

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Kathleen McCarty for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Kinesiology presented on April 8, 2022.

Title: Sport Opportunities for Collegiate Students with Disabilities: A Mixed Methods Review of Current Program Offerings, Barriers, and Facilitators.

Abstract approved:

Megan MacDonald

Students with disabilities are not being afforded the same access to sporting opportunities as their peers without disabilities. The purpose of this dissertation was to build on a foundation of information regarding collegiate adaptive sports through a Critical Disabilities Studies lens. Specific aims included: (1) identifying and describing intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US, (2) examining facilitators and barriers to existing intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US. Qualitative survey findings from program stakeholders (N=14) were organized through Slack & Parent's sport organization categories (2006) for robust understanding. Perhaps the most interesting finding was diversity in the structure of programs, despite their common goal. Further case study design including current intercollegiate adaptive programs (N=3) revealed an underlying vision of programmatic institutionalization within their housed university. This vision illuminated programmatic barriers and facilitators which can inform future initiative direction, including policy, with the voices from the community at the center.

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Sport Opportunities for Collegiate Students with Disabilities: A Mixed Methods
Review of Current Program Offerings, Barriers, and Facilitators.

by
Kathleen McCarty

A DISSERTATION

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APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Kinesiology

Head of the School of Biological and Population Health Sciences

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Kathleen McCarty, Author

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Kathleen McCarty is the lead contributing author of this dissertation. Kathleen's experience led her to conceptualize the project which further led to her designing the study, collecting the data, analyzing data, interpreting results, disseminating findings, and write all manuscripts. Kathleen will be the corresponding author and responsible for all future attempts to publish this information.

Dr. Megan MacDonald was a major contributor to this dissertation. Dr. MacDonald assisted Kathleen in every step of the completion of this dissertation from idea conceptualization to publication and everything in between. Dr. MacDonald's revisions and guidance were paramount to the completion of this project. Dr. MacDonald reviewed several drafts, including the final dissertation document before submission.

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Introduction

Students with disabilities are not being afforded the same access to sporting opportunities and higher education as their peers without disabilities. Despite over 73,000 students reportedly participating in adaptive sports programs at the K-12 level (Cottingham et al., 2015), there are too few collegiate programs to accommodate that level of matriculation. Though information is limited, accounts indicate that there are anywhere from 11 (Evans et al., 2017) to 23 (*Resource Center / American Collegiate Society for Adapted Athletics*, n.d.) collegiate adaptive sport programs operating within the entire United States. Adaptive sports programs are those created with the explicit intent to serve students with disabilities. The most common programs support individuals with physical disabilities, including wheelchair sports like basketball or tennis, and can also include sports catered to individuals with sensory disabilities, such as goalball for Blind or visually impaired individuals. However, the scope of existing collegiate programs and their exact offerings, or disabilities served, are unknown. Even disability itself is a construct in question which makes the nuance of understanding programming and true numbers of need difficult to pinpoint.

Reports indicate that overall, individuals with disabilities are matriculating to college at a much lower rate than their nondisabled peers (Wagner et al., 2005) and are at a greater risk of college drop-out when they get there (Wessel et al., 2009). It is estimated that 26% of the US adult population experiences disability (CDC, 2019) and 19% of college students report experiencing disability (*The NCES Fast Facts Tool Provides Quick Answers to Many Education Questions (National Center for Education Statistics)*, n.d.), yet only 16% of adults with disabilities report holding a bachelor's degree or higher (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Adams & Proctor (2010) found that college students with disabilities encounter social and environmental

barriers that lead to lower rates of overall adjustment to the college experience, as well as increased difficulties in social and institutional attachment, compared to their nondisabled peers. As a result, individuals with disabilities also experience higher rates of unemployment (Janus, 2009), which, in conjunction with other social barriers and stigma, leads to decreased quality of life (Groff et al., 2009).

Demonstrated benefits of participation in adaptive sport as a means of combating these issues include increases to overall health (Groff et al., 2009), quality of life (Yazicioglu et al., 2012), and employment (Lastuka & Cottingham, 2016). However, despite these benefits, barriers to sport participation and physical activity persist. Rimmer et. al. (2004) identified many barriers to physical activity as expressed by individuals with disabilities, themselves. Social barriers of stigma concerning the capabilities of individuals with disabilities and the lack of policies within fitness settings which contribute to a welcoming social environment or adequately trained staff were identified. Additionally, access to the physical environment and compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) were found to be minimal at best. Under the ADA (1990), buildings are required to provide accommodations such as ramps, curb cuts, and automatic doors for physical access to spaces, as well as accessible bathrooms and drinking fountains within. However, throughout the existence of the ADA legislation, barriers of poor implementation have been well documented (Martin, 2017; Mishra, 1995; Rimmer et al., 2004). Further, ADA compliance does little to offer concrete guidance for policies which would contribute to a fitness center's social environment for individuals with disabilities. Due to these limitations, individuals with disabilities are less likely to engage in physical activity, leading to greater risk of experiencing secondary health concerns or comorbidities (Carroll et al., 2014). These factors have contributed to what Krahn, Hammond, & Turner (2006) called a "cascade of

disparities” for individuals with disabilities, thus calling for public health organizations to take notice and action.

Recognizing these barriers to physical activity for individuals with disabilities, national policy initiatives have emerged to encourage a concerted effort to combat them. Every ten years the Surgeon General puts out a “Healthy People” initiative with specific aims on how to guide the country into more healthful practices. Healthy People 2020, published in 2010, was the first Healthy People document to include an entire section targeting individuals with disabilities (*Disability and Health / Healthy People 2020*, n.d.). Additionally, in 2013, a Dear Colleague Letter released by the Office of Civil Rights (Galanter, 2013) was circulated to clarify already existing mandates from Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973). The Dear Colleague Letter underscored interpretation for this act, which specified that no individual should be excluded from participation in activities of employment or education based on their ability, for federally funded schooling institutions. It further went on to include equitable access to extracurricular and athletic activities. However, the Letter pertained mainly to K-12 institutions and neglected the collegiate level. Cottingham, Velasco, Laughlin, & Lee (2015) found subsequently that still only 732 K-12 institutions were offering adaptive athletic programs for their students, while numbers of collegiate programs remained below 25 (Evans et al., 2017), leaving few to no opportunities through which these high school students could matriculate.

Many scholars have drawn parallels between the inequities and oppression experienced by individuals with disabilities and those experienced by other marginalized groups (Charlton, 2000; Hosking, 2008; Martin, 2017). Researchers have recognized potential parallels experienced by individuals with disabilities to women in this country and called for a US policy containing more direct language mandating opportunities, introducing the notion of a Title IX-

like policy for disability Fay (2011). Title IX of the Education Amendments Act (1972) states that “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” Coupled with the efforts of the Women’s Movement of the 1970s, the profound impact of this legislation has been well documented, and it opened doors in ways other, less precise mandates may not have. Comparing the numbers from 1972 to 2002, bachelor’s degrees earned by women went from 44% to 57% (Priest, 2003) and degree programs offered to women went from only teaching, nursing, and social work to all degree areas, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields (Lopiano, 2000). Similarly, upon attaining greater access to sporting opportunities, women began to excel and matriculate at higher rates. In 1972, 7.4% of high school athletes and 15% of collegiate athletes were female, while as of 2002, the numbers were 41.5% and 42% in high school and college, respectively (Mak, 2006). This challenged the assumption previously shared by many that women must not be as interested in playing sports as men. When given an equal chance, women have proven that their interest in learning and sporting is the same as that of their male peers (Mak, 2006). Fay (2011) acknowledged parallels between the social inequities experienced by women then to those experienced by the disability community in present-day and hypothesized that it would take similar legislation to have a similar effect on access to sports and higher education. However, given that there has been policy regarding access for people with disabilities, including a Dear Colleague Letter to underscore its mandates, there is still a gap in understanding why people with disabilities have not experienced the same benefits as women.

Social models pertaining to minoritized and marginalized groups have been used to explain institutional discrimination (Scotch & Schriener, 1997) as a way to effect change and

understand the implementation of policy. The paradigms explained by these models come from a similar underlying perspective, regardless of whether explicit to disability, sex, or race, in explaining the hardship faced by these groups due to oppression from the majority population (Imrie, 1997). As such, it is imperative that researchers begin to look at barriers experienced by individuals with disabilities through a social model to fully understand and explain the issue, as well as to develop adequate strategies to overcome it.

Critical theories are used to unpack and unveil issues of marginalization and equity. In disability research, theories highlighted include Critical Disability Studies and Critical Disability Theory. Within educational contexts, critical theories have been imperative to looking at issues at the intersections of race and disability (Annamma et al., 2013), education of health professions (Paradis et al., 2020), undocumented students (Aguilar, 2019), and more (Fleming, 2018; Griffin, 1989; Hubbard Cheoua, 2021; Payne, 2019; Regelski, 2020). Further, critical theories have been used within the sports context to explore issues including homophobia (Shaw, 2019), race in higher education (Armstrong & Jennings, 2018), and media portrayals of Black women (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016). Therefore, having been used in both the education and sport context previously, critical theory is being used herein to examine the adaptive sport context and highlight issues in a way that clarifies barriers and illuminates possible solutions. In using critical theory to guide the process and assess results, researchers will understand more of the nuance surrounding inequities faced by athletes with disabilities on the path to more inclusive programming.

The purpose of this study is to build on a foundation of information regarding collegiate adaptive sports using a critical equity lens, and utilizing a framework which blends social movement and organizational theory, as described below. Specific aims include: (1) identifying

and describing intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US, and (2) examining facilitators and barriers to existing intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US.

Specific Aims

Aim 1

To identify and describe intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US.

Research Question 1. 1) What collegiate-affiliated adaptive athletics programs exist in the US? 2) How do these programs function within their university? 3) What are the programmatic commonalities and differences, if any?

Aim 2

To examine facilitators and barriers to existing intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US.

Research Question 2. 1) What facilitators (historical, current, and future) exist to support intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US? 2) What barriers exist (historical, current, and future) which create challenges for intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US?

Institutional Review Board Approval



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Date of Notification	November 25, 2020		
Notification Type	Approval Notice		
Submission Type	Initial Application	Study Number	IRB-2020-0774
Principal Investigator	Megan MacDonald		
Study Team Members	McCarty, Kathleen		
Study Title	Sport Opportunities for Collegiate Students with Disabilities: A Mixed Methods Review of Current Program Offerings, Barriers, and Facilitators.		
Review Level	FLEX		
Waiver(s)	Documentation of Informed Consent		
Risk Level for Adults	Minimal Risk		
Risk Level for Children	Study does not involve children		
Funding Source	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	Cayuse Number	F1036A

APPROVAL DATE: 11/23/2020 **EXPIRATION DATE:** 11/22/2025

A new application will be required in order to extend the study beyond this expiration date.

Comments:

The above referenced study was approved by the OSU Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that the protocol meets the minimum criteria for approval under the applicable regulations pertaining to human research protections. The Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring compliance with any additional applicable laws, University or site-specific policies, and sponsor requirements.

Study design and scientific merit have been evaluated to the extent required to determine that the regulatory criteria for approval have been met [[45CFR46.111\(a\)\(1\)\(i\)](#), [45CFR46.111\(a\)\(2\)](#)].

Adding any of the following elements will invalidate the FLEX determination and require the submission of a project revision:

- Increase in risk
- Federal funding or a plan for future federal sponsorship (e.g., proof of concept studies for federal RFPs, pilot studies intended to support a federal grant application, training and program project grants, no-cost extensions)
- Research funded or otherwise regulated by a [federal agency that has signed on to the Common Rule](#), including all agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services
- FDA-regulated research
- NIH-issued or pending Certificate of Confidentiality
- Prisoners or parolees as subjects
- Contractual obligations or restrictions that require the application of the Common Rule or which require annual review by an IRB
- Classified research
- Clinical interventions



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Principal Investigator responsibilities:

- Keep study team members informed of the status of the research.
- Obtain IRB approval for project revisions prior to implementing changes as required by section 8.6 of the Policy Manual.
- Report all unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others within three calendar days.
- Use only approved consent document(s).

Operationalized Definitions

People/individuals/athletes/students with disabilities

and

Disabled people/individuals/athletes/students

- Person-first and identity-first language used interchangeably

Adapted/Adaptive sports/athletics

- sport modified or created to meet the unique needs of individuals (Winnick & Porretta, 2016)

Intercollegiate

- elite-level competition occurring between two universities

Disability

- a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990)
- social construction – nuanced, heterogeneous group

Barriers

- factors that challenge a person or cause

Facilitators

- factors that support a person or cause

Literature Review

Disability Rights Movement

Understanding the history of the Disability Rights Movement (DRM) allows researchers to begin working from a critical perspective. At the heart of the DRM was a notion that societal barriers were far greater than personal ones (Scotch, 1989), and that individuals with disabilities “know what is best for themselves and their community” (Charlton, 2000). These ideals were in direct conflict with the prevailing Medical Model lens which saw disability as an issue at the personal level, one that is meant to be fixed or rehabilitated by medically trained professionals, and something that individuals should not want or feel proud of (Hosking, 2008). The DRM instead allowed individuals with disabilities to take agency over their own well-being and begin to understand that the problem was not their disability but rather a systemic issue (Heumann, 2020) of a socially constructed problem (Oliver, 1986).

Emerging to prominence in the 1960s (McCarthy, 2003), the DRM occurred alongside and for the same reasons as the Civil Rights Movement but has not received the same attention (Waterstone, 2015). Within civil rights campaigns and efforts calling for equality in regards to race, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status, to name a few, disability is often left out (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005). Within disability scholarship, there is a recognized need for more research on resistance, social justice, and equity (Annamma et al., 2016; Charlton, 2000).

A goal of the DRM was and is to affect policy to promote disability justice and disrupt the status-quo (Sabatello, 2013). A prominent sentiment throughout the DRM has been the phrase, “Nothing about us, without us” (Charlton, 2000). This communicates a message demanding inclusion and agency in the lives of individuals with disabilities, reinforcing the continued interest in self-determination in their own well-being (Procknow et al., 2017).

Sports as a Movement

Sport has long been used as a vehicle for social justice and change within the United States (Darnell & Millington, 2019). One of the most notable examples of this is the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, where medalists Tommie Smith and John Carlos, both African-American men, raised their fists in the air while standing on the podium during the United States National Anthem (Hartmann, 2003). This form of ‘silent protest’ was used to elicit global awareness of the inequities experienced by Black and African-American people throughout the United States, and their image has been used to exemplify the use of a sports platform towards social justice goals (Marinelli, 2017). An additional example includes Billie Jean King’s Battle of the Sexes match, where she challenged and beat notable tennis professional Bobby Riggs in a stand for gender equality (Spencer, 2000). Even more contemporary is the example of Colin Kaepernick, a quarterback within the US National Football League who sat, and later knelt, during the playing of the National Anthem as a silent protest akin to Smith and Carlos. As he described it, Kaepernick stated, “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color” (*Colin Kaepernick Explains Why He Sat during National Anthem*, 2017).

In addition to using sports as a platform for social justice, the example of Title IX and the Women’s Movement in the US shows how sport and social movements can be interrelated. The passage of Title IX legislation could not have happened without the backing and attention of the Women’s Movement of the time (Elkins, 1978). Thaler and Sunstein (2009) suggest that, to effect change on a large scale, particularly one attributed to national policy, there must be a coalition of like-minded stakeholders ready to champion the initiative. Kingdon (1993) also speaks to the need for a policy window of opportunity, which is a situation where individual,

social, and political actors and ideals converge in such a way as to allow for legislation to be successful. Such was the case in the early 1970s within the US, which allowed for Title IX's passage. In addition, the enforcement of Title IX policies helped advance the fight for gender equality (Brake, 2012). Women's participation in and enjoyment of sports aided in shifting gender norm paradigms and allowed women to hold power and leadership in ways that had previously been limited (Mak, 2006).

As a tool for social justice, adaptive sport is no different and has helped promote the ideals of the DRM based on a call for equity, allowing for equal and meaningful opportunities for individuals with disabilities (LaVaque-Manty, 2005) in ways that parallel Title IX and the Women's Movement. Adaptive sport, categorized as "sport modified or created to meet the unique needs of individuals," was first introduced as a competitive option in rehabilitation for veterans with disabilities following World War II (Winnick & Porretta, 2016). Since then, a continuum of options from grassroot, community-level play to elite-level sport have emerged beyond the rehabilitation setting to further access to opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Kiuppis, 2018). The Paralympic Movement, considered a flagship for elite-level disability sports, has been ongoing in an effort to provide more opportunities and air-time and reduce stigma of individuals with disabilities participating in elite sport (Howe, 2008). Unlike sport activism of athletes using professional platforms to state their grievances, as exemplified by the efforts of Smith, Carlos, King, and Kaepernick, the Paralympic Movement uses examples of and access to sport to help support and perpetuate the ideals of the DRM (Bundon & Hurd Clarke, 2015). The sport itself and the opportunities made available for individuals with disabilities are the vehicle for the movement, much like in the case of Title IX and the Women's Movement.

In assessing collegiate sports through a critical lens, it is imperative to note the problematic nature of currently existing systems on a pathway to more wholly inclusive programming. Current practices within ‘traditional’ competitive, intercollegiate sport programs, such as the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), represent a highly problematic system within higher education (Gurney et al., 2017). Pervasive sexual harassment cases (Beaver, 2019) and the exploitative nature of high revenue-generating sports for students of color (Van Rhee, 2013) represent some of the most well documented issues throughout. If and when adaptive sport enters the collegiate scene at an institutional level, it is imperative that these programs are created with a lens of inclusion informed by the disability community, rather than merely making accommodations in order to survive within an already existing, problematic system. Current adaptive collegiate sports programming suggests that, because of the grassroots approach taken by those designing and facilitating it, largely borne out of necessity to work within the bounds at their disposal but not without intention, this vision of inclusion is their cornerstone and must not be lost with future efforts, like policy. Guidance provided by the ADA (1990) helps to ensure physical access to buildings and accommodations to traditional sporting competitions (i.e. flash of light alongside the buzzer to signify the start of a race for a Deaf athlete) but does little to dismantle the ableist culture surrounding Disabled student athletes. ADA policy fails to require full sport accommodations (i.e., funding a wheelchair basketball team) or allow for a larger vision of a dedicated department to develop adaptive athletics. Future policy, such as the Title IX-like legislation Fay calls for, must be crafted carefully and in conjunction with the disability community to fully capture the needs of those it is meant to serve and not perpetuate currently privileged practices (Hextrum, 2020). Further, in order to better conceptualize a truly inclusive program and pipeline, an understanding of the way the programs

look currently with the right lens and context is needed in order to create a better pathway forward.

Although adaptive sport is often referred to as a social movement (Move United, 2020), there are limited studies utilizing a social movement lens to understand the creation and sustainability of these programs. Despite demonstrated health and social benefits to collegiate play for individuals with disabilities (Groff et al., 2009; Lastuka & Cottingham, 2016; Yazicioglu et al., 2012), few programs exist, pointing to this issue being one of equity. Fay's (2011) call for specific legislation to mandate adaptive sports at the collegiate level further underscores the need for action to correct this injustice through social movement and policy. Viewing the efforts that have already taken place (i.e., currently operating collegiate adaptive sport programs) through an equity and social movement lens may begin to shed light on the phenomenon in a way very little research has done.

Conceptual Framework

A critical theory lens, particularly grounded in Critical Disability Studies (CDS), guides the ontology of this research. Critical theories allow for researchers to “explain oppression and to transform society with the objective of human emancipation” (Hosking, 2008) by centering the experiences of the oppressed. CDS is a close cousin to Critical Disability Theory (CDT), which is important to recognize in this work. CDT was derived from Critical Race Theory, which centers the impact of race and racism on a society and its structures (Yosso, 2005) as a way to bring social intersections with disability to the forefront. CDT is utilized to identify wrongful stereotypes of individuals with disabilities, demonstrate the systemic oppression of individuals with disabilities, and shift dominant social paradigms to reflect a focus of disability as an asset instead of a deficit (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Critical theories, including both CDT and

CDS, call for researchers to uplift more disabled voices to guide their research, thereby empowering the disability community and restoring their agency (Hosking, 2008). Through this ontological lens, it is also recognized that disability is a nuanced construct which is meant to represent a heterogenous group. For the purposes of this research, disability is not defined, so as to provide the most room for inclusivity in this exploratory phase.

Social Movement Theory. As demonstrated by the emergence of the DRM, individuals with disabilities experience systemic oppression they wish to resist (Charlton, 2000). Utilizing critical approaches, researchers have identified that students with disabilities are the targets of oppressive systems and discrimination within higher education (Evans et al., 2017). Furthermore, evidence in a sports context points to the perpetuation of the “super cripp” narrative, which promotes the idea that only the strongest individuals are able to ‘overcome’ their disability and succeed in sports and beyond (Silva & Howe, 2012), leaving limited capacity to understand the importance of collegiate adaptive sport. Though a push for equity, diversity, and inclusion is evident throughout higher education administration, the literature reveals a disconnect between words and action (McNair et al., 2020). The National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), the most prominent sports governing body within higher education, makes claim of an inclusive sport initiative but fails to recognize any affiliation with currently existing collegiate, adaptive sport programs (Powell, 2016b).

Social movements are born out of a collective effort of resistance to a systemic oppression or inequity experienced by a specific group of people (Meyer, 2014). As exemplified by the scarcity of available adaptive sport programming, with no formal affiliation with the governing body in power despite that body’s claimed support, there is a demonstrated resistance to these programs and a need for grassroots organizations to emerge in order to create them.

Arthur (2008) identified a perspective of social movements occurring within institutions as a form of resistance to injustice faced by those within. Utilizing Arthur's lens, it becomes clear that the adaptive programs themselves can be considered the movement and thus warrant a social movement theory approach to understanding them. However, social movement theory is an incomplete model for understanding current collegiate adaptive sport programs because of its primary focus on the larger social context (Davis et al., 2005). If the goal is to identify the programmatic aspects of the program as a phenomenon, a narrowed approach, such as organizational theory, is also warranted.

Organizational Theory. A primary focus of organizational theory is the structure of a unit or organization, to include a personnel and departmental hierarchy (Davis et al., 2005). The work of Slack & Parent (2006) brings organizational theory to the sports organization context and allows for a starting point in identifying key aspects of sports programs. They point to five key areas of describing and understanding sports organizations: (1) social entity (who is involved), (2) involvement in the sport industry (the nature of their involvement and who is serviced), (3) goal-directed focus (program vision and overall goals), (4) consciously constructed activity system (organizational structure), and (5) identifiable boundary (how they distinguish between insiders and outsiders, who they are affiliated with/depend on). Being able to identify and describe an organization based on these five areas is an important first step to asking more context- and change-driven questions (Stone, 2012). In addition to considerations of structure, organizational theory emphasizes shifts and changes made within that structure for the sustainability of the organization, as well as the power dynamics that supported or constrained such a change (Davis et al., 2005). For that reason, emergent research has begun to look at a collegiate, adaptive sport program in an organizational context. Fines & Block (2020) used a

case study design informed by organizational theory in order to understand how an adaptive sports program at the collegiate level was created to meet the needs of students. Though this provided a novel foundation for research on collegiate adaptive programs, the researchers called for a broadened epistemological lens to allow for understanding these organizations with respect to the broader context.

Blended Framework. Independently, both social movement theory and organizational theory have advantages and disadvantages for informing the creation and sustainability for collegiate, adaptive sport programs. However, when used together, these approaches provide a rich framework in which each complements the shortcomings of the other (Campbell, 2005).

McAdam & Scott (2005) introduced a framework which allows for the ‘cross-fertilization’ of social movements and organizational theory, referred to herein as “Blended Framework.” Blended Framework provides a blueprint for viewing organizational goals and change through the lens of social movement theory. In essence, it is a pointed look at an organization via its structure, hierarchy, and goal attainment within the context of a larger movement of resisting some form of social inequity or oppression (Davis et al., 2005).

As a starting point, McAdam and Scott (2005) urge analysts to look at three distinct areas: (1) the actors who were most important, (2) destabilizing events which have propelled the goals of the phenomenon to their current operation, and (3) relevant periods of activity. Three classes of actors are identified within the bounds of each relevant period including dominants, or those in power; challengers, those pursuing the interests of the phenomenon; and governance units, institutions wherein the contention between dominants and challengers exists. Destabilizing events are regarded as incidents that cause contention or change to the status quo or to the phenomenon itself. Their influence or level of importance may vary throughout the

specified phenomenon. Finally, identifying and understanding relevant periods of activity allows for the creation of a timeline of events which provides a schematic for analysis. In organizational literature, these elements can be categorized by looking into constraints and supports, or in public health literature, and for the purpose of this study, barriers and facilitators.

Utilizing this approach enabled a broadened understanding of creation and sustainability within collegiate, adaptive sports programs. Based on the efforts of the DRM and goals of affecting policy surrounding disability justice, this framework further positioned data found within this study to add to a national political conversation regarding access and rights for individuals with disabilities, as it has with other groups (Armstrong, 2005). However, in order to fulfill policy aspirations, because such limited knowledge surrounds collegiate, adaptive programs, an appraisal of the programs available and the context within which they exist was warranted. The Blended Framework allowed for such an appraisal and a proper starting point to identify size and scope of this movement.

Experiential Knowledge. Maxwell (2012) points to the importance of theory in guiding a researcher's approach while also allowing for experiential and community-based knowledge to guide the direction of a qualitative study. Maxwell also acknowledges that, due to the nature of qualitative data, researchers tend to study that with which they are familiar, which is the case for the proposed study.

A desire to explore more deeply this area of research is what inspired me to attend graduate school to earn my Ph.D. After interacting with a young woman, an accomplished wheelchair tennis player at a junior sports camp, I learned that she had limited opportunities to continue her sport at a university level. After several months of research, cold-calling, and word-of-mouth connections, I learned of the severity of this gap in collegiate play and started an

adaptive athletics program at my institution. Not being a member of the physical disability community myself, my first aim was to create a student organization to gather interest at the university. Several meetings with faculty, administrators, and sports personnel later, I found a faculty partner who was willing to take on this initiative with me and my student organization. Together, we secured several grants for equipment and marketing purposes and found a donor willing to support our cause. However, it was not until we recruited our first disabled athlete, a Paralympian and student at the university, that our program began to take off. His passion and drive grew our student organization to the point where we were able to hold large-scale, national awareness events. After graduation, he is now the Program Director and has secured funding for his position.

Despite this quick, and seemingly linear summary, this process was rife with struggle at many levels. Verbal support with no action behind it, university bureaucracy, financial woes, and overt stigma surrounding the capabilities of students with disabilities were just a few of the many roadblocks faced in this process. In addition, despite my candid conversations with other adaptive sports leadership around the United States, there was no scaffolded guidance with which to create my program. It was an exhausting, up-hill battle that my team and I were fighting in-kind. I did not imagine that our experience was unique, which is what brought me to pursue my Ph.D. I intend to complete this work having provided concrete, up-to-date information for any high school student with a disability who wishes to play sports at any collegiate level. Because little is known of the availability of programs—from recreational to elite—I intend to build a foundation for this knowledge and add to a limited literature base.

The purpose of this dissertation was to build on a foundation of information regarding collegiate adaptive sports using a critical, equity lens, and utilizing a framework which blends

social movement and organizational theory. Specific aims include: (1) identifying and describing intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US, and (2) examining facilitators and barriers to existing intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US.

Manuscript 1

Abstract

Collegiate students with disabilities are not being afforded the same access to elite sporting opportunities as their peers without disabilities. Despite legislation created to combat this (e.g., Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973), as well as the growing Para sport movement, ableism-fueled disparities persist. Critical Disability Studies (CDS) offers a self-reflexive perspective to view ableism in sport and critically examine the current landscape which contributes to this inequity. The purpose of this study was to provide a qualitative descriptive analysis of current programming as told by program activists. Key program stakeholders (i.e., program director/coach) of intercollegiate competing adaptive sport programs (N=14, 87% response rate) were given an open-ended, qualitative survey to gather information about their sport organization. Guided by Slack & Parent (2006), organizational inequities were illuminated by categories of social entity, involvement in the sport industry, goal-directed focus, consciously constructed activity system, and identifiable boundary. Perhaps the most profound finding was the diversity among each program surveyed. This study provides a unique and current look into collegiate adaptive sport organizations through CDS, adding to limited research on the topic. Future research must prioritize centering the voices from the adaptive sport and disability community towards forming equitable pathways for the creation of more collegiate opportunities.

Introduction

Collegiate students with disabilities are not being afforded the same access to adaptive sporting opportunities as their nondisabled peers (McCarty et al., forthcoming). Adaptive sports are activities which meet the unique needs of disabled athletes (Winnick & Porretta, 2016). At the elite level, they were introduced in England by Dr. Guttman at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital in the 1940s (Gold & Gold, 2007). Injured soldiers returning from World War II worked with Dr. Guttman in physical rehabilitation, including sport participation. In 1948, the first Stoke Mandeville games were held the same day as the London Olympic Games opening ceremony and in 1960, the yearly Stoke Mandeville games were officially recognized as the Paralympic Games (*Paralympics History - Evolution of the Paralympic Movement*, n.d.), para meaning parallel to the Olympics (Bressan, 2008).

Though adaptive sport opportunities have grown since the creation of the Paralympic Games, limited access to physical activity and sports for people with disabilities remains an issue, particularly at the collegiate level. Evans et al. identified (Evans et al., 2017) a paucity of adaptive collegiate programs within the United States (US) with an estimated 23 programs, while McCarty et al. (forthcoming) specified only 16 programs which operate at the intercollegiate level. It is important to pay attention to collegiate level opportunities because they represent a pinnacle of competition, with the Paralympics being the only higher level. Olympic and Paralympic pipelines in the US are dependent on collegiate athletes with 75% and 50% of athletes coming from the collegiate level, respectively (McCarty et al., forthcoming). However, barriers persist for disabled athletes in accessing sport and physical activity at every level, and evidence of these environmental and social barriers is well documented (Barr & Shields, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2018; Martin, 2013; Rimmer et al., 2004; Rimmer, 2005; Shields & Synnot, 2016).

Further, a culture of ableism runs rampant in narratives surrounding those athletes who have been lucky enough to access their sports. A medical model view of looking at disability is predominant in rehabilitative fields (McCarty et al., 2021). Through the medical model, disability is viewed as a condition to overcome or an impairment to be cured (Kennedy et al., 2021). Under this model, assumptions of athletes ‘overcoming’ their disability in a heroic effort contribute to the ableist “supercrip” narrative. The supercrip, in the words of Silva and Howe (2012), “implies a stereotyping process that requires an individual ‘to fight against his/her impairment’ in order to overcome it and achieve unlikely ‘success.’” At a surface glance, this narrative looks harmless and praise-worthy, an appreciation for the person’s story and their heroism inspiring the masses. However, Martin (2017) identified that the extensive praise given to these individuals using a supercrip narrative reflects the underlying low expectation otherwise given to people with disabilities. The same narrative that is meant to inspire is the same one that points out a collective ableist belief towards athletes with disabilities. If a disabled athlete is given praise for waking up in the morning, what does that say about the expectation that they could (or should) ever perform at an elite level? These barriers contribute to the disruption of a pipeline which would contribute to the recruitment and training of disabled athletes at all levels.

These barriers result in what Krahn et al. title a “cascade of disparities,” whereby people with disabilities experience poorer health and social outcomes based on preventable disadvantages (2006). For this reason, individuals with disabilities are a known health disparities group (Krahn et al., 2015). These effects are experienced at multiple levels, including greater health risks (Dixon-Ibarra & Horner-Johnson, 2014), lower college matriculation (Wagner et al., 2005) and retention (Wessel et al., 2009), and higher rates of unemployment (Janus, 2009). However, the benefits of disability sport to combat these barriers are well documented. These

include increases to health (Groff et al., 2009), quality of life (Yazicioglu et al., 2012), and employment (Lastuka & Cottingham, 2016) for individuals with disabilities. Therefore, it is important to remedy the dearth of adaptive sport opportunities by adding more, because as activist and athlete Shireen Ahmed has said, “How can you aspire to be something that you don’t see?” (“Athlete Shireen Ahmed on the Importance of Representation in Sports,” 2020). If youth do not have the opportunity to see models of athletes at the elite level, how will they know they can and should aspire to be active?

Responding to this need, previous work has been done at the national and legislative levels within the United States to mitigate barriers. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 ensured access to physical spaces and the Stevens Amendment to the Olympic and Amateur Sports Act in 1998 changed Paralympic governance and reflected “equal status for athletes with disabilities” (Hums et al., 2003). Released in 2010, Healthy People 2020, an initiative with specific aims on how to guide the country into more healthful practices issued by the Surgeon General every ten years, was the first to include specific aims targeting the disability community (*Disability and Health | Healthy People 2020*, n.d.). In 2013 a Dear Colleague Letter was issued by the Office of Civil Rights which clarified existing legislation to advocate for students with disabilities (Galanter, 2013). The Letter served as a reminder for publicly funded schools that, under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, they are required to provide access to an adaptive extracurricular activity, including sports and physical activity, for students with a disability. However, there was more focus on the K-12 level, leaving efforts at the collegiate level lacking. Even factions within the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) attempted to create an adaptive sports model; however, efforts were short-lived (Comerford,

2017). Despite decades worth of attempts, barriers are still present, and opportunities remain scarce at both the K-12 (Cottingham et al., 2015) and collegiate levels (Evans et al., 2017).

A question therefore looms: what is missing? Literature addressing barriers to and benefits of adaptive sport and physical activity is abundant, so why are policy attempts missing the mark and why are health disparities for people with disabilities persisting? There seems to be a disconnect between issues raised and solutions attempted, with not enough voices from disabled people at the center. This indicates a need for critical theories to be utilized in research for more self-reflexive and participatory processes.

Limited research exists regarding collegiate adaptive programs (Shapiro & Pitts, 2014), and even less literature explores adaptive sport using a critical lens. Critical Disability Studies (CDS) has been used in sport and exercise fields to offer a self-reflexive perspective on ableism in sport and to critically examine landscapes which contribute to inequity for people with disabilities (Misener et al., 2016; Smith & Bundon, 2018; Smith & Perrier, 2014). Therefore, an ontological lens grounded in Critical Disability Studies (CDS) guides this research. Critical theories allow researchers to “explain oppression and to transform society with the objective of human emancipation” (Hosking, 2008) by centering the experiences of the oppressed and affirming their humanity (Freire, 2004). CDS is utilized to identify wrongful stereotypes of individuals with disabilities, demonstrate the systemic oppression of individuals with disabilities, and shift dominant social paradigms to reflect a focus on disability as an asset instead of a deficit (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Critical Disability Studies calls on researchers to center the voices of disabled people to guide their research and thereby empowering the disability community and restoring their agency (Hosking, 2008). Through this lens, disability is also recognized to be a nuanced construct which is meant to represent a heterogenous group. For the

purposes of this research, disability was not defined, so as to provide the most room for inclusivity in this exploratory phase.

Goodley writes that CDS “denotes a sense of self-appraisal; reassessing where we have come from, where we are at, and where we might be going” (2013, pg. 632). To ground this self-appraisal within collegiate sport, researchers for this study used Slack & Parent’s (2006) five key areas of describing and understanding sports organizations, which include: (1) social entity (who is involved), (2) involvement in the sport industry (the nature of their involvement and who is serviced), (3) goal-directed focus (program vision and overall goals), (4) consciously constructed activity system (organizational structure), and (5) identifiable boundary (how they distinguish between insiders and outsiders, who they are affiliated with/depend on).

Therefore, the aim of this paper was to use guidance by Slack & Parent (2006) as viewed through CDS to describe intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US to address the following research questions: (1) How do these programs function within their university? (2) What are the programmatic commonalities and differences, if any? Being able to identify and describe an organization based on these five areas is an important first step to asking more context- and change-driven questions (Stone, 2012) on a self/field-reflexive path through CDS.

Method

Design

Qualitative Description

Qualitative descriptive (QD) design was employed for increased usability of findings by stakeholders and policy makers (Sandelowski, 2000). Using QD, researchers highlighted participants’ own language to develop a rich, ‘straight description’ of the phenomenon

(Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). This allowed researchers to design a mixed-method study which yielded quantitative data while exploring the context surrounding it.

QD is a growing methodology in health disparities research as it dictates a low-inference interpretation of data, thereby reducing the potential of “competing explanations” or researcher bias (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005). Consistent with QD design, researchers utilized frameworks to overlay data to best organize findings and represent experiences expressed by respondents.

Sample

Programs

Adaptive sports programs operating at the intercollegiate level (N=16) were included for the purposes of this study. Program inclusion criteria as identified by McCarty et al. (forthcoming) included: (1) intercollegiate competition, (2) identified as providing inclusive or adaptive sports (i.e., for individuals with a disability), (3) to college students, though may not be exclusively, (4) indicated university affiliation, (5) at any four-year institution, (6) within the United States.

Participants

Within these 16 programs, key program stakeholders (e.g., program directors, program coordinators) were recruited. Key program stakeholders were program insiders having accountability across financial, organizational, and discursive aspects of the organization (Katzenstein, 1998). Participant inclusion criteria included: (1) person who identified as a lead program stakeholder, (2) who had intimate knowledge and accountability of the program (i.e., not a distant administrator), and (3) could verify updated information on their program’s adherence to pre-identified inclusion criteria.

Materials

Questionnaire

An open-ended questionnaire (Appendix) to identify programs and glean descriptive organizational information was created and informed by the components of understanding sport organizations (Slack & Parent, 2006), in conjunction with the researcher's practical experience in building these programs (Maxwell, 2012). Slack & Parent (2006) outline five key elements of sports organizations, which were utilized in the questionnaire to facilitate program understanding. Due to limited knowledge of existing programs, an open-ended questionnaire style was adopted. Questionnaires were completed by one representative for each program and administered via Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, Provo, UT).

Procedure

Program and Participant Selection

McCarty et al. (forthcoming) identified 16 intercollegiate adaptive sport programs in the US, using robust criteria and a systematic process detailed in their paper and below.

Data Collection – Phase I. An initial web-based search was conducted by three researchers in fall 2020 to identify programs that met study inclusion criteria using a manifest content analysis approach (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). The search included Google, Yahoo, and Bing platforms as they accounted for ~98% of search activity in the US from May 2018-2019 (*Search Engine Market Share United States Of America*, n.d.). Each researcher was assigned a search engine and employed the same keyword searches after pilot testing to ensure intra- and intercoder reliability, respectively (Kondracki et al., 2002).

Search terms were identified to allow for the greatest inclusivity of potential programs and used combinations and abbreviations of the words “college/collegiate,” “university,” “higher education,” “adaptive/adapted,” “disability/disabled,” “inclusive,” “sports,” “athletics,”

“program,” and “club.” Each phrase was entered into the search engines and the first three pages of websites were reviewed for potential programs that met inclusion criteria. Potential programs were entered into a spreadsheet for further examination. Phase I concluded once a saturation of data was reached and searches no longer yielded new programs (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). This initial screening identified 42 potential programs.

Data Collection – Phase II. An in-depth web-based search was conducted for each of the 42 potential programs to determine which programs met all program inclusion criteria identified previously. Each program was the subject of closer examination of its own web presence (e.g., website, social media). Search terms included combinations of the words “[name of university],” “[name of program, if applicable],” “adaptive/adapted,” “disability/disabled,” “inclusive,” “sports,” “athletics,” “program,” and “club.” Program websites, social media pages, press releases, and publicly available documentation (e.g., marketing brochures) were reviewed to confirm inclusion criteria. Sixteen programs met inclusion criteria, the largest eliminating factor being the intercollegiate level competition.

Data Collection – Phase III. Contact information was collected for each of the 16 programs to identify key program stakeholders who met participant inclusion criteria identified previously. Intended questionnaire participants were key program stakeholders, such as Program Directors, Coordinators, or any other leadership title of the person who was responsible for overseeing the program. For this reason, preliminary contact was made with each program by phone, when possible, to verify those individuals and ensure that current contact information was valid, and that the personnel being contacted as questionnaire participants were the intended stakeholders. Contact information for verified program leaders who met individual inclusion criteria was entered into an Excel spreadsheet for questionnaire correspondence, and initial

contact efforts for questionnaire participants were sent by email. Two follow-up email reminders were sent within a one-month time frame (Solomon, 2001).

Questionnaire distribution also depended on snowball sampling (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). In addition to the questionnaire, potential respondents received a list of all 16 programs identified by researchers based on publicly available data. Respondents were asked to review the identified programs and add any known programs that met inclusion criteria, if not already included, to ensure that researchers had the most updated list, as understood by the community itself. These programs were subject to phases I and II to verify their eligibility due to inclusion criteria. If inclusion criteria were unclear, further correspondence with the respondent who identified the program was used to clarify any discrepancies in understanding. If the program did not appear to be eligible for inclusion based on their publicly available, web-based data but was identified by the community to be eligible, it was included for the current study. One such program was included. Due to limited knowledge of program opportunities and the nature of this sampling, no a priori target number of participants was determined (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). Of the 16 programs found to meet inclusion criteria, 14 responded (87.5% response rate) to participate in this study. Though respondents were given unlimited characters to respond, much of the data obtained was either shorthand or consisted of 1-3 sentences. Data were fully deidentified throughout responses and aggregated by question (Saldaña, 2013) for full anonymity, given the small size of the community (Saunders et al., 2015).

The procedures for this study were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Experiential Knowledge

Based on the author's previous experience with the community after having laid the foundation for an intercollegiate, adaptive sports program, sustaining contacts were leveraged as

a means of distributing the questionnaire. When needed, contacts were asked to aid in understanding of respondent topic salience to increase participation incentive (Martin, 1994) without disclosing identifiable participant data. Though within qualitative work a connection to the community is recognized to add to a robust analysis, it also introduces researcher bias, and the balance of the two must be carefully considered. For this reason, a QD design was chosen to provide more data straight from community voices, and data were aggregated to allow a level of separation between data and researcher (Saldaña, 2013).

Analysis

Pragmatic Qualitative Approach

Researchers utilized a pragmatic approach in qualitative processes as a preferred method of analysis, using “strategic combining and borrowing from established qualitative approaches to meet the needs of a given [applied] study” (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). This meant a flexibility in using design, methodologies, and analysis paradigms that may seem to be at odds with one another but are specific and necessary given the nature of their use (Morgan, 2014). This further reinforced the self-reflective and critical lens through which this research was conducted, as it allowed for the blending of theory and practice in matching the best methodological fit at each stage (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020; Ramanadhan et al., 2021). Researchers grounded their pragmatic approach within Critical Disability Studies to allow for the centering and prioritization of the voices of the participants to guide next steps and methods, instead of relying only on one theory or practice (Hosking, 2008; Morgan, 2014).

The informed consent document signed by all participants included an admission that, given the small size of the collegiate adaptive community, participants and programs may be

identifiable, but that every precaution would be taken to de-identify data and responses would be aggregated to further ensure anonymity (Saldaña, 2013; Saunders et al., 2015).

Respondents were given unlimited characters as they responded to all questions, including organizational goals and structure, some indication of the program's inception, and facilitators and barriers to programming. However, most wrote in shorthand or wrote between 1-3 sentences. Data were aggregated by question and transferred from the original Excel document into individual Word documents and then organized and analyzed using NVivo software (QSR International, 2019). After results were analyzed, the original data were aggregated and numbered (1-14) to represent the 14 program respondents (e.g., Program 1, Program 2, etc.) and to ensure diversity in the representative data included in the study results.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used as it is the preferred analytic strategy when performing a qualitative descriptive study where “straight descriptions of phenomena are desired” (Sandelowski 2000). Sandelowski further wrote that qualitative content analysis:

is an effort to understand not only the manifest (e.g., frequencies and means), but also the latent content of data. Yet qualitative content analysis is the least interpretive of the qualitative analysis approaches in that there is no mandate to re-present the data in any other terms but their own (2000).

Therefore, researchers used both deductive and inductive coding analyses, as is common for qualitative content analysis (Forman & Damschroder, 2008). Deductive coding was based on the pre-existing categories Slack & Parent introduced to define a sport organization (2006) and included continued and critical examination of each category for the data that fit within (Milne & Oberle, 2005). Inductive coding was possible in each category based on limited yet rich

responses but was kept basic in order to remain consistent with qualitative descriptive design (Sandelowski, 2000). Creswell and Poth's "The Data Analysis Spiral" (2016, p. 185) was used as an approach to continually engage and reengage with data through a non-linear spiraling of analysis steps. These steps included an immersion and review of data, highlighting possible categorical alignment, grouping data based on their framework category, highlighting initial inductive codes, rereading responses for category fit, additional highlighting for categorical fit, continued reading of responses and theme generation, use of exploratory analysis tools within NVivo such as word cloud, freewriting of memos, and verbal processing. Data were organized by their fit within the key elements of a sports organization (Slack & Parent, 2006) and further supported by quotes. Additional themes were discussed within each category section. Free-written researcher memos added to the depth and analytical richness of data (Maxwell, 2012).

Where appropriate for inductive analysis, the researcher operated with a constructionist epistemology with a relativist ontology (Smith & McGannon, 2018) and approached data for themes that developed through continued exposure without believing in or aiming to find a single true existing truth that the data were expected to reveal. Instead, it was understood that, though this was exploratory, no analysis was free of experiential perspectives or theory (Braun & Clarke, 2012), and the researcher constructed themes accordingly. For this reason, analysis included engaging with "critical friends" who challenged researcher-developed codes and themes for further development instead of relying on a two person coding team (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

Results

Responses included representation from 14 of the 16 programs targeted (87.5% response rate). All respondents were program insiders (Katzenstein, 1998) and held intimate knowledge of

their respective programs. The five key elements of sports organizations by Slack & Parent (2006) provided the grounding framework within which the data were organized.

Social entity

Respondents all held titles of either Head Coach or Program Director, and 71% (n=10) indicated having a paid position-full or part time not specified. Only 36% (n=5) were considered founders or co-founders of their program. Respondents indicated paid or in-kind staffing, which varied greatly (range=3-175 people, mean=34, median=10, mode=5) and often included athletes themselves as staff. All listed the support of undergraduate or graduate student workers or volunteers.

Of note was the use of the word ‘adaptive’ throughout program titles and response language. The academic field of kinesiology and, more specifically, adapted physical activity utilize the past tense verb form of ‘adapt’ to categorize the field (Hutzler & Sherrill, 2007). Language used by the collegiate sport community adopts the adjective form of ‘adapt,’ which may speak to current language as preferred by the community and could indicate a more ethically responsible way to use ‘adaptive’ language moving forward (Goodwin & Howe, 2016).

Involvement in the sport industry

Years of program existence varied (range=2-70 years old, mean=23, median=15, mode=2). Number of served athletes also varied, regardless of program existence (range=2-49, mean=18, median=10, mode=10). Across all programs, athlete demographics were reported or confirmed as unknown. Of those data reported compared to the total number of athletes reported served (n=193), athletes were majority cis-gender male (73%), from the United States (91%), considered out-of-state students (54%), with a disability (98%; 54% acquired, 32% congenital),

and White (27%), with the next greatest racial representations being Hispanic/Latino (17%) and Black/African American (13%).

Athletes were indicated as having been recruited by the program director or head coach through attendance at junior tournaments, program-hosted athletic camps, connecting through national governing bodies (NGB), attending tournaments throughout the year, and continued [word-of-mouth] contact with prospective athletes and families. All programs indicated holding academic and practice-based standards for their athletes, once recruited, with some indicating that they upheld similar or the same requirements as National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) student athletes, even though none held NCAA status. One respondent wrote:

“While the NCAA doesn't sanction collegiate adaptive sports, our plans are to adhere to NCAA guidelines as much as possible. While our program is not housed in our University's Athletic Department, it is affiliated with it (think of it as a collaboration between my dept. and the Athletic dept., with most of the work on me) and as such, we reflect on [university] Athletics, hence our plans to adhere to NCAA in most things” (Program 1).

All respondents reported adhering to athlete classifications that came from the National Governing Body (NGB; e.g., National Wheelchair Basketball Association, International Wheelchair Basketball Federation, United States Tennis Association) specific to each sport. One program leader clarified that NGB classifications can affect recruitment efforts based on their needs for their team:

“Each sport has a classification system. As a result, some of our recruitment will be based on need for each program. If basketball needs a class 2 athlete, they will not

strongly recruit a bunch of 4.5's however we typically will recruit any person with a disability that can get into the University” (Program 7).

Sports offered was one of the more streamlined categories (range=1-9, mean=2, median=1, mode=1). Most prevalent was wheelchair basketball (71%; n=10), followed by wheelchair tennis (36%; n=5) and others which were mentioned by 2 or fewer programs (i.e., rugby, track, handcycling, swimming, golf, field, adaptive track and field, ambulatory track and field). After wheelchair basketball and tennis, the designation of ‘intercollegiate’ became difficult to describe. Athletes may have played for their university—using college logos and names—but if there were not enough collegiate affiliated teams to play the sport, the athletes or team were designated as a club or not recognized in any official capacity by the university. This did not mean it was not elite-level play, as many programs indicated playing high-level club designation, nationally, or even professionally. The number of competitors, though, were only listed by all respondents for basketball (women’s teams=5-6, men’s teams=10-13) and tennis (teams=6-25+). Many also wrote of tennis being “flexible on eligibility” (Program 12), meaning that the USTA allowed community members as well as student athletes to participate on collegiate teams, contributing to greater numbers of competitors. In terms of competitions, though there was likely some variation based on sport, the numbers of overall sport competitions were similar throughout (range=3-12, mean=7, median=7, mode=5 and 8). Further, though some indicated having a coed team offering, only 4 respondents (29%) listed a women’s-specific team, and all were for wheelchair basketball.

Most respondents indicated providing services above and beyond supporting the team efforts. There was mention of disability awareness and practitioner training, as well as hosting tournaments, collaborating with the university’s research efforts, and community service to

benefit adults and children with disabilities, with one stakeholder indicating, “We do a lot of community service and go into schools to teach what students with disabilities can do” (Program 3).

Goal-directed focus

Mission and vision statements varied widely, though many indicated goals which extended beyond sport performance to providing a service to current and future students, such as life-, academic-, employment-, and physical-type training. Many indicated their program and initiative was a vehicle for something larger than just sport within disability. Goals included building leadership, social skills, educational tools, and contributing to growing graduation and employment numbers for students with a disability. One respondent explained:

“There are programs that will prepare you for the Paralympics, our program guarantees you employment and we are much larger than most programs. If we get 10-15 people in the workforce [every] year, that's a victory. Sports is a vehicle” (Program 12).

Brief descriptions of program inception also varied but seemed to be connected by uplifting a coalition aspect: “It was a concept that was started by founders of a student organization at [university] that turned into a reality with the help of other stakeholders from within the university and outside the university” (Program 4). Every program inception involved the need for a combination of students, administrators, and a permanent faculty or staff member for the program to grow and succeed. Some highlighted the connection to the local community and the importance of collaborations and donors that were external to the university. Many programs (71%; n=10) indicated having been incepted due to a grassroots effort by students or faculty as opposed to something the university initiated from the top, executive level down.

Respondents were asked to identify their top three barriers and top three facilitators to program sustainability. Interestingly, the top three barriers and facilitators were the same. Listed as the top three barriers *and* the top three facilitators were: (1) overall awareness and perception of the program, (2) funding, and (3) university support. Further identified barriers included: (4) recruitment and (5) environment. Additional facilitators included: (4) having a dedicated and knowledgeable staff.

Barriers

Awareness. Respondents stressed difficulties in overall awareness of the program as a frequent barrier. This included awareness from the university that there were efforts emerging, as well as, once they were known, how creating an adaptive program for students with a disability contributed to “educating the campus on inclusion [and building] the concept of equity and inclusion” (Program 2) to meet the universities’ strategic plans. A further “lack of public knowledge of the program” (Program 8) contributed to difficulties in recruitment, funding, a perceived lack of support.

Funding. The most ubiquitous barrier listed was funding of some kind with one stakeholder concluding, “fundraising is always the major issue” (Program 7). While overall funding sustainability was a stand-alone barrier, including a limited operating budget or having a budget that was dependent on uncontrollable factors such as student enrollment, aspects of funding barriers were interrelated with others. Limited access to scholarships was related to difficulty in recruitment of athletes, given the ever-growing “financial burden of a college education” (Program 5). Additionally, operating within a university setting created boundaries which made it challenging for some to seek funding for the program. Both the constrained budgets of the current economic situation within the US and the structure of university

development offices were mentioned by respondents with one noting, “fundraising with some of our University Foundation rules makes [seeking funding] a little tricky” (Program 7).

University Support. Though broad in the definition of who is meant by the ‘university,’ most respondents pointed to institutional difficulties and resources which it was believed the university could provide.

“Clearly, [a barrier is] direct institutional support. We are successful and proud of this program. However, there is no real sustainability. If I am not here hustling money every year this would all collapse. It has to be something the University values at an instructional level” (Program 12).

Given the perceived resources received by sport programs within university athletics departments, one stakeholder noted unequal support, writing, “while we are partnered with the Athletic Department, they do not provide any financial support (not yet anyway). So, I have to raise all money to fund our program” (Program 1). Respondents also noted that limited resources such as the “lack of storage and office space specific to the program” (Program 6) made day to day operations difficult.

Recruitment. Athlete recruitment was another highly indicated barrier. This was connected to funding and to marketing the university experience. Stakeholders from smaller or non-NCAA division I universities wrote on the difficulties of attracting athletes when they competed against larger, division I universities for the same candidates. Further nuance extended to a lacking youth pipeline:

“Because there are fewer people playing wheelchair [sports], we need to build up the player development opportunities. There are little to no opportunities for adaptive sport in the state of [state]. We have plans to provide youth development opportunities in

wheelchair tennis, but this takes many resources, namely money and people. While all the people in our organization are affiliated with the University and donate our time, we can't work for free forever" (Program 1).

Environment. Due to the constraints posed by the global pandemic, two respondents listed COVID-19 as a barrier with one clarifying, "[A barrier is] COVID, but that's a barrier to everything right now and not sure that's a fair issue" (Program 1). This was mainly stated as a barrier without explanation, presumably with the assumption that it was understood that it meant a shutdown of activities. However, despite the documented effects the pandemic had, particularly on the disability sport community (Fitzgerald et al., 2020), there was no further mention by any respondents.

One respondent indicated weather (i.e., snow) as a barrier, though it was not further specified. This could have been as it related to the overall accessibility of the campus, to how cold temperatures which lead to snow could cause issues for some athletes with thermoregulation disorders (Patatoukas et al., 2011), or merely to an assumption that snow was not a preferred climate overall.

Facilitators

Facilitators generated were mainly the same listed as barriers. Respondents were less verbose in their explanation of facilitators than they were with barriers.

Awareness. An overall knowledge of the program, including benefits to athletes and the university, as well as to the surrounding community, was a frequently mentioned facilitator. Many respondents wrote on the importance of demonstrating the value of the program through measurable success outcomes (e.g., graduation rates, grade averages). Less measurable but impactful aspects included building community within the university that extended to current

students and alumni, as well as the local and Paralympic communities. These connections bolstered recruitment and funding efforts.

Funding. Funding sources listed were specific to the type of funding received and how helpful that was to the programs' success and sustainability. Listed sources of funding included major community sponsors, matching funds from the state, grant funds, alumni, and donations. Also uplifted were the benefits of having funding to pay for specific resources, such as a head coach. Future facilitators were listed, such as the need for a "'streamline of flexible money,' and 'direct financial support'" (Program 12), and overall "increased funding" (Program 13).

University Support. Having any form of support from the leadership at the top of the university was present as a facilitator in almost every response. Similar to the barriers, what was meant by 'university' was unspecified other than a mention of "Executive Leadership" (Program 1) or department-specific support. Often this facilitator was mentioned alongside financial assistance.

Dedicated Staff. Personnel was a resource mentioned by many respondents. Most indicated in-kind [donated time/volunteer] and student support and went further to describe a "highly dedicated and skilled student staff" (Program 12) as the most helpful. However, there was also mention of the importance of a staff who did not leave or graduate to ensure better programmatic sustainability. Additionally, having staff with previous experience either working in or participating in adaptive sports was acknowledged as "invaluable as a source of credibility (as viewed from university leadership)" (Program 1).

Consciously constructed activity system

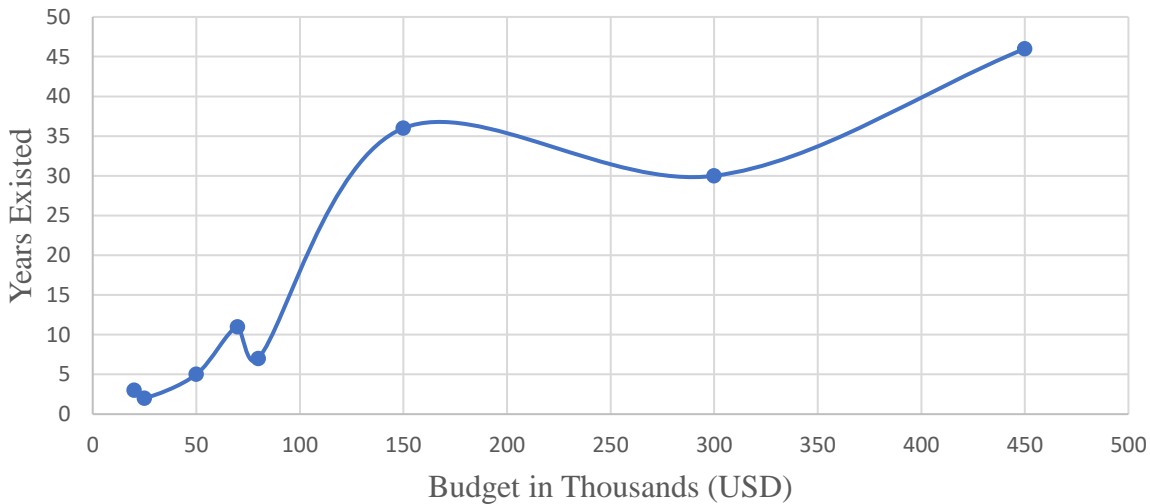
All respondents held a title of 'Director' of some kind or a variation of 'Head Coach' and all were direct reports to the director of the department under which they were housed. Housing

department units varied, with academic units (e.g., college of health) being the most prevalent (29%, n=4), followed by Campus Recreation (21%, n=3), Student Services (i.e., disability services, student affairs; 21%, n=3), and athletics (14%, n=2), with two programs (14%) unspecified.

Budgets varied largely (range=\$20,000-\$450,000; mean=\$132,000; median=\$50,000; mode=\$50,000) and, except for one outlier, had a pattern of increasing based on their years in existence (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Programs According to Budget and Existence



Note. This figure represents only respondents who provided this information (n=9) and excludes one outlier.

Identifiable boundary

Respondents listed students, athletes, coaches, coordinators, volunteers, community members, administrators, and even donors as part of their team. In line with a goal-directed focus including a coalition of many stakeholders, there seemed to be a ‘the more the merrier’ approach to building and sustaining their programs.

The greatest source of funding was listed as donations of some kind, including endowments (50%, n=7). Program fundraising efforts were the second most common funding source (29%, n=4), followed by grants, state-awarded funds, student fees, or unspecified direct university support. Only one respondent listed a corporate partner as part of their funding, but the relationship was not specified.

Scholarship options ranged from allowing athletes to pay in-state instead of out-of-state tuition to providing housing and dining waivers—though it was also mentioned by one respondent that these offerings were cut recently—and/or book cost offsets of up to \$3,000. Many reported being able to provide unspecified scholarships to athletes, most commonly around \$1,000 and as high as \$30,000.

Affiliated NGB were both specific to sport (i.e., National Wheelchair Basketball Association, United States Tennis Association, United States Wheelchair Rugby Association) and broadly affiliated (i.e., Move United, US Paralympics). The NCAA was not mentioned in these responses. However, in response to a direct question regarding program structure and the NCAA, 9 (75% of respondents to question) said they want to mirror the NCAA, though most also included nuance within their answer. Respondents indicated wanting the access to opportunities through NCAA participation and suggested that affiliation “gives a 'social legitimacy' to [adaptive] athletics” (Program 2). Though many wrote of the NCAA model, it is not clear whether that is regarded as the best model for collegiate adaptive sport.

“We are not yet sold on the belief that we should be included in the NCAA as we believe this would restrict the amount of program we would be able to offer. It is our goal to have our student-athletes have the same type of experience that their non-disabled counterparts have” (Program 7).

Respondents described their visions changing over time, having started by mirroring the NCAA model and evolving to something which better fit their athletes and experiences:

“Our organization is not attempting to mirror NCAA or any other NGBs structure or policy, we are creating our own model because it's a policy based off the resources (students, student athletes, coaches, administration, etc.) that we currently have or are planning on attaining” (Program 4).

Further Descriptive Results

The questionnaire concluded with two final questions: (1) which program was viewed as the most successful currently in existence and why, for a perspective on what ‘success’ might mean to the present group; and (2) whether there were any additional comments, to add insights to context surrounding these programs.

Programs mentioned as being successful were judged by the longevity of the program’s existence; decoration and success of the team(s); prestige and quality of the team(s); availability of resources such as facilities, staff, and funding; and student athlete graduation success. Further review of those most listed as successful revealed similarities in the survey responses. All programs indicated by respondents had been in existence for decades, had 2+ paid positions, included at least wheelchair basketball as a sports offering, indicated receiving some financial support from ‘the university,’ and were incepted by a grassroots effort—though one indicated having had success following the university’s effort to adhere to national policy guidelines. Facilitators for these programs were more program-specific and pointed to the support of the people involved. Barriers were more focused on higher level university issues that were out of the program director or coach’s hands, such as the “financial burden of a college education” (Program 5) or rules of the university funding system (i.e., Foundation) making fundraising

efforts “a little tricky” (Program 7). Every respondent representing a program deemed successful by the community wrote of nuance around NCAA involvement and an appreciation for the prestige it could give but a neutral or negative view of whether it was the right model for their athletes.

The ‘additional comments’ question provided extra open-ended insights, including hardships specific to new programs, as one respondent offered:

“With so few programs, acquiring athletes can be an arms race. In able bodied sports there are Divisions I, II, III, NAIA and the community colleges. One of the greatest challenges is breaking in. Because, some schools are well resourced, and realistically, with so few teams, getting competitive games at the high end, mid end, and lower end are difficult. So, you get blowouts. It happens in basketball and tennis. This will likely work itself out as the number of teams increase over time but it’s a rocky ride for new programs looking to get their foot in the door” (Program 12).

Another respondent shared a hopeful insight, indicating that they had recently noticed an increase in research like this project as many other researchers had recently approached them:

“Not sure if something is happening nationwide that is causing so many people to be looking at this at the same time, or if this is even considered to be a lot. But given the absolute lack of information that is out there about collegiate adaptive, this is badly needed work” (Program 1).

Finally, one respondent wrote about the application of this research and the need for researchers to connect their findings to the community they intend to serve: “If this study can be utilized in a way to make people want to invest in these sporting opportunities, then this study will have done a great service for the adaptive sports community” (Program 4).

Discussion

Viewing results from an open-ended, qualitative survey of intercollegiate adaptive sport programs in the US through a CDS lens showed a wide range of diversity among the programs in existence and further illuminated the collegiate adaptive sport landscape. Though there are a reported 732 K-12 schools which provide some kind of adaptive physical activity opportunities to 62,112 youth (Cottingham et al., 2015), only 16 collegiate adaptive athletics programs in the United States were found, serving a total of 193 athletes. This is as compared to the 1,099 NCAA member institutions serving 499,217 athletes (Irick, 2019), further highlighting the inequity faced by disabled athletes. Perhaps the most profound finding specific to programming was the diversity among each program surveyed. Utilizing an open-ended survey and QD approach was necessary, given limited literature, and yielded results which were difficult to aggregate.

Interestingly, the only pattern found within the data occurred between years in existence and budget, with a trend towards longer programmatic tenure coinciding with a larger budget, apart from one outlier (Figure 1). This could mean that the longer a program is in existence, the greater access they have to sources of funding. However, no other funding or other programmatic similarities were found to parallel this trend. Further research is warranted to understand this pattern.

Most programs, regardless of budget or years established, had only one paid position, offered one or two sports, and were dependent on a team of students and volunteers. Having the available support of paid, graduate research assistant students could be an important factor to program success, and future research should investigate this further. Additionally, it should be noted that even with increased years of experience and budget, programs were still only able to support one to two major intercollegiate sports and, therefore, only so many athletes. Though

many wrote of club and national level competition for their elite athletes because of a lack of intercollegiate programs, they were not themselves able to create more of those intercollegiate opportunities for sports other than wheelchair basketball or tennis. Major perceived barriers were a lack of sustainable funding, which many expected the university to provide, and the general system in which the programs operate, including the rules dictated by both the university and the NCAA.

It was clear that respondents viewed the adaptive sports programs as parallel to traditional NCAA athletic programs, holding their athletes to similar standards and competing at high, intercollegiate levels. The expectation was that their programs would be provided with the same level of prestige, resources, funding, and overall support from the university as a team competing within the athletics department and NCAA divisions based on their level of competition and vision for the athletes. This is consistent with elite perceptions within the Paralympics in comparison to the Olympics, the para- prefix meaning parallel or alongside (i.e. of the Olympics) (Bressan, 2008). However, there was a perceived disconnect in how the university viewed each program's value and importance versus how the stakeholders viewed it. Further research is warranted to understand the barriers expressed by respondents in the context of the systems governing their programs and the institutional and possibly ableist causes of these barriers.

Respondents expressed a perception that although programs bring in money for their university, benefit their disabled athletes beyond the realm of sports, and in some cases attract international-level competition, they are not getting the recognition or support they deserve, perpetuating a system of disabling and 'othering' these athletes. Full programmatic function was dependent on mostly one but up to five people at select institutions to act as coach, development

(i.e., funding) officer, administrator, equipment manager, athletic trainer, publicist, etc. As a result, programs were caught between needing prestige to get the attention and funding from their university and needing the resources and support from their university to be recognized with any prestige. This is why, it seems, there is such a focus on NCAA level support. Many respondents reported following NCAA rules for athlete eligibility, as well as following sport-specific classification and athlete rules to be seen as legitimate. This was concurrent with a sentiment that being recognized by the NCAA would bring a legitimacy to the sport, such that the university would pay attention and provide more support. The perception was that if these adaptive sports programs could attract the recognition of being accepted by the NCAA, that would open a window of funding and support from the university, and they would be treated equally to traditional athletic programs.

The path to NCAA acceptance has been difficult. Historically, there was an effort through the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) within the NCAA to build an adaptive sports model (Powell, 2016b). However, the original vision was for over 1,000 disabled athletes to play within the ECAC by 2020 (Comerford, 2017) and there are currently not that many athletes even within all of intercollegiate adaptive sports. Accountability to that vision is unclear and warrants future research. The NCAA does provide an ‘emerging sport’ path for women’s sports, which could be something adopted by adaptive sports. The emerging sport program was designed to address inequity faced by female athletes and “to help schools provide more athletics opportunities for women and more sport-sponsorship options for the institutions, and also help that sport achieve NCAA championship status” (Powell, 2016a). Given the inequity individuals with disabilities face within sports, this could be seen as a possible option. However, an emergent sport on the path to full NCAA recognition has 10 years to develop institution-

sponsored programs at a minimum of 40 institutions. Pulling from CDS, which encourages an examination of the current moment in understanding capitalist individualism (Goodley et al., 2019), this puts the responsibility on those interested in the sport to work through the individual, programmatic, institutional, and systemic barriers which work against them to reach this status. Findings from this study indicate that the oldest existing adaptive sport program in the United States is 70 years old, yet still faces the same barriers as those most recently inceptioned. For organizations like the NCAA and academic institutions that claim to prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion, they are not doing much for the disability community, and future efforts must be more intentional (Bernhard, 2016).

Some argue that current policy under the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, all created with the intent of opening access for people with disabilities, do not go far enough, further suggesting a Title IX-mirroring policy to mandate adaptive sport opportunities at the collegiate level (Fay, 2011). Title IX legislation, which prohibits discrimination in education and related activities on the basis of sex (Buchanan, 2012), may serve as a foundation for disability policy and non-discrimination laws. It must be noted, though, that Title IX and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act were passed within one year of each other and contain extraordinarily similar language, with the former focused on gender issues and the latter on disability (Lakowski, 2011). However, Section 504 did not have the same effect on people with disabilities as Title IX had on women in sport. Title IX and the Women's Movement were closely aligned in cause, including sport, and were beneficial to one another in affecting women's access to physical activity, among other things (Sandler, 2007). The difference for Section 504 could have been the (sport-absent) agenda and overall strength of the concurrent civil DRM. This warrants a deeper dive into the

persistence of these grassroots, adaptive sport programs as their own social movement. Whatever the route to policy, continued research is warranted, with disabled voices at the center, to ensure that athletes with a disability are given the same sport opportunities as their nondisabled peers.

Of note, many respondents wrote of nuance surrounding NCAA involvement and whether the current model is even something that should be perpetuated. Current NCAA practices have come under fire of late as they represent a highly problematic system within higher education (Gurney et al., 2017). The CDS construct of intersectionality insists on a recognition of the exploitative nature of high revenue-generating sports for Black students and students of color (Van Rheenen, 2013), as well as pervasive sexual harassment cases brought by female athletes (Beaver, 2019), which represent some of the most well documented issues. Some have called for a massive reform of the NCAA (Grow & Haugh, 2021; Gurney et al., 2017; Zaccagnini, 2021), while others have called for a full abolition of the organization (“Should the NCAA Be Abolished?,” 2020). Future research that explores a reform versus abolition perspective for the NCAA and adaptive sport could provide a rich depth to the conversation and help center intersectional inclusion.

Additionally, patterns of exclusionary pathways to collegiate sport which create a homogenous group of privileged athletes who benefit from current NCAA participation (Hextrum, 2020) could already be present in adaptive sport. The results from this survey reveal a possibly similar pattern among even this limited offering of sport. Not only are women’s adaptive sport opportunities rare, the majority of currently served athletes are also cisgender, white males with an acquired disability. Future research exploring the current, albeit limited, pathway to collegiate adaptive sport is warranted to understand a broader picture and critique the level of inclusion or exclusion which exists within.

If and when adaptive sport enters the collegiate scene at the level it deserves, it is imperative that programs are created through a lens of inclusion informed by the disability community, and not merely the accommodations made to survive within an already existing, problematic system. Current adaptive collegiate sports programming suggests that, because of programs' mainly grassroots inception, largely borne out of necessity to work within the bounds at their disposal but not without intention, this vision of inclusion is their cornerstone and must not be lost with future efforts in programming or even policy. This study was imperative to lay a groundwork for understanding the functioning of collegiate adaptive programs, which is a necessary step in a self-appraisal guided by CDS. Future research should continue this work and take a deeper dive into the barriers and facilitators to program sustainability in order to get a more robust picture of the landscape.

Limitations

Relying on a fully self-reported questionnaire introduced limitations for this study. However, given the dearth of information surrounding these programs, it was necessary to create an exploratory, open-ended questionnaire which was informed by both research and experience. Future research may explore further the creation and validation of such a survey, using the data herein as a beginning reference point.

An additional limitation was the use of aggregated data within this qualitative study. This could have resulted in an overrepresentation of quotes by one or two respondents, leading to results which may not be representative of the community as a whole. Given how close the lead author was to the community and the desire to view the phenomenon from aerial view, a conscious decision was made to aggregate in this case, in order to reduce researcher bias and to provide a first, exploratory look into the community. After quotes were attributed to their

identified sources, 10 of the 14 programs (71%) were represented in quoted responses. Future research may consider exploring unaggregated data.

Conclusion

College students with disabilities are not being afforded the same access to health benefits through sporting opportunities as their peers without disabilities, leading to greater disparities experienced by students with a disability. Despite there being over 62,000 disabled athletes at the K-12 level (Cottingham et al., 2015), the current study found that there were only 16 collegiate adaptive athletics programs in the United States, serving a total of only 193 athletes. This is compared to the 1,099 NCAA member institutions serving 499,217 athletes (Irick, 2019). National policy, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, exists to try to address this gap, but limitations in guidance for creating opportunities within higher education make the creation of adaptive sports programs difficult.

To create a pathway for the emergence of more collegiate adaptive sports programs, current programmatic structure as described by the community was studied to add to a limited literature base. After analyzing responses from a comprehensive, open-ended survey given to programmatic insiders (N=14 out of 16 programs; 87.5% response rate), results indicated a diverse set, and limited number, of programs. Using Slack and Parent's (2006) five key elements of sports organizations and viewing responses through a CDS lens provided a grounding framework to organize results and discuss areas for future research.

This study provides a unique and current look into collegiate adaptive sport organizations which adds to limited research on the topic. Future research must prioritize centering the voices from the adaptive sport and disability community towards forming equitable pathways for the

creation of more adaptive sports, as well as for policy to emerge which includes collegiate athletes with a disability.

Appendix

Phase 1 Instrument

Open-ended Questionnaire

Social Entity

1. What is your organizational title?
2. What is your role within the organization?
3. Were you the founder or a key, initial stakeholder in your organization's inception?
4. How many total staff/students/volunteers play a role in running your organization?
5. What are the titles (if any) of these leaders within the organization?
6. Indicate for each whether these are:
 - a. Paid position or in-kind
 - b. Part-time or full-time
 - c. Student or professional

Involvement in sport industry

7. How long has your program been in existence?
8. How many sports does your organization provide?
9. What specific sports are offered?
 - a. Indicate which level for each (i.e. recreational, intramural, club, intercollegiate, national)
 - b. Indicate for each whether they are inclusive of (do they allow participation by) nondisabled participants
10. Does your organization provide any other services? What are they?
11. How many athletes does your organization serve?

For questions 12-17, please provide the following information regarding your athletes if known (please do not guess, simply write “unknown”). You will need to click each box and provide your answer for each.

12. Number of athletes that are from the US

- a. Number from in-state
- b. Number from out-of-state

13. Number of athletes that are from outside the US

14. Number of athletes that identify as:

- Male
- Female
- Genderqueer/diverse
- Trans Male
- Trans Female
- Other

15. Number of athletes with a disability

- Acquired
- Congenital

16. Number of athletes that identify as:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- More than one
- Other

17. Number of athletes without a disability

18. Is there an athlete recruitment effort for your organization?

- a. If so, please provide a brief description of those efforts
19. Does your organization utilize a classification system for your athletes?
- a. If so, which classification system do you use?
20. Roughly, how many competitions does your organization engage in per academic school year?
- a. Indicate by each sport, if necessary
21. Roughly, how many teams are available to compete in your sport that operate at the collegiate level?
- a. Indicate by each sport, if necessary
22. Describe the academic and sport specific expectations of your athletes, if any?

Goal-directed focus

23. What is the overall goal (e.g. mission or vision) of your organization?
24. Would you briefly tell me about your organization's historical development?
25. Was the program created based on direction from the top of university administration (e.g. as part of the college's strategic plan, a specific university initiative), or was the initial idea for the program started by a grassroots effort (e.g. community member or student-driven)?
26. What would you identify as your three biggest barriers (things that make the development or sustainability of the program more difficult)?
27. What would you identify as your three biggest facilitators (things that make the development or sustainability of the program smoother)?

Consciously structured activity system

28. Please describe your organizational chart, if applicable. If it's easier, please respond to the email with this survey (to mccarkat@oregonstate.edu) with a print-out of this chart. Please include job titles only.
29. What position does the organization's primary leader hold within the university, if any (this could be you)?
30. What institutional department houses your organization?
31. What is your organization's yearly budget?

Identifiable boundary

32. Is your organization affiliated with any national governing bodies? If so, what are they?
33. Is your organization aiming to mirror NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) structure and policy? Why or why not? If not, is there another organization you are trying to model or is yours a new model?
34. What is the primary funding mechanism of your organization?
35. Are there other funding mechanisms of your organization? What are they?
36. Do you offer any athlete scholarships or funding?
37. How much per year?
38. How are they funded?

Final questions

39. Which collegiate, adaptive sports program in the US is the most successful and why?
40. Is there anything else about your organization that you would like to speak to or identify?

Manuscript 2

Abstract

Sport, adaptive sport included, has often been viewed as a vehicle for social justice and used as a tool within civil rights movements. However, there is limited research utilizing a social movement lens to understand adaptive sports at the elite, intercollegiate level. The purpose of this study was to build on a foundation of information regarding collegiate adaptive sports utilizing a Blended Framework, which blends social movement and organizational theory. A multiple case study and qualitative description (QD) design was conducted on three of the 16 programs identified to explore their experiences more deeply. Qualitative content analysis through a Blended Framework overlay revealed novel perceptions regarding (1) the actors who were most important, (2) destabilizing events, and (3) relevant periods of activity. Further thematic analysis was used to construct themes within relevant periods of activity, which resulted in a preliminary pathway to the creation of more programs. This included guidance to (1) Start with What You Know, (2) Build a Coalition of Like-Minded Partners, (3) Prepare for the Long-Haul, and (4) Look for Windows of 'Luck.' Participants hypothesized that key stakeholder procurement of "students first, then coach, and then the university" could result in a trifecta within which the successful program was the center. Verbatim participant questions for future research direction are included in Appendix A.

Introduction

The Disability Rights Movement (DRM), like concurrent civil rights movements, asserts that individuals with disabilities know what is best for themselves and their community (Charlton, 2000). Sport has often been viewed as a vehicle for social justice and used as a tool within civil rights movements (Darnell & Millington, 2019). Adaptive sport is similarly referred to as a social movement by the community, based on resistance faced in the creation of or credibility gained by programs and athletes (LaVaque-Manty, 2005). However, there is limited research utilizing a social movement lens to understand adaptive sports at the elite, intercollegiate level. Exploring the collegiate adaptive sport programs that do exist through a social movement lens may begin to shed light on the conditions enabling the creation and sustainability of these programs. Social movement theory may be incomplete to view these programs at the programmatic level, though, as organizational theory is also incomplete at understanding adaptive programs within the larger social context (Campbell, 2005). The purpose of this study was to examine the current landscape of intercollegiate adaptive sports programming (i.e., barriers and facilitators) through a ‘Blended Theory’ (McAdam & Scott, 2005) which incorporates organizational and social movement theory to better understand the path towards creating additional adaptive sports programs.

Disability Rights Movement

Understanding the history of the DRM is critical to begin working from a social movement perspective. At the heart of the DRM was a notion that societal barriers were far greater than personal ones (Scotch, 1989), and that individuals with disabilities “know what is best for themselves and their community” (Charlton, 2000). These ideals were in direct conflict with the prevailing Medical Model of Disability, which saw disability as an issue at the personal

level, one that is meant to be fixed or rehabilitated by medically trained professionals, and something that individuals should not want or feel proud of (Hosking, 2008). The DRM instead allowed individuals with disabilities to take agency over their own well-being and begin to understand that the problem was not their disability but instead a systemic issue (Heumann, 2020) of a socially constructed problem (Oliver, 1986).

Emerging to prominence in the 1960s (McCarthy, 2003), the DRM occurred alongside and for the same reasons as the Civil Rights Movement but has not received the same attention (Waterstone, 2015). Within civil rights campaigns and efforts calling for equality in regards to race, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status, disability is often left out (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005), and within disability scholarship, there is a need for more research on resistance, social justice, and equity (Annamma et al., 2016; Charlton, 2000).

A goal of the DRM is and was to affect policy to promote disability justice and disrupt the status-quo (Sabatello, 2013). A prominent sentiment throughout the DRM has been the phrase, “Nothing about us, without us” (Charlton, 2000). This message demands inclusion and agency in the lives of individuals with disabilities, reinforcing the continued interest in self-determination in their own well-being (Procknow et al., 2017).

Sports as a Movement

Sport has long been used as a vehicle for social justice and change within the United States (Darnell & Millington, 2019). One of the most notable examples of this is the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, where medalists Tommie Smith and John Carlos, both African-American men, raised their fists in the air while standing on the podium during the United States National Anthem (Hartmann, 2003). This form of ‘silent protest’ was used to elicit global awareness of the inequities experienced by Black and African-American people throughout the

United States, and their image has been used to exemplify the use of sports platforms toward social justice goals (Marinelli, 2017). An additional example includes Billie Jean King's Battle of the Sexes match, where she challenged and beat notable tennis professional Bobby Riggs in a stand for gender equality (Spencer, 2000). Even more contemporary is the example of Colin Kaepernick, a quarterback within the US National Football League who sat, and later knelt, during the playing of the National Anthem as a silent protest akin to Smith and Carlos. As he described it, Kaepernick stated, "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color" (*Colin Kaepernick Explains Why He Sat during National Anthem*, 2017).

In addition to using sports as a platform for social justice, the example of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Women's Movement in the US shows how sport and social movements can be interrelated. The passage of Title IX legislation, which prohibits discrimination based on sex and opened up sporting and higher education access for women in the US, could not have happened without the backing and attention of the Women's Movement of the time (Elkins, 1978). Thaler and Sunstein (2009) suggest that, to effect change on a large scale, particularly one attributed to national policy, there must be a coalition of like-minded stakeholders ready to champion the initiative. Kingdon (1984) also identified the need for a policy window of opportunity, which is a situation where individual, social, and political actors and ideals converge in such a way as to allow for legislation to be successful. Such was the case in the early 1970's within the US, which allowed for Title IX's passage. In addition, the enforcement of Title IX policies helped advance the fight for gender equality alongside the Women's Movement (Brake, 2012). Women's participation in and enjoyment of sports aided in

shifting gender norm paradigms and allowed women to hold power and leadership in ways that had previously been limited (Mak, 2006).

Adaptive Sport as a Movement

As a tool for social justice, adaptive sport is no different. The adaptive, or para, sport movement has helped promote the ideals of the DRM based on a call for equal and meaningful opportunities for individuals with disabilities (LaVaque-Manty, 2005) in ways that can be paralleled to Title IX and the Women's Movement. Adaptive sport, categorized as "sport modified or created to meet the unique needs of individuals," was first introduced as a competitive option in rehabilitation for veterans with disabilities following World War II (Winnick & Porretta, 2016). Since then, a continuum of options from grassroots, community-level play to elite-level sport have emerged beyond the rehabilitation setting to further access to opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Kiuppis, 2018). The Paralympic Movement, considered a flagship for elite-level disability sports, has made an ongoing effort to provide more opportunities and air-time and to reduce stigma of individuals with disabilities participating in elite sport (Howe, 2008). Unlike sport activism of athletes using professional platforms with which to state their grievances, as exemplified by the efforts of Smith, Carlos, King, and Kaepernick, the Paralympic Movement uses examples of and access to sport to help support and promote the ideals of the DRM (Bundon & Hurd Clarke, 2015). The sport itself and the opportunities made available for individuals with disabilities are the vehicle for the movement, much like in the case of Title IX and the Women's Movement.

Collegiate Adaptive Sports and Social Movement Theory

Much like sporting opportunities for women pre-1972, college students with disabilities have limited options. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations (1990)

ensure physical access to buildings and accommodations for traditional sporting events (i.e., flash of light alongside the buzzer to signify the start of a race for a Deaf athlete), they do little to dismantle the ableist culture that prevents Disabled student athletes from participating in sports. Nor do these regulations allow for a broader vision of the development of adaptive athletics programs (e.g., funding a wheelchair basketball team). Despite a reported 732 K-12 schools which provide adaptive physical activity opportunities to 62,112 youth (Cottingham et al., 2015), only 16 collegiate adaptive athletics programs in the United States exist for them to matriculate to (McCarty et al., forthcoming), leading to only 193 athletes competing at the collegiate level as of 2020 (McCarty et al., Manuscript 1). Of those programs that exist, many are limited to one or two sports, are male-dominated, and consistently face barriers which threaten their sustained existence (McCarty et al., Manuscript 1). Research is still limited regarding these programs (Shapiro & Pitts, 2014).

Historically, the NCAA has touted being a champion of an adaptive sport model (Powell, 2016b). In 2013, a Dear Colleague Letter was issued which clarified interpretation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973), reinforcing the need for equitable access to sport for school-aged children at federally funded institutions (*Dear Colleague Letter*, 2020). However, the Dear Colleague Letter focused mainly on the K-12 level, leaving collegiate opportunities lacking. In response to the limited access for collegiate athletes, the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) within the NCAA acted. Their response included holding adaptive sport demonstrations and hosting collegiate para sporting events (Comerford, 2017). It was also the NCAA's goal to have over 1,000 disabled athletes playing within the regionally based ECAC by 2020; however, there are currently not even that many athletes within all of intercollegiate adaptive sports across the entire US (McCarty et al., Manuscript 1). There has been no evidence

of continued effort or institutionalization of an adaptive sport model by the greater NCAA organization, leading to a continued gap in participation (Comerford, 2017).

Social movements are born out of a collective effort of resistance to a systemic oppression or inequity experienced by a specific group of people (Meyer, 2014). As exemplified by the scarcity of available adaptive sport programming, with no formal affiliation with the governing body in power (i.e., NCAA) despite that body's claimed support, there is a demonstrated resistance to these programs and a need for grassroots organizations to emerge to create them. Arthur (2008) identified a perspective of social movements occurring within institutions as a form of resistance to injustice faced by those within. Utilizing Arthur's lens, it becomes clear that the adaptive programs themselves can be considered the movement and warrant a social movement theory approach to understanding them.

However, social movement theory alone is an incomplete model for understanding current collegiate adaptive sport programs because of its primary focus on the larger social context (Davis et al., 2005). If the goal is to identify the programmatic aspects of the program as a phenomenon, a narrowed approach, such as organizational theory, is also warranted.

Organizational Theory

A primary focus of organizational theory is the structure of a unit or organization, to include a personnel and departmental hierarchy (Davis et al., 2005). The work of Slack & Parent (2006) brings organizational theory to the sports organization context and allows for a starting point in identifying key aspects of sports programs. They point to five key areas of describing and understanding sports organizations: (1) social entity (who is involved), (2) involvement in the sport industry (the nature of their involvement and who is serviced), (3) goal-directed focus (program vision and overall goals), (4) consciously constructed activity system (organizational

structure), and (5) identifiable boundary (how they distinguish between insiders and outsiders, who they are affiliated with/depend on). Being able to identify and describe an organization based on these five areas is an important first step to asking more context- and change-driven questions (Stone, 2012). In addition to considerations of structure, organizational theory emphasizes shifts and changes made within that structure for the sustainability of the organization, as well as the power dynamics that supported or constrained such a change (Davis et al., 2005). For that reason, emergent research has begun to look at a collegiate, adaptive sport program in an organizational context. Fines & Block (2020) used a case study design informed by organizational theory in order to understand how an adaptive sports program at the collegiate level was created to meet the needs of students. Though this study provided a novel foundation for research on collegiate adaptive programs, the researchers called for a broadened epistemological lens to allow for understanding these organizations with respect to the broader context.

Blended Framework

Independently, both social movement theory and organizational theory have advantages and disadvantages for informing the creation and sustainability for collegiate, adaptive sport programs. However, when used together, these approaches provide a rich framework in which each complements the shortcomings of the other (Campbell, 2005).

McAdam & Scott (2005) introduced a framework which allows for the ‘cross-fertilization’ of social movements and organizational theory, referred to herein as “Blended Framework.” Blended Framework provides a blueprint for viewing organizational goals and change through a broader context of social movement theory. In essence, it is a pointed look at

an organization via its structure, hierarchy, and goal attainment within the context of a larger movement of resisting some form of social inequity or oppression (Davis et al., 2005).

As a starting point, McAdam and Scott (2005) urge analysts to look at three distinct areas: (1) the actors who were most important, (2) destabilizing events, and (3) relevant periods of activity which have propelled the goals of the phenomenon to their current operation. Three classes of actors are identified within the bounds of each relevant period including dominants, or those in power; challengers, those pursuing the interests of the phenomenon; and governance units, institutions wherein the contention between dominants and challengers exists. Their influence or level of importance may vary throughout the specified phenomenon. Destabilizing events are regarded as incidents that cause contention or change to the status quo or to the phenomenon itself. Finally, identifying and understanding relevant periods of activity allows for the creation of a timeline of events which provides a schematic for analysis. In organizational literature, these elements can be categorized by looking into constraints and supports, or in public health literature, and for the purpose of this study, barriers and facilitators.

Utilizing this approach enabled a broadened understanding of creation and sustainability within collegiate, adaptive sports programs. Based on the efforts of the DRM and the goals of affecting policy surrounding disability justice, this framework further positioned data found within this study to add to a national political conversation regarding access and rights for individuals with disabilities, as it has with other groups (Armstrong, 2005). However, in order to fulfill policy aspirations, because such limited knowledge surrounds collegiate, adaptive programs, an appraisal of the programs available and the context within which they exist was warranted. The Blended Framework allowed for such an appraisal and a proper starting point to identify size and scope of this movement.

The purpose of this study was to build on a foundation of information regarding collegiate adaptive sports, utilizing a framework which blends social movement and organizational theory. Specific aims included: (1) to identify what facilitators (historical, current and future) exist to support intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US and, (2) to identify what barriers exist (historical, current and future) which create challenges for intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US.

Method

Adaptive sports programs operating at the intercollegiate level as identified by McCarty et al. (forthcoming) were included for the purposes of this study. A multiple case study and qualitative description (QD) design was conducted on three of the 16 programs identified in order to explore their experiences more deeply. Case study design allows researchers to explore the nature of the phenomenon (i.e. program) while understanding that they do not operate alone, underscoring the importance of the context through which the programs were created and are sustained (Yin, 2013). By asking pointedly about facilitators and barriers (Appendix B), researchers began to understand a complete picture of the programs' emergence and continued success.

QD is also a well demonstrated design “on discovering the who, what, and where of events or experiences and gaining insights from informants regarding a poorly understood phenomenon” (Kim et al., 2017). QD involves processes which allow researchers to develop a rich, ‘straight description’ of an event or phenomenon using as much of the language used by participants as possible (Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). This makes QD a preferred qualitative methodology for social justice-oriented health disparities researchers, as the low-inference interpretation of data reduces the introduction of “competing explanations,” or bias, by

researchers (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005). Frameworks, such as those in this study, were useful to overlay data in a way that best represented stakeholder experiences and allowed for the organization of data such that practical take-aways were apparent. Further, these take-aways were stated within the participants' own language, therefore facilitating a process whereby solutions were generated by the community and merely organized by researchers for ease of dissemination, also resulting in an ease of researchers reaching consensus (Sandelowski, 2000).

Sample and Procedure

Programs and Selection

Case study sites were determined to provide a representative sample out of the sample initially generated by McCarty et al. (forthcoming). Purposeful sampling was used to identify programs that varied in structure and offering. For this reason, the initially intended cases included one program from each collegiate NCAA division (i.e., Division I, Division II, and Division III). When that distinction was not possible, cases were instead chosen based on yearly budget categories. After review of survey data from 16 programs across the US (McCarty et al., Manuscript 1), yearly programmatic budgets were analyzed for frequency and grouped into brackets of high [$> \$80,000$], median [$\$30,000 - \$80,000$], and low [$\leq \$30,000$]. These brackets helped determine cases that included one from each category of high, median, and low financial budget.

Participants and Selection

Within-case participants were targeted for one-on-one interviews that were collected from the sample generated by McCarty et al. (forthcoming). Program stakeholders were interviewed from each case site with the intention of gathering perspectives from multiple levels. The initial interview was conducted with the initial survey respondent, deemed the program

insider (Katzenstein, 1998), from the selected case. This stakeholder was subsequently asked to identify other possible participants from their university. As inspired by a systems theory approach of understanding a more robust story to facilitate change (Ricigliano, 2015), program insiders were asked to recommend other stakeholders at varying levels (e.g. student volunteer, alumni athlete, university administrator). These participants would have an insider knowledge of the program (Katzenstein, 1998), though operating from a different lens than the program director. Ultimately, the program director acted as gatekeeper to the remaining participants and no more than two additional stakeholders were recommended for any case.

Participants were notified of the expected case study timeframe and the study itself, and they signed after reading a clause of informed consent as approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Materials

Interviews

One-on-one, semi-structured Zoom interviews (*Zoom Meetings*, 2020) were conducted with participants who were associated with the case study program. Interview questions (Appendix B) were piloted during semi-structured, open-ended, one-on-one interviews with two program leaders who were not included in this study; the interviews consisted of seven main questions and were conducted in 35-50 minutes. Their programs both occurred on the west coast and, at the time, were in developmental stages. Of particular note was the last question [Why did you embark on this mission and why do you continue?]. This question was added within the piloting stage based on the researcher's experience and informed by McAdam and Scott (2005). This question aided in identifying not only the what and how but the who that were particularly

relevant in order to begin to unpack the inception and sustainability of collegiate adaptive athletics programs; therefore, the question was added to interviews within this study.

Analysis

Pragmatic Qualitative Approach

A pragmatic approach was utilized within this qualitative work, meaning a combination of evidence-based, qualitative strategies was employed that best met the needs of this applied study (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). Based on what was needed at any given stage, methodological paradigms which are not always congruent but are specific and necessary given the nature of their use in the moment were used (Morgan, 2014). Researchers used the tools grounded in the Blended Framework alongside participant responses to create a flexible bridge across the theory-to-practice gap, matching the best methodological fit at each stage and highlighting the self-reflexive and critical nature of the researchers' lens (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020; Ramanadhan et al., 2021).

Qualitative interview data were transcribed verbatim using third party transcription software and verified for correctness by researchers. Interviewees were given names which described their role instead of their personal names in order to protect the privacy of non-census data findings. However, given the small size of the collegiate adaptive sport community, informed consent included an acknowledgement that participants and programs may be identifiable, despite efforts to de-identify data.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used as it is the preferred analytic strategy when performing a qualitative descriptive study (Sandelowski 2000). To accurately represent the data through a qualitative content analysis, critical and continual evaluation pertaining to the

relevance of themes within each framework category was imperative (Milne & Oberle, 2005). Researchers engaged in a process which Creswell and Poth (2016, p. 185) termed “The Data Analysis Spiral” wherein interrelated and concurrent steps are spiraled through repeatedly. As such, verbatim transcribed interviews were printed out and initially hand-coded with pen and highlighter through multiple iterations of reading in different orders. Initial codes and themes were constructed through this immersion into the printed data. Subsequently, interview transcripts were uploaded into NVivo (QSR International, 2019) and coded for continued organization of quotes through the overlaid theory and immersion in the data. Descriptive information for each case was captured in McCarty et al. (Manuscript 1) and was referred to in order to gather a more robust story from each case. Researcher memos were recorded after every engagement with the data in a freewriting format to add analytical depth to the theme process and generation (Maxwell, 2012). Visual review of descriptions and verbal processing added further depth.

Findings were organized using McAdam and Scott’s Blended Framework (2005). While overlaying findings within this framework, sections pertaining to actors and destabilizing events were easily analyzed and reported using qualitative content analysis, with participants speaking directly to these. By asking about program-specific barriers and facilitators, researchers were able to get a more robust picture of moments and people to describe through this framework. Activities, however, required a deeper analysis based on participant responses. Thus, a thematic analysis was utilized and themes were defined within.

Thematic Analysis

It is common for QD studies to use a combination of inductive and deductive coding processes (McKenzie & Brown, 2021; Nzinga et al., 2021). While deciphering actors and

destabilizing events was a straightforward, deductive process of analysis, periods of activity were less immediately graspable and required further, inductive thematic analysis. When asked about actors or events, participants were able to speak directly to those, recalling specific examples, reported herein. However, when asked about relevant periods of activity, participants' responses varied and included side stories or anecdotes; the messages were not as clear. Utilizing a thematic analysis within the 'relevant periods of activity' was therefore necessary based on the richness of data collected through stories told by participants. Further, it allowed for the application of reported barriers and facilitators to construct a possible pathway to more opportunities. Sandelowski (2000) wrote of QD studies that descriptive summaries of data "may themselves yield the working concepts, hypotheses, and thematic moments for future grounded theory or phenomenologic study, or themselves contain early versions of them," which, combined with further thematic analysis, was the case here.

For the thematic analysis, the researcher adopted a constructionist epistemology with a relativist ontology (Smith & McGannon, 2018) and approached data for themes that developed through continued exposure, without believing in or aiming to find a single true existing truth that the data were expected to reveal (Milne & Oberle, 2005). Instead, it was understood that, though the entire process of analysis included both descriptive/exploratory and thematic analysis, no analysis is free of experiential perspectives or theory (Braun & Clarke, 2012), and the researcher reported data and constructed themes accordingly. For this reason, 'critical friend' engagement with deidentified data challenged researcher-developed codes and themes (Smith & McGannon, 2018) on two occasions. The first occasion included discussion among trained researchers within the field of adapted physical activity. The second occasion included a presentation of initial, deidentified data to stakeholders within the adaptive sport community,

including several participants of the study. Their feedback provided rich depth and confirmation of analysis rather than relying on inter-coder reliability or member checks for an assumed validity (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

Researcher Positionality

Engaging in research which is familiar is a driving factor for many qualitative and mixed method researchers (Maxwell, 2012) and was also the case for the current study. As guided by Maxwell, the use of intentional “researcher identity memos” (2012, p.46) allowed researchers to explore the connection to their work to better understand code and theme construction and subsequent analysis. Further, plainly acknowledging the researcher’s social location and experiential knowledge allows for continued clarity in perspective.

Social Location

Conducting qualitative research is subject to the cultural background of the researchers designing and analyzing the data, which should be discussed in order to ensure procedural rigor (Smith & McGannon, 2018). As the primary researcher, it is important that I socially locate myself to ground my perspective in the systems which have influenced the lens I bring to this work (Piepmeier et al., 2014). As a cis-gendered white woman with no visible disability, I am a beneficiary of the historical and social privilege that exists within oppressive, settler-colonial systems. I acknowledge this and know this has an impact on my overall perspective. My aim in this environment is for readers to recognize the work I have done to continue to educate myself around this, and to question and challenge the perspectives I bring on a path towards a greater, more inclusive understanding of these data.

Experiential Knowledge

Maxwell (2012) points to the importance of theory in guiding a researcher's approach while also allowing for experiential and community-based knowledge to guide the direction of a qualitative study. Maxwell also acknowledges that, due to the nature of qualitative data, researchers tend to study that with which they are familiar, as is the case for the proposed study. This work was inspired by having laid the groundwork for the inception and sustainability of an intercollegiate, adaptive sports program. Being a member of the adaptive sport community afforded me unique insight into potential questions and introduced the potential for bias. However, it also contributed to an environment of trust between researcher and participants, which allowed for deeper probing when needed (Milne & Oberle, 2005).

Results and Discussion

Cases (N=3) were chosen based on yearly budget categories so as to include one case from each category of high [>\$80,000], median [\$30,000-\$80,000], and low [<\$30,000] financial budget. Interestingly, these budget categories also coincided with programs' years in existence, with the lowest budget program being the newest and the highest budget program existing the longest. Having happened to investigate three cases at different points of historical existence provided a window into the manifestation of the framework, barriers, and facilitators throughout the programs' timelines, which will be discussed throughout.

Cases

For anonymity, the programs have been given pseudonyms and are described as follows.

New University (NU)

Participants from NU (n=2) included the program director (PD) of the adaptive athletics program and an administrative-level stakeholder (AD). The program operated at a 4-year, public, NCAA Division I university with a student body of 20,000+. An academic unit housed the

adaptive sports program, and the director, who held a faculty position within the academic unit, was the founder. The additional stakeholder held an administrative-level position within the athletics department and volunteered their time to coach within the adaptive program. The program was one of the newest in existence and reported a budget in the low financial bracket.

Middle University (MU)

Participants from MU (n=2) included the program director (PD) of the adaptive athletics program and an undergraduate student intern, non-athlete (ST). The program operated at a 4-year, public, NCAA Division I university with a student body of 40,000+. An academic unit housed the adaptive sports program, and the director, who held a faculty position within the academic unit, was the founder. The additional stakeholder was a student intern who was deeply involved in daily and event-based programming. The program was within the mid-range of existence and reported a budget in the mid financial bracket.

Seasoned University (SU)

Participants from SU (n=3) included the program director (PD) of the adaptive athletics program, an administrative-level stakeholder (AD), and an alumni athlete (AT). The program operated at a 4-year, public, NCAA Division II university with a student body of 4,000+. The program was housed under the university athletics department and the director, who held a paid position to sustain the program, was not the original founder. The additional stakeholders included an administrator within the disability services unit of the university who supported the program in-kind and an alumnus who participated as an athlete while earning their undergraduate degree and volunteered their time to coach. The program was one of the most long-standing and reported a budget in the high financial bracket.

Organization through Blended Framework

Actors Who Were Most Important

Three classes of actors were identified within the bounds of each relevant period including dominants, or those in power; challengers, those pursuing the interests of the phenomenon; and governance units, institutions wherein the contention exists. Their influence or level of importance varied throughout the specified phenomenon.

Dominants. Often referred to broadly as ‘the university,’ participants identified higher level decision-making staff and administrators as the dominants in power. This included department chairs and other faculty, college heads, up to the President of the university. There was an overwhelming perception that ‘the university’ was the most prominent gatekeeper for adaptive programming across programs. Participants spoke of their relationship with university staff throughout their timeline and mentioned university ‘buy in’ as the main make-or-break of the program. Within that was the struggle of administrative turnover, with varying support for or understanding of the program itself. An administrator could help a program reach success or cause heavy setbacks to the whole program. The alumni athlete (AT) at SU spoke of supportive cases:

“Having the recognition of our faculty at the university, and some of our presidents, I want to make sure I put an emphasis on *some* [emphasis added] of our presidents, were awesome because not only did they see what we were doing as a diverse group of individuals, we were bringing recognition to the university on a worldwide stage.”

While the administrative level stakeholder (AD) at SU spoke of unsupportive examples:

“There were always new administrators and some of them, again, would think that we're doing wonderful things, but it just costs too much. And we shouldn't be doing all that.

And others would say, you promised that we would be an NCAA team and you haven't come up with the other teams yet.”

Often, participants would point to one individual as a contact on whose support the program would hinge. Finding the ‘right people’ to support the program was a common thread throughout. Those people were individuals who had a close family member who experienced disability, a history of having worked in adaptive sports at some point, and/or an open mind and, as the program director (PD) at NU put it, “were very open to [new ideas and programming], this was kind of the culture in our department.”

Putting it plainly, the PD at NU remarked, “the executive leadership at the university, if they're not going to support it, I cannot push [adaptive programming] without their support. They have to buy into it.” In other words, a university-approved institutionalization of the program, such that the adaptive sport initiative became a stable part of the university, was the end goal, with a broad scope of dominants as the main gatekeeper.

Challengers. Stakeholders who align themselves with and actively support the adaptive sport program are the challengers to the dominants (i.e., the university) in power. This includes the participants themselves as program directors, coaches, student volunteers, athletes, alumni, and administrative volunteers. Further identified challengers included community members and donors. Of those interviewed, every person either claimed a Disability identity or had an immediate family member who did. Individuals involved were described as “passionate, “creative and resourceful, “calculated, “a force of nature.” There were many stories about thinking outside of the box and not being afraid to take risks—being willing to ask forgiveness over permission. Everyone involved seemed to understand that this work of putting together programs was necessary and worth a little risk. They also expressed that it was not a highly

lucrative career choice but simply something that needed doing. The AT at SU spoke to the underlying activism of the work:

“Nine times out of 10, people don't just wake up the next day and be like, hey, I want to start a program. No, they see someone that they know, they understood that they're struggling or that they want to get them more active.”

Within this activism, there was also a clear vision. When asked to describe their dream program, all participants were able to describe, in great detail, what that would look like. This vision was informed by the athletes around them and the frustration of seeing ‘traditional,’ or nondisabled, NCAA-level athletes getting resources that they did not. However, there was a spirit of perseverance among all participants. The PD at SU, leading one of the oldest programs in existence, remarked that “even though it's not where I want it to be right now, I know we can get it back there somehow. I don't know how, but, you know, somehow, we'll do that.”

However, as is common in activism (Chen & Gorski, 2015), a thread of burnout was present. The PD at MU pointed to the entirety of their adaptive programming, including hosting international tournaments, being “absolutely none of my job, formally,” and voiced a resolve that “I'm not gonna do it for free anymore.” Even the PD of the newest program, NU, described their efforts as their “side hustle” and lamented that “I can't be the only one screaming from the rooftops.” It is clear that there is a need and challengers are willing to put in the effort—“So make that clear, nobody's forcing this on me or anything. I'm like, I'm here for it,”—but their ability to fight an upward battle may ebb and flow. However, the pressure to remain with a clear goal of institutionalization by the university was expressed by challengers. Regardless of tenure, all cases expressed a worry for the sustainability of their program, should they discontinue their effort. Despite having experienced a long tenure, the PD of SU lamented:

“Will [my leaving] be the end of [our program]? I don't know. I mean, my guess is yes. So, I'll probably accommodate our alumni and our current players [by staying] because I don't want to see [it fail]. I've worked too hard to build the program up.”

Governance Units. The system these university adaptive sport programs operate within encompasses several governance units. All governance units have their own structures and sets of rules that dictate how these programs are governed. This includes the NCAA, the university, sport-specific national governing bodies (NGB), and a system of social ableism.

NCAA. Intercollegiate sports are dominated by the presence of the NCAA. University athletics programs are at the whim of this large body if they want to participate in the level of sporting competition that will recruit students to their university and contribute to community and national school fandom. For this reason, participants underscored the importance of NCAA acceptance of adaptive sports to assist with university credibility and to grow their programs and sports. However, sanctioning rules and requirements created barriers to adaptive sport acceptance. Though also in support of Title IX legislation and efforts, the PD at SU lamented, “they’re [the athletics department] more concerned about Title IX than they are ADA.” This meant that, when arguing for more adaptive opportunities, stakeholders heard, instead, worries that creating adaptive sport programs would throw off Title IX counts (i.e., providing equal numbers of opportunities for men and women), encouraging administrators to abandon adaptive efforts due to nuance.

Further, the PD at MU spoke about the NCAA’s previous efforts towards building more adaptive sport opportunities with the help of the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC):

“I mean the folks that headed that up, weren't really in the community and they just sort of thought it would work like able-bodied sports and it just crumbled. And no one

really...they just sort of quietly let it die. And the reason things like that happen is because there's unique challenges specific to this population and you have to have a really strong political will to deal with stuff.”

Participants overwhelmingly agreed, on the surface, that NCAA acceptance was the route adaptive sports should take. The AT at SU added, “I think that that would be an awesome opportunity to have sports be sanctioned in the fact that it’ll also help end the funding aspect.” However, when pushed further, most admitted the NCAA model may not be the best for adaptive sport but is merely the only one in existence. The student intern (ST) at MU further spoke to the uncertainty:

“Sometimes I believe maybe adaptive sports should have their own league. But also, I’m kind of wary if people would be willing to [create their own adaptive league] because everyone knows about the NCAA, and they respect it. I’m not sure people would be wanting to watch [adaptive sports] separately. Which is kind of sad to say, but I’ve seen both models where it’s separate and the same league, and they both have pros and cons... I’m not sure [the NCAA] would be attuned to the needs of the athletes.”

Future research is warranted, with the voices of the community at the center, to continue the conversation of whether the NCAA model is the best for collegiate adaptive sports or not.

University. Operating within the bounds of a university, participants spoke about their experience of systems within. Particularly with regard to recruiting, university restrictions (e.g., rising GPA admission standards and overall cost) led to difficult barriers for student athletes as well as for the coaches trying to recruit them. The PD at MU lamented, “you’re recruiting against a university that’s much easier to get into” and spoke of losing athletes who wish to transfer to more established university adaptive sports programs. The PD at MU responded further, “we’re

exceptionally poorly positioned for [offering wheelchair basketball] because we're two hours down the road from arguably the best funding program in the country.” Finally, the PD at MU spoke on ethical difficulties in recruiting athletes when sustainability by the university is not guaranteed: “It is very stressful for me because, I mean, you feel very uncomfortable looking at a child or his parents, and you say, hey, come to [a new city/state]. I have 10 months of funding in the bank.”

National Governing Bodies (NGB). Specified NGB were the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) and the United States Tennis Association (USTA). While in most cases participants merely pointed to these organizations as their source for rules and sanctioned competition, ST at MU pointed to a possible misalignment between the USTA’s spoken support and actions, as made clear during the pandemic:

“It was very apparent, when the pandemic hit, that the USTA officials wanted [the US Open] to go on, but they didn't want the wheelchair division. It was not right for them to let the US Open continue but not the wheelchair athletes to come in and play. They cited *health* [emphasis added] concerns, but it was just, you know, they just didn't want to be creative and get resourceful [in order for the Disabled athletes to compete].”

This experience of barriers or unfounded concerns which disrupt the ability for Disabled athletes to be physically active or to compete are present throughout the literature (Barr & Shields, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2018; Martin, 2013; Rimmer, 2005; Rimmer et al., 2004; Shields & Synnot, 2016). This leads researchers and participants to wonder about the underlying ableist structures which are present throughout sport organizations and institutions of higher education.

Ableism Around Adaptive Sports. Looking at three cases at different time points in their development highlighted that, regardless of time and sustained effort, there was something

holding these programs back. SU's PD, operating a program that has been in existence for multiple decades, questioned simply, "What are [they] making us wait for? Why are we not included?" They continued their speculation:

"Why do you not accept adaptive athletics? Is it because you don't have to, because you [the university or the NCAA] haven't been sued? Is it because you don't want to? Because you don't want to spend the money or is it because you don't really believe [Disabled athletes] are athletes and there's no time for it."

Utilizing critical approaches, researchers have identified that students with disabilities are the targets of oppressive systems, such as ableism, and discrimination within higher education (Evans et al., 2017). Furthermore, evident in a sports context is the perpetuation of the "super crip" narrative, which promotes the idea that only the strongest individuals are able to 'overcome' their disability and succeed in sports and beyond (Silva & Howe, 2012). This leaves limited capacity to understand the importance of elite collegiate adaptive sport. Participants spoke of these perceptions when discussing the importance of finding the 'right people,' or perhaps more precisely, the right people with the right (e.g., anti-ableist) perspectives.

Though a push for equity, diversity, and inclusion is evident throughout higher education administration, a disconnect between words and action is evident in the literature (McNair et al., 2020). The NCAA similarly makes claims to be an inclusive sport initiative but fails to recognize any affiliation with currently existing collegiate, adaptive sport programs (Powell, 2016b). Participants stressed the need for university institutionalization to ensure the sustainability of their programs and a hope that with NCAA recognition would come the credibility to do so. MU's PD, though empathizing, pointed to the immense pressure it takes to prove program value, stating, "there isn't a presumption that we have that value. But I don't think it's active

paternalism, as much as it's just, it is a very constrained system.” However, with such a large disconnect between spoken desires and actions, participants’ faith seemed to be waning that any paradigms would shift in their favor.

Destabilizing Events

Destabilizing events are regarded as incidents that cause contention or change to the status quo or to the phenomenon itself. These were illuminated as participants spoke on facilitators and barriers to their programs where successes in particular were attributed to situations described as ‘luck.’ It was generally these moments of ‘luck’ that allowed the programs to move forward or continue to thrive. These examples included participants capturing the attention of an administrator who had a close connection to disability which led to them creating a full-time position, a donor who led to growing an equipment arsenal, a student finding a funding loophole, or a ‘by chance’ email or phone call from an interested party.

Though these instances were attributed to luck, there was some hypothesizing about the recipe for future success. As to the inception process overall, the PD at SU theorized:

“I think that's really the way it works with students first, then coach, and then the university. And it's probably not A-B-C as much as it's more of a triangle, you know. And in the middle of the triangle was the actual program.”

Participants also spoke to anticipating potential future destabilizing events through national policy. Many participants pointed to the abundance of national policy, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and ADA, but wondered why enforcement was lacking. There was a common belief that if new policy was created or current policy was enforced, it would lead to better outcomes for all, for both emerging and developed programs. Furthering language around adaptive sports being the grassroots efforts within a larger social movement, participants

believed that a galvanizing of efforts from those involved could lead to a large-scale destabilizing event for programs across the nation. The PD at NU remarked:

“There’s all of this legislation. None of it is being...no one’s feet are being held to the fire with it. There’s an absence of opportunity for students to access these sport opportunities and why? ADA was passed in [19]90 and it took a long time for it to, for the teeth to set in on it. And I wonder if that’s just what has happened here. There’s legislation that has passed. There’s so many little pieces to it, right? So [it has] just taken a long time for the teeth to set in, to grow into, to have some actual repercussions for not doing it. And maybe it’s time for a call-out from us who were trying to build it.”

Relevant Periods of Activity

Identifying and understanding relevant periods of activity took shape in the creation of a timeline of events which provided a schematic for analysis. Taken from stories told by multiple university level participants, the following are themes based on advice given which provide a potential baseline pathway towards more programming, as recommended by the participants themselves. These themes included; (1) Start with What You Know, (2) Build a Coalition of Like-Minded Partners, (3) Prepare for the Long-Haul, and (4) Look for Windows of ‘Luck.’

Start With What You Know. Regardless of whether they were the inceptor of the program or not, participants pointed to a starting point which centered around their knowledge and interests. The PD of SU inherited a program and grew it from recreational to intercollegiate by way of coaching, the PD of MU began by aligning their research and service agenda with their program, and the PD of NU secured funding for sport chairs to begin academic classes pertaining to adaptive sports and practices immediately. All programs took a different approach which highlighted their skillset and utilized the resources they had at hand. Participants

acknowledged that it was a continued and emerging process which, perhaps due to not having full institutionalization, was met with humility and merely a decision to take charge of creating/continuing a program. The PD of NU humbly stated,

“I'm the self-proclaimed program director. I don't know how you proclaim yourself or you become a program director, but, you know, I'm the one who acquired those chairs and, I, you know, kind of believe with my background that I'm the qualified person to be doing it.”

Though none of the programs interviewed had the same starting point, respondents shared the same collective vision of an intercollegiate adaptive sports program which received the resources and recognition they felt was deserved. The end goal provided a pathway forward, which eventually looked similar at every institution. The beginning included a passionate individual dedicated to making the program happen and starting from a place within their knowledge set. Once this point was established, the next step was recruiting a coalition.

Build a Coalition of Like-Minded Partners. All participants stressed the importance of a multidisciplinary coalition of people to build and sustain their adaptive program. This included multiple individual actors from different levels who shared in the same vision. The PD of MU joked, “a person is very helpful. People are generally not. If you can sort of identify those individuals and make those relationships, that's a lot of it.”

There was a focus on finding the ‘right people’ to ensure a level of trust and dependability. This included people whose perspective did not contribute to the continued disabling and oppression of the athletes involved (Goodley, 2013). Speaking on recruiting partners, the ST at MU spoke about problematic coaches whose ableist perspectives affected athletic potential:

“We had a coach who the athletes didn't like, and they just dreaded coming to practices just because he didn't know what he was doing, or he would treat the athletes like babies and the athletes aren't babies. [He] would just look at them as not fully, like, capable adults. And that's kinda, that's disrespectful, you know? The athletes are never going to get to the potential that they can definitely reach.”

The ST at MU also spoke to the types of volunteers to recruit:

“Having people who are passionate and doing it for the right reason will improve the quality of the organization because you want people that are looking out for the athletes. You don't want people that are, you know, just showing up, not even talking to the athletes, just [looking for] a resume booster. It's really apparent when you see those types of people and they can definitely run an organization down. It was really disappointing and frustrating to deal with that.”

When talking about frame of mind for partners involved, the AT at SU spoke to the type of perspective they were looking for to describe disability, “Sometimes certain people are special. They're born differently. That means they're meant to have a different impact on the world.” The following are groups of people identified by participants as having active roles in their adaptive sport coalition and descriptions of the unique importance of their contribution.

Students/Athletes. Based on the setting within higher education, participants identified students as an essential piece of the puzzle, not only because “[their] manual labor is unbelievable” but because their positive experience could influence future programming. The PD of MU remarked regarding student involvement, “we do put on a really good event, because those students during that semester, that is their heart, their soul. And you can tell they're in it emotionally.” The ST at MU went on further to explain the students' impact on the athletes:

“It's three days of hard work, zero sleep. I mean, I think I got a total of five hours of sleep that weekend of that tournament. I mean, it was painful, like physically painful. It was so worth it, just to see how everyone enjoyed themselves. And the athletes, they were so thoughtful. They repeatedly told us how grateful they were for us hosting the tournament. I mean, they didn't need to thank us, but they did.”

The athletes, when feeling supported, were able to compete at high levels and think about their roles beyond being an athlete. Their role became that of advocate for themselves, their program, and disability justice. The AT at SU remarked, “So now it's my job, as an individual with a disability, my job as an athlete is to change [ableist] perception.”

Participants also noted the importance of student volunteers and athletes as a spark which could further ignite the university to pay attention to their programming. Perception of university leadership included a belief that they support programs that come from the student level and may be more likely to act on such an effort. The PD at SU noted, “I think the most important thing, and it might sound a little corny, but it had been the students. The students really drove the process.” Further, there was a common perspective that, if students had a positive experience of enacting change within their university, they were likely to return as alumni donors and continue to spread awareness or donate their time and money.

Director/Coach. Findings suggest that the main driver and champion of the adaptive program was the director or head coach. Participants stressed the need for this person to have sustainability within the university, as if an anchor which holds the program steady. The perception was that this person is likely the one to recruit the students who will learn and work with the athletes, who will then cause a spark for change, but, as important as students are, they are within the bounds of their educational journal and, therefore, temporary. Having someone

permanent mitigates the ebb and flow of students and athletes. Further, participants advised that this person be affiliated (i.e., employed) with the university in some way for programmatic sustainability and success. The PD at NU reflected, “the person leading the effort has to have longevity and be a permanent person at the university and be somebody who has the ability to get into those doors and into those offices at the highest levels.” NU and MU had tenure-track faculty at their helm as PDs, while SU’s PD was the Head Coach who was hired into that position. Both faculty members admitted that running their program was not a formal part of their contract but rather something they worked to integrate into their positions as much as possible. The PD at NU stated, “It’s all extra and I happily do it.”

Administrators. Having higher level administrators within the adaptive programming coalition continued to open the doors of possibility for programs interviewed. The AD at SU indicated that the “[administrator’s] role wasn’t really to get into the moment-by-moment sports, it was more of a support component.” NU’s AD went further to describe the relationship between the program director and administrator: “[As an administrator] I’ve been here 20 years now and experienced a lot and have the networking, and then [program director] has the academic side. So, we’ve been able to pull resources and ask favors.” Participants also spoke of administrators aiding in credibility and institutionalization goals of the programs by taking on a supportive championing role.

Community. All participants spoke of community partners as imperative to the success of their programs. These included Disabled advocates, former or professional athletes, donors, corporate sponsors, and many other stakeholders not associated with the university in any formal way. In many cases, community athletes were able to supplement collegiate teams to allow for greater practice competition and more robust travel rosters. Further, these community partners

brought resources such as funding, facilities, and even coaching. Participants related the importance of leaning on the surrounding community, but MU's PD also alluded to potential differences depending on the physical location of the university within more urban or rural settings: "We have been able to establish relationships in the community that are very meaningful and that opened up doors for us. I think that's been very helpful for us being in a [big] city that has resources." Others speculated that geographic communities could have an influence on recruiting and possibilities for funding and postulated that efforts may take a longer time but finding resources was not impossible in these places.

Prepare for the Long-Haul. Equity and advocacy work takes time and, as the PD at MU observed, "movements in terms of disability advocacy have absolutely come from the grassroots, not from governmental leadership." In other words, there was a perception that advocacy must start from the ground up without expectation of top-down support. Participants at every level spoke to the gap between their current program and the vision of their dream program, and voiced their anticipation of a long-term path. The PD at NU advised that the way to prepare for the long haul is to "work smarter, not harder," meaning picking battles carefully and leveraging opportunities to accomplish more tasks as efficiently as possible to prevent burnout. There was also a continued appreciation and acknowledgement of the team effort. Participants stressed that their survival was contingent on a strong group of people who were dedicated to the cause and that together, they could weather barriers and create a better program. From an overall perspective, SU's AD advised, "you have to be creative about [barriers] and have a good sense of humor and work with people and say, you know, I may fail doing this, but let's try another way, then we'll figure it out."

Participants related difficulties in their work and recruitment based on the lack of a sport pipeline at the high school level. Though some legislation and efforts have worked to create more adaptive programming at the K-12 level, there are still not many programs and, additionally, participants pointed to the ableism which creates barriers to higher education for students with disabilities (Evans et al., 2017). SU's PD observed:

“Kids come out of high school, some of them want to go to college. But my concern has always been that we're not identifying all the kids. And on the other side of that, all the kids either don't know about college, or they don't know about all the college programs.”

Students with disabilities are not matriculating to college at the same rate as their peers without disabilities (Wagner et al., 2005), as SU's PD identified. Many participants believed that having a dedicated sports program to showcase the talents and capabilities of students with disabilities may help to rectify that at both the social and sports levels. But shifting the paradigm on how disability is viewed on a social level is a long-term goal, and participants spoke of themselves as advocates on that long term mission. NU's PD remarked, “everybody should have this opportunity. [It's about] equity and access.”

Look for Windows of 'Luck.' An interesting theme of luck or being in the right place at the right time was present throughout all cases. Participants spoke to their successes largely depending on chance. For instance, NU's AD reminisced:

“I don't know, just pure, you know, how fate sometimes puts us together... those people were here, already existing [at the university], and that's where I think it's just the right time. So, it's the right people. And it's the right time that somebody asked at the right time and maybe the right way.”

At every level of development, participants explained their process as more fluid and going with the needs expressed by those around them to dictate program growth. The PD at NU further stated, “we said yes to a lot of little things along the way. It seemed very haphazard and like we weren't thinking and planning, but it came fast and furious as soon as we opened the door.” Additionally, participants continued to highlight that growth was dependent on the specific environment and people that programs were exposed to at a ‘lucky’ moment.

However, upon further investigation, it became evident that perhaps perceptions of luck were not so much a function of chance but instead of the tenacity of the person/people at the helm and the amount they put their program out there—enough that it was more likely to succeed. They got ‘lucky’ one time out of ten times having tried something in order to get noticed or supported. The ST at MU remarked on their process that, “it was tough, they were getting told, ‘no’ multiple times. I think our people went to at least 200 places and I think they only got 12 ‘yeses.’” Participants spoke of serendipitous moments of connecting with ‘the right donor’ or the sponsorship or athlete who opened the door for the continued success of the program without ever taking credit for their own, self-described hustle and tireless efforts. These included continued social media efforts, being connected with university adaptive sport classes, holding intramural demos, attending university events, and not being afraid to talk with anyone and everyone, including cold calling, about the program. This further spoke to the need of having leaders of the program who were dedicated enough to work through all the barriers and put themselves out there enough to experience something that they perceive as luck to help their program grow.

Future Directions for Researchers

As part of this dissertation was designed to highlight participant voices and co-create content alongside the community, participants were asked to identify questions they had which researchers might be able to investigate. The question asked was, “given an unlimited budget and access to a researcher like me, what question(s) do you have that you would like the answer to, pertaining to intercollegiate adaptive sports?” Consistent with a QD design, participant questions are listed, verbatim, in Appendix A so future researchers have access to the questions, as formulated and asked, direct from the community (Sandelowski, 2000).

Conclusion

A multiple case study and qualitative description (QD) design was conducted for this research, analyzed using a combination deductive and inductive qualitative content analysis. Cases (N=3) represented intercollegiate athletic sports programs from three financial categories (i.e., high [$> \$80,000$], median [$\$30,000$ - $\$80,000$], and low [$< \$30,000$] yearly budget). Interestingly, these budget categories correlated to the programs’ years in existence with the lowest yearly budget being the newest program and the highest yearly budget being the longest in existence. Data were organized through an overlay within the Blended Theory Framework (McAdam & Scott, 2005) including three areas: (1) the actors who were most important, (2) destabilizing events, and (3) relevant periods of activity. Qualitative content analysis was used to describe the first two areas, important actors and destabilizing events, with participants speaking directly about these areas. Qualitative content analysis was used in line with QD studies to allow for the voices of participants to be centered and heard. Thematic analysis was used to construct themes within the third area, relevant periods of activity, which resulted in a preliminary pathway to the creation of more programs. This included guidance pertaining to themes to (1) Start with What You Know, (2) Build a Coalition of Like-Minded Partners, (3) Prepare for the

Long-Haul, and (4) Look for Windows of ‘Luck.’ Further, participants themselves hypothesized that key stakeholder procurement of “students first, then coach, and then the university” could result in a trifecta within which the successful program was the center.

Participant voices were highlighted throughout, and an appendix of questions participants suggested for future research is included. Participants recommend and the researchers of this study underscore that continued research should be conducted to explore equity within adaptive athlete recruitment, the benefits of intercollegiate sports programming, the funding mechanisms of current and future programs, the policy and ableism surrounding sports pipelines, and the community’s collective vision towards (or away from) the NCAA, alongside the disabled athlete and adaptive sport community themselves.

Appendix A

Participant Research Questions

Seasoned University

Program Director

- This would be more of an NCAA question-What are you making us wait for? Why are we not included? Why do you not accept adaptive athletics? Is it because you don't have to, because you haven't been sued? Is it because you don't want to spend the money or is it because you don't really believe they're athletes and there's no time for it? That's probably the biggest question I would ask.
- Looking at other programs, where do they get their funding from? You know, how are they funded?
- How did you start the program and why?
- How do you compare these different programs? How do you decide what's comparable, what's relevant?

Alumni Athlete

- Why do we find it so hard to market disabled sports as a whole? Why is it difficult?
- We have equal opportunity laws, right? That extend to all genders, all races, all disabilities. What regulations do we have to enforce these people to continue hiring without any prejudices?
- Where do we go to enforce these regulations? How do we find a way to enforce these rules? How do we find a way to put these tough conversations in the forefront?
- I go into middle schools, high schools, elementary schools, because they're our future leaders for tomorrow. And we have these conversations about, you know, the perception when we perceive people. Why don't we have these conversations with them?

Administrative Level Stakeholder

- Everyone has a different view of what athletics should look like, adaptive athletics or sports. I'm not sure there are good definitions or criteria that establish exactly what a particular sport is.
- How would you do [classifications] for a sports team? I wonder how other schools are doing it.
- If you're going to try and field the team, you've got to have so many members, and do you have that number of interested with people in your population?
- How do we include more people to enjoy sports and what are lifelong physical activities and sports that people can participate in that they can do for the rest of their lives?
- How do we encourage people to get involved with [lifelong adaptive physical activities and sports]? How we could make them enjoy something and say, gosh, I want to keep doing this.

Middle University***Program Director***

- How do you prove that this program makes your university better? [That the program] makes your university a better place with students who are more accepting of disability, who are more accepting of diversity, who acknowledged physiological differences as something that make their community better?

Student Volunteer

- [I wonder about] minorities in sports.
- [I wonder about] gender biases.
- Examining the components of all benefits of sports and why most athletes do it.
- I want to know the importance of sports to that specific individual. What's their why? Why do you do it? What do you gain out of sports?

New University

Program Director

- If you didn't know how to look in the literature to find that stuff, how would you find any information? But, hey, let's be honest. There's nothing in the literature because we've not published anything about how to do this.
- What does it take to start a collegiate program? How do we actually do this?
- Where else could we put [information about starting adaptive sports programs] as people who are generating that knowledge? Where else could we put it, that it is freely accessible to anybody who wants to be starting up a collegiate program?
- Where is the information? How are we getting it into the hands of the people who need it?
- Did this produce knowledge in such a way that somebody could take it and say, okay, step one do this, step two do this, step three do this? Most [program initiators] are starting from ground zero every single time, which is such a waste of time and such a waste of resources. We're just spinning wheels and wasting time and resources that nobody has to waste.
- When we talk about equity, does equity mean that there needs to be a one-to-one adaptive to non-adaptive collegiate experience across the nation?
- Can we do [a one-to-one system] without the NCAA on board?
- Are [university leadership] going to see the return on that investment when [the program is] for five people, as opposed to the 175 student athletes that are within the athletics behemoths?
- It's eight or 10 people in eight or 10 different places. This isn't a coordinated effort. Which is why I think something like a program director symposium could be really helpful or maybe something at like Move United's conference or something like that that focuses on collegiate and gets all the people in the room, including the research side of it.

- There's a lot of knowledge that we can produce, but is that what we need to be able to build the capacity across the nation to support what we want?
- There's a lot of benefits that come from being sanctioned [through the NCAA] and there's a lot of drawbacks that come from being sanctioned.
- What is the pipeline to college sports?
- Does that conversation [of being a professional athlete or focusing on studies instead] even ever happen with kids with disabilities? No. The conversation doesn't even happen that you can play worldly in a lot of places because it's just not there.

Administrative Level Stakeholder

- How am I going to get resources?
- Is there grant money out there right now to give me enough scholarships to attract world class Paralympians, to [our] university, to get a degree?
- Find me resources to help these veterans transition from war. Let's get them out of rehab and let's get them on a court. I don't care what sport it is but let's help them transition from being active warriors and take that passion and let's move it into sport so that they can live really good prosperous lives and be good citizens and transition back into some type of normalcy.

Appendix B

One-on-one Interview Question Guide

*semi-structured, probes will be used when appropriate

Program Stakeholders

Overview of informed consent document. “What questions can I answer for you? Is there anything that is unclear?”

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. Could you tell me what your program looks like today?
 - a. Your position/role
3. Would you tell me about your organization’s historical development? What’s the inception story? Timeline?
 - a. Experienced barriers
 - b. Experienced facilitators
4. Tell me about your experience being involved in this program?
5. Tell me about your experience reaching this point?
6. Describe what your perfect, fully successful program looks like.
 - a. Do you want university institutionalization?
 - b. What do you think about the NCAA?
7. What components do you see as necessary to get to the type of program you described?
 - a. Foreseeable barriers
 - b. Foreseeable facilitators

8. Is there any one thing you mentioned [in your answer to question #4] that you think might be of particular importance? Or the thing you need most in order to move towards your vision of that program?
9. Why did you embark on this journey? Why do you continue?
10. I'm curious, what questions do you have? And by that I mean, as a researcher, I want to help find answers to questions you have about other programs, athletes, processes, resources, whatever it may be. So, what questions do you have that you may not have the time to investigate but I might be able to help with?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add about anything we talked about, anything about your program or its inception that we didn't cover?
12. Could you identify other stakeholders that have been integral in building this program?
 - a. Could you please forward them an email from me so they may contact me at their discretion?

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation was twofold: (1) identifying and describing intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US and (2) examining facilitators and barriers to existing intercollegiate, adaptive athletics programs in the US. Furthermore, in utilizing qualitative description methodology and critical theory-informed ontology, researchers built upon these aims to communicate concrete take-aways for the adaptive sport community, including hypothesizing a potential pathway towards the creation of more programs. Utilizing a mixed method design, content, qualitative description, and thematic analyses, and a Blended social movement with organizational theory Framework through a Critical Disability Studies lens, researchers generated results alongside participants which are novel to adaptive sport literature.

The current dissertation explored the 16 programs that were identified to have met the inclusion criteria: (1) intercollegiate competition, (2) identified as providing inclusive or adaptive sports (i.e., for individuals with a disability), (3) to college students, though may not be exclusively, (4) indicated university affiliation, (5) at any four-year institution, (6) within the United States (McCarty et al., forthcoming). An open-ended questionnaire was distributed among these programs, targeting one stakeholder deemed a program insider, to complete the questions. Results included 14 respondents (87.5% response rate), all of whom were the lead stakeholder of their program at either the Head Coach or Director level. The questionnaire included areas of questioning that were informed by researcher expertise and further organized using Slack & Parent (2006) categories of identifying and describing a sports organization. These categories included: (1) social entity (who is involved), (2) involvement in the sport industry (the nature of their involvement and who is serviced), (3) goal-directed focus (program vision and

overall goals), (4) consciously constructed activity system (organizational structure), and (5) identifiable boundary (how they distinguish between insiders and outsiders, who they are affiliated with/depend on). Respondents were given unlimited characters to respond to questions and most wrote in brief shorthand or wrote between 1-3 sentences.

Using a qualitative content analysis through a Critical Disability Studies lens allowed for participant voices to be highlighted throughout in a way that is novel in the adaptive sports field. Further, it spotlighted the unequivocal inequity faced by collegiate athletes. Though there are a reported 732 K-12 schools which provide adaptive physical activity opportunities to 62,112 school-aged athletes (Cottingham et al., 2015), only 16 collegiate adaptive athletics programs in the United States were found, serving a total of 193 athletes. This is as compared to the 1,099 NCAA member institutions serving 499,217 athletes (Irick, 2019), leading to questions of why more focus has not been put on the creation of more collegiate programs for disabled athletes.

Perhaps the most interesting organizational finding was the diversity in the structure of programs. The only findings which gave the impression of a positive correlation were the yearly budget and years in existence. Other similarities included having only the capacity to offer 1-2 sports, with wheelchair basketball and tennis being the most prevalent. This finding was interesting based on the longevity of some of the programs. Despite some being in existence for several decades, their program offerings were similar to those which were just starting. Through continued analysis, this perhaps speaks more to the onslaught of barriers which are continually faced by programs than a lack of creativity or misuse of funds by the program director.

In fact, participants identified the same barriers and facilitators to their programs, regardless of years in existence, budget, or other resource access. Reported as the top three barriers and the top three facilitators were: (1) overall awareness and perception of the program,

(2) funding, and (3) university support. Further identified barriers included: (4) recruitment, and (5) environment. Additional facilitators included: (4) having a dedicated and knowledgeable staff. This finding indicated that, regardless of level of support or resources, programs were up against the same things. Similarly, the perceived solution was merely to take away roadblocks. Based on these findings, a more in-depth look into programming was warranted.

Therefore, a qualitative description and case study design was employed to understand these barriers and facilitators at a deeper level. Three programs were selected which represented brackets of high [$> \$80,000$], median [$\$30,000 - \$80,000$], and low [$< \$30,000$] financial budgets. This also coincided with the years of each programs' existence, with the lowest budget representing the newest program and the highest budget representing the most seasoned program. Lead program stakeholders (i.e., Head Coach and/or Program Director) were contacted for one-on-one interviews and asked to identify additional stakeholders (i.e., alumni athlete $n=1$, administrator $n=2$, student volunteer $n=1$) to whom researchers could talk. Gathering perspectives from multiple accounts allowed for a richness of data and a well-rounded picture of the context and landscape of case study programs, including barriers and facilitators.

Findings were overlaid using a combination of social movement and organizational theory called Blended Framework, based on critically examining programs through a CDS lens and the language surrounding adaptive sports as a movement. Through this framework, it was possible to understand the end goal or vision for intercollegiate adaptive sports in order to better understand barriers and facilitators. When looking again at earlier identified factors (i.e., overall awareness and perception of the program, funding, and university support) the vision became clear. These responses spoke more to an underlying vision of programmatic institutionalization within their housed university. Essentially, similar to the way athletics programs operated within

the university, the vision was to have sustainability through funding and resources regardless of staffing turnover. A commonly stated fear within each case study was the worry that if the program director left, the program would crumble. As a result, the person at the helm continued to push themselves, often to the point of physical exhaustion, for a program that may or may not have actually been a part of their job description. This is consistent with advocacy and activist literature and unfortunately leads to overwhelming burnout and high turnover (Chen & Gorski, 2015). However, participants believed that if they had the right combination of funding, awareness, and support from their university, they would experience this goal of institutionalization, effectively meaning that adaptive sports at their university would have arrived. Nevertheless, success or failure should not be left on the shoulders of only the most passionate people. With institutionalization comes an admittedly laughable goal that a university should be able to hire people who are not great at their job and not risk total elimination.

This finding can be helpful to continuing research surrounding intercollegiate adaptive sports. The question then becomes, what will it take to become institutionalized as a program? Further, and similar to a participant question, will it take becoming institutionalized within the NCAA first or within the university first? Even further, based on the disagreement found within regarding the NCAA, does the intercollegiate adaptive sport community want to institutionalize within the NCAA or do they want to create something of their own? Very little research has been done within the question, with most assuming that NCAA institutionalization is the goal (Comerford, 2017; Fay, 2011; Robeznieks, 2020). However, given a current political climate where reform versus abolition debates are common in criminal justice and criminology fields (Akbar, 2020; Ben-Moshe, 2018), perhaps it is time for the adaptive sport community to join the conversation. Based on current findings, equity for athletes with disabilities should not have to

rely solely on what overworked advocates perceive as opportunities of luck to succeed. Equity means institutionalization and if universities and the NCAA really care about their stated equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives, or their students, they need to start to step up their game.

Until that moment comes, there is still plenty to do at the grassroots level. Participants had many questions for researchers to pursue, including procurement of resources and funding, program inception stories, benefits of programs, pipelines at the K-12 level, knowledge generation and dissemination, existing policy accountability or creation of new policy, recruitment of athletes including equity for women and people of color, and others. Additionally, this research alongside community members has yielded the beginnings of a potential pathway towards more programming, particularly at the collegiate level, that requires more research and testing. One possible model offered guidance towards a timeline to: (1) Start with What You Know, (2) Build a Coalition of Like-Minded Partners, (3) Prepare for the Long-Haul, and (4) Look for Windows of 'Luck.' Within that, one participant hypothesized that a coalition 'trifecta' could be the key to programmatic success and suggested the recruitment of "students first, then coach, and then the university" by the leading stakeholder. Other participants also hypothesized that leading stakeholders must already be established at their university (e.g., current faculty or other long-term staff) to ensure programmatic stability within the university. Future research should test these hypotheses alongside the adaptive sport community.

Continued grassroots level initiatives included a need to connect each program to build a more interconnected movement within intercollegiate adaptive sports. Successful movements for change require a level of interdependence and collective understanding (brown, 2017). Case study participants lamented the dearth of available information and believed that there was no reason for every new program to have to 'reinvent the wheel.' Finding a way to disseminate this

information to be publicly available is imperative to a more cohesive movement. Though participants understood that all universities would likely require slightly different resources and processes, overall, most program leaders seemed to intuit similar aspects of what was needed to succeed. Therefore, an effort to connect program leadership for trade secrets and training, such as through a conference or association, could be highly impactful to the movement.

Regardless of the stage they are in, all programs viewed their offerings as more than sport and part of the larger Disability Rights Movement to provide more access and break ableist barriers for people with a disability. Consistent with Arthur's work (2008) in higher education, the lifeblood of the movement is each grassroots program that has emerged despite barriers at multiple levels. However, there is still a disconnect between the efforts in the adaptive sport community and the larger movement. No historical example of this is clearer than the aftermath of Title IX and Section 504 legislation within the United States.

Social movements are born out of a fight against oppression from one or multiple groups (Meyer, 2014). In this case, experiencing the ableism surrounding intercollegiate adaptive sports program and the resulting barriers acted as a driver for many, as stakeholders viewed themselves as not just leaders, but activists. This experience could be viewed in parallel to the plight of women in gaining access to sports and higher education. Sexism surrounding women's abilities to perform in institutions of higher education and elite-level sports contributed to the growth of the Women's Movement in the 1970s (Sandler, 2007). The efforts of those involved with the Women's Movement led to the eventual passing of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Because the movement towards gaining sport access in higher education worked alongside the larger Women's Movement, this legislation was impactful for women (Sandler, 2007). However, despite similar legislation being passed for people with disabilities within a year of

Title IX (i.e., Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act) the same access was not experienced in the disability community. Future research may dig deeper into the parallels between these phenomena (i.e., Disability Movement with Section 504 and Women's Movement with Title IX) to get a better picture of how to move forward. As such, it is important that researchers continue to view these programs through this social movement lens to describe and understand them and their impact further.

The movement for disability rights, which has only recently embraced sport as a pillar for justice, may need a revamp of vision towards rights and legislation to bring these two causes together. Participants viewed their work as activism and themselves as activists. There was a continued theme of finding collaborators and building coalitions of people who understood the barriers for and successes of athletes with disabilities. Throughout survey responses and interviews, participants referred to adaptive sports as a movement towards greater access, with sports as the vehicle through which to demonstrate their cause. Challengers, as referred to through the Blended Framework (McAdam & Scott, 2005), can be paralleled to disrupters and activists within other movements based on their advocacy work. Their work is necessary to combat the ableism experienced by disabled athletes because of the paucity of collegiate programs and the limited school-based, K-12 pathway. Participants spoke of legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, having given them the access to the buildings, though this is still found to be lacking at best (Rimmer et al., 2004). Participants additionally spoke to physical access not equaling full inclusion. This sentiment has been echoed by disability rights advocate Judy Heumann, who has stressed the importance of going beyond just access to the building and onto access to equitable treatment and expectations (2018). Therefore, there is a congruency between those in the Disability Rights Movement and of those advocating for intercollegiate

adaptive sports, which further highlights the need for building a more cohesive strategy between the two.

Additionally, and importantly, sports can be used to connect a cross-cause coalition, which could have the potential to impact legislation in a big way. Current practices at the elite sport level represent many issues that occur at a systemic level (Gurney et al., 2017). The sports literature is saturated with documented exploitation of students of color, particularly Black and Brown athletes in revenue-generating sports (Van Rheenen, 2013); a pervasive culture of sexual harassment (Beaver, 2019) and inequity for women (Bowes et al., 2021); and continued discrimination against trans athletes (Crepeau, 2021). It is no secret that, though sport can be used as a vehicle for justice, it has also been the site for perpetuated oppression (Hextrum, 2020). Advocacy surrounding equity in sport is not a new concept (Lee & Cunningham, 2019). Perhaps it is necessary for activists in all areas of sport advocacy to join together, along with their larger rights movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter, LGBT+, Women's, Disability), to form a coalition towards a collective cause.

It is clear from the data collected within this study that the adaptive sports movement is rapidly growing, and now may be time to seize the moment and act (McCarty et al., Manuscript 1). It is also clear that, consistent with higher education literature, there is a disconnect between institutions such as universities and the NCAA developing EDI initiatives and actually creating plans to act on them (McNair et al., 2020). In the words of one participant, "why are you making us wait?" Athletes with disabilities deserve the same access to sport participation as their peers and yet they are not being afforded these opportunities. Something has to change. Either these institutions get their act together and generate concrete strategies or the adaptive sports movement needs to branch off and create something of its own.

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