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Examining 'Inspiration': Perspectives of Stakeholders Attending a Power Wheelchair Soccer Tournament

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Abstract

Athletes with disabilities are commonly referred to as *inspirational* or *inspiring* (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001). Spectators report feeling inspired watching people with disabilities engage in sport (Cottingham et al., 2014). However, others argue that marketing disability sport as inspirational is problematic. Hardin and Hardin (2004a) and Hargreaves and Hardin (2009) determined that wheelchair basketball players were aware, and concerned, that spectators perceived them as inspirational due to the presence of their disabilities. To further understand inspiration in disability sport contexts, this study explored the concept of inspiration from numerous perspectives on a population with less physiological function than the subjects of the Hardin and Hargreaves' studies. Employing a qualitative case study design, we sought to understand power soccer stakeholders' (e.g., athletes and their parents, spectators and event organizers) perspectives of inspiration as a way to describe the sport and its athletes. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with power soccer stakeholders and three power soccer websites at the league, national, and international levels. The findings revealed that most spectators, including parents, believed it was appropriate to describe power soccer and its athletes as inspirational. However, most athletes and event organizers believed this type of representation was inappropriate. Our findings indicate athletes with disabilities may not believe they are inspirational and have reservations to be labeled as such, but that inspiration can be a marketing tool to audiences in disability sport because it connects people emotionally to a previously unknown event. Governing bodies should consider using inspiration as a marketing tool to generate support beyond existing stakeholders.

Keywords
Disability sport; Sport promotion; Power Soccer; Wheelchair Soccer; Familial support

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Introduction

In its most recent publicly produced strategic plan, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) stated, "Paralympic Games has placed Paralympic sports more than ever under the spotlight …" (2010, p. 9). Resultantly, the IPC has gained additional resources and opportunities to promote the Paralympic Games. However, the IPC acknowledged there are "an insufficient number of competition opportunities and events for athletes at the local and regional level in order to gain ranking points and also to be classified before they reach the Paralympic Games level … organizations lack the resources, administrative experience, or competencies to support home-grown athletes and officials …" (p. 9). Clearly, a discrepancy exists in the level of resources from the international level compared to local and regional levels. One way to generate additional resources for these underserved populations is to better understand how to promote disability sport.

Historically, elite-level disability sport was promoted nationally and internationally as an inspirational trope, referred to by academics as the supercrip image (Hardin & Hardin, 2005). This inspirational trope focuses on an athlete's story and disability, rather than focusing on more mainstream sporting characteristics such as athleticism. Research shows that athletes with disabilities have serious reservations related to being perceived as inspirational (Hardin &

Hardin, 2004b; Hardin & Hardin, 2005; Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009), while spectators tend to have mixed reactions to the supercrip image (Cottingham et al, 2014; Cottingham, Byon, Chatfield, & Carroll, 2013). Since this research focused on athletes with only lower extremity disability, what we know about athletes' and spectators' perspectives on those with more severe disabilities is unknown.

Recently, elite-level disability sport has steered away from inspirational promotions and, instead, focused on the athletes' athleticism and abilities (Cottingham, Gearity, & Byon, 2013). However, no research exists on athletes' and spectators' perspectives of those with more impactful disabilities who participate in regional and local disability sport. It is important to understand localized perspectives in order to more effectively provide recommendations for the following reasons: to attract sponsors who can provide value to investors for these underfunded sports, to examine disability sport from a less elite perspective, and to gain greater knowledge from an underrepresented portion of the disability community.

Disability Sport Promotion

We identified four distinct research lines on the promotion and marketing of disability sport. First, scholars use a social justice approach to argue society has an ethical obligation to support disability sport (Eleftheriou, 2005; Fay, 2011; Hums, 2002; Hums, Moorman, & Wolff, 2003). To address this obligation, the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) incorporated the Paralympic brand, and countries such as Canada and Great Britain provide substantial funding to Paralympic programs. Social justice approaches have also assisted national and international disability sport organizations, such as the Canadian Paralympic Committee, gain funding through tax revenues. However, tax policies and the allocation of existing funds in the

United States and Canada have resulted in cuts to parks and recreation funding (Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation, 2012), once a primary source of funding for disability sport at the community-grassroots level.

The second line of research focuses on promoting athletes with disabilities in the media. Researchers noted that the disability is rarely presented, or is presented poorly, in non-adaptive media outlets as diverse as *Sports Illustrated for Kids* (Hardin, Hardin, Lynn, & Walsdorf, 2001), *Golf Magazine* (Maas & Hasbrook, 2001) and textbooks (Hardin & Hardin, 2004b). Researchers have also shown that the disability sport media outlet *Sports 'N Spokes Magazine* relies upon the supercrip or inspirational tropes rather than featuring a more robust view of athleticism (Hardin & Hardin, 2005).

The third line of research focuses on consumer behavior of disability sport. Evaggelinou and Grekinis (1998) showed that spectators at an international disability sport event fit Wann's classification of a fan, did not have a direct relationship to disability, and seldom had disabilities. Recent studies examining consumer motivation in national collegiate wheelchair basketball championships in the United States determined that surveys designed for non-adaptive sport could, with some modification, be applied effectively to examine consumer behavior in disability sport (Byon, Cottingham, & Carroll, 2010; Cottingham et al., 2013).

The fourth line of research related to disability sport promotion focuses on athletes' perspectives of the media's portrayal of disability sport. Hardin and Hardin (2004a) and Hargreaves and Hardin (2009) determined elite-level athletes with disabilities believed they were often presented as supercrips and female athletes with disabilities believed they were objectified. No research has examined consumers' perspectives of the media's promotion of athletes with disabilities at the local level. By understanding consumers' perspectives, and comparing them to

athletes' perspectives, disability sport promoters may be able to develop effective strategies, while also respecting athletes' concerns on the use of inspirational tropes. Accordingly, the following section provides a brief review of the literature on supercrip and inspiration in order to provide working definitions of the terms.

Supercrip and Inspiration

Two dominant discourses on athletes with disabilities are the supercrip image and inspiration (Peers, 2012). Inspiration, as defined by Thrash and Elliott (2003), is an external experience that upon being internalized leads to behavior change. This external experience can be a vision, a person, or an action. Inspiration seems to be a cross-cultural phenomenon and occurs in varied settings (Avramenko, 2013). Research shows that inspired people demonstrate increased creativity (Thrash et al., 2010), happiness (Straume & Vittersø, 2012) and entrepreneurship (Yun & Yuan-qiong, 2010). While this research presents inspiration as an overwhelmingly positive experience, we have already identified research showing athletes with disabilities do not want to be labeled inspirational (Hardin & Hardin, 2004a; Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009).

A supercrip, according to Gliedman and Roth (1980), is a person with a disability who overcomes normal (i.e., able-bodied) expectations. Against all odds, the supercrip may heroically overcome their condition (Goggin & Newell, 2010) or may live life in a normal way (Kama, 2004). Hardin and Hardin (2004a) and Hargreaves and Hardin (2009) suggest that a supercrip is, by definition, inspirational. Providing some conceptual clarity on the use of these terms and their meanings, Cottingham et al. (2014) noted that a supercrip is not inherently inspiration. They argued that although spectators may report disability sport athletes as inspirational, the meaning

of their responses is more in line with the term and definition of supercrip. While spectators commented how inspirational disability sport athletes were and often used language like "overcoming," they failed to identify a change in their behavior. Additional research suggests that those who are inspired can only be inspired by those with whom they identify (Lockwood & Kunda, 1999). It is possible that if the disability is the point triggering inspiration, and the viewer is not disabled, then the experience is not truly inspirational. If instead, something other than the disability was the point of inspiration (i.e., she is a gritty soccer player), then a person without a disability could be inspired by a person with a disability.

Power Soccer

Power soccer is the fastest-growing sport for individuals who use motorized wheelchairs (United States Power Soccer Association, n.d.). The athletes' wheelchairs are fitted with various forms of guards, which are used to "kick" a 33-centimeter soccer ball. All chairs are governed at a maximum speed of 10 kilometers per hour. The sport is played four-on-four on a basketball court. Power soccer was not a Paralympic sport in 2012, but its governing body, the Federation Internationale de Powerchair Football Association, was pursuing inclusion at the time of this study. The United States has a national team**,** although Josh Pennington, program director of the Disabled Athletes Sports Association, explained that the vast majority of power soccer competition in the United States exists between community teams (J. Pennington, personal communication, 12 February, 2012). Community teams are organized by athletes, families, independent living centers, disability sport non-profit organizations, rehabilitation centers, or parks and recreation departments.

At the time of this study, the only studies conducted on power soccer focused on power chair driving and control (Kumar et al., 2012), participants' motives to engage (Wessel, Wentz, & Markle, 2011) and wheelchair maintenance (Zaidie, 2009). No research exists on the promotion of power soccer, or stakeholders' perspectives of inspiration.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of inspiration and its use in describing athletes with physical disabilities. This study specifically explored how the term inspiration was perceived by power soccer stakeholders. This included the perspective of a population with low physiological function (e.g., the athletes), as well as spectators and event planners. Researchers sought to understand this phenomenon by seeking the answer to a "how" question (Creswell, 2007, p. 107). The "how" question supports Creswell's explanation that qualitative research questions are "open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional" (p. 107). This concept was incorporated into this study's research question:

RQ: How do stakeholders of power soccer interpret the term inspiration, and its appropriate use within their sport?

Methods

This study adhered to Merriam's (2009) definition of case study where a bounded system was identified and investigated. Power soccer was the bounded system, and the different stakeholders were treated collectively as the unit of analysis. Researchers adhered to a constructivist paradigm which posits: people construct knowledge through their interactions within complex social worlds, the potential for multiple truths, and the purpose of research is to

describe, understand, and interpret human experience (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009).

Trustworthiness was achieved through data triangulation using interviews with athletes, spectators, and event organizers, as well as documents such as tournament and organization websites. It was important to identify and interview power soccer stakeholders with different affiliations to capture different perspectives and construct the most accurate portrayal of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The researchers served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). Additional details on the research sample selection, data collection and data analysis are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Sample

All athletes, spectators, and event organizers at a regular season power soccer tournament for a league in the Midwest United States were informed by event coordinators on speaker systems that data collection would be taking place during the tournament. Participants were solicited before and after tournament matches. The criterion for inclusion in the study was participants' self-identification as one of the following: athlete, spectator, or event organizer. Stakeholder sampling is typically used to identify individuals affected by a program or service and seeking evaluation (Palys, 2008).

The final sample consisted of 15 participants: seven spectators, six athletes and two event organizers. Five of the spectators self-identified as parents of athletes competing in the tournament. Seven participants were female and eight participants were male. Thirteen participants identified as white, and two participants identified as Hispanic. Six of the participants identified as having a physical disability, all of whom competed at the event.

Data Collection

Data were collected through digitally recorded interviews and documents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by one of the researchers or research assistants in February 2011 with participants at a regular-season power soccer tournament in the Midwest United States. Interview questions were developed to help answer the research question. For example, one question used, "What is your response to the term 'inspirational' in context of events like this?" was consistent with a case study design that seeks to collect unseen experiences such as feelings, thoughts, and intentions (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that brief qualitative interviews are permissible if they are "rich in meaning" (p. 162). Interviews were conducted with athletes, spectators, and event organizers between games during the tournament setting. A second researcher transcribed and analyzed the data.

Document analysis was conducted on three power soccer websites: (1) fipfa.org, the international governing body of power soccer website; (2) powersoccerusa.net, the governing body of U.S. power soccer website; and (3) dasasports.org, the power soccer event website. These websites allowed the researchers to examine how the organizations talked about and promoted power soccer. One of the researchers analyzed each of the websites.

Data Analysis

Two forms of data analysis were used in this study. The constant comparative method was used for data analysis of the interview transcripts and ethnographic content analysis was

used for data analysis of the documents. Constant comparative method compares "one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 30). Data were then grouped based on similar qualities and assigned a category to identify patterns or themes. Each theme was combined with similar themes within each group to avoid redundancy with the aim of understanding how power soccer stakeholders interpreted inspiration in relation to their sport (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The websites served as documents for this study, and data from each were analyzed using ethnographic content analysis to "document and understand the communication of meaning" so that the researchers could better understand the messages (Altheide, 1987, p. 68). A topical guide was created to organize data from the three websites to explore the ways in which the sport of power soccer was explained, the framing of the athletes, the framing of the sport, and the promotion of the sport. The topical guide served as a means of constructing themes within the websites, which were then positioned with data from the interviews to construct the findings.

Findings

In general, the meaning of inspiration differed amongst stakeholder groups, but showed similarities within groups. Spectators stated that the power soccer athletes were inspirational to them and others, while the athletes diverged on whether they supported inspiration as a term used to describe themselves. Event organizers said that describing the athletes as inspirational may not be appropriate. The differences in expectations were highlighted by comments from Althea, a parent of a power soccer athlete:

> … [W]hen people perceive an athlete as having less skill or less ability, they see that as something they have to overcome, and therefore work past to achieve success in any given sport or field. So I think able-bodied people perceive that as

> inspiration. … I would think that people who have disabilities don't see that as inspiration. They just see it as their life. It's what they've got to do.

Althea's explanation exemplified a split between the perspectives of spectators and the perspectives of those individuals more closely involved with the sporting event (e.g., athletes and event organizers). The remaining sections describe how the participants explained their perspectives on whether inspiration was an appropriate way to describe power soccer athletes.

Inspirational

The seven spectators, which included family members and general fans at a regional power soccer tournament, said that inspiration was an appropriate term to describe athletes with disabilities at the event. Two of the six athletes said they understood how others view athletic performances as inspirational, and they, in fact, view other athletes as inspirational. The findings that supported inspiration were based on three themes: greater challenges, lower expectations and athlete-to-athlete.

Greater challenges. Six spectators said that athletes with disabilities faced greater challenges than able-bodied athletes, which resulted in their appreciation for athletic achievements. With regard to their appreciation for the athletic accomplishments within daily living, Neil said, "Living for them in general is just more difficult. Our son is disabled, and I know that for a fact when he can achieve something, it is a greater achievement … It's just easier for able-bodied people, life in general." Consistently, the athletes' achievements were highly regarded because of their disability and the extra effort they put into preparation and competition. For example, Hugh stated, "You have to work harder for it, so I think that's why it's so inspiring—or people tag it to that—because there's more to overcome than just being

good at it." Among the spectators, there was an assumption that athletes faced a more difficult road to success considering the daily challenges presented by a disability, as well as the trials of athletic training and competition. In summary, participants perceived the accomplishments of the athletes to be inspirational because of daily living challenges they also faced.

A direct comparison to able-bodied individuals was also made when spectators discussed daily living challenges of the athletes. "People come to watch these kids and they're able-bodied [the spectators], and they're like, 'Wow, if they can do that, that's my inspiration.'" Neil added that, "For me, it's like, if he can do it then I have no excuses not to. So for me, it's motivational." The spectators identified the athletes as inspirational because they challenged the spectators' own perception of abilities. Therefore, the successes of the athletes with disabilities were viewed as overcoming greater challenges than those faced by able-bodied athletes, which in turn supported the notion that the public had low expectations of success for the athletes with disabilities.

Low expectations. Spectators expressed "shock value" when they saw the athletes performing. "People think they can't do anything, but they'll surprise you. To me, that's inspirational," said Lance. Although meant to be a compliment toward the athletes' achievements, it also established a low-baseline of success. In other words, the expectations of athletic success are lower for people with disabilities than for people without disabilities, and the fact that they can do anything athletically in relation to able-bodied athletes is perceived as a surprise.

Athletes acknowledged that spectators, including family members, set low expectations for them. Cody, one of the power soccer athletes, said low expectations exist "because I think people without disabilities tend to assume people with disabilities have a lower quality of life or can't do as much. So when they're surprised, they're like, 'Oh wow, what an inspiration.'" Cody

connected the establishment of low expectations resulting in the labeling of achievements as inspirational. Lenore, a spectator, reinforced that the athletic achievements progress the athletes from their low-baseline of expected success:

> Anybody that can overcome any kind of physical or mental disability and be able to compete in a sport or get an education, to be able to provide a source of income or sustain themselves, I think that is where inspiration comes from. These people are not of the normal physical and mental attributes in that they have taken themselves to a different level.

Lenore said the athletes are not normal because they go beyond what other individuals achieve by compensating for their respective disabilities while also succeeding at their sport. This description was similar to others in that it acknowledged positive attributes of the athletes, but again reinforced a sense of normalcy that remained unchallenged and set low expectations for people with disabilities.

Athlete-to-athlete. Three of the athletes acknowledged that they were in fact inspirational or were at least neutral to the term, and those athletes said they were new to power soccer or disability sport. The athletes said their performances are impactful for their family members because the family members were exposed to watching the athletes accomplish things they may normally not do at home, but they used inspiration to also describe other athletes against whom they compete.

Darryl said other athletes could be inspirational to him by challenging him to improve. Darryl explained, "When you see somebody with a disability that might be worse than your own, it's an inspiration to you to go on and do better." Darryl's comments were similar to the perspectives of spectators. For many of the spectators, the athletes with disabilities were in a worse physical condition than themselves, and therefore were perceived as inspirational due to what was perceived as a greater physical disability.

Additionally, the three athletes acknowledged they were inspired by the athletic performances to improve upon activities in other aspects of their lives. Ashlee explained:

> It inspires us just to be able to compete because of our disabilities. It inspires us to develop the social skills that we have. It inspires us to have independence and freedom. When you're with this group of people, there is no disability. You don't see disability. You only see the abilities and what we can do. I think it's truly an inspiration because I might see someone who has the same disability and may handle a certain situation and be like, OK, now I have a new way of handling it.

The following conversation with Alana supported the comments by Darryl and Ashlee:

Researcher:	Do you think inspiration exists from a person who is disabled to another person who is disabled?
Alana:	Totally. Totally. I mean, those people here that are 10 times better than me; watching them I pick up skills and ideas from them. They inspire me to want to be better so I can improve our team.
Researcher:	Does that mean you also think you're an inspiration to other people?
Alana:	I mean, I could be—be it other people with disabilities, parents or other people. I very well could be.

It is important to note that the three athletes who said other athletes inspired them also directly tied inspiration to specific benefits. For example, the athletes said inspiration existed because (a) watching other athletes inspired them to increase their own performances and (b) athletic performance inspired them to achieve greater goals beyond athletics. The athletes were specific with how they were inspired, whereas the spectators offered general statements of inspiration due to athletes overcoming greater challenges and lower expectations. The spectators failed to identify specific ways in which they were inspired.

Non-Inspirational

Four of the six athletes and the two event organizers said inspiration was not an appropriate term to describe their athletic accomplishments because the athletes were achieving

their expectations in many cases, although they may be exceeding the expectations of others. The responses were categorized into two themes: degrading and intent.

Degrading. Athletes and event organizers said that using the term inspiration to describe their performances was degrading to the athletes and their accomplishments. "… [F]or me, working with people with disabilities my whole life, inspiration seems to be when people think, 'Awww, isn't that great,' or, 'Isn't that neat that they're doing that.' It's kind of downplaying, actually," said Max, who was an event organizer. He went on to explain that inspiration is an action word, that if someone is inspired then they are moved to go and do something similar. The explanation offered by Max connects to the low-baseline of expectation, which was offered by spectators who were surprised by athletic achievements. Whereas spectators expressed appreciation for those athletic achievements and labeled it as inspirational, athletes and event organizers both suggested that such praise is degrading because it reinforced the notion that such achievement was never expected. Both athletes and event organizers said they wanted their sport and athletic achievements to be respected for athleticism rather than a feel-good story.

Alana further commented that labeling overcoming low expectations as inspirational degrades athletes:

> Well, I don't like the word to mean that people think it's amazing that people with disabilities are being successful playing soccer. It should be happening. So some people who lack information knowledge might see that as an inspiration. To me, that person lacks a knowledge in that disability … it just humiliates me. That's why I'm not a big fan of people with disabilities inspiring other people. It's used in the wrong context.

Alana, who is an athlete, suggested that the expectation should, in fact, be that people with disabilities participate in sport and that overly praising the achievements can be, in her words, "humiliating." In summary, the athletes and event organizers suggested that overly praising

common and regular athletic achievements as if they were never expected is degrading to the athlete and to his or her accomplishments.

Intent. Evidence from document analysis revealed the websites sent messages to portray athletes as competitors rather than as inspirational. For example, the Federation Internationale de Powerchair Football Association (FIPFA) website for the sport's international governing body was arranged like a news site, presenting sponsor information, educational information on the sport, and news from recent events. One section explains the sport of power soccer through videos and photographs without telling the viewer how those images should be interpreted (e.g., as inspirational). A section of the website called "The Game" delivers educational information in objective language about basic principles of power soccer: "Powerchair Football is a team sport played in a power wheelchair that respects the same rules as football …" This objective language is comparable to what may be seen on any soccer website explaining the sport. Additionally, the United States Power Soccer Association (USPSA) website uses objective language to explain the game directly on the homepage, mentioning the types of disabilities that athletes may have but focusing the remainder of the paragraph on logistics of the game: "Two teams of four players attack, defend, and spin-kick a 13-inch soccer ball in a skilled and challenging game similar to able-bodied soccer." Framing the sport as an exciting event focused on athletic skill repositions the fact that athletes with disabilities are participating. Disability, then, becomes secondary to the competition and skill. Similarly, the Disabled Athlete Sports Association (DASA) was the event website and focused on promoting the event as well as framing athletes with disabilities as athletes first. Again, the language was objective and free from emotion: "DASA currently offers 3 Power Soccer teams varying from recreational to highly competitive." The simple choice of

using descriptive words rather than emotionally charged words reinforces the intent to promote the competition and athletes rather than their stories of disability.

USPSA explains its goals to promote the game as one where all people with disabilities "who use power wheelchairs will have the opportunity to play and experience power soccer." The wording does not downplay the competitive nature of the sport. In fact, such qualities are emphasized by USPSA in that the sport "is a team sport that helps build character through teamwork, communication, hard work, perseverance, good sportsmanship." Similar to wording that was found to explain the sport, such language could be located on any competitive recreational league no matter the sport or level of ability.

While consumer interpretations of messages were beyond the scope of this study, the researchers interpreted the intent of the messages to be focused on governance of the sport, specific events and educating viewers about the sport. This observation was important because it stood in direct contradiction to how spectators described the athletes. Whereas the websites, event organizers and a majority of the athletes themselves intended for power soccer and the competitors to be viewed for their athletic achievements, spectators did not appear to be receiving that message clearly and instead viewed the athletes as inspirational.

Athletes said they never intended to be inspirational. They said participating in their sport was simply part of their lives just as able-bodied individuals may run, bike or play basketball. Still, athletes recognized that able-bodied individuals associated the term "inspirational" with disability sport. "I think because people that don't have disabilities probably look and think, 'Wow, it would be really hard to have to go through something like that or live that way,' or, 'Boy, they have a lot to overcome,'" said Rae. Other participants supported the statement that able-bodied individuals may believe that disability presents its own difficulties that are well

beyond the challenges of sport competition. Yet, the athletes said their disability was no different than any other challenge able-bodied athletes face outside the field of competition. "It's seen as overcoming an adversity, whereas, even though that's true, the way I look at it, everyone has a thorn in their side. … The difference is that ours is just visible to the naked eye," said Rae. The explanation presented by Rae was that able-bodied athletes do not aim to be inspirational; they aim to compete. She continued: "I think the majority of people with disabilities would say that we're really not inspirational at all. We're just people living and playing a sport like anybody else." The athletes and event organizers who said inspiration was not an appropriate way to describe athletic achievements explained that athletes with disabilities have the same desires and seek to be portrayed similarly to able-bodied athletes. Therefore, they believed that being portrayed as inspirational undermined their accomplishments on the athletic field.

Discussion and Conclusion

Athletes' and Event Coordinators' Perspectives

Hardin and Hardin (2004a) and Hargreaves and Hardin (2009) explain that most of the wheelchair basketball players in their studies resented or did not appreciate being perceived as inspirational supercrips. The findings in this study indicate that while a majority of the power soccer athletes have reservations about how people identify with disability sport as being inspirational, a minority of the athletes either identify themselves neutrally or positively with the term inspiration. As noted previously, participants of power soccer have more physical limitations than the athletes in the Hardin and Hargreaves studies, which may be a factor in being less averse to the inspirational moniker.

However, it is also possible that athletes at the community level are more open to being labeled as inspirational because they are exposed less frequently to the term inspiration than their more elite counterparts. Silva and Howe (2012) recognize that the supercrip as an inspirational image is frequently used in the context of Paralympic athletics. Paralympic athletes, such as the athletes in the Hargreaves and Hardin studies, are competing at elite levels. However, their stories are often told with supercrip imagery that enhances their performances as bigger than life. While some of the subjects in this study were highly competitive, none were members of the U.S. national team, which may have resulted in less contact with the supercrip image and decreased awareness or resistance to the inspiration label.

While national team members may be used to media publicity that includes inspirational and supercrip stories, the athletes in this study were not exposed in this manner and therefore likely had fewer experiences of being portrayed or described as inspirational. In addition, some athletes with disabilities competing at the local level may be open to being portrayed and understood as an inspiration because this strategy is a tool to promote their respective sport. For example, a media report of a local power soccer tournament offers greater exposure for the athletes and the sports even if such a report is saturated with inspiration and supercrip imagery. For these athletes, exposure, and the resulting additional resources, sponsorship, and support, may be of greater importance than their preference of not being labeled as inspirational (Cottingham et al., 2013).

Still, many of the athletes, and both event coordinators, noted that power soccer players were not inspirational, that the term was misused, or that the individuals using the term were not educated about disability. These statements were consistent with the findings from Hardin and

Hardin (2004a) and Hargreaves and Hardin (2009) who noted athletes with disabilities expressed a number of concerns related to being perceived as supercrips.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, some of the athletes reflected that that they were comfortable being inspirations to other people with disabilities. These findings are consistent with Berger's assertion that athletes with disabilities believe that other people with disabilities can respect them and be inspired by them, but the general public uses inspiration as objectification. These findings reflect the "like inspire like" theory posed by Lockwood and Kunda (1999). Specifically, genuine inspiration means that there must be identification of self in the source providing the inspiration. This explanation might be the crux of differentiation between supercrip paternalism, which frustrated the athletes, and a more genuine form of inspiration. Fiske et al. (2002) note that people with disabilities are generally liked, but not seen as competent. The lack of competency seems to be noted from the people with disabilities who recognize that they are being seen paternalistically when they are noted as inspirational. To address this issue in sport, it would be more appropriate to promote factors traditionally identified in sport such as ability and athleticism (Cottingham et al., 2014). This respect might help the evolution from supercrip inspiration to a more socially desirable form of inspiration.

Spectators' Perspectives

All spectators identified the relationship between inspiration and the athletes as a positive one. The findings of this study support existing research that posits the supercrip image as inspirational (Clogston, 1994; Goggin & Newell, 2010; Silva & Howe, 2012). The findings of this study provide empirical evidence demonstrating the connection of inspirational imagery to disability.

Perhaps the most noticeable findings of this study are the differences in perspectives between spectators and athletes. Although both parties support disability sport through attendance or participation, their experiences of power soccer and inspiration vary in significant ways. Furthermore, the event spectators who participated in this study may in fact be engaging in a form of ableism or prejudice against disability, rather than advocating against ableism, as Neely-Barnes et al. (2010) contend that individuals in the support systems of people with disabilities might actually do. Ryan and Cole (2009) note that individuals with a relationship to disability become advocates for people with disabilities. The current study, however, suggests they may still engage in a form of ableism by focusing on athlete inspiration rather than athleticism or related components of the sport. This finding is supported in part by Brittain (2004) who noted that those close to disability may still have problematic perceptions of disability because they provide assistance or service to those with disabilities. If the majority of the current spectators of power soccer have personal relationships to the athletes, then these viewers might not have the perspective to appreciate the players' abilities because they are focused on inspirational activities.

The current study may have identified one reason explaining why community-based disability sport has not been well received or supported within the United States. According to Khoo, Surujlal, and Engelhorn (2011), friends and family members often assist in promoting disability sport. However, if they are invested in an inspirational athlete focus, then they may be consciously or subconsciously promoting strategies shown to be ineffective by Cottingham et al. (2014), specifically the inspiration and the supercrip imagery. Poor promotional strategies could adversely impact the spectatorship of community disability sport. Investing in promotion can insure greater sponsorship and community support, which in turn can fund greater participation.

In short, greater spectatorship can mean more resources for participation acquisition. These findings would seem to indicate that the inspirational supercrip trope still has a place in regional power soccer, as it is an experiential motivation for spectators. That being said, the transition should quickly change from an inspirational trope to an athletic one. In non-disability sport contexts, this change is referred to as changing a spectator to a fan, or low identification to high identification (Wann & Pierce, 2005).

This research is consistent with other studies that show the supercrip image is ingrained in spectators' minds (Cottingham et al., 2013; Cottingham et al., 2014) but also supports findings that athletes have reservations with the objectification of the supercrip image (Hardin & Hardin, 2004a; Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009). For these reasons, inspirational promotional efforts should be used initially, but sparingly. As recommended by Cottingham, Gearity, and Byon (2013), who conducted research on international disability sport promotion, inspiration can be used as a hook and then give way to athleticism, game style, athlete statistics, education on the sport and more traditional components of consumer behavior. Inspiration may be an effective pull, but the aforementioned research notes that it does not drive long-term consumption.

We would like to briefly note that what is identified inaccurately as inspiration may, in fact, be praising emotions such as elevation or admiration (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). In essence, the trope of inspiration is so ingrained that the term inspiration may be used when simply admiration exists. The greater issue is that admiration is not as marketable to spectators (Maher, Clark, & Maher, 2010) as inspiration or athleticism (Cottingham et al., 2014).

Limitations and Future Research

As an exploratory qualitative study with a sample of 15 participants, the findings of this study should be viewed cautiously and are not meant to be generalizable. In addition, this study only included power soccer stakeholders from one tournament. Future studies should consider sampling those stakeholders from multiple tournaments in multiple regions, levels of play, or expanding to various sports for people with physical disabilities to examine any differences or similarities that may exist. Participants were interviewed between six and 15 minutes due to the setting of the power soccer tournament. Shorter interviews are permissible if they result in rich data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, in the future, lengthier interviews may capture more unanticipated data as each participant reflects on their involvement with disability sport. Such limitations may be overcome in future studies through prolonged engagement and expanding the sample.

It is essential to explain that these findings are what were captured at this particular point in time during a specific setting, where the researchers may have indirectly shaped participants' responses. While we acknowledge that bias is present in all research, it is worth noting that the participants did not know the researchers, and the researchers were introduced to the participants by an event organizer. One researcher who had a mobility impairment that was visible to participants (e.g., use of a wheelchair) collected data and was accompanied by either one or two students who did not have visible disabilities. The presence of disability may have shaped the participants' responses, and we acknowledge that as a limitation. In future studies, it may be beneficial to collect data with the researcher having an impairment and with the researcher not having an impairment and compare results.

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