000) points out that medical distinctions are powerful cultural distinctions which promote and reinforce social hierarchies and sort people into the bare 'essentials' of identity. Disabled people are often both defined and confined by medical jurisdiction because they are confronted on a daily basis with the discourses of tragedy, medicalisation and "otherness" which influence their experience and their sense of self and identity. As Morris (1991:28) indicates:

The messages we receive are very strong and clear and we have little access to different values which may place a more positive value on our bodies, ourselves and our lives. Our self image is thus dominated by the non-disabled world's reaction to us.

Having an impairment is perceived to be a deviation from the norm. As Hargreaves

(2000:185) indicates, “The impaired body immediately and conspicuously signifies difference and abnormality. Thus, the disabled body is tied to self and identity in a most intense and evocative way”. Disability is discursively identified as an undesirable personal attribute which has led many disabled people to reject disability as a social identity for themselves and to become tangled up in various forms of self-oppression such as self-punishment, denial and passing (Swain and Cameron, 1999). Disabled people are expected to make an effort to conform to an able-bodied ideal and under pressure to prove themselves; to convince others that they are doing their best to fit in; to demonstrate that the impact of their impairment is of minimal significance in making them who they are. These are the responses of disabled people to the experience of living with impairments within a world that is dominated by the individualised medical discourse of disability. Nonetheless, the emergence of the social model of disability offers people with impairment an alternative frame of reference within which to build their own identities. The separation of impairment from disability allows the process of “coming out” as disabled to be relatively unproblematic (Swain and Cameron, 1999) since disabled people have an understanding that it is society, not them or their impairment, that is the problem. Disabled people can positively recognise their impairment as no longer a reason for self-disgust or something to be denied or hidden and view disability as a socially-imposed oppressive category to be challenged and broken down.

The social approach to disability identity has played a crucial role in the development of the disability movement and the on-going political disability rights struggle. Identities are related to sameness and difference. Through the recognition of difference and the contestation of dominant notions of sameness, the historically ‘silent’ self and marginalised groups find their voices and record multiple, not singular, views of history. However, in disability studies, identity as a disabled person is often presented as something fixed or stable. The concept of a single disability identity is appealing for its political use, but it ignores counter identities such as gender, class and ethnicity. As Hall (1996:4) asserts:

Identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and

fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.

Following this argument, Shakespeare (1996a) suggests that it may be necessary to consider a variety of disability identities rather than a single essentialist disability identity.

This aim of this chapter is to explore disabled people's notions of self-identity which are grounded in the accounts of the British and Taiwanese participants in this research. It starts with an analysis of the participants' views of identities in relation to their impairments, disabling society, and senses of difference and normality. The second section follows with a discussion of their construction of "new selves" in relation to their experiences as elite athletes, with particular focus on the way disability sport can be a context for research participants to take pride in a disabled identity and engage in disability identity politics through the development of alternative discourses.

### **Impairment and disability in the construction of self-identity**

An individual's impairment is read, influenced and constructed by various social, cultural, economic and political factors as well as by his/her own experiences. It is undeniable that impairment plays a part in determining a person's sense of self because "unlike other bodies marked by difference (e.g., race, gender, and sexual orientation), persons with disabilities cannot argue that their bodies are not physiologically different from other bodies" (Promis, Erevelles, and Matthews, 2001:39). In fact, physical differences sometimes do hinder individuals with disabilities from "normal" functioning in the able-bodied world. On behalf of all disabled people, Wendell (1989) states, "We are *dis-abled*. We live with particular social and physical struggles that are partly consequences of the conditions of our bodies and partly consequences of the structures and expectations of our societies, but they are struggles which only people with bodies like ours experience" (cited in Meekosha, 1998:179). Most of the research participants initially found it difficult to



answer the question about how they define themselves because they had never thought about it before. They appear to have complex feelings about their self-identity and their various answers reveal the diverse, shifting and contradictory nature of identities.

*I am impaired and I am disabled.*

Most of the Taiwanese participants and some British participants clearly identify themselves as disabled people. Evidently they incorporate impairment within their identity. For example, Xiao-shuan regards herself as a disabled person “because I have this spinal cord injury. I am in a wheelchair. I couldn’t walk”. They cannot deny the existence of their impairment. It is especially true for Fiona, because the lived experience of impairment for her is so real. She indicates that her life has never been the same after acquiring a spinal cord lesion in an accident when she was 20 years old and she elaborates about the changes in her life as a result of her impairment, as follows:

I think it [the impairment] is always there. You could never forget it, so you have to make sure there is somewhere to park when you are going out anywhere. I don’t know, you just can’t get away from it. It’s always there. It’s always a bit annoying because I can’t really do all the things I want to do. I think when people bring their shopping home in the car, for example, they can carry two bags in each hand and come in. I can only carry one bag because I’ve got a stick. Things like that it would take me like 4 times longer to get the shopping in from the car. That sort of thing, and if it’s icy I am house bound, so I can’t really go out when it’s really cold. So it’s kind of a few disadvantages...Sometimes I do wish that I was able-bodied and could go running and dance because I used to like disco dancing when I was young. I can’t really do that now.

Fiona’s impairment in her legs has actually altered her life and become a substantial part of her living experience as well as a signifier of difference. Her corporeal knowledge about her previous body function and image affects her current sense of bodily self. She has had to relinquish a non-disabled identity and accept a disabled identity. In addition, participants are also aware that their impairments are visible identifiers which distinguish them from non-disabled people and are often used by able-bodied people to identify them. As Gao-ming indicates, “I suppose your body says who you are to some extent because that’s how people perceive you”. Their

identities thus are often reduced to medical categories (Hughes, 2000). As Zhong-zhe states regarding his experience:

I think I would say I am a person with a visual impairment. I couldn't see as clearly as sighted people, could I? When people refer to me but can't remember my name, they mention my impairment. They automatically regard me as a disabled person.

These participants fully accept impairment as part of themselves and have got used to it. They get on with their lives like everyone else. They emphasise that their impairment does not disable them and feel therefore that they are not fundamentally different from others. As Zhong-she argues, "Apart from my visual impairment, I am the same as other people. Most of the time I am just as normal as other people and I do things that others do". Yen-wen also points out, "Yes, in sighted people's eyes, I am blind so that I am abnormal to them. Most people just have the stereotype of blind people. They think blind people are nothing like them. But apart from not being able to see, I am perfectly 'normal'". The impairments of the participants are recognised as important parts of their sense of self. Identity for them is thus fundamentally embodied. But they reject the meaning that the able-bodied world attaches to impairment because having an impairment, they believe, does not disable them.

The discriminatory treatment they receive in life as a result of their impairment is another common reason that Taiwanese participants identify themselves as disabled people. As Xien-ge indicates, "The situation I am in makes it clear that I am not an able-bodied person even though I know I am no different from them apart from my impairment". He further argues, "My impairment is normal to me. All the inconvenience and unequal treatment becomes normal to me. The difficult life becomes normal to me". In commonplace thinking their physical impairments are neither "right" nor "admirable" and thus they do not "belong" and do not deserve the same treatment as able-bodied people (Morris, 1991). Moreover, Hui-hui's following comment appears to suggest that she has internalised the dominant perception about disability in Taiwanese society and accepted the prescribed notion of self-identity without developing the awareness that it is the society that disables her in life rather

than her impairment:

I suppose I am a disabled person because it's a fact that I couldn't walk. And that's how I have been told. But I never like to be disabled. I would like to say that I am not a disabled person, but I can't. When I want to go somewhere, sometimes I just couldn't access like others. When I need help like this, it just, you know, shows that I am disabled. I am different from able-bodied people.

Hui-hui passively and negatively accepts her disability identity that the society assigns to her because of her impairment. She is socialised into thinking about her impairment from a medical perspective. Morris (1991:37) explains why many disabled people are vulnerable to the dominant disability discourse:

One of the most important features of our experience of prejudice is that we generally experience it as isolated individuals. Many of us spend most of our lives in the company of non-disabled people, whether in our families, with friends, in the workplace, at school and so on. Most of the people we have dealings with, including our most intimate relationships, are not like us. It is therefore very difficult for us to recognise and challenge the values and judgments that are applied to us and our lives. Our ideas about disability and about ourselves are generally formed by those who are not disabled.

Hui-hui's attempt to disassociate herself from the label of disability reflects on her preference to hang around with able-bodied people because being with other disabled people reminds her about being a disabled person. She elaborates as follows:

I belittled myself when studying in junior high school, but I got on very well with my classmates. On the contrary, I didn't get on that well with peers in the care centre because I didn't like to hang out with disabled people. I like to be with people like you. I felt happier to be with able-bodied people. I wouldn't feel I was disabled or behave like a disabled person in front of able-bodied people. When I was around people in the care centre, they seemed to remind me that I was disabled like them.

### ***I am impaired but I am NOT disabled.***

Two British and two Taiwanese participants are adamant that they do not identify themselves as disabled people. They do not deny their impairment, but their identities are not determined by their impairment. For example, Curtis indicates that he is just a normal person in a wheelchair and feels that he is no different from others:

It is difficult. Sometimes you know I can't go down the stairs and I'll wait for a lift and all that, but I don't really see myself as disabled. I just see myself like getting on with wheels. It is just no...different. I mean when we go out to a shopping centre, I use the escalator and all that. I am no different to anyone else. I can use an escalator though I can't use stairs...I see myself as someone that goes around on wheels, but just a normal person.

Gao-ming shares a similar view, “I don’t feel like a disabled person. I see myself as a person who happens to have a slight impairment. But I am perfectly normal and do things normal people do”. They stress that they are normal persons and claim that having an impairment makes no or very little difference to them as a person because they have grown up with their physical impairment. As Tricia explains:

I think because I have grown up with it, it hasn’t made that much difference. If anything I would probably have a more active life being disabled than what I would have done if I hadn’t been. You know, obviously I wouldn’t have taken up powerlifting. So I don’t honestly think it made that much difference to me. I always said that I wouldn’t have liked to become disabled, probably when I was 20, something like that. I think that took more adaptation as a child.

However, Tricia admits that she does experience “being different” in an able-bodied world. As she elaborates:

I feel as if I am different in the so-called ‘normal’ world. I am the stranger sometimes and it’s me that has to cope in this world but I have never accepted I am disabled. I feel I am the same as everyone else but with more obstacles to overcome. Access obviously causes some problems but if everywhere was accessible then it would be ‘normal’.

The above accounts suggest that the presence of impairment is not important to the athletes in this study and does not affect their sense of self, which challenges the notion of the biological self. Their physical impairment or usage of a wheelchair does not create problems between themselves and able-bodied people in their thinking. They believe, rather, that the sense of difference they experience in daily life stems from social prejudice and discrimination. Their self-definition lies in what they are *able* to do. For example, Curtis is able to get around in a shopping centre like any non-disabled person, and how he does it is not important. If they cannot do something, as Tricia argues, it is due to the environmental or social barriers instead of their impairment. This can also explain Charles’ comment about him being “half disabled”. He is aware that although he does not feel disabled in many aspects of his life, having to compete in disability sport seems to automatically classify him as a disabled person. Socially segregated institutions and excluded practices obviously set in place the boundary between those who are and those who are not disabled. This may be why some participants are hesitant to express their sense of self or assertively

to claim, like Curtis and Tricia, that they are not disabled. Their choice of not identifying themselves as disabled people may be explained by Watson (2002:525): “In the hierarchy of social values prevalent within British society, which accords little or no status to disabled people, describing oneself as disabled cannot be seen as a positive step. There is no social status to be gained for ‘coming out’ as disabled”. However, identity is a creation of self-determination, autonomy and choice. I would argue that the cases of Curtis and Tricia demonstrate dynamic processes during which they are able to confront stereotypes associated with disability, reject negative perceptions, and present themselves as active agents who can define disability on their own terms.

### *Re-definition of normality*

The concept of “normality” is at the heart of the othering process that produces and spoils disability as an identity, and the medical gaze has played a crucial role in invalidating bodies that do not conform to its idealised discursive constructs. Swain and Cameron (1999:75) further indicate:

...the social identities of those who consider themselves to be normal (or non-disabled or able-bodied) are secured only through a process which involves the systematic social exclusion and marginalisation of others (‘the disabled’), who are identified in terms of their deviance from an imagined ideal. .

Having an impairment is often thought of as being abnormal and deviant in societies defined by able-bodied people. However, the participants give alternative accounts of normality. Many British and Taiwanese participants indicate that impairment is a normal part of their daily experience. It is a fact of life for them. As Ross claims, “Normality to me is the life that I have led”. Tricia further questions the notion of normality:

Normality is what I am. I can barely remember what life is like when I wasn’t disabled, so disability is normal to me and all I have known....Who is normal? Everyone is different, but to them that difference is normal. Society puts normal labels on people. I am a different individual, yes, but who isn’t?

It is also normal for Eva to be in a wheelchair, as she explains: “Because my disability is from birth I don’t know any different. But you come up against other

people's prejudices and ideas of how you should act because you are in a wheelchair". But although society imposes predominant norms upon people and tends to exclude those who are "deviant", commonplace assumptions about disabled people are, as we have seen, often wrong. Charles argues that, "Everyone is different. It's like being really small, really tall, really fat or whatever. I think everyone finds someone to pick on really". Curtis stresses that he believes "Circumstances are odd but people are normal". Specifically, participants in this research recognise their physical impairment as the only significant difference and confront the commonsense construction of normality. For instance, Yen-wen argues that some sighted people who are perceived as normal do things which endanger society. Gao-ming also questions the definition of normality of able-bodied people:

When I learn from the news about the crazy people who kill people or idle around making no contribution or are even a danger to our society or the world, I would think, "What's normal?" If you say disabled people are abnormal just because they have impairments, then how about these people?

### *Multiple identities*

Disability is a powerful identity which often transcends other identities. It becomes a primary and significant identity for individuals with impairments. Disability identity is consequently a central political discussion in disability studies. However, it tends to overlook the concept and reality of multiple identities as disabled people actually have other identities which are related to a number of social and cultural contexts. Whether to embrace them or not, individuals can draw their sense of self-identity from a variety of sources including gender, class, age, sexual preference, marital status and so on. The concept that identities are fractured, fluid, multiple and contested is mirrored in the self-identities of some of the research participants. For instance, Yi-xiou does not identify himself as a disabled person because of his mild impairment. He argues that he sees himself as a normal person and assumes other identities as follows:

Well, I don't really see myself as a disabled person. I am just a normal person. I look like a normal person. The only difference is the length differences of my legs. It's no big deal. When I sit down or stand still, no one would notice that or the brace around my right leg. So I don't feel that I am disabled. I am just an ordinary man, a powerlifter, a junior high school teacher. I do what people normally do. My life is

pretty much the same as everyone else's.

Juen-juen initially defines herself as a disabled person because of her impairment, the way she walks, and the wheelchair. Then she argues, "I think I am not just a disabled person. Sometimes I am an athlete. I am also a wife, a mother. I have different identities which depend on what situations I am in". The self-identity of some participants like Yi-xiou and Juen-juen are structured within various relationships as well as situations and social roles. Being disabled-non-disabled is not a major identity to them anymore. As Hargreaves (2000:7) indicates, "The politics of difference and identity have led to a questioning of the essentialist notion of a single and fixed identity and a recognition that identities are diverse and fluid, affected by changing political, social and cultural conditions". Fawcett (2000) argues that an individual can be seen to have "a shifting core" which frequently changes so that it makes it possible to relate to different people in different situations in different ways. She further explains, "The 'self' in accordance with perspectives emanating from postmodern feminisms(s) is a social self, and interaction necessitates the adoption of a wide range of responses and personas" (p.134). Moreover, identity is a matter of "becoming" rather than simply "being". As Hall (1990) argues, "Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power...identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (cited in Swain, *et al.*, 2003:56). Many participants constitute a new narrative of self of their own making – an elite athlete - discussed in the following section.

### **'Becoming' elite athletes**

Participation and accomplishment in disability sport encourages Taiwanese and British participants to establish an identity based on the role of elite athlete, which is regarded by them as having a master identity status. For example, Ross defines himself neither as a disabled person nor a non-disabled person. He used to position himself as "an athlete with a disability". Even although he is now retired from powerlifting, he views himself as "a retired disabled powerlifter" and explains,

“because that was what I did for 19 years of my life and I achieved great things”. He describes how he feels about his retirement: “It was more of a bereavement than I’d thought it would be... And I would like to get involved in another way so at the moment I am looking at coaching. I am going to coaching”. Although Ross incorporates impairment within his identity, his self-definition clearly illustrates the potential that involvement in elite sport provides a base for people with disabilities to redefine themselves and think beyond the dualism of disabled-non-disabled in self-identity. Being an elite athlete was an empowered identity to Ross and remains so influential to his sense of self even after his retirement that he carries on positioning himself in the relevant narratives and seeks to re-establish his sport identity by becoming a coach. Similar cases can be found among other retired British participants such as Paul and Tricia whose self-identities remain strongly based on sport. They have gone into either coaching or refereeing as a way to extend their sport careers and maintain their sport identities.

Many Taiwanese participants also claim that being an elite athlete is their key identity. Hui-hui indicates she has always been referred to as an elite disabled powerlifter when she is introduced to or mentioned by other people. Despite the integration of disability into such an identity, it moves beyond the reduction to a simple medical category, for example, someone who has polio, cannot walk and is a wheelchair user, and demonstrates an affirmation of what she “can” do with reference to her sporting abilities. This sense of pride and celebration of difference through the identity as elite disabled athletes is commonly remarked on by other Taiwanese participants as well. Yen-wen is proud to be a blind athlete: “I present myself as a Taiwanese blind marathoner. That is how people know me. It makes me unique”. Xiao-shuan states, “It’s my main identity because sport is my job. It is what I do, who I am, and what I am proud of. It makes me special as I am good at something”. Li-li explains as follows how being an elite athlete turns her into “somebody” rather than just a disabled person:

Being an elite powerlifter is my major identity, definitely. I was nobody. I used to think so. I didn’t think I could be somebody one day. I had never thought of that. I didn’t think I could really. As a disabled person, I just wanted to find a job and live a



normal life like everyone else. But now I am one of the best powerlifters in Taiwan.

In terms of sport identity, most of the British participants and virtually all the Taiwanese participants view themselves as “athletes with disabilities” instead of just athletes. As Ross indicates, “I can’t ever deny that I have that disability” and he is proud to be a disabled person and to have competed in the Paralympics. Gao-ming states, “I know I am just like able-bodied athletes, but I happen to have a slight impairment in my leg”. However, these participants all emphasise that they devote the same time and effort as able-bodied athletes to improve their performance. As Steven argues:

I would probably say I am an elite athlete running with a disability. For the simple reason that I do the same training as I mentioned. You know, I run 100 and 200 miles a week. I do nothing different from anyone else who is running, for example, in the Olympic marathon. I do exactly the same as them. My only difference but which is obviously not changing anything is that I have a visual impairment.

These elite British and Taiwanese athletes with disabilities recognise their “difference”, i.e. their physical impairment, which has been an integral part of their existence. They neither feel ashamed of it nor want to deny it in any way. They are clear that their impairments are not detrimental to their physical competence and their hard training is no different from that of any able-bodied athletes. As a result, they are proud of being elite athletes with disabilities and of their achievement in sport through their bodies. Eva’s following comment voices how proud she is to be an elite disabled powerlifter and how she considers herself to be as skilled, distinguished and of equal status as an elite able-bodied powerlifter: “I don’t know many men who can bench press but oh I can....We are on a par with our able-bodied counterparts. My world record is the same. So I think that’s been a lot of kudos as well”. Indeed, powerlifters are classified by their bodyweight instead of their disability in the competitions so that they can compare their performance with able-bodied powerlifters. Their performances often out-weigh those of many able-bodied counterparts which allow them to see their physicality as just as good as, or even better than that of able-bodied athletes. Therefore a powerlifter like Yi-xiou is able to claim that, “I see myself primarily as a powerlifter although I compete in disability

sport” because his powerlifting performance is on par with the performances of able-bodied athletes. This may be why a couple of British powerlifters insist that they are “just athletes”. Curtis expects people to see him specifically for his sporting ability and Tricia hopes that people see her as an athlete and a successful one. The rejection of tying the disabled label to their sport identity is consistent with their self-definitions as non-disabled persons described in the previous section. In the medical model scenarios, those who do not identify as disabled people are usually positioned as “heroic survivors” for seeking identification with “normal people” through their sporting practice. However, Curtis argues against the dominant medical perspective of disability sport which over-emphasizes disability and regards elite disabled athletes as “super-crips”. Instead, he prefers that people perceive his sport participation and achievements in the same way as those of able-bodied athletes. He makes his position clear when he says:

We have done nothing heroic. All we’ve done is going out there and doing what we are supposed to do... All right, perhaps like if I make the Paralympics. Yep, that is something to shout about...I am just a normal person who does what he is interested in. I am an athlete, so I have just done what I am supposed to do.

Nonetheless, some Taiwanese athletes draw attention to the difficulty in seeing themselves as just athletes. Yen-zi raises the question, “How can we see ourselves as just athletes when we get treated differently from able-bodied athletes and our achievements and hard work are not recognised and valued by people?” Li-li also argues:

I like to think that I am just an elite athlete, but the circumstances we are in and the treatment we get in many ways makes me feel that I am just a disabled athlete. So how can I expect the public to regard me as just an athlete? I think it’s very difficult.

The above quotations demonstrate that the disability identities of the Taiwanese participants and their lack of a sense of being ‘just athletes’ does not result from their impairments but is, rather, a consequence of prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice and discrimination are reflected in the unequal reward systems, negligence of support from sport governing bodies, poverty of media recognition and ideologies about disability sport being inferior to able-bodied sport.

To be viewed as athletes with disabilities or just athletes does not seem to be important to the sense of self-identity of many participants because they are certain of their true ability and their sense of self. For example, Zhong-zhe indicates that he does not care too much about how others see him in sport as long as he knows himself how good his sport performance is and he believes his gold medal speaks for itself. Charles explains that he does not care about how people see him because “it does not matter enough to me. It does not make any difference to who I am”. For other participants such as Xien-ge, if people can truly understand that the Paralympics are as highly competitive as the Olympics and therefore fully recognise the hard training that is equally necessary for achievement, then it means that people recognise the physical competence of disabled athletes and regard them as just athletes. Moreover, the segregated sporting setting, i.e. the Paralympic Games, is not regarded as a negative identification but an exclusive arena for disabled people to perform in. For example, Ross argues that the Paralympics are solely for disabled people and there is no need to be integrated into the Olympic Games which may cause disabled athletes to become marginalised in able-bodied people’s events. The most crucial thing he believes is to recognise the sport achievement of athletes with disabilities and the equal competitiveness of the Paralympic Games as on a par with the Olympic Games. As he states:

...a lot people I know want...they want to sort of integrate the Paralympics into the Olympics. I do not. I am not interested in that.... The Paralympics is our [disabled people’s] event, and it is something we should be proud of. It doesn’t need to be absorbed into the Olympic Games. The word Paralympic means Parallel Olympics (i.e. to run along side). We should look at the Paralympics as an event with the same status as the Olympics.

It is worth noting that although being an elite athlete is a major aspect of the identity of each participant, some of them emphasise that they do not want to be seen as uni-dimensional in the sense that being an athlete is all that they are. For example, Eva suggests that she has other hobbies in her life which allows her to keep things in perspective, and despite the importance of sport success to Zhong-zhe and his family, he equally values his talent in music. Steven recognises the need to put sport aside, explaining that when he finishes running in the morning: “Once it is over for me,

then it is my work and I am an everyday person”. While Li-li claims that after walking away from sport competitions and with the glory of being a medallist fading away, she is back to being an “ordinary” person. These narratives appear to support the notion of multiple identities. Although for all the participants being a successful elite athlete is a primary identity, it does not altogether mask the presentation of self as fluid and diverse. The participants reject the notion of fixed and stable identities.

### **Coming out through elite sport**

People with impairments are socialised into thinking of their physical differences in a medical model way and consequently often deprecate themselves. Besides, disabled people often have little or no contact with a subculture “that de-stigmatises or positively values their difference from the non-disabled” (Wendell, 1996:60), which makes self-identification as disabled people hard. From the medical discourse of disability, negative self-identity is viewed as a result of impairment and the attention is focused on the need for individuals with impairments to come to terms with loss and adjust themselves to fit into society. But the social model perspective considers negative self-identity as an outcome of the experience of oppressive social relations in a disabling society and thus the focus is on empowering disabled people, promoting an alternative self-understanding and the possibility for changing society (Shakespeare, 1996a). The shift in approach from medical model to social model turns disability into a positive identity which is essential to the identity politics of the disability movement. It can be achieved in the context of sport as illustrated by the experiences of elite athletes with disabilities as follows.

Disability sport at its ultimate level, the Paralympic Games, offers people a key to the basic process of identifying as a disabled person. Shakespeare (1996a) points out that even segregated institutions can enable disabled people to foster a response to exclusion. Indeed, disability sport enables people with impairments to actively resist dominant ideologies associating the impaired body as defective and disabled people as weak, inactive and dependent, as well as normalising influences of able-bodied societies, as we have seen in Chapter Five. Sport is a context that facilitates both

resistance and empowerment beyond merely the sporting experience. Castelnuovo and Guthrie (1998) indicate that we experience and define ourselves through bodily movement. By moving the body, the embodied experience of one's identity and consciousness is developed. When taking part in sport, disabled people are not simply mastering the skills required of high-level competitions and improving their physical strength and endurance but, more importantly, they also experience the enhancement of an "overall" self. Elite athletes with disabilities in both countries in this research experience self-empowerment in sport both physically and mentally. They feel physically empowered by their excellent health and fitness achieved by their regular sport practice. They consider that it is an "advantage" to be physically fit and energetic as it helps their daily movement in life and allows them to pursue other things. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Five, disabled athletes are empowered by the feeling of being physically skilful and powerful and by the increasing sense of control they have over their bodies which further facilitates their mental strength to take charge of their own lives. The mental empowerment perceived and experienced by research participants can be discussed in two aspects: competent self and social integration. While disabled people may experience oppressions that stem from institutional obstacles and limitations associated with disability and consequently internalise negative perceptions about themselves, the participants in this study have shown that sport involvement builds up self-confidence and facilitates positive self-perceptions. This is mirrored in the following quotation from Steven who regains confidence through the marathon although he has struggled with a poor education and lack of job opportunities:

Being a disabled person I also had that restriction of visual impairment. It's very difficult to see, excuse the pun, you are blind because you cannot really see what is in front of you, what you want to do, you can't think what you want to do because you are so restricted. But my running and the opportunities give me a lot of confidence. It's I suppose you would say lots of hard work, I suppose it has been luck, but at the end of the day it has been very good, what I stand for currently. Sport is what I do currently because it's giving me everything. But it's been taking a long time.

Participants develop confidence in their ability through elite sport which helps them feel better about themselves and enhances their self-esteem. For example, Tricia

believes that sport achievement significantly increases her confidence to try and do different things in life, whereas she used to think she couldn't do things beforehand. And Curtis claims that powerlifting helps his ego among friends and in front of others: "It makes you feel that you can do something other people, even able-bodied may not be able to do". Yen-wen also points out that sport success gives him confidence to do what he is interested in and to develop an active and optimistic personality which makes him determined to pursue his ambition and to take his life seriously. In addition, elite sport cultivates participants in unique ways. For instance, under the constant pressure that top-level international competitive sport brings, they build up their mental strength and develop the ability to deal with stress in life. Facing the domestic and international media is also an instructive life experience. As Li-li indicates, "Facing the media is now very common to me. I have confidence to speak in front of many people, especially the able-bodied, telling them how I feel about my performance. I don't feel sorry for myself anymore. Powerlifting has changed my life". Moreover, participants gain an incredible sense of accomplishment proving their ability in elite sport. They are proud to be in front of others as elite athletes instead of being just other disabled persons. As Xiao-shuan explains:

My sport achievement makes me special. It is something I am proud of and I can make my family proud of. When people ask me what do I do, I don't have to be ashamed to say that I work in a factory or I am unemployed. I have something which makes me not like ordinary disabled people, especially I am good at something which people don't think disabled people can achieve physically. I like to see the amazement on their faces and hear their compliments. It makes me happy and satisfied. All the difficulty or sadness in life has gone. The hard training is worthwhile.

The feeling of self-actualisation gained from elite sport provides participants with a sense of self-worth. As Xien-ge explains, "I think only when you are good at something, you feel that you actually exist because people take notice of you and you have something to be proud of". Xiao-shuan indicates how important sport is for her, "I feel I have never been this happy in my life. I prefer this to finding a job and just working for the rest of my life. I feel I am actually living my life this way". She argues that the sense of self-worth gained in sport would be hard to find elsewhere and it makes her realise that her life can be significant and this is why she persists in

her sporting career. As she explains:

It's impossible to really achieve anything at work. The jobs we can do are very limited anyway. Because I have this impairment, I am limited in many things. I didn't know what I lived for. Being an elite powerlifter, apart from broadening my world, makes me realise that I actually exist...It gives me a great motivation as I feel that it could be meaningful to live. It keeps me going.... I think everyone has the self-esteem and desire to be complimented. When we tell people that we work in a factory, there is disappointment in people's eyes. We feel sad, probably because we are more sensitive than others. This is why we want to do powerlifting even though we have difficult lives. This is our stage to perform.

Shakespeare (1996a) points out that disability as a positive identity is a process, "where subjection opens up the possibility of subjectification". Elite athletes with disabilities in this research have replaced their negative identifications with impairment with a different self-understanding. Elite sport significantly impacts on the research participants' self-perception of competence. They gain confidence and thus develop a strong belief in self and an increased awareness of their potential. Sport allows them to abandon the assumed boundaries and limitations of disability and to redefine their ability and aspirations. Elite athletes with disabilities feel a sense of independence by taking an active role in controlling and determining their lives. Their lives are fulfilling as they are doing something enjoyable and meaningful which provides a sense of accomplishment and self-actualisation. With the creation of a "competent self" through sport, they feel considerable control over themselves as well as society, (Patrick and Bignall, 1984) viewing their difference as a source of pride. As Sherrill and Williams (1996:52) suggest, "The meaning of sport for elite athletes with disabilities is linked to global processes of becoming such as self-actualization, creating the competent self, and self-empowerment".

Moreover, Shakespeare (1996a) indicates that the process of positive self-identification is more likely to take place in a collective context. Indeed, elite disability sport provides such a collective opportunity. While many people with disabilities find themselves socially restricted, having limited social interaction and networks, the research participants feel empowered by the process of social integration through sport participation as it provides opportunities for them to connect to other people and foster the feeling of interpersonal inclusiveness. It is

especially apparent when female participants comment on their friendships with teammates. As Xiao-shuan expresses, “Female powerlifters all get on very well. There is a very good atmosphere in the team. It is just like a family to us, in a way more than my real family because most of us are away from home and we understand one another more than anyone else”. They feel a sense of togetherness and belongingness which are important reasons why female powerlifters adhere to their sport. Sport bonds them closely together like a family where they share the same passion toward their sport and experience similar struggles between work and sport as well as frustrations and oppressions from the outer world. As Li-li indicates, “We have encouraged and helped one another for so many years, getting through difficult times together in the course of pursuing our ambitions in elite sport”. Friendships built through sport are also valued by male participants. For example, Ross enjoys the social side of sport and refers to the difficulty of maintaining contact with his sports friends after retirement.

Most of my friends I met through sport, so they have been attached to this sport and shared experiences and things like that. It's such a large part of my life. My friends are involved in sport. It's more of a problem since I retired because you lose contact with them. Whereas I had been in contact with people for like 24 years doing sport, once I retired I began to lose contact with them.

Sport involvement expands the possibilities for social interaction. Through sport the participants broaden their life circle and make friends who share a similar interest in sport as well as the experience of disability. As Juen-juen points out, “Sport widens my social circle because I meet and socialise with people who have a common interest. It gives me some space other than with my family and work”. Elite disability sport thus facilitates a shared identity. As Weeks (1990:88) explains, “Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some other people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic, it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality”.

In addition, elite sport involves a lot of travel opportunities which broaden participants' social experiences. It is identified as an initial and major incentive for one British and some Taiwanese athletes in this research to take sport seriously up to



elite level. Fiona admits that world travel is the main reason for her continuation in elite sport. Hui-hui and Xiao-shuan both state that travelling was their purpose at the beginning of doing powerlifting and that they feel empowered by the experiences of travelling. As Hui-hui explains:

In the first two years before the Sydney Paralympics I didn't take it [sport] that seriously and just enjoyed going abroad. As a disabled person, it was impossible to go abroad with a tour group. You know it's difficult enough to travel around in Taiwan because the transportations are not very accessible. I never thought that one day I could travel abroad. Whenever I told my friends, they all envied me. I become much more confident that I can represent my country to compete internationally and have the wonderful opportunity to travel.

Xiao-shuan's following comment also suggests that Taiwanese participants seem to be empowered by not only world travel itself, but also as a result of the honour of competing for their country abroad:

My mom used to tell me that as long as I work and earn money, I can do anything I want. But that's different. It's inconvenient for us to travel. But when we go abroad to attend competitions, everything is taken care of by the organising country, we are respected because we represent our country. This is totally different from spending your money to go on a holiday abroad.

Moreover, the experiences of international competitions, travelling and meeting people around the world enrich the participants' lives and provide them with a topic of conversation in other social situations. For instance, Xiao-lien indicates that she has got attention because she is an elite athlete: "More people would like to get to know me...And I have a lot of things to talk about like my competitions, training, and travelling. Some boys in the university show an interest in talking to me. Elite sport definitely facilitates my social life". Ross remarks on how elite sport helps him socialise with people:

It [My sport involvement] also gave me certain life experiences which I could use in a social context. For example, I could talk about travelling or enter into informed discussions with my peers about sport even though I didn't play football or rugby.

Even if they do not play in mainstream sport, being elite athletes with disabilities with experiences of international competitions renders them "expert" in the general field of sport. Their opinions and comments are respected. Indeed, some Taiwanese participants also indicate that being elite athletes makes them be accepted better.

Hui-hui points out that she is respected among peers and as she claims, “I often become the centre in a group. That makes me feel good”. Curtis states that being in the local paper and well-known in the local area help him get accepted a lot better. Sport success grants the participants social accessibility and helps to improve the public’s view about them.

Elite athletes with disabilities sense more a mind-body unity and interdependence than separation and opposition. They experience the physical and psychological empowerment that comes from being skilful in the use of the body even more profoundly than able-bodied people as they are not only developing their mind-body capabilities but also challenging stereotypes related to physical disability (DePauw, 1997; Guthrie and Castelnovo, 2001). Sport also provides an environment where disabled people can get together, enjoy themselves, broaden and share life experiences, and consider issues of common concern. Disabled people can “come out” and embrace a positive identity and define themselves on their own terms. Nearly all the British and Taiwanese research participants comment that sport means a lot to them because it changes their lives. Many athletes point out that if they had not gone into elite sport, they would not have experienced so many things or achieved so much. As Paul indicates, “It has been my life-saver really. It enhances my life”. Indeed, aspirations to win Paralympic medals, along with the experiences of travelling and meeting people around the world, give athletes with disabilities a purpose in life. As Elsa explains:

And then there is obviously specifically powerlifting, I enjoy the competitions. You know the competitiveness, and the fact that I have met people I would never have met if I hadn’t been doing this. I have been to places I certainly wouldn’t have got to. So it’s all that aspect of it. And it’s nice to have something to aim for. I think if I was just training for the sake of it, I wouldn’t have the motivation – I would lose it quicker. But because you’ve got the competitions and you know you’ve got things to work for, it keeps you going through the times that are a little bit harder.

The meaning of elite sport to athletes with disabilities may be concluded by Steven’s comment on how the marathon shapes his overall being and his whole life, as follows:

It’s given me in my life a lot of confidence. It’s given me “something else” which has put interest into my overall being over the last 20 years. Not just because of being a disabled person or a partially sighted person, but because I just didn’t have

anything else which was a fixed permanent hold in my life before. That's given me the way I construct and manage my life over the last 20 years. It's given me the experiences of confidence. It helps me to travel. It helps me communicate better with people. It's certainly to a degree helped me to get on in life. I think the way I have been able to associate with all different people in all sorts of areas of life, for example, just my ordinary family, through to probably athletes of the same ability as myself, through to being with the local media, international media, and right up to even a long time ago now, in 1996, when I went to Buckingham Palace I received my MBE from the Queen.

Being an elite disabled athlete is a shared cultural identity composed of challenging stereotypes and building solidarity and recounting new stories. Calhoun (1990:28) argues that the politics of personal identity and the politics of collective identity are inextricably linked: "Identities are often personal and political projects in which we participate, empowered to a greater or lesser extent by resources of experience and ability, culture and social organisation". In accordance with the disability movement, elite sport provides the collective context for political identification. It involves processes during which elite athletes with disabilities challenge dominant perceptions of disabled people as incapable, powerless and passive; and the embodied experience gained from sport enables disabled people to construct the terms for themselves, as an example of conscious raising. Elite athletes with disabilities thus transform themselves into active and creative agents for social change by redefining the very meaning of disability.

### **Concluding remarks**

This chapter is a space for elite athletes with disabilities in this research to speak the truth about themselves. It is clear that having an impairment is a fact of life to the participants in both countries, but it is not necessarily the basis of their self-definition. Most of the Taiwanese participants define themselves as disabled people. They incorporate impairment into their sense of identity. Unequal and discriminatory treatment as well as difficult life experiences also remind them about being disabled persons. This is consistent with Oliver's (1996:5) view that disabled people are identified through three key elements: the presence of an impairment; the experience of externally imposed restrictions; and self-identification as a disabled person. On the contrary, some of the British participants reject impairment as a biological, essential

determinant of the self. Physical difference is recognised by them, but their self-identity is about what they are *able* to do. Their sense of self is linked less to their impairments than to the discriminatory practices and barriers in society that make disabled people different or restrict their lives. Their self-reflexivity makes them resistant agents who define disability on their own terms.

Moreover, the notion of multiple identities is supported by the research participants' narratives. They adopt different identities depending on the specific situation in which they find themselves, rather than simply basing them on the disabled-non-disabled dualism, thus confirming that identities are diverse and fluid, shifting and changing with time, context, and interaction with others.

While many people with an impairment are negatively labelled and identify themselves as disabled people, disability sport provides a way out of the traps of negative identification in the collective context by offering potential for positive subjectivity and a changed self-understanding and increased sense of personal empowerment. Individuals with impairments are able to justify their disability identity on the basis of discrimination and prejudice rather than explaining their situation in terms of personal failure. They embrace disability as a valid social identity and establish their status as the experts on disability.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

In both the GB and Taiwan disability sport has been an under-researched area. But whereas in Britain, a more open and critical discourse emanating from disability studies and the disability human rights movement is to some extent influencing the analysis and practice of disability sport, in Taiwan sociology remains a relatively under-developed and minor discipline in sport, and the theoretical analysis of disability sport has taken place predominantly within the fields of medicine and psychology. However, in both contexts, the voices of disabled people in sport have rarely been heard. One of the aims of this thesis, which has explored the lived experiences of elite athletes with disabilities from their own perspectives, was to address this problem.

Starting from my initial research questions: ‘Why are athletes with disabilities so determined and persistent in elite disability sport despite living difficult lives?’ and ‘How do they see themselves?’, this project investigates how elite male and female track and field athletes and powerlifters experience their bodies and construct their identities in relation to their participation in elite sport. It embodies an analysis of the ideologies and discourses associated with disability, gender and sport that are pervasive in Britain and Taiwanese societies producing disabling physical and social barriers that impinge on their lives and sporting experiences and the construction of their identities. In line with the emancipatory research framework I adopt in this research, the elite athletes with disabilities are not the objects of the research but active participants telling their own stories. They are positioned as ‘the experts’ who articulate their experiences as people and athletes with disabilities and whose voices are central to the analysis throughout this thesis. Their oral testimonies not only highlight problems, oppressions, struggles and aspirations but also raise a wide range of issues that pervade every aspect of civic culture such as power, autonomy,

ideologies, independence/dependence, competence, aesthetics, physical appearance, notions of normality and bodily perfection, and identity.

### **Problems and oppressions**

One of the major foci of this research is to expose the oppressive social and structural barriers experienced by athletes with disabilities with regard to their sport participation. The ideologies embedded within the medical model discourse are manifest in various oppressive practices within social institutions and further reinforce the dominant notion of disability and negative perceptions towards people and athletes with disabilities. In the educational settings, especially mainstream schools, students with physical disabilities are often excluded from physical education or have restricted participation despite their desire and ability to actively take part in physical activities with their peers. Disabled students and their non-disabled peers are thus socialised with the discursive message that physical impairment prevents them from full social participation and makes them “different” and “invalid”. But moving towards adult life, the participants in this research have managed to transcend negative stereotyping – for example, most of the British participants sought sporting opportunities in local sports club and some of them in response to Stoke Mandeville Hospital’s invitation, whereas most of the Taiwanese participants discovered and developed their sport potential after they went to special school at high school level.

Although the sport involvement of participants in both countries was encouraged and supported emotionally and financially by their families, in Taiwan the attitudes of the parents of the participants of this study changed notably as they got older. The Taiwanese parents supported the sport participation of their disabled children when it was for rehabilitation, recreation, or part of the school curriculum, when, in common with the medical perspective, the emphasis was on the benefits of exercise for health and fitness. However, they often opposed their children’s continuation of their sport as a career. In part this is because the deprioritisation of sport in Taiwan has resulted in the lack of a comprehensive sport system to support athletes’ sport training and

take care of their lives, and thus not only fails to make being an elite athlete a valued, rewarded and promising career, but also continues to leave them in poverty and unemployment. Participants' dependency is exacerbated when they train as full-time athletes without a proper income and gamble on winning major international competitions to receive prize money which is far less than that for able-bodied athletes. Unlike in Western countries, sport does not appear to be a practical means of social mobility for individuals with disabilities in Taiwan. This situation contributes to the under-representation of elite disabled athletes in Taiwan and the decision of some participants to be part-time athletes who train only after work and consequently often find it hard to achieve the standard of performance required for international competition. Finance is indeed a key issue for virtually all the disabled athletes in this study who are in a relatively poor economic position as a result of pursuing a sporting career and remaining at elite level. Perhaps if a system similar to WCPP was introduced to disability sport in Taiwan, those who have talent and aspirations at elite level could have more options in terms of sport-work arrangements, at least their financial pressures could be alleviated to some extent, and it would go some way towards making sport a respected and worthwhile profession and career choice. However, it is not to suggest that WCPP is a perfect solution. As revealed in the British participants' interviews, it brings enormous pressure to stay in the Programme and secure the funding which is sometimes detrimental to athletic performance.

Condescending and paternalistic attitudes are displayed by officials and administrators in sports governing bodies in their behaviours and actions towards participants in both countries. Unequal treatment in organisational and training support, development and funding were especially evident for British participants in comparison with their non-disabled counterparts after they became integrated into mainstream sport organisations. The specialised organisational structure of disability sport in Taiwan renders CTPC the exclusive and ultimate power over disabled athletes, for example, in selecting elite disabled athletes for major international competitions or suddenly appointing another coach for competitions.

Disability evidently embodies a set of unequal power relations. As we have seen earlier, teachers have the power to dismiss or restrict students with physical disabilities from attending physical education classes and physical activities. In Taiwan, parents have authority regarding their disabled children's sport involvement and their decision-making about taking sport as a career, in particular in the case of those athletes who are financially dependent on their parents. At competitive level, disabled athletes rely on the support of sports organisations in terms of training, competition preparation and funding. In other words, the participants in this study emphasise that they do sport on the terms of the organisers rather than on their own terms and are expected to accept conditions imposed by coaches, officials, administrators and others. As shown in Chapter Six, these key personnel in both countries do not always put disabled athletes' needs first or consult them in decision-making. The lack of communication and rather autocratic management-style of sport governing organisations tend to intimidate disabled athletes so that they have kept silent about their problems for fear of risking their sport careers. This may explain why some British participants have felt able to make critical comments about the oppression and problems encountered in relation to their sport governing bodies only now since they are retired or at the end of their sport career. This may also explain why many Taiwanese participants articulate their wish to establish sport organisations *of* disabled people in the future in order to gain autonomy in their sporting lives.

The medical model discourse is clearly underlying the unequal power relations of disability and the discriminatory and oppressive practices in the sport context. The prevalent misconception that people with a physical impairment may also have a mental problem so that they are unable to make their own decisions and need to be told what to do leads to the paternalistic and condescending attitudes and behaviours of parents, officials and administrators in sport organisations and is commonly experienced by the participants in sport as well as in every other aspect of life. But a most significant point in this research is the incongruity between the medical model perspective about the poor physical capabilities of people with impairments and the



ideologies of sport that associate it with, for example, supreme physicality, masculinity, and sexuality, which, in turn, contribute to the pervasive British and Taiwanese perceptions of disability sport being inferior to able-bodied sport. Such perceptions are manifest in various discriminatory practices, for instance: differential organisational support received between British disabled athletes and their able-bodied counterparts in the mainstream sport organisations; enormous disparity in the prize money awarded to elite disabled and able-bodied athletes; the discrepancy of media treatment between the Paralympic and the Olympic Games in the GB; and the absolute poverty of media coverage of the Paralympic Games in Taiwan. Lack of media recognition of the athletic achievements of elite athletes with disabilities further reinforces and perpetuates the poor awareness of disability sport and the dominant medical views of disabled people as well as the negative perceptions of disability sport and disability in general.

It is evident in this research that although the Britain and Taiwan are different types of society and culture and with very different histories and infrastructures of disability sport, and in some cases the athletes have had different experiences, it is surprising that in many respects the athletes from both countries in this research have had quite similar experiences, feelings and opinions, particularly in relation to discrimination and oppression.

However, the physical impairment of athletes with disabilities in this research has evidently never hindered them from taking up the sports of their choice or pursuing their Paralympic ambitions. Their lived experiences expose that the real barriers result from ideologies embedded in the medical perspective of disabilities and the non-disabled people in the able-bodied world who self-righteously impose dominant discourses onto disabled people that profoundly impinge on their lives. For the participants in this study who are involved in competitive disability sport, their athletic experiences are absolutely central in their lives and have profoundly influenced their views about their bodies and self-identities.

### **Fighting back: transforming body identities**

Another focus of this research is to provide an authentic account of how elite male and female athletes with disabilities in both countries see themselves as individuals as well as athletes with disabilities, which involves an interpretation of how they experience their bodies – impaired, gendered, and sporting - and construct, negotiate, and perform their identities in relation to their involvement in elite disability sport. A dynamic picture is presented in this research through their verbal testimonies.

As shown in Chapter Five, whether in Britain or Taiwan, impairment has historically been viewed and defined in negative terms as something unknown, abnormal and tragic, as a punishment from God in religious discourse, as a medical condition dominated by medical discourse and most recently, and, still evolving, as socially-defined and constructed. Although British and Taiwanese research participants have talked about an increased awareness and acceptance of disability issues and legal protection which reduce the disadvantages they face, their lived experiences indicate that prejudices and misconceptions of disability embedded within the medical perspective remain in public consciousness. They may be manifest in more subtle forms in Britain than in Taiwan where patronizing attitudes are still prevalent. The oppression of people with impairments lies largely in the myth of bodily perfection or the “able-bodied” ideal (Barnes, 1996) which is endemic in modern consumer societies. Indeed, most of the research participants, both male and female, have been in thrall to what Glassner (1992) terms “the tyranny of bodily perfection” (cited in Hughes and Paterson, 1997: 331) through the normalizing gaze of the able-bodied world and thus disciplined self-surveillance is common in their everyday experiences. However, female research participants seem to be relatively more aware of and concerned about their body images than their male counterparts, although most of the British female athletes appear to possess more positive self-images than their counterparts in Taiwan who appear to be influenced to a greater extent by the prevalence of sexism and ableism. On the other hand, an individual’s impairment has often become the primary basis of identification and an all-encompassing description of identity, which mutes other social characteristics. Through a wide range of

surveillance techniques and discourses, people with impairments tend to internalise culturally-imposed negative social identities which impel them to deny or hide their impairments.

Nonetheless, rather than passively accepting the negative label assigned by the dominant culture about their inferiority, male and female research participants actively engage themselves in their body projects in competitive sport. They turn their bodies into sites of resistance against the prevailing medical discourses and normalising practices through sport participation. They are active in constructing their own bodily meanings and taking control over their personal bodies. It is also a gendered project for male participants to regain a sense of hegemonic masculinity and validate their male body and thus their status as real men, whereas female participants confront the pervasive ableism and sexism in sport and reclaim their equal right in enjoying competitive sport and achieving success without the burden of the conventional notions of masculinity and femininity. Male and female elite athletes with disabilities in this research dynamically redefine their bodies and position themselves to exercise greater choice and power. Most importantly, they transform their own sense of self by speaking openly about their constructions of new selves of their own making as elite athletes. The participants develop a self-identity through reflexivity within a collective context (Giddens, 1991). As Watson (1998:160) indicates, "Through interaction with disabled people they were provided with a narrative and were thus able to perpetuate a biography, the self being reflexively created into a self-identity". British and Taiwanese research participants "come out" through their participation in elite disability sport which provides a straightforward identification with other disabled athletes and places the body in the spotlight. Paterson and Hughes (2000: 31) point out that, "'Coming out' transforms the ideology of the disabled body as deficit into a statement of collective muscularity". Research participants engage themselves in a consciousness-raising process by actively resisting the self-righteous cultural and social stereotypes associated with disability and gender and empowering themselves physically and mentally through their participation in and pursuit of sport excellence. Furthermore,

through sharing the commonality of their experiences and growing consciousness in a collective context such as sport, elite athletes with disabilities are not vulnerable to able-bodied discourses of disability anymore and are able to appreciate and take pride in their bodies as well as in their disability identities. As Paterson and Hughes (2000:43) explain, “Disability pride is a positive, collective, aesthetic expression of self-recognition that constitutes a ‘great refusal’ to accept discrimination and second-class citizenship”. Research participants refuse to be ashamed of revealing their impaired bodies and return the gaze back onto able-bodied people. This is why they all recognise and incorporate their impairment into their sense of self-identity. Whether they also define themselves as disabled people or not, they all refuse the meaning attached to impairment by non-disabled people because they believe that it is society and not the impairment that disables them. The social model of disability which separates impairment from disability allows most of the British participants to come out positively as disabled. Even in Taiwan where the social perspective of disability is absent, virtually all the participants point out that it is discriminatory treatment that renders them disabled. For those who reject the definition of *disabled*, their sense of self is clearly based on what they are *able* to do. Although the participants’ responses to questions are diverse, those from both countries perceive themselves in important ways to be active, in a process of redefining disability on their own terms.

Although any impairment is always part of an embodied identity and is crucial in the identity politics of disabled people, the oral testimonies of participants in this research show that they view and understand themselves as heterogeneous selves with multiple identities. As presented throughout this research, the identities of participants are related to different areas and phases of life – disability, gender, sport, parenthood, family and work. Analysis of the inter-connection between these characteristics reveals the complexity of identities which change as one engages with others in communities of sameness and of difference. Thus, the suggestion of Reeve (2002:303) to “consider a variety of disability identities, rather than a single essentialist disability identity” may be more useful and necessary in terms of identity

politics. If disability identity is viewed as a multi-faceted and fluid concept, it may make the disability movement more relevant to more people.

### **Inclusion of impairment: towards a renewed social model of disability**

Since the social model of disability theory was introduced thirty years ago to fight against the medical or individual approach to explaining, interpreting and responding to disability, it has proved an invaluable tool in the disability movement and has become, as Barnes (2003:9) claims, “the new orthodoxy” in disability studies. However, the highly dualistic construction of the medical-social binary is problematic. Paterson and Hughes (2000:30) contend that the “dualistic view of the social and biological as binary opposites is one of the maxims on which disability studies is founded” and that the embodied experience of disability has been denied. Meekosha (2004:723) also argues that the conceptual distinction between impairment and disability as a discursive strategy evolved from the development is helpful in “offering analytical purchase on a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, yet it could at times undermine the experience of disabled people in their daily lives, where the distinction was both blurred and less meaningful”. This leads to a split within the disability movement nowadays which can be identified between those whose focus is on the removal of disabling barriers in society, and those whose focus is upon how disabled people subjectively experience these societal barriers, or even their own impairments (Finkelstein, 1996). There is an growing acknowledge that “(a)n essential element in the politicisation of disability has been the recognition that the personal is political” (Barton & Oliver, 1997:7). This approach is often equated with a feminist disability politics which has been argued that by focusing on social barriers it is, in effect, denying their personal experience of disability and of impairment (Morris, 1991; French, 1993; Crow, 1996). The extent to which impairment and personal experience of disability should be included has therefore been an underlying debate (Swain et al., 2003).

My research is an attempt to integrate a greater understanding of impairment into the social analysis of disability which is, as Crow (1996) advocates, a renewed social

model of disability. In line with the emancipatory research approach, the experiences, narratives and stories of elite male and female athletes with disabilities are discussed and analysed within social and cultural settings highlighting the disabling consequences of societies of non-disabled people like Britain and Taiwan. In addition, the cultural production of normality, the predominant able-bodied ideal and the consequential responses to impairment as well as the way research participants come to terms with the consequences of impairment in societies that constantly and systematically devalues and oppresses people with impairments. As Hughes (2002:66) argues that “impairment is social and disability is embodied”. It is not to document a personal tragedy but to make manifest the real tragedy is that able-bodied societies “continues to discriminate, exclude and oppress people viewed and labeled as disabled” (Barnes, 2003:10).

Although the body has been and still is central to the oppression of people with impairments, it can also be viewed historically as subject to a diversity of changes through time and space. Throughout this research we have seen a dynamic process that participants experience as they re-construct their bodies and redefine their identities, as well as the complex relations between individuals, body and society. Male and female athletes with disabilities in this research represent the new generation of disabled people in the twenty-first century by choosing to place themselves in the context of sport where the visibility of impairment and physical difference is heightened. In the arena of disability sport, we notice the impairments; the wheelchair in racing and tennis; amputations and prostheses in track and field events; blind guides in marathons, and so on. The sporting body experiences of elite male and female disabled athletes not only shatter the dominant discourses and stereotypes associated with impairment of being weak, passive and invalid, but also give an alternative meaning to impairment which is actively created and redefined through the body movement of disabled people. The physical activeness and sport excellence of elite athletes with disabilities prove the assumptions of able-bodied people wrong. Such research can eliminate the concern of feeding into hegemonic notions of disability as personal tragedy so as to downplay the impairment and

personal experience in the social model of disability. Documenting body experiences of elite athletes with disabilities can be a starting point of incorporating impairment into social model analysis and can be a powerful force in disability movement because disabled sporting bodies can be a feature of power.

Due to increased academic contribution and active disability movement, the public nowadays are more aware of disability issues and can better recognise the significance of impairment than the time when the social model of disability came about. With the success and high-profile of recent Paralympic Games, the traditional view of the 'normal' body and its athletic performance is constantly shifting and the contradictory images of disability and sport become blurred. The active physical images and sporting ability of disabled athletes have impressed the world with the potential to change societal perception of disability in positive direction. The visibility of disabled sporting bodies make it more relevant for people to see the relations between impairment and social conditions, as impairment itself is clearly not the barrier to their social participation but the wider social contexts that disable them. Although the social model has challenged societal perceptions of disability, it is not a complete alternative to the medical or individual model (Brett, 2002). Hughes (2002:73) argues that "Disability studies and the disability movement...could use the sociology of impairment as a tool to measure and counter the nature and extent of these contemporary, cultural threats" The dynamics and complexity of impairment and disability presented in this research suggest the need to move beyond simplistic social model and the time to integrate impairment within the empowerment debate of the social model of disability where impairment with its new found status discards any links with the medical model of disability without weakening the social model of disability. As Thomas (2002:46) suggests "the deepening of a materialist theorization of disability, about one that encompasses questions of culture, difference and impairment". Only a model that is developed around and built upon the experience of disabled people will be appropriate to begin to understand disability from the perspective of profound impairment.

## **Reflections on disability sport and emancipatory research**

Sage (1993:153) indicates that, “Sports and physical education are practices which are socially constructed within the culture in which they exist, and any adequate account of them must be grounded in an understanding of power, privilege, and dominance within society”. This research set within the social model of disability and engaging with the emancipatory approach records the lived experiences of athletes with disabilities and identifies the disabling and discriminatory discourses and practices manifest in various social institutions with regard to their sport involvement. Despite feeling empowered through elite sport, they also talk about the inequalities of organisational support and funding, patronising and indifferent attitudes, and lack of recognition and media attention to their athletic abilities and achievements. By doing so, they reveal that their oppressions in sport appear to be a reflection of the oppressions disabled people experience in other aspects of life.

Hopefully this research is deemed as adequate way of collectivising experience (Oliver, 1997) within emancipatory research framework. Also hooks (1989: 129) argues, “Silence is the condition of one who has been dominated, made an object; talk is the mark of freeing, of making one subject”. As Melucci (1995) argues that social movements are generated through a sequence of stages, particularly a transformation in awareness that personal problems are socially generated, and that alternative ways of thinking are crucial to addressing these problems. Honneth (1995:139) argues that the pain of experiencing oppressive “disrespect” (the withholding of recognition) can be transformed through an appropriate political process into a politics of self-validation, in which the subject position and experience of the individuals are validated and their rights to participate are legitimated. He further indicates that “only if the means of articulation of a social movement are available can the experience of disrespect become a source for motivation of acts of political resistance”. My interviews with research participants seem to suggest the possibility of their self-emancipation, as Xiao-shuan states on behalf of the female powerlifters in her email to me:

Your interview had made us, for the first time, think very hard about the problems



and oppressions we have faced in the course of our sporting careers. I suppose we didn't always think about them and had just got on with it for years. But it was so nice to talk to you, and finally verbalise how we felt and thought, and suddenly things seemed to become so clear. We all felt this way. Thank you very much for taking an interest in our lives and making it possible for our experiences and thoughts to be heard.

Yet I honestly think I am the one who should be grateful because the three-year period of PhD research has been such a valuable self-discovery experience for me. I hope that this thesis will go some way towards raising consciousness about the pervasiveness of societal perceptions that operate and impinge on the lives of elite athletes with disabilities in Taiwan and in Britain and the ways in which the participants in this study have overcome conventional boundaries to become supreme athletes. Research documenting impairment and personal experiences may not change the lives of disabled people in material sense but it enables disabled people to develop historical awareness and alternative view and understanding of themselves and their lives which can be empowering for the people concerned. Yet we still know so little about disability sport and the experiences of disabled athletes themselves. I hope that more stories of disabled athletes will be written in an emancipatory research framework in the future which is better informed concerning the experience of disabled people in relation to impairment and body experiences in order to expand the range of phenomena that the current disability study encompasses.

## **Interview Agenda**

### **Demographic Information:**

Gender, Age, Disability, Education, Vocation, Marital status,  
Sport classification, Training base, Best result to date

### **The starting points:**

Life history of sport involvement: When did you first become involved in sport?  
Life history of individual's impairment

### **Topics or areas to be explored (and leading questions):**

Views of impairment and body image  
Self-identity: How do you define yourself?  
School experiences and physical education  
Sports organisations for people with disabilities  
Experiences of attitudes and reactions of people encountered towards sport participation  
Experiences of discrimination inside and outside the disability sports field  
Gender: Did you find being a man/woman make any differences to your sporting career?  
Mass media  
The meaning of sport  
Difficulties  
Expectations of future developments

### **Question to end all interviews:**

Are there any other comments – about your personal history or about disability sport – that you would like to make?

Appendix 2. Demographic information of British research participants

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Vocation	Marital Status	Sport	Disability	Classification	Competing Period	Competitive Level	Best Result	Training Basis
Curtis	M	24	College	College Student	Single	Power-lifting	Spinal bifida -wheelchair user, since birth (24)	82.5Kg	7 Years, Since 1997	World Championship	175Kg	Milton Keynes
Ross	M	39	University	Social Worker	Married	Power-lifting	Spinal bifida-crutch/wheelchair, since birth (39)	67.5Kg	23 Years, 1980-2002	Paralympic Games	World recorder holder 1989-1992	Wales
Paul	M	51	University	Customer service officer in local government	Married	Power-lifting	Polio - Wheelchair User, since 8 (43)	67.5Kg – 75Kg	20 Years, 1980-2000	Paralympic Games	142Kg	Birmingham
Eva	F	23	GCSE	F/T Athlete	Single	Power-lifting	Spinal bifida -wheelchair user, since birth (23)	82.5Kg Or Above	9 Years, Since 1994	Paralympic Games	Gold Medallist /135Kg	Wales, coach's garage
Elsa	F	26	Higher National Diploma	P/T Primary School Caretaker	Single	Power-lifting	Spinal Bifida -wheelchair user, since birth (26)	44Kg	7 Years, Since 1997	Paralympic Games	7th in Sydney	Coventry
Tricia	F	60	Further Education	F/T Athlete	Married	Power-lifting	Polio -Wheelchair user, since 6 (54)	40Kg Or Below	12 Years, 1989-2001	World Championship	World Champion /50Kg?	Hull
Fiona	F	39	A Level	Unemployed	Single	Field event	Spinal Cord Lesion, since 20 (19)	Shot Throwing F57	11 Years, 1989-2000	Paralympic Games	5th in Sydney Paralympics	Crawley, house backyard
Charles	M	31	A Level	IT Support/ P/T Athlete	With Partner	Field event	Cerebral Palsy, since birth (31)	Discus Throwing F33	15 Years, Since 1988	Paralympic Games	Gold Medallist	Mansfield, Gym In Local College
Ben	M	42	A Level/ MA (Hon)	F/T Athlete	Married	Track event	Blind, since 20 (22)	Marathon B1/ T11	21 Years, Since 1982	Paralympic Games	Gold Medallist	Leamington
Steven	M	43	GCSE	Civil Servant	Single	Track event	Visual Impairment, since Birth (43)	Marathon B2	20 Years, since 1980	Paralympic Games	Gold Medallist	Bristol

Appendix 3. Demographic information of Taiwanese research participants

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Vocation	Marital Status	Sport	Disability	Classification	Competing Period	Competitive Level	Best Result	Training Basis
Yi-xiou	M	30	University	Junior High School Teacher	Single	Power-lifting	Polio - wearing leg brace, since 1 (29)	60Kg-67.5Kg	4 Years, Since 1998	World Championship	137.5Kg	Tainan
Gao-ming	M	36	Vocational High School	Scrivener	Married	Power-lifting	Polio, since 1 (35)	52Kg	4 Years, Since 1998	World Championship	100Kg	Tainan
Xien-ge	M	34	Vocational High School	High school assistant teacher	Single	Power-lifting	Polio - wheelchair user, since 3 (31)	100Kg	11 Years, Since 1991	World Championship	Gold Medallist, 1992 World Championship	Changhua
Yen-zi	F	23	Vocational High School	F/T Athlete	Single	Power-lifting	Polio - wheelchair user, since 3 (20)	40Kg And Below	6 Years, Since 1995	Paralympic Games	The 6Th in Sydney	Changhua
Xiao-shuan	F	26	Vocational High School	F/T Athlete	Single	Power-lifting	Spinal cord injury-wheelchair user, since 3 (23)	52Kg-67.5Kg	6 Years, 1993-1995, 1998-	Paralympic Games	Bronze Medallist, 2002 FESPIC Games	Changhua
Hui-hui	F	22	Vocational High School	F/T Athlete	Single	Power-lifting	Polio - wheelchair user, since 9 months (21)	67.5Kg-82.5Kg	5 Years, Since 1997	Paralympic Games	Gold Medallist, 2002 FESPIC Games	Changhua
Li-li	F	33	Vocational High School	F/T Athlete	Single	Power-lifting	Polio - wheelchair user, since 3 (30)	40Kg-44Kg	10 Years, Since 1992	Paralympic Games	Bronze Medallist in Sydney	Changhua
Yen-Wen	M	38	High School	Disabled Organisation	Single	Track event	Blind, since 22 (16)	Marathon B1/T12	13 Years, Since 1990	Fespig Games	Silver	Taipei
Zhong-Zhe	M	22	University	Student	Single	Field event	Visual Impairment, since 10 (12)	Javelin, Discus, Shot Put B2/F13	7 Years, Since 1996	Paralympic Games	Gold Medallist in Sydney	Taipei
Xiao-Lien	F	21	University	Student	Single	Track event	Polio, since 2 (19)	T54	4 Years, Since 1998	Fespig Games	Gold Medallist	Tao-Yuan
Juen-Juen	F	38	High School	Administrator	Married	Track event	Polio, since 5 (33)	T54	14 Years, Since 1989	Fespig Games	Bronze	Chang-Hua

## Appendix 4

### **Information and examples relevant to PE and disabled students in National Curriculum Inclusion Statement**

#### **Examples for B/3a – creating effective learning environments**

Teachers create effective learning environments in which:

- the contribution of all pupils is valued
- all pupils can feel secure and are able to contribute appropriately
- stereotypical views are challenged and pupils learn to appreciate and view positively differences in others, whether arising from race, gender, ability or disability
- pupils learn to take responsibility for their actions and behaviours both in school and in the wider community
- all forms of bullying and harassment, including racial harassment, are challenged
- pupils are enabled to participate safely in clothing appropriate to their religious beliefs, particularly in subjects such as science, design and technology and physical education.

#### **Examples for B/3c - providing equality of opportunity**

Teaching approaches that provide equality of opportunity include:

- ensuring that boys and girls are able to participate in the same curriculum, particularly in science, design and technology and physical education
- taking account of the interests and concerns of boys and girls by using a range of activities and contexts for work and allowing a variety of interpretations and outcomes, particularly in English, science, design and technology, ICT, art and design, music and physical education
- avoiding gender stereotyping when organising pupils into groups, assigning them to activities or arranging access to equipment, particularly in science, design and technology, ICT, music and physical education
- enabling the fullest possible participation of pupils with disabilities or particular medical needs in all subjects, offering positive role models and making provision,

where necessary, to facilitate access to activities with appropriate support, aids or adaptations. (See Overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils.)

### **Examples for C/5b - developing skills in practical aspects**

Teachers create opportunities for the development of skills in practical aspects of the curriculum through:

- providing adapted, modified or alternative activities or approaches to learning in physical education and ensuring that these have integrity and equivalence to the National Curriculum and enable pupils to make appropriate progress

### **C Overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils**

1. Teachers must take account of these requirements and make provision, where necessary, to support individuals or groups of pupils to enable them to participate effectively in the curriculum and assessment activities. During end of key stage assessments, teachers should bear in mind that special arrangements are available to support individual pupils.

#### **Pupils with special educational needs**

2. Curriculum planning and assessment for pupils with special educational needs must take account of the type and extent of the difficulty experienced by the pupil. Teachers will encounter a wide range of pupils with special educational needs, some of whom will also have disabilities (see paragraphs C/4 and C/5). In many cases, the action necessary to respond to an individual's requirements for curriculum access will be met through greater differentiation of tasks and materials, consistent with school-based intervention as set out in the SEN Code of Practice. A smaller number of pupils may need access to specialist equipment and approaches or to alternative or adapted activities, consistent with school-based intervention augmented by advice and support from external specialists as described in the SEN Code of Practice, or, in exceptional circumstances, with a statement of special educational need. Teachers should, where appropriate, work closely with representatives of other agencies who may be supporting the pupil.

3. Teachers should take specific action to provide access to learning for pupils with special educational needs by:
  - a. providing for pupils who need help with communication, language and literacy
  - b. planning, where necessary, to develop pupils' understanding through the use of all available senses and experiences
  - c. planning for pupils' full participation in learning and in physical and practical activities
  - d. helping pupils to manage their behaviour, to take part in learning effectively and safely, and, at key stage 4, to prepare for work
  - e. helping individuals to manage their emotions, particularly trauma or stress, and to take part in learning.

### **Pupils with disabilities**

4. Not all pupils with disabilities will necessarily have special educational needs. Many pupils with disabilities learn alongside their peers with little need for additional resources beyond the aids which they use as part of their daily life, such as a wheelchair, a hearing aid or equipment to aid vision. Teachers must take action, however, in their planning to ensure that these pupils are enabled to participate as fully and effectively as possible within the National Curriculum and the statutory assessment arrangements. Potential areas of difficulty should be identified and addressed at the outset of work, without recourse to the formal provisions for disapplication.
5. Teachers should take specific action to enable the effective participation of pupils with disabilities by:
  - a. planning appropriate amounts of time to allow for the satisfactory completion of tasks
  - b. planning opportunities, where necessary, for the development of skills in practical aspects of the curriculum
  - c. identifying aspects of programmes of study and attainment targets that may present specific difficulties for individuals.

Appendix 5. British television coverage of the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games

Date	Time/mins	Channel	Title
9 Sep (Thu)	22:35-23:25 (50m)	BBC1	Wheels of Gold (British men's wheelchair basketball team)
11 Sep (Sat)	01:05-01:35 (30m)	BBC1	Grandstand-Paralympics
12 Sep (Sun)	16:50-17:10 (20m)	BBC2	Sunday Grandstand – The Big Interview: Tanni Grey Thompson
18 Sep (Sat)	14:05-15:45 (100m)	BBC1	Grandstand - Paralympics
19 Sep (Sun)	17:00-18:30 (90m)	BBC2	Sunday Grandstand - Paralympics
20 Sep (Mon)	18:00-19:30 (90m)	BBC2	Paralympic Grandstand
21 Sep (Tue)	6:00-7:30pm (90m) 19:30-20:00 (30m)	BBC2 BBC2	Paralympic Grandstand Sweet Chariots (British wheelchair rugby team)
22 Sep (Wed)	18:00-19:30 (90m)	BBC2	Paralympic Grandstand
23 Sep (Thu)	18:00-19:30 (90m)	BBC2	Paralympic Grandstand
24 Sep (Fri)	18:00-19:30 (90m)	BBC2	Paralympic Grandstand
25 Sep (Sat)	17:30-19:25 (90m)	BBC2	Paralympic Grandstand
26 Sep (Sun)	18:00-19:30 (90m)	BBC2	Paralympic Grandstand
27 Sep (Mon)	18:00-19:30 (90m)	BBC2	Paralympic Grandstand
28 Sep (Tue)	18:00-19:30 (90m)	BBC2	Paralympic Grandstand



Appendix 6. British television coverage of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games

Date	Time/mins	Channel	Title
12 Aug (Thu)	22:35-23:35 (60m)	BBC1	Preview
13 Aug (Fri)	18:35-22:00 (30m)	BBC1	Opening Ceremony
14 Aug (Sat)	07:00-12:00 (300m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	13:00-13:30 (30m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	13:30-22:00 (510m)	BBC1&2	Olympic Grandstand
	24:00-01:30 (90m)	BBC1	Olympics Today
15 Aug (Sun)	07:00-09:45 (165m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	10:30-12:30 (120m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	12:30-13:00 (30m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	13:00-22:00 (540m)	BBC2	Olympic Grandstand
	23:00-24:30 (90m)	BBC1	Olympics Today
16 Aug (Mon)	07:45-12:30 (285m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	12:30-13:00 (30m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	13:40-17:00 (200m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	17:00-18:00 (60m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	18:00-22:30 (270m)	BBC2	Olympic Grandstand
	22:35-24:00 (95m)	BBC1	Olympics Today
17 Aug (Tue)	07:45-12:30 (285m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	12:30-13:00 (30m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	13:40-17:00 (200m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	17:00-18:00 (60m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	18:00-22:30 (270m)	BBC2	Olympic Grandstand
	22:35-24:00 (95m)	BBC1	Olympics Today
18 Aug (Wed)	07:45-12:30 (285m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	12:30-13:00 (30m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	13:40-17:00 (200m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	17:00-18:00 (60m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	18:00-22:30 (270m)	BBC1&2	Olympic Grandstand
	22:35-24:00 (95m)	BBC1	Olympics Today
19 Aug (Thu)	07:45-12:30 (285m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	12:30-13:00 (30m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	13:40-17:00 (200m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	17:00-18:00 (60m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	18:00-22:30 (270m)	BBC1&2	Olympic Grandstand
	22:35-24:00 (95m)	BBC1	Olympics Today
20 Aug (Fri)	07:45-12:30 (285m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	12:30-13:00 (30m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	13:40-17:00 (200m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	17:00-18:00 (60m)	BBC1	Olympic Report
	18:00-22:30 (270m)	BBC1&2	Olympic Grandstand
	22:35-24:00 (95m)	BBC1	Olympics Today
21 Aug (Sat)	07:30-12:00 (270m)	BBC1	Olympic Grandstand
	13:00-13:30 (30m)	BBC1	Olympic Report

	13:30-22:00 (510m) 24:00-01:30 (90m)	BBC1&2 BBC1	Olympic Grandstand Olympics Today
22 Aug (Sun)	07:00-09:45 (165m) 10:30-12:30 (120m) 12:30-13:00 (30m) 12:45-22:00 (555m) 23:00-24:30 (90m)	BBC1 BBC1 BBC1 BBC1&2 BBC1	Olympic Grandstand Olympic Grandstand Olympic Report Olympic Grandstand Olympics Today
23 Aug (Mon)	07:00-12:30 (285m) 12:30-13:00 (30m) 13:40-16:30 (170m) 18:00-22:30 (270m) 22:35-24:00 (95m)	BBC1 BBC1 BBC1 BBC1&2 BBC1	Olympic Grandstand Olympic Report Olympic Grandstand Olympic Grandstand Olympics Today
24 Aug (Tue)	07:45-12:30 (285m) 12:30-13:00 (30m) 13:40-17:05 (205m) 17:05-18:00 (55m) 18:00-22:30 (270m) 22:35-24:00 (95m)	BBC1 BBC1 BBC1 BBC1 BBC1&2 BBC1	Olympic Grandstand Olympic Report Olympic Grandstand Olympic Report Olympic Grandstand Olympics Today
25 Aug (Wed)	07:45-11:00 (195m) 12:30-13:00 (30m) 13:40-17:10 (210m) 17:10-18:00 (50m) 18:00-22:30 (270m) 22:35-24:00 (95m)	BBC1 BBC1 BBC1 BBC1 BBC1&2 BBC1	Olympic Grandstand Olympic Report Olympic Grandstand Olympic Report Olympic Grandstand Olympics Today
26 Aug (Thu)	07:45-11:00 (195m) 12:30-13:00 (30m) 13:40-16:45 (185m) 16:45-18:00 (75m) 18:00-22:30 (270m) 22:35-24:00 (95m)	BBC1 BBC1 BBC1 BBC1 BBC1&2 BBC1	Olympic Grandstand Olympic Report Olympic Grandstand Olympic Report Olympic Grandstand Olympics Today
27 Aug (Fri)	08:00-16:45 (445m) 16:45-18:00 (75m) 18:00-21:30 (210m) 22:00-22:30 (30m) 22:35-24:00 (95m)	BBC1&2 BBC1 BBC1&2 BBC2 BBC1	Olympic Grandstand Olympic Report Olympic Grandstand Olympic Grandstand Olympics Today
28 Aug (Sat)	07:30-12:00 (270m) 13:00-16:30 (210m) 17:35-22:00 (275m) 24:00-01:30 (90m)	BBC1 BBC1 BBC1&2 BBC1	Olympic Grandstand Olympic Grandstand Olympic Grandstand Olympics Today
29 Aug (Sun)	11:15-19:00 (285m) 19:00-22:00 (180m)	BBC1&2 BBC1	Olympic Grandstand Closing Ceremony

## References

- Abberley, P. (1987). The concept of oppression and the development of a social theory of disability. *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 2(1), 5-19.
- Abberley, P. (1993). Disabled people and "normality." In J. Swain, V. Finkelstein, S. French, & M. Oliver (Eds.), *Disabling Barriers – Enabling Environments* (pp. 107-115). London: Sage.
- Aitchison, C. (2003). From leisure and disability to disability leisure: developing data, definitions and discourses. *Disability & Society*, 18(7), 955-969.
- Arthur, S. & Finch, H. (1999). *Physical Activity in Our Lives: Qualitative Research among Disabled People*. London: Health education authority.
- Audit Commission. (2002). *Special Educational Needs: A Mainstream Issue*. London: Audit Commission.
- Auslander, G. K. & Gold, N. (1999). Media reports on disability: a binational comparison of types and causes of disability as reported in major newspapers. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 21(9), 420-431.
- Baird, M. (2004). Comparing cases: studies of commitment systems in Australia and the United States. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15(3), 433-440.
- Barn, R. (1994) Race and ethnicity in social work: some issues for anti-discriminatory research. In B. Humphries & C. Truman (eds.), *Re-thinking Social Research* (pp. 37-58). Aldershot, UK: Avebury.
- Barnes, C. (1991). *Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination: A Case for Anti-discrimination Legislation*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.
- Barnes, C. (1996). Theories of disability and the origins of the oppression of disabled people in western society. In L. Barnes (eds.), *Disability and Society: Emerging Issues and Insights* (pp.43-60). London: Longman.
- Barnes, C. (1997). A legacy of oppression: a history of disability in western culture. In L. Barton & M. Oliver (eds.), *Disability Studies: Past, Present and Future* (pp.3-24). Leeds: The Disability Press.
- Barnes, C. (1998). The social model of disability: a sociological phenomenon ignored by sociologists. In T. Shakespeare (ed.) *The Disability Reader* (pp. 65-78). London: Cassell.

- Barnes, C. (2003). What a difference a decade makes: reflections on doing 'emancipatory' disability research. *Disability & Society*, 18(1), 3–17.
- Barton, L. (1993). Disability, empowerment and physical education. In Evans, J. (ed.), *Equality, Education and Physical Education* (pp. 43-54). London: The Falmer Press.
- Barton, L. & Oliver, M. (1997). *Disability studies: past, present and future*. Leeds: Disability Press.
- Barton, L. (1994). Disability, difference and the politics of definition. *Australian Disability Review*, 3, 8-22.
- Begum, N. (1992). Disabled women and the feminist agenda. *Feminist Review*, 40, 70-84.
- Benney, M. & Hughes, E. C. (1984). Of sociology and the interview. In M. Bulmer (ed.), *Sociological research methods: an introduction* (pp. 215-224). London: MacMillan
- Bilton, T., Bonnet, K., Jones, O., Stanworth, M., Sheard, K., & Webster, A. (1991). *Introductory Sociology*. London: Macmillan Education.
- Birkenbach, J. (1990). *Physical Disability and Social Policy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Blinde, E. M. & McClung, L. R. (1997). Enhancing the physical and social self through recreational activity: Accounts of individuals with physical disabilities. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 14, 327-344.
- Blinde, E. M. & McCallister, S. G. (1999). Women, disability, and sport and physical fitness activity: the intersection of gender and disability dynamics. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 70(3), 303-312.
- Borkan, J. (1999). Immersion/Crystallization. In B. F. Crabtree & W. Miller (eds.), *Doing Qualitative Research* (pp. 179-194). London: Sage.
- Bornat, J. (1999). *Biographical Interviews: The Link between Research and Practice*. London: Open University.
- Bourdieu, P. (1978). Sport and social class. *Social Science Information*, 12 (6), 819-840.
- Branfield, F. (1998). What are you doing here? 'non-disabled' people and the disability movement: a response to Robert F. Drake. *Disability & Society*, 13(1), 143-144.

- Brasile, R. M., Kleiber, D. A., & Hamisch, D. (1991). Analysis of participation incentives among athletes with and without disabilities. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 25(1), 18-33.
- Brett, J. (2002). The experience of disability from the perspective of parents of children with profound impairment: is it time for an alternative model of disability? *Disability & Society*, 17(7), 825-843.
- Brettschneider, W. & Heim, R. (1997). Identity, sport and youth development. In Kenneth R. F. (ed.), *The Physical Self: From Motivation to Well-being* (pp. 205-227). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Bricher, G. (2000). Disabled people, health professionals and the social model of disability: can there be a research relationship? *Disability & Society*, 15(5), 781-793.
- British Paralympic Association website. (<http://www.paralympics.org.uk>)
- British Sociological Association website. (<http://www.britsoc.co.uk>)
- Brittain, I. (2002). *Perspectives of Elite Athletes with Disabilities: Problems and Possibilities*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, Brunel University.
- Calhoun, C. (1990). *Social Theory and the Politics of identity*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Carrington, B. & McDonald, I. (2001). *'Race', sport, and British society*. London: Routledge.
- Castelnuovo, S. & Guthrie, S. R. (1998). *Feminism and the Female Body: Liberating the Amazon Within*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Chen, K. (2004). Political reporters keep covering news about first lady and real Paralympic sport news are very little. *BCC News* 16/09/2004 (<http://www.bcc.com.tw>) accessed 17/09/2004
- Chen, L. C. (2001). *A Survey on Sport Participation of People with Disabilities in Taiwan*. National Council on Physical Fitness and Sport Research Project, Taipei, Taiwan.
- Chen, H. P. (2003). *Beyond Normality: Sociological Thoughts about Disabled Body*. Unpublished master thesis. Tunghai University, Taiwan.

- Chen, S. F. (2002). *A Survey on Implementation of Special Physical Education in Primary Schools*. Unpublished master thesis. National Changhua University of Education, Changhuw, Taiwan.
- Chick, G. (2000). Editorial: opportunities for cross-cultural comparative research on leisure. *Leisure Sciences*, 22, 79-91.
- Chinese Taipei Sports Federation for the Disabled website. (<http://www.ctsod.org.otw>)
- CIA World Factbook (2004). (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook>) accessed 08/08/2004.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Costa, D. M. & Guthrie, S. R. (1994). *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- CMS/Strategy Unit. (2002) *Game plan: a strategy for delivering government's sport and physical activity objectives*. London: Cabinet Office. (<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/su/sport/report/01.htm>) accessed 30/05/2005.
- Craft, D. H. (2001). Impressions from Australia.- The Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games. *Palaestra*, 17(1), 20-22.
- Crawford, C. (1989). A view from the sidelines: Disability, poverty, and recreation in Canada. *Journal of Leisurability*, 16(2), 3-9.
- Crow, L. (1996). Including all of our lives: renewing the social model of disability. In J. Morris (ed.), *Encounters with Strangers: Feminism and Disability* (pp. 206-226). London: Women's Press.
- Davies, G. A. (2004). US media snub may hit bid. *The Daily Telegraph* 22/09/2004.
- Davis, R. W. (1996). The 1996 Atlanta Paralympics. *JOPERD*, 7(6), 59-61.
- Deegan, M. J. (1985). Multiple minority groups: A case study of physically disabled women. In M. J. Deegan, & N. A. Brookes, (Eds.), *Women and Disability: The Double Handicap* (pp.37-55). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2000). *A Sporting Future for All*. London: DCMS.
- Department for Education and Employment. (1999). *Physical Education: the National Curriculum for England; Key Stages 1- 4*. London: HMSO.

- Department of Education and Science. (1991). *National Curriculum Physical Education for Ages 5 to 16. Final Report*. London: DES.
- Department for Education and Skills. (2003). *Learning through PE and Sport: A guide to the physical education, school sport and club link strategy*. London: DfES.
- Department of Work and Pension, UK, website: (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk>)
- DePauw, K. P. (1997). The (In)Visibility of disability: cultural contexts and “sporting bodies”. *Quest*, 49, 416-430.
- DePauw, K. P. (1999). Girls and women with disabilities in sport. *Journal of Physical Education and Recreation*, 70(4), 50.
- DePauw, K. P. & Gavron, S.J. (1995). *Disability and Sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Disability Rights Commission website: (<http://www.drc-gb.org/thelaw/index.asp>)
- Drake, R. F. (1997). What am I doing here? ‘non-disabled’ people and the disability movement. *Disability & Society*, 12(4), 643-645.
- Duckett, P. S. (1998). What are you doing here? ‘Non-disabled’ people and the disability movement: a response to Fran Branfield. *Disability & Society*, 13(4), 625-628.
- Fawcett, B. (2000). *Feminist Perspectives on Disability*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson education limited.
- Felske, A. W. (1994). Knowing about knowing: margin notes on disability research. In M. Rioux & B. Bach (eds.). *Disability is not Measles: New Research in Disability* (pp. 181-199). Canada: Roeher Institute.
- Finkelstein, V. (1980). *Attitudes and disabled people*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.
- Finkelsten, V. (1996). Outside, ‘inside out’. *Coalition*, April, 30-36.
- Finkelstein, V. (1998). Emancipating disability studies. In Shakespeare T. (ed.). *The Disability Reader* (pp.28-49). London: Cassell.
- Finkelstein, V. & Stuart, O. (1996). Developing new services. In G. Hales (ed.) *Beyond Disability: Towards an Enabling Society* (pp.170-187). London: Sage and Open University Press.

- Fontana, A. & Frey, J. H. (1994). Interviewing: the art of science. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 361-376). London: Sage Publications.
- Fontana, A. & Frey, J. H. (1998). Interviewing: the art of science. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.). *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (pp.47-78). London: Sage.
- Forster, N. (1994). The analysis of company documentation. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (eds.) *Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research: a Practical Guide*. London: Sage.
- French, S. (1993). Disability, impairment or something in between? In J. Swain et al. (eds.) *Disabling Barriers: Enabling Environments* (pp. 17-25). London: Sage.
- French, S. (1994). *On Equal Terms: Working with Disabled People*. London: Butterworth Heinemann.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1. An Introduction*. London: Allen Lane.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. London: Penguin.
- Gao, C. T. & Liang, S. Y. (2004). Low acceptance of enterprises in employing people with disabilities, on *United News* website (<http://udn.com/NEWS/LIFE/LIFS1/1978138.shtml>) accessed 20/04/2004.
- Gastelnuovo, S. & Guthrie, S. (1998). *Feminism and the female body: liberating the Amazon women*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Gerschick, T. J. (1998). Sisyphus in a wheelchair: men with physical disabilities confront gender domination. In J. O'Brien & Howard, J. A. (Eds.). *Everyday Inequalities* (pp. 189-212). UK: Blackwell Publishers.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Security in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gillespie-Sells, K., Hills, M. & Robbins, B. (1998). *She Dances to Different Drums: Research into Disabled Women's Sexuality*. London: King's Fund.



- Gordon, D., Parker, R., Loughran, F. & Heslop, P. (2000). *Disabled Children in Britain: A Re-analysis of the OPCS Disability Survey*. London: Stationery Office.
- Grey – Thompson, T. (2001). *Seize the Day: My Autobiography*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Grimes, P. S. & French, L. (1987). Barriers to disabled women's participation in sports. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*, 58(3), 24-27.
- Guthrie, S. & Gastelnuovo, S. (1994). The significance of body image in psychosocial development and in embodying feminist perspectives. In D. Costa & S. R. Guthrie (Eds.) *Women and Sport* (pp.307-322). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Guthrie, S. & Gastelnuovo, S. (2001). Disability management among women with physical impairments: the contribution of physical activity. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 18, 5-20.
- Hahn, H. (1984). Sports and the political movement of disabled persons: examining nondisabled social values. *Arena Review*, 18(1), 1-15.
- Hall, A. (1996). *Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays on Theory and Practice*. Champaign, IL; Leeds: Human Kinetics.
- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: who needs 'identity'? In Hall, S. & P. de Gay (eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp.1-17). London: Sage Publications.
- Halliday, P. (1993). Physical education within special education provision – equality and entitlement. In Evans, J. (ed.), *Equality, Education and Physical Education*, (pp. 205-215). London: The Falmer Press.
- Haralambos, M. & Holborn, M. (2000). *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. London: Collins.
- Hardin, B. & Hardin, M. (2003). Conformity and conflict: wheelchair athletes discuss sport media. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 20, 246-259.
- Hargreaves, J. (1994). *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports*. London: Routledge.
- Hargreaves, J. (2000). *Heroines of Sport: the Politics of Difference and Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Harvey, L. (1990). *Critical Social Research*. London: Unwin Hyman.

- Henderson, K. A. & Bedini, L. A. (1995). "I have a soul that dances like Tina Turner, but my body can't": physical activity and women with mobility impairments. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 66, 151-161.
- Henderson, K. A. & Bedini, L. A. (1997). Women, leisure, and "double whammies": empowerment and constraint. *Journal of Leisurability*, 24(1), 36-46.
- Henderson, K. A., Bedini, L. A., Hecht, L., & Schuler, R. (1995). Women with physical disabilities and negotiation of leisure constraints. *Leisure Studies*, 14, 17-31.
- Hertz, R. (1997). Introduction: reflexivity and voice. In R. Hertz (ed.), *Reflexivity and Voice* (pp.7-18). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hillyer, B. (1993). *Feminism and Disability*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Hirst, M. & Baldwin, S. (1994). *Unequal Opportunities: Growing up Disabled*. London: HMSO.
- Holmes, S. (1997). Sporting chance. *The leisure manager*, 15(4), 38-40.
- Honneth, A. (1995) *The struggle for recognition: the moral grammar of social conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hooks, b. (1989). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston: South End Press.
- Hsu, Y. S. (1997). *A Survey on Students with Disabilities and Their Placement of Physical Education at Schools of All Levels in Taiwan*. Ministry of Education, R.O.C.
- Hu, Y. C. (1997). The reformation and comments of newly amended Special Education Act. *Special Education Gardener*, 4(12), 29-35.
- Huang, T. S. (2005). Interpellation of Lawmaker T. S. Huang to the Prime Minister. (<http://netinn.udn.com/community/forum/article.jsp?aid=1180663&tpno=0&raid=1202206&no=50292&t=t#rep1202206>) accessed on 30/05/2005.
- Hughes, B. (1999). The constitution of impairment: modernity and the aesthetic of oppression. *Disability and society*, 14(2), 155-172.
- Hughes, B. (2000). Medicine and the aesthetic invalidation of disabled people. *Disability & Society*, 15(4), 555-568.

- Hughes, B. & Paterson K. (1997). The social model of disability and the disappearing body: towards a sociology of impairment. *Disability & Society*, 12(3), 325-340.
- Humphrey, J. C. (1999). Disabled people and the politics of difference. *Disability & Society*, 14(2), 173-188.
- Imrie, R. (1997). Rethinking the relationships between disability, rehabilitation, and society. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 19(7), p.263-271.
- International Paralympic Committee website (<http://www.paralympic.org>).
- Jambor, T. & Gargiulo, R. (1987). The playground: A social entity for mainstreaming. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*, 58, 18-23.
- Jarvie, G. (1991). *Sport, Racism, and Ethnicity*. London: Falmer.
- Jary, D. & Jary, J. (1999). *Dictionary of sociology*. Glasow, UK: Unwin Hyman.
- Jenkins, R. (1996). *Social Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Jiang, Y. W. (2002). After FESPIC Games: preparation for Athens Paralympic Games - Strike while the iron is hot, on *Ming-shen News* website ([http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Sideline/3519/news/200211/20021104\\_training.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Sideline/3519/news/200211/20021104_training.htm)) accessed 15/04/2004.
- Johnson, J. M. (2002). In-depth interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (ed.). *Handbook of interview research: context and method*.
- Jung-jung. (2004). The 2004 Athens Paralympic Games – An example of Taiwanese sport diplomacy. *Epoch Times* 09/08/2004. (<http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/4/9/8/n653837.htm>) accessed 12/11/2004.
- Kew, F. (1997). *Sport: Social Problem and Issues*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann.
- Kirk, D. (2002). The social construction of the body in physical education and sport. In A. Laker (ed.), *The Sociology of Sport and Physical Education* (pp.79-91). London : Routledge Falmer.
- Kitchin, R. (2000). The researched opinions on research: disabled people and disability research. *Disability & Society*, 15(1), 25-47.
- Kleinman, S., Stenross, B. & McMahon, M. (1994). Privileging fieldwork over interviews: consequences for identity and practice. *Symbolic Interaction*, 17(1), 37:50.

- Kohn, M. L. (1987). *Cross-national Research in Sociology*. London: Sage.
- Kolkka T. & Williams, T. (1997). Gender and disability sport participation: setting a sociological research agenda. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 14, 8-23.
- Kristen, L., Patriksson, G. & Fridlund, B. (2003). Parents' conceptions of the influences of participation in a sports programme on their children and adolescents with physical disabilities. *European physical education review*, 9(1), 23-41.
- Kuao, L. H. (2001). *Taiwanese Women's Right White Paper*. Taiwanese Women Employment Facilitating Association.
- Labanowich, S. (1987). The physically disabled in sports: tracing the influence of two tracks of a common movement. *Sport 'n' Spokes*, March/April, 33-42.
- Li, H. C. (2004). Disabled athletes became supporting parts again. *United Evening News* 14/09/2004.
- Liao, C. C. (1999). Talking from the perspectives of body. *Taiwan School Physical Education Bimonthly*, 52(6), 24-26
- Lienert, C., Sherrill, C. & Myers, B. (2001). Physical educators concerns about integrating children with disabilities: a cross-cultural comparison. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 18(1), 1-17.
- Lin, H. W. (2004). Baseball and Taiwanese society. ([http://www.cbs.org.tw/big5/baseball/news/news\\_040719.htm](http://www.cbs.org.tw/big5/baseball/news/news_040719.htm)). accessed on 30/05/2005.
- Lin, J. K. (2003). Sports population doubling strategies for the handicapped: viewpoints based on policy analysis. *Physical Education Quarterly*, 137, 53-57.
- Lin, P. C. (2000). Exploration of ancient "Three-inch golden lotus" and modern "Beauty and fitness". *Gender Equality Educational Quarterly*, 10(2), 81-90.
- Liu, B. Y. (2000). *A Comparative Study on the Policies of Inclusive Education Between Taiwan and U.S.A.* Unpublished master thesis, National Chi Nan University, Nantou, Taiwan.
- Londsdale, S. (1990). *Women with Disabilities: The Experience of Physical Disability among Women*. London: Macmillan Education.

- Mastro, J. V., Hall, M. M. & Canabal, M. Y. (1988). Cultural and attitudinal similarities: female and disabled individuals in sports and athletics. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*, 59(9), 80-83.
- May, T. (2001). *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Maykut, P. & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning Qualitative Research: a Philosophic and Practical Guide*. London: Falmer Press.
- McCann, C. (1996). Sport for the disabled: the evolution from rehabilitation to competitive sport. *British Journal of Sport Medicine*, 30(4), 279-280.
- McCracken, G.. (1988). *Qualitative research methods: the long interview*. London: Sage.**
- Meager N., Bates P., Dench S., Honey S., Williams M. (1998). *Employment of Disabled People: Assessing the Extent of Participation*. Department of Education and Employment (DfEE) Research Report RR69 (<http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/summary/summary.php?id=ddapart>) accessed 15/09/2004.
- Meek, G. (1991) Mainstreaming physical education. In N. Armstrong & A. Sparkes (Eds.). *Issues in Physical Education*, (pp. 74-90). London: Cassell Educational.
- Meekosha, H. (1998). Body battles: bodies, gender and disability. In T. Shakespeare (Ed.), *The Disability Reader* (pp.163-180). London: Cassell.
- Meekosha, H. (2004). Drifting down the Gulf Stream: navigating the cultures of disability studies. *Disability & Society*, 19(7), 721-733.
- Melucci, A. (1995) The new social movements revisited: reflections on a sociological misunderstanding. In L. Maheu (ed.). *Social movements and social classes: the future of collective action*. London: Sage.
- Middleton, L. (1999). *Disabled Children: Challenging Social Exclusion*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.
- Miller, J. & Glassner, B. (1997). The 'inside' and the 'Outside': Finding realities in interviews. In D. Silverman (eds.). *Qualitative Research: theory, method and practice* (pp.99-112). London: Sage.
- Ministry of Education, R.O.C. (1995). *Republic of China Education Report – Educational Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century*. Taipei, Taiwan: Ministry of Education, R.O.C.

- Ministry of Education, R.O.C. (1998). *Ministry of Education Annual Progress Report 1998*. Taipei, Taiwan: Ministry of Education, R.O.C.
- Ministry of Interior, R.O.C. (<http://www.moi.gov.tw>)
- Ministry of Interior, R.O.C. (2000). *A Survey on Life Circumstances of People with Disabilities*. (<http://www.moi.gov.tw/W3/stat/home.asp>) accessed 15/09/2004.
- Moore, M., Beazley, S. & Maelzer, J. (1998). *Researching Disability Issues*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Morris, J. (1991). *Pride against Prejudice*. London: Women's Press.
- Morris, J. (1992). Personal and political: a feminist perspective on researching and disability. *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 7(2), 157-166.
- Morris, J. (1993). Gender and disability. In J. Swain, V. Finkelstein, S. French, & M. Oliver (Eds.), *Disabling Barriers – Enabling Environments* (pp.85-92). London: Sage.
- Morris, J. (1994). Gender and disability. In S. French (Ed.), *On Equal Terms – Working with Disabled People* (pp.207-219). Butterworth-Heinemann: Oxford.
- Morris, J. (1996a). *Encounters with Strangers: Feminism and Disability*. London: Women's Press.
- Morris, J. (1996b). Prejudice. In J. Swain, V. Finkelstein, S. French & M. Oliver (eds.), *Disabling Barriers – Enabling Environments* (pp.101-106). London: Sage.
- Murdie, D. (1993). Physical education for the visually impaired in a special school. *British Journal of Physical Education*. Autumn, 1993; 12-13.
- Murphy, R. (1987). *The Body Silent*. London: Phoenix House.
- National Council on Physical Fitness and Sport, R.O.C. website (<http://www.ncpfs.gov.tw>)
- National Council on Physical Fitness and Sport, R.O.C. (1999). *A Survey on the Sport Participation of People in Taiwan*. Taipei, Taiwan: National Council on Physical Fitness and Sport.
- National Curriculum Online website ([http://www.nc.uk.net/nc\\_resources/html/inclusion.shtml](http://www.nc.uk.net/nc_resources/html/inclusion.shtml))
- Neuman, W. L. (2000). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative*

- Approaches*. Boston, Mass: Allyn and Bacon.
- New Internationalist. (1998). *Human Rights – the Facts*. Issue. 298, January – February 1998.
- NieBen, M. (1982). Qualitative aspects in cross-national comparative research and the problem of functional equivalence. In M. Niessen & J. Peschar (eds.). *International comparative research: problems of theory, methodology and organisation in Eastern and Western Europe* (pp. 83-100). Oxford: Pergamon.
- Niu, W. Y. (2000). *The Study of a Feasible Model on Implementing Inclusive Education at Primary Stage*. Ministry of Education Research Project, Taipei, Taiwan.
- Nixon, H. (1989). Integration of disabled people into mainstream sports: case study of a partially sighted child. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 6, 17-31. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics.
- Oliver, M. (1990). *The Politics of Disablement*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Oliver, M. (1992). Changing the social relations of research production? *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 7(2), 101-114.
- Oliver, M. (1993). Re-defining disability: a challenge to research. In Swain, J., Finkelstein, V., French, S. & Oliver, M., (Eds.). *Disabling Barriers – Enabling Environments* (pp. 61-68), Open University: Milton Keynes.
- Oliver, M. (1996). *Understanding Disability: from Theory to Practice*. London: MacMillan Press.
- Oliver, M. (1997). Emancipatory disability research: realistic goal or impossible dream. In: C. Barnes & G. Mercer (eds.). *Doing disability research*. Leeds: The Disability Press.
- Oliver, M. & Barnes, C. (1997). All we are saying is give disabled researchers a chance. *Disability and Society*, 12(5), 811-813.
- Pascall, G. and Hendey, N. (2004). Disability and transition to adulthood: the politics of parenting. *Critical Social Policy*, 24(2), 165-186.
- Paterson, K. & Hughes, B. (2000). Disabled bodies. In P. Hancock, B. Hughes, E. Jagger, K. Paterson & R. Russell (eds.). *The body, culture and society: an introduction* (pp.29-44). Open University Press.

- Patrick, D. R. & Bignall, E. (1984). Creating the competent self: the case of wheelchair runner. In J. A. Kotarba & A. Fontana (Eds.). *The Existential Self in Society* (pp. 207-221). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Penny, D. & Evans, J. (1995). The national curriculum for physical education: entitlement for all? *The British Journal of Physical Education*. Winter, p.6-13.
- Price, B. (1997). *Paralympic Compatibility with the Olympic Movement*. Paper presented in the 1997 International Olympic Academy.
- Price, J. & Shildrick, M. (1998). Uncertain thoughts on the dis/abled body. In M. Shildrick & J. Price (eds.). *Vital Signs: Feminist Reconfigurations of the Biological Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Priestley, M. (1998). Constructions and creations: idealism, materialism and disability theory. *Disability and Society*, 13(1), 75-94.
- Priestley, M. (1999). Discourse and identity: disabled children in mainstream high schools. In M. Corker & S. French (eds.) *Disability Discourse* (pp.92-102). Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Promis, D., Erevelles, N. & Matthews, J. (2001). Reconceptualizing inclusion: the politics of university sports and recreation programs for students with mobility impairments. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 18, 37-50.
- Punch, K. F. (1998). *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative approaches*. London: Sage.
- Pyett, P. M. (2003). Validation of qualitative research in the "real world". *Qualitative Health Research*, 13(8), 1170-1179.
- Ragin, C. C. (1994). *Constructing social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Reeve, D. (2002). Negotiating psycho-emotional dimensions of disability and their influence on identity constructions. *Disability & Society*, 17(5), 493-508.
- Reid, G & Prupas, A. (1998). A documentary analysis of research priorities in disability sport. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 15, 168-178.
- Robinson, C. (2002). *Real World Research: a Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Roper, P. (1990). Changing perceptions through contact. *Disability, Handicap & Society*, 5(3), 243-255.



- Rossi, P. H., Wright, J. D., & Anderson, A. B. (1983). *Handbook of Survey Research*. London: Academic.
- Sage, G. H. (1993). Sport and physical education and the new world order: Dare we be agents of social change? *Quest*, 45, 151-164.
- Schantz, O. J. & Gilbert, K. (2001). An ideal misconstrued: newspaper coverage of the Atlanta Paralympic Games in France and Germany. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 18, 69-94.
- Schell, L. A. B. & Duncan, M. C. (1999). A content analysis of CBS's coverage of the 1996 Paralympic Games. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 16, 27-47.
- Scraton, S. & Flintoff, A. (1992). Feminist research and physical education. In A. C. Sparkes (ed.), *Research in Physical Education and Sport: Exploring Alternative Visions* (pp. 167-187). London: Falmer Press.
- Shakespeare, T. (1993). Disabled people's self-organisation: a new social movement. *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 8(3), 249-264.
- Shakespeare, T. (1994). Cultural representations of disabled people: dustbins for disavowal. *Disability & Society*, 9(3), 283-301.
- Shakespeare, T. (1996a). Disability, identity and difference. In C. Barnes & Mercer, G. (eds.). *Exploring the Divide* (pp.94-113). Leeds: The disability press.
- Shakespeare, T. (1996b). Power and prejudice: issues of gender, sexuality and disability. In L. Barnes (eds.), *Disability and Society: Emerging Issues and Insights* (pp.191-214). London: Longman.
- Shakespeare, T. & Watson, N. (1997). Defending the social model. *Disability and Society*, 12(2), 293-300.
- Sharkey, P. (1996). Equal rights. *Recreation*, 55(8), 31-33.
- Sherrill, C. (1993). Women with disability, Paralympics, and reasoned action contact theory. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 2(2), 51-60.
- Sherrill, C. & Rainbolt, W. J. (1986). Sociological perspectives of cerebral palsy sports. *Palaestra*, 2(4), 20-23; 25-26.
- Sherrill, C. & Williams, T. (1996). Disability and sport: psychosocial perspectives on inclusion, integration, and participation. *Sport Science Review*, 5(1), 42-64. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

- Sheu, T. W. & Wu, S. S. (1999). The current status and future directions in education of students with disabilities. *Journal of Special Education*, 13, 179-219. National Changhua University of Education, Changhua, Taiwan, R.O.C.
- Shilling, C. (1993). *The Body and Social Theory*. London: Sage.
- Shu, D. L. (1996). *Current Status and Opinions on Special Physical Education in Taiwan Junior High Schools: a Survey Study*. Unpublished master thesis. National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei.
- Siann, G., Calaghan, M., Lockhart, R. & Rawson, L. (1993). Bullying: teacher's views and school effects. *Educational Studies*, 19, 307-321.
- Simeonsson, R.J., Carlson, D., Huntington, G.S., McMillen, J. S. & Brent, L. J. (2001). Students with disabilities: a national survey of participation in school activities. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 3(2), 49-63.
- Smith, A. & Twomey, B. (2002). Labour market experiences of people with disabilities. *Labour Market Trends*, August, 110(8), 41-427. ([http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/labour\\_market\\_trends/People\\_with\\_disabilities\\_aug2002.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/labour_market_trends/People_with_disabilities_aug2002.pdf)) accessed 15/09/2004.
- Smith, L. M. (1994). Biographical method. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp.286-305). London: Sage.
- Sports Council. (1993). *People with Disabilities and Sport: Policy and Current Planned Action*. London: Sports council.
- Sport England (2001). *Disability Survey 2000: Young People with a Disability and Sport – Headline Findings*. London: Sport England.
- Stanley, L. (1990). *Feminist Praxis: Research, Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology*. London: Routledge.
- Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N.K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 236-247). London: Sage Publications.**
- Stephan, W. G. & Brigham, J. C. (1985). Intergroup contact: introduction. *Journal of Social Issues*, 41(3), 1-8.
- Stewart, D., Robinson, J. A., & McCarthy, D. (1991). Participation in deaf sport: Characteristics of elite deaf athletes. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 8(2), 136-145.
- Stone, E. & Priestley, M. (1996). Parasites, pawns and partners: disability research and the role of the non-disabled researcher. *British Journal of Sociology*, 47(4),

699-716.

Stone, S. D. (1995). The myth of bodily perfection. *Disability & Society*, 10(4), 413-423.

Stroot, S. A. (2002). Socialisation and participation in sport. In A. Laker (ed.), *The Sociology of Sport and Physical Education: an Introductory Reader* (pp. 129-147). London: Routledge Falmer.

Sung, P. Y. & Keh, N. C. (2002). *Perception of and Attitudes towards Inclusive Adapted Physical Education: Pre-service Elementary Teachers with Different Background*. The 44th International Council for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance World Congress. June 26-29, Taipei, Taiwan.

Swain, J. & Cameron, C. (1999). Unless otherwise stated: discourses of labelling and identity in coming out. In M. Corker & S. French (eds.) *Disability Discourse* (pp.68-78). Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Swain, J. French, S. & Cameron, C. (2003). *Controversial Issues in a Disabling Society*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Sweeting, H. & West, P. (2001). Being different: correlates of the experience of teasing and bullying at age 11. *Research Papers in Education*, 16(3), 225-246.

Taipei Representative Office in the UK website Taipei Representative Office in the UK website: (<http://www.roc-taiwan.org.uk/taiwan/5-gp/brief>)

Taiwan Federation of the Disabled (2001). *Life Circumstances Report of People With Disabilities in 2001*. (<http://www.enable.org.tw/res/res2001.htm>) accessed 15/09/2004.

Taub, D. & Greer, K. R. (2000). Physical activity as a normalizing experience for school-age children with physical disabilities. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 24(4), 395-414.

The League of Welfare Organization for Disabled (LWOD), R.O.C. (2001). *Report on Circumstances of People with Disabilities in 2002*. (<http://www.enable.org.tw/res/res2001.htm>) accessed 05/01/04.

The Paralympian online (2000) no.4  
(<http://www.paralympic.org/paralympian/20004/2000401.htm>) accessed 01/08/04'.

The Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (1976). *Fundamental Principles of Disability*. London: Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation.

- Thomas, C. (1999). *Female Forms: Experiencing and Understanding Disability*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Thomas, C. (2002). The 'disabled' body. In M. Evans & E. Lee (ed.). *Real Bodies: A Sociological Introduction* (pp. 64-78). Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Thomas, J. R. & Nelson, J. K. (1990). *Research Methods in Physical Activity*. Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics Books.
- Thomas, N. (2003). Sport and disability. In B. Houlihan (Eds.). *Sport and Society: a Student Introduction*, (pp. 105-124). London: Sage Publications.
- Thomas, N. & Green, K. (1994). Physical education teacher education and the 'special needs' of youngsters with disabilities – the need to confront PETE's attitude problem. *The British Journal of Physical Education*, 26-30.
- Thomas, N. & Smith, A. (2003). Preoccupied with able-bodiedness? An analysis of the British media coverage of the 2000 Paralympic Games. *Physical Activity Quarterly*, 20, 166-181.
- Tregaskis, C. (2002). Social model theory: the story so far. *Disability & Society*, 17(4), 457-470.
- Tsang, T. (2000). Let me tell you a story: a narrative exploration of identity in high-performance sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17, 44-59.
- Turner, B. (1996). *The Body and Society*. London: Sage.
- Tzeng, C. D. (2004). Give the stage back to Paralympic athletes. *United News* 19/09/2004.
- UK Athletics website (<http://www.ukathletics.net>)
- UK National Statistics website (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>)
- UK Sport. (2000). *WCPP Leavers*. London: UK Sport.
- UK Sport Annual Report, 2002-2003. London: UK Sport.
- UK Sport website (<http://www.uksport.gov.uk>)
- Veal, A. J. (1997). *Research Methods for Leisure and Tourism: a Practical Guide*. London: Pitman.

- Vickerman, P., Hayes, S., & Whetherly, A. (2003). Special educational needs and national curriculum physical education. In S. Hayes & G. Stidder (ed.). *Equity and Inclusion in Physical Education and Sport: Contemporary Issues for Teachers, Trainees, and Practitioners* (pp. 47-64). London: Routledge.
- Wagner, E. A. (1989). *Sport in Asia and Africa: a Comparative Handbook*. London: Greenwood Press.
- Wang, C. T. (2001). *The Rewarding Policy for Elite Athletes in Taiwan – National Guo-guang Sports Award*. Unpublished master thesis. National Ping-Tung Teachers College, Taiwan, R.O.C.
- Ward, L. W. & Flynn, M. (1994). What matters most: disability, research and empowerment. In M. Rioux & B. Bach (eds.). *Disability is not Measles: New Research in Disability* (pp. 29-47). Canada: Roeher Institute.
- Warnock, M. (1978). *Meeting Special Educational Needs: a Brief Guide by Mrs Mary Warnock to the Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Education of Handicapped Children and Young People / (for the) Department of Education and Science (and) Scottish Education Department (and) Welsh Office*. London: H.M.S.O.
- Watson, N. (1998). Enabling identity: disability, self and citizenship. In T. Shakespeare (ed.), *The Disability Reader* (pp.147-162). London: Cassell.
- Watson, N. (2002). Well, I know this is going to sound very strange to you, but I don't see myself as a disabled person: identity and disability. *Disability & Society*, 15(5), 509-527.
- Weeks, J. (1990). The value of difference. In J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (pp.88-100). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Weiss, O. (2001). Identity reinforcement in sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38(4), 393-405.
- Wendell, S. (1996). *The Rejected Body*. London: Routledge.
- Wilkinson, P.F. (1984). Providing integrated play environments for disabled children: A design or attitude problem? *Journal of Leisurability*, 11, 9-16.
- Williams, S. & Bendelow, G. (1998). *The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues*. London: Routledge.
- Wilson, M. (1996). Asking questions. In R. Sapsford & V. Jupp (eds.), *Data Collection and Analysis* (pp.94-120). London: Sage.

Yin, R.K. (1994). *Case Study Research, Design and Methods*. London: Sage Publications.

Zarb, G. (1992). On the road to Damascus: first steps toward changing the relations of disability research production. *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 7(2), 125-138.