

**“I had to pop a wheelie and pay extra attention in order not to fall:” Embodied
Experiences of Two Wheelchair Tennis Athletes Transgressing Ableist and Gendered
Norms in Disability Sport and University Spaces**

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Abstract

When bodies move in certain contexts, it can mean very different things for different people. In our society, some bodies are more valued than others, and detrimentally, this can mean that certain types of bodies are ostracized and segregated to the outskirts of production economies and society. Dis/ability sport spaces, able-bodied sports spaces and able-bodied university spaces have been an under-researched area when considering how the body moves throughout these spaces for elite wheelchair athletes taking part in university courses. To learn more, this paper drew on feminist poststructuralism and new materialist perspectives and shared an insight into how two athletes with dis/abilities transgressed abled and gendered norms in different spaces and how they positioned themselves as athletic bodies and disabled bodies in these spaces. Employing a post-critical ethnographic design, we found that dependent on the space a dis/abled body is in constant flux as to when it feels marginalised and different (typically able-bodied spaces) and when it feels included, valued, and strong (typically dis/abled spaces). Significantly, the materiality of the institutional structures of universities, founded upon historic aesthetics of beauty dictated the physical spaces the athletes entered and created spaces of exclusion based on capitalist and ableist ideologies.

Keywords: dis/ability, wheelchair tennis, bodies, feminist poststructuralism, new materialism, ableism, space

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“A norm is something that can be inhabited. I think of a norm as rather like a room or a dwelling: as giving residence to bodies” (Ahmed 2017, 115).

Introduction

Bodies have taken on a broader social context, whereby those that do not conform to the status quo are excluded/segregated (Giese and Ruin 2016). Thus, normative categories are dangerous for ‘abnormal’ bodies and exclusive to the privileged, such as those that are able-bodied. Bodies are subjects that negotiate power relations and dominant discourses (Azzarito and Solmon 2006), for example, ‘different’ bodies have dissimilar values placed on them and can be seen as undesirable and negative (Fitzgerald 2005). Different bodies are considered to have a dis/ability; this term is historically situated, has evolved, is a fluid subjective state, and is a means to identify (Author 2019). Within the context of this paper, the word dis/ability has been used throughout for several reasons: it disrupts the binary (ability and disability), it serves as a reminder of the perceived inferiority and negative relationship between the terms (Fitzgerald 2005), and it highlights the need to understand ability and dis/ability as joint entities in combination with each other (Goodley 2014).

Dis/ability is still viewed as an abnormality today (Erevelles 2014), and People with a Dis/ability (PwD) have generally been placed at the lowest part of the production economy. Otherwise known as the capitalist society, which ‘develops modes of production that make labour a commodity to be sold in the market’ (Goodley 2011, 61), this type of production excludes PwD’s from taking part in specific types of economic activities (Erevelles 2000; Goodley 2011). ‘The broken body intrudes social consciousness, becoming a reminder of illness and fragility that is unwanted’ (Ahmed 2017, 184), reproducing ableist perspectives in society. Ableism (ableist perspectives) positively values able-bodiedness and ‘renders

disability as abject, invisible, disposable, less than human, while able-bodiedness is represented as at once ideal, normal and the mean or default' (Dolmage 2017, 7).

Consequently, ableism is oppressive and seeks to regulate, discipline, and categorise bodies (Erevelles 2000); moreover, ableism maintains the status quo that the productive body is one that 'fully works'.

Ableism is a sociocultural view tied to neoliberalism (Giese and Ruin 2016), and bodies become consumers of capitalism (Goodley 2014). This cycle is reproduced by education systems, the initial place where bodies become formally normalised and forced to receive separate and unequal educations (Azzarito and Solmon 2006; Erevelles 2000). Those deviant in terms of dis/ability, race, and class become social outlaws in school and beyond (Erevelles 2014); thus, inaccessibility is inherently part of structural and social habits (Ahmed 2017).

Importantly, ability is intersectional and does not just influence a person independently but in conjunction with other oppressors (Author 2019). In this paper, both physical education (PE) and elite sport experiences are important for the development of participants' embodied identities. Sport is one place that has habitually rendered the traditional idea that physical activity is an able-bodied activity (DePauw 1997) and dis/ability sport has been considered to amplify the segregated nature of sports (Giese and Ruin 2016). Additionally, PE can overtly focus on physical components, where a specific type of physicality is reinforced and celebrated (Fitzgerald 2005). This ensures the exclusion of certain types of bodies in PE, where dominant conceptions of ability are above question and lack criticality. Research specifically investigating PwD in PE has largely been negative, suggesting that PE is an area where dis/abilities are hyper-visible, and experiences are painful/troublesome due to being segregated and ignored by teachers (Bredahl 2013; Fitzgerald 2005). PE is then a difficult place for PwDs, as they negotiate developing feminine and masculine subjectivities alongside being positioned as less able in sport or physical activity. However, within the discipline,

there is much work needed to be done to gain a more coherent picture of PwDs experiences in PE and sport.

Feminist poststructuralism and new materialism

Feminist poststructuralism has been a valuable position in studies of gender and sport, for enabling a challenge of universalist notions about bodies. This perspective examines the production of ideas about normative bodies, and how individuals encounter discourses that attempt to discipline bodies through surveillance and categorisation (Weedon 1997).

Discourses relevant to this paper include what it means to be able, feminine, or athletic. Some discourses have more power than others and are reproduced more often. However, feminist poststructuralism sees individuals as active agents constructing their own identities by taking up and modifying multiple discourses. Agents position themselves among competing dominant and alternative discourses to produce ‘a constellation of practices and meanings that affect the ways ... athletes experience their bodies’ (Cox and Thompson 2000, 8, drawing from Cole 1993). Thinking about multiple subjectivities rather than fixed identities may help consider the varying ways individuals position themselves and their practices and also are positioned by others (Davies and Harré 1990).

For instance, using a feminist poststructuralist framework to analyse girls’ PE experiences, Garrett (2004, 144) says young women have ‘multiple and changing bodily experiences or ‘positions’ regarding the relationship between the body, identity and physical activity’ and move between them depending on context (place) and discourses available. They might define their selves as ‘sporty’ or ‘unsporty’, as ‘comfortable’, ‘bad’, or ‘different bodies’ (Garrett 2004). According to Garrett (2004), a ‘comfortable’ body is experienced by individuals who are happy because they conform to ideal or normalised characteristics and behaviours. ‘Bad’ bodies internalise ideals but disengage from PE/sport because of shame or awkwardness or use it as a space/practice to achieve the slender or fit body. If one perceives

oneself as lacking, it can result in a constrained embodied sense of self and lead to engaging or disengaging in physical activity to try to shape the body to the ideal (Garrett 2004).

Alternatively, a 'bad' body may try to position itself as not sporty, or not interested in participating, in order to maintain a sense of femininity; resist being seen as inferior or incapable by dropping out; this maintains control of the way one is positioned in discourses of sport and 'good' bodies. 'Different' bodies resist sport and PE as places where a slender or fit body should be achieved. They deviate from ideals but still have positive experiences in physical activity, transgressing the disciplining of dominant femininity discourses. A typical example is female body-builders but in the context of dis/ability, Paralympic athletes might be seen as 'different' bodies. Resistance against dominant discourses is possible and agents make continuous negotiations within different sport and PE spaces or activities, physical cultures, and peer groups as they cope with complex competing discourses of gender or ability, making decisions on how to explain experiences and to embody practices.

In an example of feminist poststructuralism applied to studies of disability sport, the participants in van Amsterdam et al.'s (2015) study of young PwD took different positions regarding what 'normal' meant to them. Various the participants positioned themselves as normal, tried to hide from view to avoid being seen as abnormal, or challenged others' reading of them as abnormal by laughing along. Sport is a normalising activity (if you take part, you are normal), but some academics contend that able-bodied people believe that PwD cannot play sport, so they cannot fit the model of a normal person (Anderson 2009). Being positioned as normal is important for youth development and acceptance, state van Amsterdam et al. (2015), and hence young people may reproduce the able/disabled binary. PE students with dis/abilities may then come up with resistance strategies to manage or minimise their marginalisation (van Amsterdam et al. 2015).

This feminist poststructuralist perspective can be used within dis/ability research and activism to challenge ideas about impairment and normality and has provided a way to demonstrate that an individual can have multiple selves as they position or define themselves differently in different spaces. As with the social model of disability, the emphasis is on challenging how normative/abled society defines and constrains impaired bodies. Recently there has been some caution (see Feely 2016) against the use of poststructuralism in dis/ability research as it focuses on language (what a body 'is') over materiality and embodiment (what a body can do) (Fullagar 2017; Monforte 2018; Seal 2012). Although feminist research has been valuable in dis/ability studies to identify how disabled women athletes are marginalised as both women and as PwDs (Seal 2012), (feminist) poststructuralist positions have lately been found lacking for their failure to pay full attention to the materiality of the body and environment. This ignores the realities of life with dis/ability or might suggest, argues Feely (2016), that calling impairment by another name will reduce debilitating symptoms or other embodied experiences. New materialism, a perspective that builds upon and also challenges poststructuralism (Robinson and Osgood 2019), is used to reconcile the material aspects of impairment or dis/ability with the 'extreme social constructionism' of poststructuralism (Seal 2014). Instead, we acknowledge these debates and view bodies as biological, material and social (Thorpe and Clark 2020), we can avoid merely thinking about identity as discursive and consider how the materiality of the body, the material world and discourses produce one another. This follows theorists such as Barad (2007) who highlights the 'intra-action' of human bodies with environments and non-human bodies or entities. Such analysis has been developed regarding dis/ability and sport or physical activity by Monforte, Perez-Samaniego and Smith (2018) who highlight the importance of 'material <-> semiotic' environments in agentic relationships with persons:

‘The environment is not separate from humans, but part of the human experience. It is not a mere backdrop for their deeds and meanings but an assemblage of human and non-human entities, affects, things and cultural practices’

Monforte’s (2018; Monforte et al. 2018; Monforte et al. 2019) research explored how assemblages of body, wheelchair and gym environments affected embodiment and restitution or rehabilitation for a man with spinal cord injury. In non-disabled sporting contexts, Thorpe and Clark (2020) explored how women’s embodied health experiences are formed through social, material and biological processes; that creating social meaning about ideal sporting bodies using physiological data (such as body composition and hormone levels) has an impact on the biological body.

However, there are examples of feminist poststructuralist research in sport that illustrate that embodied experience and subjectivity, even the body itself, change when moving between activities or over time within one practice or space (Author 2013; Cox and Thompson, 2000). Thus, we do not need to discard a feminist poststructuralist perspective. Feminist new materialism is ‘entangled’ with other feminist theories, rather than breaking away different theories can be layered (Robinson and Osgood 2019). Bearing this in mind, we acknowledge both feminist poststructuralist and new materialist frameworks to explore the participants’ own subject positioning while paying attention to how context shapes their embodied experiences as wheelchair tennis players, as women, and as students. To learn more about the current experiences of elite sports PwD, this paper sought to answer how two athletes with dis/abilities transgressed abled and gendered norms in tennis (dis/ability sport) spaces, abled sports spaces and university spaces and how they positioned themselves as athletic bodies and disabled bodies in these material spaces.

Method

To explore how two athletes with dis/abilities transgressed abled and gendered norms in tennis, a post-critical ethnographic approach was adopted (Madison 2012). Through a mutual and reciprocal participatory design, critical ethnographers evoke social consciousness and change by describing, analysing, and dialogically uncovering power and assumptions (Thomas 1993). It becomes ‘post’ when the research becomes a reciprocal encounter, and researchers interrogate their assumptions in the process. Furthermore, post means ongoing reflections, reciprocal dialogue, negotiation and empowerment with research participants (Hyttén 2004); in addition to acknowledging individuals as active and unstable beings. As St Pierre (2014) suggests, post-inquiry rejects humanist step-by-step methodologies and terminology such as reliability, objectivity and triangulation and opens up possibilities for imaginative thinking. Through the data collection and analysis, we very much kept ourselves open to possibilities or what MacLure (2013: 80) calls “the ongoing construction of a cabinet of curiosities or Wunderkammer”. Furthermore, throughout the twelve months of interactions as part of data collection, the principal researcher¹ positioned herself as active in the research, which allowed for interrogation of her able-bodied privilege and power, thus, making the research wholly vulnerable to judgement (Madison 2012).

Participants and setting

Participants included two elite wheelchair tennis players (Victoria and Rachel, self-selected pseudonyms to preserve anonymity) in a large south-eastern United States public university taking part in an adapted athletics tennis programme. The principal researcher had known the participants for one year before inviting them to be a part of the study and several times in conversation Rachel and Victoria suggested the idea of sharing their embodied experiences. Victoria identified as 19-years-old, a Caucasian female with a congenital dis/ability. Rachel

¹ The first author. This will be changed to the author’s name upon acceptance of the manuscript and is kept anonymous for a blind review.

identified as 22-years-old, an Asian American female with a congenital dis/ability. Person-first language was used throughout this paper because we looked at how participants identified themselves and spoke about themselves. Rachel explicitly chose person-first language, referring to herself as 'Rachel, who is in a chair'. The small sample was a matter of access to players. At the time of the study, there were three full-time female wheelchair tennis players at the university, however, the third female player was new to tennis and played on another varsity team. It was considered that in-depth research with two participants that could devote more time to the study was more appropriate.

Data collection

After signing consent forms agreeing to take part in the study, the principal researcher asked both participants how they would prefer data to be collated. Both participants were given suggestions and came up with several independently. Seven data collection methods were agreed.

First, participants were asked to complete a *physical activity timeline*, which detailed significant time periods in sport and PE and allowed the researcher to visualise the participant journey. Secondly, two largely conversational *interviews* took place with each participant.

The first interview was driven by key themes: identity, prior PE and sport experiences, facilitators and barriers participants faced, and the collegiate program. During the interview, both Victoria and Rachel led a discussion regarding their timeline. Furthermore, Victoria and Rachel were asked to bring meaningful *photos* along. Victoria brought four significant photographs and Rachel brought 19. These pictures were discussed at length and produced a different kind of information by evoking a deeper element of consciousness (Mannay 2015).

The second interview took place halfway through the study and allowed the principal researcher to ask questions related to the first interview and the study so far. The interviews took place in locations convenient to the participants, for example, a coffee shop and the

student lounge area, and on one occasion the investigator drove Rachel home (upon request). Interviews lasted between 21 and 88 minutes and were transcribed by the principal investigator adding 36,311 words to the data set stored in an online password-protected cloud.

Non-participant observations took place during tennis practices (both outdoor and indoor), one gym weight session, and two tournaments. The purpose of these observations was to observe appearance, verbal and physical interactions/behaviour, space, and relationships. The field notes included observer comments and *informal conversations* and were taken on a password protected iPad. They comprised of 7032 words and were added to the data set. At the second interview, both participants suggested two further digital methods of collection that were more convenient to them rather than another interview, which included more *photos* and *SMS communication*. The participants shared a photo with the principal researcher highlighting facilitators and barriers to being on a college campus; they shared pictures via SMS and followed it with a message explaining the content. The principal investigator would respond with necessary questions. Rachel sent one barrier related photo and Victoria sent four barriers and one facilitator photo. This data, along with the conversation around the image, was screenshotted and added 20 images to the data set. All 29 photographs (including those from the initial interview on meaningful photos) were looked at more closely by the principal investigator where notes were taken for each photo related to participant appearance, scenario, and the space of others. These notes comprised of 914 words and were added to the data set. Lastly, Rachel offered her personal statement as a form of *document collection*; this was added to the data set and comprised of 888 words. The investigator took notes on the statement and added it to the field notes.

Data analysis

Victoria and Rachel were involved in data coding and offered feedback on initial interpretations. They were asked whether their voices were represented, and confirmed they were. Although invited to be more deeply involved in analysis, both participants were unable to do so due to university commitments. For the data analysis process, the principal investigator enlisted the support of the second author². To begin, the analysis was carried out in an inductive process, beginning with reading through all data and making initial notes on the impressions we had. Early stages to establish codes were done in a collaborative process of discussion and note-making and were informed by feminist poststructural and new material perspectives. Both researchers investigated potential theories to apply to the data and decided on the overarching key themes. The transcripts, photographs and other artefacts were then transferred into QSR NVivo 11 and broad categories of codes created. The second researcher read through all the interview data in-depth looking for dominant discourses and coded relevant data to the existing codes or created new codes if necessary. Analytic memos were also kept along the way. The principal researcher then repeated the process of in-depth reading and coding with the observation and photograph data. Questions raised throughout the coding process were shared between the researchers to clarify any issues. The final themes were decided and quotes for manuscript use were deductively selected. Data authenticity and credibility was ensured by data crystallisation (Richardson 2000), being mindful of the researcher positionality and able-bodied perspective, collaborative analysis (constantly questioning each other's perspectives), maintaining an audit trail and keeping quotations by participants authentic and unedited.

Findings and discussion

Three main themes were identified from this study, which illustrated the ways the participants identified as athletes (with dis/abilities): (a) an athlete identity in dis/ability sport spaces, (b) a

² Name will be written in final manuscript, anonymous for blind review.

disabled identity in abled spaces, and (c) wheelchairs as both enabling and encumbering an athlete identity.

An athlete identity in dis/ability sport spaces

Dis/ability sport was a space where Victoria and Rachel could demonstrate strength or identify as strong. The physicality of participants was inherently connected to the physiological, social, and cultural norms of society that values sculpted individuals (e.g. Thorpe and Clark 2020). Victoria and Rachel shared several photos of their meaningful experiences where their strength or athleticism in playing tennis was demonstrated, and they pointed to this in subsequent interviews. Tennis spaces concentrated on developing their physical skills and fitness. This environment was materially designed for PwD, biologically developing their bodies as strong or athletic, and had meaning for them in helping identify themselves as athletes, in a challenge to abled and gendered assumptions about women with dis/abilities.

In line with Bredahl (2013), both participants did not always have a positive experience of dis/ability sport. Growing up, Victoria had opportunities to try adapted or dis/ability sport, but found them a bit ‘weird’:

I wanted to be like my friends, so I thought it was weird if I play a sport where there was all wheelchairs. (Victoria)

When I was younger, I wasn’t too big into adapted sports. I thought it was really weird ... so I didn’t do it from [age] 4 to 11 or 12. (Victoria)

Wanting to fit in with her (able-bodied) friends and culturally normalised activities, Victoria found adapted sports spaces too different to the idea she had about sport being something she could do with her friends. There was, however, something about tennis that resonated with her and Rachel both, as indicated by Victoria:

But then eventually, I don't know what it was that changed my mind, but maybe it was tennis. It was probably tennis. Where I kind of shifted that mindset and I was like, this is pretty cool. (Victoria)

Tennis camp at the age of 16 was a turning point for Rachel, and her time in camp was significant. She explained that she had rarely been around a lot of PwDs earlier in life:

I didn't grow up around a lot of people with disabilities, especially children, so that's when I had my really unhappy point of life and I was really embarrassed and everything. And then when ... I went to that [tennis] camp where I was surrounded by all these people ... that's when I met a bunch of people who had spinal bifida all playing tennis, and it was a really great point of my life. (Rachel)

Rachel related that attending junior tennis camp 'is where my life started with this whole world':

I never really played with any other juniors in wheelchairs before. So, this was a defining moment where I met other juniors. When I went to that camp, and I found out that, hey, I can compete with other wheelchair players ... it made me wanna continue, I guess. (Rachel)

Rachel placed high importance on playing with or against other PwDs in a wheelchair tennis camp. In that space,

I didn't see a disability with me. There was no difference between me and them, and I could compete. (Rachel)

Even though she had previously been able to find some adapted sport opportunities with non-disabled people (wheelchair tennis and basketball), segregated spaces were more affirming for her. In a dis/ability sports space, she was able to resist being positioned as disabled: 'I

didn't see a disability with me'. When Rachel spoke about dis/ability sport spaces including tennis camp, university training or competitions, she could talk about herself as an athlete: someone who is competitive, trains hard and succeeds. This alone highlights a psychological change when playing sport and the blurred lines between athlete, dis/ability, biology, psychology and physicality within the body as a connected being. Moreover, although tennis is not a masculine-coded sport, women's and men's ways of playing are gendered, such that strong or muscular able-bodied women tennis players have their femininity scrutinised. A further contradiction is negotiated by Rachel and Victoria as PwD may be constructed as non-gendered (Richard et al. 2017), with women with dis/abilities struggling to position themselves as feminine and as athletes in sports that value masculinity and able-bodied physical achievement.

The spaces of international dis/ability sports competitions, whether tennis-only or larger like the Paralympics, were also affirming places for Rachel to be. Her highlight of attending the [named] Paralympic Games was being in the cafeteria and 'seeing the most disabled people I have ever seen in my life; there were 4000 disabled people'. Rachel felt a part of a community of people, where she could be accepted and not be embarrassed about herself. However, it was also a place where she felt lucky to not have a more severe dis/ability:

That was the thing that I remember from that trip [to the Paralympics] ... like there is always gonna be somebody more disabled than you. They became an inspiration to me to show me that no matter how hard your life is there is always gonna be someone worse than you, like a lot of them are probably making what they can out of it. (Rachel)

Rachel might be seen here to have internalised normative or ableist language, positioning dis/abled people as inspirational. Rachel was also positioned as inspirational herself when she was invited, after the Paralympics, to go to the White House for an event. Being in a diverse

place like the Paralympic Games made her feel less awkward about herself and allowed her to feel fortunate.

Victoria also celebrated being around other athletes with dis/abilities in her university tennis team because they could understand each other's issues, having shared experiences:

The way that we live our lives is a little different and we have challenges that we have to overcome every day and things are a little bit, we live life differently so it's just the fact that we are all in wheelchairs and we all understand that we do things differently. I think it just brings us together.

We realise we all have challenges. (Victoria)

The university team share experiences both of working hard in their sport, like any athletes, but also because there are additional barriers they overcome in order to succeed, so that made their achievements extra special. Both participants found the environment at their university affirming and supportive of their tennis goals, a place where they could push themselves to achieve. For Rachel, until she came to university, she 'didn't know any disabled people, so I wasn't in the loop', which affected her knowledge of welfare benefits that were available to her. Now she is at university, 'tennis defines me', and she positions herself as a dedicated athlete:

I am on the court five days, and then three days I am lifting. I'm part of my national team as well as the University team, and I go to tournaments and try and maintain a world ranking every year. (Rachel)

Tennis offered affirming spaces to celebrate dis/ability visibility and diversity, although not without their problems. Being materially present as a dis/abled body in a community of dis/abled bodies had an impact on their identity and feelings towards being a PwD (Monforte et al. 2019; Thorpe and Clark 2020). To define for themselves their sporting engagement, not

trying to fit into an able-bodied world, contributed to Victoria's and Rachel's athlete identity as comfortable bodies (Garrett 2004) who could embody 'athlete'.

A disabled identity in abled spaces

Spaces where PwDs and able-bodied people played together largely contributed to Rachel and Victoria feeling different, not included. This section highlights two spaces in which Rachel and Victoria navigated disabling environments.

PE and school sport space

PE was a disabling space, not an enabling one for Rachel. In elementary school, she was involved, but as classmates got faster or more skilled, she felt unable to play the same games as them. By high school, Rachel took part in no PE. She discussed this positively, because (at the invite of the teachers) she could spend time in the art classroom while her peers did PE, and it helped her to avoid looking awkward:

When I was younger, I didn't see my disability as positive. I kind of felt different and I was embarrassed about the way I sounded when I walked around and the way I looked, I guess. So, I guess that's why I was in the unhappy zone. Then the difficulties participating in PE. So even in middle school, everyone has to participate in PE, and I would go to art class, or I would go to the art studio and make things. It was fun for me. (Rachel)

Rachel absented herself from the physical space of PE and in a way, was excluded as a bad body at that time (Garrett 2004). Rachel was facing issues of developing a physical identity as a young woman as well as being/having a disabled body; it was easier to absent herself (or easier for teachers). Unlike Victoria, she did not have a specific adapted PE coach in middle school to help her participate. Segregation and individual activities for students with dis/abilities continue the idea that able is normal (Erevelles 2014; Giese and Ruin 2016).

Only later, when a teacher took time to engage Rachel in one-to-one weightlifting lessons, did Rachel get any physical activity in school – this was a positive experience for her, but it took place away from her peers in PE. For there to be nothing for Rachel to be involved in (until the teacher offered her one to one weightlifting) is concerning. Abled spaces, including PE, are not always inclusive or spaces where PwDs can thrive or develop as athletes. The PE teachers and the sports they provided could remain normative, not adapted to include Rachel (Fitzgerald 2005). PwDs struggle to be socialised into an athletic identity in able-bodied spaces (Anderson 2009).

Victoria had somewhat of a similar experience to Rachel, to the extent that she had to try to find a way to fit in with what the rest of the class was doing, although unlike Rachel, Victoria did participate:

I just tried to adapt to what the able-bodied players were doing ... and I didn't think it was weird. I thought that I would just do this a little bit differently. (Victoria)

Victoria discussed her determination in trying to find a way to fit in, rather than being told it would not work. Victoria's engagement was greatly influenced by her middle school adapted PE coach, who had a long-term impact on Victoria: he always worked to keep her involved rather than doing something separate to the rest of the class. Victoria said:

He is actually one of the biggest reasons that I am playing wheelchair tennis. He was a big factor in getting me active and wanting me to live an active lifestyle, and I feel like he was always so excited about being active ... he thought it was not okay if I was not participating. He would always do what he could to make sure I was involved with the other students. He

wanted to integrate me into the whole group instead of saying ‘let’s go do something [else]’. (Victoria)

The adapted PE coach helped her to not feel ‘like an outcast’, and it set her up for figuring out how to adapt once she had moved to high school (with some exceptions, such as flag football). Perhaps this contributed to Victoria’s experience of playing on her high school tennis team where although it was an abled space made inclusive, she felt ‘cool’ about it and had no issues being accepted into the team or by the opposition. This was one positive adapted sports experience:

My high school coach contacted all the other coaches in our league and asked them ‘is it okay if we make this exception?’ and they all said yes. So yes, that was pretty cool. So then said, ‘is it fine that she competes and plays in these matches against your girls even though she has two bounces?’ and they all said yeah, it’s acceptable. I was really excited about it ... it was cool how everyone supported me even though it was a little different. (Victoria)

Victoria embodied a different or transgressive body (Azzarito and Solmon 2006; Garrett 2004) in abled spaces; she worked to engage in sport in these spaces, but also challenged ableist notions about who can participate in sport. Relationships with significant others such as parents, teachers, and adapted sports coaches who did not fall back on narratives of low capability but expected their engagement in physical activities were crucial for both participants; Rachel’s significant others, however, were not in school but outside, at home or in dis/abled sport spaces. The participants’ engagement with space was mediated by the people they interacted with and who advocated for them. Thus, both Victoria and Rachel shifted their subjectivities and ways of being in the world because of a co-production of

enactments, their constructed relationships with others, the everyday practices of their school and material conditions (Jackson and Mazzei 2012).

University space

The university campus was another significant ableist space, which highlighted the discursive practice of the material world (Jackson and Mazzei 2012). Drawing from readings concerning materiality and meaning-making (e.g. Monforte 2018; Thorpe and Clark 2020) we were supported in understanding how the environment shaped identity formation. It appeared to the principal researcher that able-bodied tennis players - the 'varsity' team - were treated better or had better facilities than the wheelchair team, as these two examples from the field notes suggest:

It was raining outside today, so Coach managed to 'make a deal' with the University athletics tennis facility which is normally for the varsity (able-bodied) teams. The able-bodied team have a specific indoor facility; the coach informed me that the varsity team coach is reluctant to let them use it because their chairs can mark the floor and it was built for with 'varsity' money - not for adapted sports. (Field notes)

Rachel assists another player in getting new balls out that they have received. They put them in the container and are all excited to play with new balls. It seems a luxury - but the varsity team get new balls for practice and each game, they don't, so it seemed extra special. (Field notes)

The money provided from the university to the varsity team was greater than that for the wheelchair team, and this led to a feeling of luxury and excitement when the wheelchair team were able to use their facilities (only when the varsity team were not using them). This suggests that the wider (abled) tennis environment reinforced the notion that sport is an able-

bodied activity, that serves to segregate those with a dis/ability through structural habits, placing those with a dis/ability at the lowest end of the production economy inherently tied within neoliberal structures (Ahmed 2017; DePauw 1997; Dolmage 2017; Erevelles 2000; Giese and Ruin 2016). Said another way, the materiality of sports facilities reproduced the status quo, where those who are a minority are always at the bottom of the production economy (the capitalist agenda), and they know it.

This feeling of not being welcome or catered for was evident in the principal investigators' field notes in terms of the structural design of the University tennis facility. The doors into the building were not automatic, so the two participants sometimes found themselves wheeling in their everyday chair while pushing their tennis chair ahead of them, then having to open the doors too. The principal researcher observed that when accessing the tennis courts, Victoria had to remove a wheel from one of her chairs in order to be able to push it through a single door; rather than accept help with this, Victoria said she needed to learn how to do it herself and insisted on removing the wheel, pushing herself in her other chair, then replacing the wheel, by herself. At other times, Rachel and Victoria would accept help from each other, just not from able-bodied people. Hence, the material can construct how we position our knowledge (Jackson and Mazzei 2012) and what knowledge others may have to support PwDs.

Although Rachel's mother had encouraged her to walk as much as possible growing up, campus spaces prompted her to use her chair more than her crutches, because being in a chair made it a lot easier to carry things. Rachel had regularly used a wheelchair in high school and university:

Principal Investigator: What else can you do now you are in your chair more?

Rachel: I can definitely go further ... when I was in high school, I had my laptop, I had my textbooks, I had a flute, my lunch. I had all these things and going around campus obviously I would not have been able to do that with my crutches. I would have probably had all those things in my hands while walking and clumping around with my big bag.

Victoria made the transition to a chair later, at university, as she had found it easier than Rachel had to navigate school with crutches. The size of the university campus was what prompted Victoria to transition into using her chair fulltime:

But now in college, since campus is more spread out, I have been using my wheelchair a whole lot more and a lot of people don't know that I can walk, like use a walker [but] I just don't use it very often because getting [around] campus it's just really far, and it would take me forever. (Victoria)

As Victoria indicates, using a chair can enable able-bodied people to assume that she cannot walk, so other people's positioning of her contributes to her identity. At university, both participants relied on having a car or getting the bus to get around the large campus, but also experienced issues as pedestrians or in their chairs. During the photo-sharing section of the project, the participants' photos reflected their current experiences of campus, showing broken curbs, uneven surfaces, and lifts that could not get them to the parts of a building they needed to access:

'[Named] Hall is super confusing in terms of accessibility. I was trying to get to the fourth floor today, went inside, and the elevator only went to the 3rd floor. I had to ask 3 or 4 different people then finally a professor knew that the outside elevator would take me to the 4th floor. Super confusing and difficult'. (Victoria, SMS communication)

Both experienced dangerous broken pavements and curbs as they crossed roads, as Rachel demonstrates in her explanation of her photo of an uneven curb:

There were a lot of people following me, so I felt like I couldn't slow down and mess people up. I had to pop a wheelie and pay extra attention in order not to fall, but that shouldn't be necessary when there's a curb cut. (Rachel, SMS communication)

One positive photo of the campus was shared by Victoria, of the buttons that are installed on some doors to open them automatically. The university campus was experienced as somewhat of a disabling space, where inaccessibility was part of the material structure (Ahmed 2017) for Victoria and Rachel. The lack of dropped curbs or lifts that do not go all the way to the top of a building contribute to the construction of the ideal student as able (Fitzgerald 2005; DePauw 1997) and the routine exclusion or inconveniencing of PwDs in spaces that claim to be inclusive, welcoming or educative. Imrie (2015, 171) notes how the social production of space constitutes us and the opportunities we can take up; 'Moving between places brings disabled people into conflict with disabling design and frictions that routinely exclude them from interfacing with the world around them in ways they would choose'. Spaces are politicised: if someone has to withdraw from a space that they cannot access they are seen as deviant, not the space as unwelcoming (Titchkosky 2011). Thus, aesthetic architecture reinforces the ideal, normal, and default body (Dolmage 2017).

Wheelchairs as enabling and encumbering an athlete identity

Like Monforte et al. (2018) we have found the role of spaces or environments to be important to the development of identities for two athletes with disabilities, and the process of becoming 'en-wheeled' (Monforte, Smith and Perez Samaniego 2019) is also significant in Rachel and Victoria's identities. In their accounts of how they came to have wheelchairs, and which type of chairs, Rachel and Victoria constructed chairs as both enabling and as an

encumbrance. Wheelchairs were in a way one of the main barriers to Victoria and Rachel playing sport and their access to the sport of wheelchair tennis was something that continued to mark them as 'different'. Rachel had several stories about the difficulties of paying for or funding a chair that fits her. There were also political and economic decisions within the tennis team, exemplified by the time a teammate bought herself a new chair:

It started off with Mavis ... she needed to find a new chair. We went to this tournament where there was a [Brand A] rep, and she just got her measurements, and she was really happy with the rep, and she got a [Brand A] chair, and now Coach is like, we are sponsored by, our team is sponsored by [Brand B]. We can't have you in a brand-new [Brand A] chair. (Rachel)

Knowledge was crucial to getting the right chair and getting it set up correctly. Rachel was in international competitions before a coach from another country told her that her chair was set up wrongly:

For my first two years, none of my US coaches ever told me anything about how chairs worked. I basically had this one chair, and I guess it was good enough for me. Then somebody ... he was the South African national head coach, and he took some time, he took an hour out of his day to sit with me and look at my chair ... he just told us all these things that nobody had ever told me that I needed to know in a wheelchair. (Rachel)

Rachel learned then that the backrest was too high, causing her to swing her arm widely to avoid hitting the rest. Lacking this technical knowledge about wheelchairs could hold an athlete back, for instance, by making it uncomfortable to play. During observations at training sessions, Victoria expressed to the principal researcher that her feet were hurting from the

straps she wore to keep them attached to the chair's footrest. A badly set up chair, or one that was the wrong size, could cause short- and long-term injuries, and affect playing ability.

Access to, and knowledge about, dis/ability technologies is crucial for success and for being seen as a successful athlete. These are some of the ways in which wheelchairs materially affected the position that Rachel could occupy within tennis.

As noted above, Victoria and Rachel had used crutches or a walker to move when they were younger, and only recently had begun to use their everyday chairs more frequently (or became en-wheeled, Monforte et al. 2019), due to carrying lots of things with them as they navigated the university campus. Both noted that this had contributed to a reduction in bodily strength, particularly physicality in the upper body, and that to now use crutches again was more painful than it used to be. So, chairs were both enabling (getting around campus, being able to carry things) and a hindrance (contributed to reduced physical strength; could cause injuries when playing); another layer of success or failure dependent on an individual's ability to afford and use technology appropriate for their body at that time. A wheelchair acts on an individual's actions and identity in, for instance, educational and sporting environments (Monforte et al. 2019). The chair opens opportunities, but only if the individual has the cultural currency through knowledge and means to use it correctly.

Using a chair, being in and moving in it, contributed to the participants' identities. Although they had access to the tennis facilities, their experiences were different and their difference to other athletes was made clear; the tennis facility was constructed as exclusionary when Victoria struggled to get through the doors. The material and discursive constraints in sport and university spaces demonstrated to Rachel and Victoria that they were not ordinary students whose needs were centred. Using new materialist thinking about bodies as not ending at the skin (Barad 2007) but in intra-action with chair, building, pavement, means we can extend thinking of Rachel and Victoria's embodiment as athletes to how their athlete

identities are facilitated and constrained by environment and other bodies (Fullagar 2017; Monforte 2018).

Concluding remarks

This study highlights that there is a vast difference between participant experiences in abled and dis/abled spaces. In abled spaces, the participants were rendered dis/abled by their surroundings; this included tennis spaces where doorways were not wide enough to get through. In abled spaces, it was difficult for athletes with dis/abilities to have comfortable bodies or conform, because they felt visibly different to peers and their skills, sporting achievements, and bodies were not valued. Ableist perspectives were reinforced throughout education, where the participants received separate and unequal educations (Azzarito and Solmon 2006; Erevelles 2000). Specifically, in PE, to make the space more critically engaging and accessible for students with dis/abilities, issues of masculinity, feminine slenderness, and ableism need to be addressed. Such a programme would include a different ability curriculum, which destabilises notions of normativity and challenges the status quo regarding ability (Author 2019). However, we acknowledge the difficulty in tasks ahead due to the complex interplay between biology, physicality, psychology, culture, and social forces that together form a 'dynamic unpredictable constellation of multiple agentic forces' (Thorpe and Clark 2020: 14).

In the wheelchair tennis space, Rachel and Victoria did not feel marginalised, their needs were specifically centred, and they could embody comfortable bodies in locations. In their self-selected photos, Victoria and Rachel positioned themselves as celebrating being strong or competitive in tennis spaces, not fragile or awkward as ableism reinforces. But, in university spaces, they were positioned as marginalised because both the space itself and the activities of other people did not allow access. Being strong or athletic was not a persistent feeling, and in abled spaces they were unable to embody athlete on an equal footing to able-bodied

athletes, as a wheelchair tennis player was not a form of embodiment that held value. However, and most importantly, institutionalised spaces were political and embedded within the neoliberal structure that granted access and dictated the physical space the participants entered. Architecturally, institutions have a moral obligation to redesign their structures so that all students have equitable access and support for students' (physical and financial) needs to be on offer, along with dis/ability education for all challenging ableist perspectives. This paper has specifically offered original ideas regarding the interplay of dis/abled embodiments, identities, situations in different spaces in Rachel and Victoria's tennis playing and student lives. We suggest further studies warrant investigation that also look at the body from a multi-space, multi-perspective viewpoint to gain a more coherent picture of oneself and interacting forces. Visual methods such as photovoice and SMS communication allow co-collaborators to share experiences of the body in 'real-time'. Furthermore, while feminist poststructuralism was helpful, the new materialism perspective was also productive and created a series of ways to resist traditional research practices and intervene in status-quo thinking filling spaces of potential (Fullagar 2017).

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