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Classification Experiences of Para Sport Athletes

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Kinesiology

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the Para sport classification experiences of Canadian high-performance athletes, and how their experiences shaped their embodied perceptions of themselves during classification. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with five participants. Using interpretive content analysis, the data was analyzed with an embodiment framework. The findings demonstrated that both classification experiences of Para sport athletes, and how athletes constructed their understanding of classification. The results show that athletes accepted the bodily experience of the classification process in different ways; 1) as a necessary pathway to sport, or 2) as a medicalized gaze upon the disabled body. They further reflected on the power imbalances in the experiences where often their own voice was rendered silent. These moments demonstrate disruption to self in embodied experiences. Athlete experiences were shaped by their knowledge surrounding classification, their identity as an individual with disability, and lastly their identity as an athlete. Knowledge from this study offers insights into the embodied experiences and disruptions of Para sport classification. This knowledge may offer insight and shape future classification models and research.

Keywords

Para Sport, Disability, Classification experiences, Embodiment, Interpretive content analysis

Summary for Lay Audience

Disability sport classification is an evaluation of athletes with disabilities through physical, technical, and observational assessments. After evaluations, athletes are divided into different sport classes based on the impact the disability has on their ability to compete in sport. Although the goal of the classification system is to provide equal opportunity and fair competition for Para sport athletes, there are multiple concerns surrounding the process and accuracy of classification. Although classification is largely divorced from the actual sport experiences of athletes, it can greatly impact individual participation and embodied experiences. Additionally, this process suggests there is a power imbalance between Para sport athletes and classification personnel that non-disabled athletes do not experience. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the classification experiences of Canadian Para sport athletes and how this experience impacted their embodied self-perception. Through in depth, multiple semi-structured interviews with five participants, I sought to understand classification experiences of athletes through the lens of embodiment, and how experiences contribute to their understanding of classification. The findings suggest that athletes experience acceptance of classification despite the disruptions to self, confronted in the process. It further highlights the power dynamic of classification where athletes' voices are often rendered silent. This knowledge may offer insight and shape future classification models and research.

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

Imagine putting countless hours into training for your sport, just to be told that you might not qualify to compete despite your skill level. This is a common occurrence in Para sport, as there is an extra layer of complexity for athletes to compete in their respective sport. This extra step is known as disability sport classification. Classification is a process in which a single group of units are ordered into multiple smaller groups, based on their observable properties and commonalities (Tweedy et al., 2014). In the context of Para sport, the classification system is meant to create a more equitable competitive environment by categorizing athletes into sport classes based on the impact of their disability within a certain sport (International Paralympic Committee [IPC], 2015). Sport classes are categories used to group athletes together based on their disability and sport to ensure competition is fair. These classes are typically compared to the more commonly known selective classification in which people are grouped together based on age, sex, weight, etc. (Tweedy & Vanlandewijck, 2011). Often, classification can prevent participation in competitive Para sport. In relation to sport development pathways for Para sport and non-disabled sport, this is a key difference that has become a hot topic because non-disabled athletes do not experience the powerful procedure of being classified.

Retired Paralympic athlete, Danielle Peers (2012) has described the classification process as a period of judgement that places athletes in a vulnerable position, often dehumanizing Para sport athletes. Further, Howe (2008) described his sport classification experiences as “an alienating experience as each time a different team of individuals

determines whether your body fits into the textbook of carnal typology that is acceptable to those who govern the element of Paralympic sport” (p.4). Further, Para sport athletes have expressed that classification largely influences their experiences in sport and can sometimes put athletes at a competitive disadvantage. For example, “while I may have a similar disability as someone else, that doesn’t mean that we both have the same ability” (Evans et al., 2018, p.84). Yet, others have described the potential for positive outcomes of the classification process. For example, Van Dornick and Spencer (2020) examined the experiences of classification of Canadian Para-swimmers. They reported that swimmers felt that the process helped them gain access to high-performance opportunities in their sport and offered a sense of connection with other swimmers of similar ability. But the authors also found that athletes had feelings of uncertainty that came from the classification experience. Classification negatively impacted their dignity of identity as it highlighted the body’s limitations and in turn, could have a negative impact on the athlete’s self-esteem.

As can be gathered from the description above, the process of classification is largely divorced from the actual sport experiences of athletes. But the experiences of athletes in the process of classification is fundamental to understanding how this process impacts the quality of their participation in Para sport (Van Dornick & Spencer, 2020). There have been reports of athletes claiming the classification process is dehumanizing (Howe, 2008; Peers, 2012). Therefore, Para sport athlete experiences, specifically athlete embodied experiences are of interest for this study. An embodied perspective reflects that the body is the center of perception and subjectivity and where we create meaning in the world. Experiences are shaped by cultural forces as people engage with their body in the

world (Piran, 2017). This concept is important to Para sport when trying to examine individuals with disabilities physical experiences of sport and physical activity because it recognizes expectations that are socially constructed, and the value placed on their bodies in sport (Powis, 2020).

1.1 Purpose

To date, there is little scholarly research that has been done on the classification experience of athletes in Para sport. With this study, I aim to offer some perspective on how classification shapes broader embodied experiences in sport participation.

Importantly, I am interested in how an athlete's perspective of their classification experience evolved over the course of their athletic career. In this way, I sought to provide some understanding of the embodied experiences of Para sport athletes' classification. Recognizing the experiences associated with Para sport classification has the potential to highlight the power dynamics within sport and create space for new understandings of the ways in which bodies inform sport participation opportunities.

This research project sought to examine Canadian Para Sport athletes' experiences of Para sport classification and how this process impacted their embodied self-perception. By exploring the embodied experiences of Para sport athletes, I sought to further understand how Para sport athletes construct their understanding of classification. The following questions will guide this research project:

What are the experiences of Canadian athletes during Para sport classification?

What impact did classification have on athlete development?

How has the classification process informed athlete embodied perceptions of themselves?

1.2 Terminology

The term disability sport refers to organized physical competition for individuals with disabilities (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). However, Para sport is used to describe the high-performance pathway in sport in which athletes can eventually compete in the Paralympics (Bullock, 2018; IPC, 2021). The IPC uses the term Para sport to describe any sport with classification rules that comply with the IPC classification code in which people with disabilities can participate (IPC, 2021). Therefore, I used the term Para sport throughout this study as we aimed to understand classification experiences of Para sports following the IPC classification code. Additionally, I use the term non-disabled sport or individuals when referring to those who live without disability. The term ‘non-disabled’ is encouraged by the IPC as the term ‘able-body’ implies that individuals with disabilities lack an able-body, and therefore should be avoided (IPC, 2021). Further, I use the term individual/person with a disability as it follows IPC language which uses person-first terminology and recognizes the limitation of opportunities for individuals in social and physical situations due to the presence of barriers (IPC, 2021).

1.3 Researcher Positionality

As a researcher, I recognize that my life experiences shape my positionality and interest in this study. I identify as a non-disabled female with a background in high performance sport and coaching, having the privilege to participate and compete in many different sporting environments growing up. Therefore, I recognize that I approach this study on Para sport classification from an outsider’s perspective looking in. Most of my life has been shaped around sport. I played on many soccer, basketball, volleyball,

hockey, and softball teams during my junior high and high school days, as well as playing club and provincial volleyball for five years. My access to sport allowed me the opportunity to play varsity volleyball for the Lancers at the University of Windsor in Southwestern Ontario for four years.

Growing up in a small town in Newfoundland, Canada, I did not have a lot of exposure to Para sport in my community. While completing my bachelor's degree in Human Kinetics at the University of Windsor, I was introduced to Para sport on an academic level. As a student, my knowledge on disability and Para sport grew immensely after taking courses that focused on adaptive physical activity. This course inspired me to apply for an internship at the John McGivney Children's Centre in Windsor, where I had the opportunity to work alongside physiotherapists using physical activity and movement strategies that aimed to provide children with physical and intellectual disabilities a better quality of life through sport. Sport is a great way for individuals to feel a sense of belonging in their community while moving their bodies. This was truly an eye-opening experience for me, especially when I came to realize the limited or rather difficult process that individuals with disabilities have when it comes to accessing sport and recreation. My overall interest in Para sport led me to start a master's degree at Western University in sociocultural studies where I have been able to further explore parasport, specifically high-performance Para sport.

As a female athlete and now coach, I have been subject to many forms of criticism regarding my body. Being self-conscious and hyper-aware of my appearance and ability is very common in female sport. After reading works by David Howe (2008) and Danielle Peers (2012), I came to realize that Para sport athletes face a similar

judgement from a different type of adversity that is required to participate in Para sport. A requirement that non-disabled individuals are not subjected to. This being Para sport classification. Although this process is an important part of Para sport to create a fair playing field, there are many negative stories that result from classification that appear to be taking away from the overall quality of sport participation for athletes. I believe sport should be easily accessible and enjoyable to all individuals regardless of their abilities. My experiences with sport have been largely positive and I wish for others to experience similar benefits, which is why I am interested in further understanding the experiences of Para sport classification. Exploring these experiences among Para sport athletes will potentially allow an understanding of why this process can be negative in nature and can lead to ideas on how to improve this process for future athletes.

Chapter 2

2 Literature Review

In this chapter, I will present a review of the literature to connect this study to previous research in the field. The first section will provide a brief history of Para sport and the origins of classification. The second section is an overview on the classification athlete assessment process and the different sport class statuses. The third section provides an overview of the models of disability. Specifically, the medical model, the social model, and the social-relational model of disability. Next, I review existing research that has investigated first person experiences and feelings of Para sport athletes surrounding classification. Section five summarizes existing research that explored classification experiences of Para sport athletes. Finally, the last section provides insight to the theoretical framework of embodiment that is being applied to this research as I explore embodied experiences and disability and provide a brief overview of research in this area to give readers a general understanding of this lens.

2.1 A History of Para Sport and Classification

To understand the origins of classification in Para sport, we must look to the beginning of the Paralympic movement which is said to have begun after World War II (IPC, n.d.a). German neurologist, Dr. Ludwig Guttmann, believed sport could be strong method of rehabilitation for disabled war veterans, and in 1948 Dr. Guttmann hosted the first ever Stoke Mandeville Games. These games held competitions for athletes in wheelchairs and was the pioneer to the beginning of the Paralympic Games in Rome, 1960 (IPC, n.d.a). The word Paralympic has Greek origin and is a combination of the

word's para, meaning "beside" or "alongside" and Olympic, the previously existing non-disabled sporting competition. Further, the term Paralympics can also be understood as "parallel" to the Olympics, meaning they exist side-by-side.

The Stoke Mandeville Games was the beginning of classification in Para sport. However, at the time, sport classes followed what is known as the medical classification system meaning athletes were categorized according to their physical disabilities. Further, the medical classification system at that time essentially followed the structure of the rehabilitation hospital and therefore athletes with spinal cord injuries, amputations, and neurological damage all had separate sport classes. Medical classification was originally used to "ensure equal competition opportunities for – at the time – athletes with higher and lower spinal cord lesions" (IPC, n.d.a). Athletes received a sport class that represented their medical diagnosis and competed within that class for all sporting competitions (Tweedy & Vanlandewijck, 2011).

In 1964, the International Sport Organization for the Disabled (ISOD) was created to review the existing disability sport system, and advocate for sport for persons with disabilities (IPC, n.d.a). As a result, the ISOD recognized that the current Para sport system did not offer an opportunity for persons that are visually impaired, amputees, individuals with cerebral palsy, and paraplegics. 16 different countries joined ISOD and pushed for greater inclusivity in the 1976 and 1980 Paralympic games. As the Paralympic movement matured, the focus shifted from rehabilitation to focusing on sport for persons with disabilities. At this time, the flaws in the medical classification system became apparent, and classification shifted to a functional perspective. As stated by Tweedy & Vanlandewijck (2011) "in functional systems, the main factors that determine class are not

diagnosis and medical evaluation, but how much the impairment of a person impacts upon sport performance” (p. 262). Additionally, functional classification systems are sport-specific and account for the limitation an athlete may have while competing in each different sport.

Eventually, in 1989, the IPC was created in 1989 and became the governing body of the Paralympic movement (IPC, n.d.a). By 1992, the IPC required that all sports competing in the Paralympic games have sport-specific functional classification systems. Classification began to rapidly progress, and by 2007 the IPC introduced the international classification code based on the limited evidence around classification for each sport. The theory of evidence-based classification is that sport classes for athletes, despite their medical disability will result in similar levels of difficulty in their given sport (Tweedy & Vanlandewijck, 2011). This code has since been revised in 2015, with the goal to “enable para-athletes to achieve sporting excellence and inspire and excite the world” (IPC, 2015, p.3), and is currently undergoing a code review process. This code functions on two components. The first is that it defines who is eligible to compete in Para sport. The second component is that it groups athletes into sport classes that aim to ensure the impact of their disabilities are comparable to other athletes while trying to achieve excellence in their sport.

2.2 Athlete Assessment Process

While there are nuances to the process for each sport, generally there are three parts to the classification assessment for physical disabilities: physical, technical and observation assessments (IPC, 2015). Both the physical and technical assessment components take place during the classification evaluation period that occurs before

competition. Observation assessments take place during training or competition periods in which the athletes are participating in their sport. Classifiers, those qualified individuals who make the decisions about an athlete's sport class, are in a position of unique power to decide the fate of an athlete's sport class (Howe & Jones, 2006). While there are nuances between sport, in most sports, athletes are required to perform a series of tests and measurements for classification panelists to determine the impact of an individual's disability on sport functioning which helps them to establish what class they are eligible to compete in (Tweedy et al., 2014). The classification panel consists of two accredited classifiers that have completed special training. A medical classifier is required to confirm the disability of the athlete, while the sport classifier assesses the impact of the athlete's disability on their physical function in the sport. These classifiers are typically individuals with relevant professional skills such as physicians, coaches, experienced athletes, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists. Although athletes are permitted to have coach or similar support personnel with them to advocate on their behalf, this process essentially renders athletes powerless. Then, the allocation of sport class is ultimately decided by classifiers which can have a potential negative impact on athletes and their careers in Para sport.

Most IPC sports require a physical assessment in which medical classifiers will examine the athlete's muscle tone, range of motion, endurance, coordination, sensory and intellectual abilities (IPC, 2015). However, during technical assessments, classifiers will evaluate an athlete's performance of activities related to the sport in which they compete. Conditions such as specific wheelchair skills may be performed to assess an athlete's technical abilities. Finally, the observational component of assessment occurs during an

athlete's practice or first appearance in an event. In some instances, the classification panel may use video footage from competitions to assess an athlete's ability prior to deciding on a sport class.

There are a total of ten eligible impairments included in the classification system for Para sport (IPC, 2007). Please see Appendix A for a description of the eligible impairments. Depending on each athlete's disability they may be required to submit documentation of test results relevant to their diagnosis, including radiographs, medical reports, magnetic resonance imaging, etc., (Tweedy et al., 2014). Most of these classifications do not require equipment, and the tests and measurements can be performed almost anywhere, making it easy to provide classification at many events. Some sports, for example wheelchair basketball require in-game classification, meaning the classifiers do part of their assessment during practices or games. These in-game classification experiences could potentially be positive or negative embodied experiences depending on how consciously aware athletes are of the classifier's observations.

Each sport class is determined by each International Sport Federation classification rules (IPC, 2015). Further, sport classes categorize athletes based on their ability to perform tasks and fundamental activities that are specific to the sport in a controlled environment. To understand the differences in each sport class, please see Appendix B. After being given a sport class, athletes will receive a sport class status which is determined by the classification panel. There are three possible sport class statuses (IPC, 2016). The first sport class status is 'confirmed' (C). An athlete will receive a confirmed status if the classification panel believes the athlete's disability is stable and therefore their designated sport class is unlikely to change. Therefore, they will

not be required to undergo further classification for competitions. The second sport class status is titled 'Review' (R), meaning that athletes may be subjected to further evaluation prior to any international competition. Athletes may receive sport class status (R) for reasons such as the following: the athlete is new to Para sport competitions; an athlete has not reached full muscular maturity; or the athlete's disability is progressive or unstable and can change the impact it has on the athlete (IPC, 2016). Finally, the third sport class status is New (N). This is for athletes who have not yet been internationally classified and therefore, they must attend an athlete evaluation prior to competing in any international competition.

2.3 Models of Disability

To further understand the progression of classification, it is important to understand how medical discourses have changed over time. Historically, disability has been conceptualized through models of disability. Specifically, the medical model, the social model, and the social-relational model of disability. Each of these models have contributed to the development of classification and how we approach disability.

2.3.1 Medical Model of Disability

The medical model of disability recognizes disability as a medical impairment and is the prevailing perspective of the impaired body. This approach focuses on how the body or mind are disabled in a way that stops individuals from being able to do or feel things the same way as 'normal' or 'healthy' people do (Leigh, 2019). This model does not account for any environmental, social, or political factors that may act as barriers and contribute to the disabling of individuals (Loja et al., 2013). It highlights non-disabled discourses by medical professionals who attempt to identify and correct functional

deficits (Thomas & Smith, 2009). It portrays individuals with disabilities as victims of circumstance and expands the notion that all disabled people are helpless and must overcome their disability (Powis, 2020).

In classification, the medical model of disability contributed to the original development of classification procedures (Tweedy & Vanlandewijck, 2011). Although evidence-based classification has seemingly disconnected the medical model, it is still present through the identification procedures that compare Para sport athletes to a non-disabled standard, requiring medical documentations, and by giving classifiers the power to include or exclude individuals based on their disability.

2.3.2 Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability was developed by disability activists from the United Kingdom in the 1970s, and claims society is what disables impaired individuals (Smith & Bundon, 2018; Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013). Further, individuals are disabled when they are excluded from fully participating in society from barriers such as an inaccessible physical environment, attitudinal prejudices, education, etc., (Leigh, 2019). In this model, disability occurs outside of an individual. Historically, classification categorized and excluded individuals based on their disability. However, in classification, the social model is seen throughout Para sport as it aligns with the Paralympic movement (Tokyo, 2020). Meaning, the Paralympic movement intends to increase accessibility, opportunity, and change attitudes about disability. Para sport is intended to be an accessible environment with the opportunity for athletes to participate in sport, which coincides with the social model of disability.

Hughes (2000) argued that the limitations of this model become apparent when investigating the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities, however Anastasiou and Kauffman (2013) used the following example to highlight subjective experiences:

“Quadriplegia is the condition in which all four limbs are paralyzed, and this fact is subject-independent. But how a person with quadriplegia experiences this condition or how the existing social values affect the state of being a person with quadriplegia is subject-dependent.” (p.444).

This model allows for an understanding that although each athlete will have experienced classification, each athlete will have different feelings or attitudes towards the process. These feelings and attitudes are constructed based on the social and lived experiences in which the athletes are informed.

2.3.3 Social Relational Model of Disability

The social-relational model conceptualizes disability by loosely combining pieces from both the medical and social models and largely contributes to current classification processes. In relation to the social model, Thomas (2010) built on the ideas of disability first as originally introduced by the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in 1976. Rather than theorizing disability and impairment separately, the social-relational model argues that impairment does not cause disability, rather it is the socio-biological substance upon which disability is built (Thomas, 2010). Impairment is always embodied and biosocial in nature, and can directly impact an individual’s functioning in society, also known as ‘impairment effects.’

Shakespeare (2013) argued that the social-relational model is flawed because disability continues to be theorized as a form of oppression as oppression operates on

both the inside and outside of disabled experience (Thomas, 2010). This model is dependent upon how individuals with disabilities interact with their world and the role of lived experience in theorizing how disabled people experience multiple forms of oppression. This model can help understand the medicalized aspect of classification recognized in the historical development of classification, and the present use of medical documents and in the authority given to classifiers, as well as the social aspects and how they both contribute to the classification experience. Specifically, it is important to understand this model as we investigated how the experiences of Para sport athletes contributed to their understanding of classification.

2.4 First Person Accounts of Classification Experiences

To contextualize this research, it was important to review existing research surrounding classification experiences of Para sport athletes. There are two personal scholarly accounts of classification experiences that demonstrate a form of discontent with the athlete assessment process. Both Howe (2008) and Peers (2012) presented their experiences with classification through autoethnographies. Specifically, Howe (2008) critically examines the classification process using personal experiences and argues that classification does not represent the ideology of ‘Paralympism’, or Paralympic Movement intended to ‘empower, inspire, and achieve’. Being labelled as a particular type of body and feeling as though they were “an object of medical science where my disembodied identity does not seem to matter” (p. 4) is an example of the dehumanizing feelings this athlete associated with classification. Further, Howe (2008) reported becoming aware of how the public would view his body as a “spaz” while performing the

tests required for classification as his Cerebral Palsy removes an element of control that non-disabled individuals possess.

Sherill and Williams (1996) described classification as a process that illuminates a hierarchy of acceptable disabilities within society and athletics. Howe (2008) emphasized this further by commenting on how classification was “an alienating experience as each time a different team of individuals determines whether your body fits into the textbook of carnal typology that is acceptable to those who govern the element of Paralympic sport” (p. 4). This disputes the idea of “empower, inspire, and achieve” if you can only apply the ideology to a select group of individuals in the disabled community.

Similarly, Peers (2012) narrated their experience with classification, describing it as part of who they were as a person and as an athlete. Peers (2012) believed that classification is essentially an entity that is controlling Para sport. As a relatively non-disabled appearing individual, Peers (2012) spent most of their career trying to convince others that they were ‘disabled enough’ to be in Para sport. Otherwise, they would face scrutiny from outsiders such as athletes, fans, and personnel at the Paralympic games or major sporting events. “If I am deemed too strong, I am seen as a faker and a fraud” (Peers, 2012, p. 184-185). Further, they recounted being surveyed and dissected by classifiers, which they internalized throughout their career. The internalization of this scrutiny caused Peers (2012) to adapt their effort and ability in their sport of wheelchair basketball to avoid others questioning their place within classification.

Classification appeared to impact Peers (2012) outside of sport too. In sporting environments, they went out of her way to show people they were disabled by using crutches and a wheelchair because appearing ‘too abled’ caused a multitude of questions

and unwanted gazes from people. However, outside of sport, Peers (2012) attempted to hide their disability and often felt naked and fearful when they were caught trying to explain to non-disabled individuals that they were a Paralympian and how their disability fit within the classification system. Both Howe (2008) and Peers (2012) showed their intrapersonal experiences with classification and how it had a lasting impact in sport and in their personal lives. These examples are two accounts of athletes' personal experiences with classification and provide rich narratives about classification. Moving forward, it is important to listen to these individual stories as we attempt to further understand how individual embodied experiences impact the classification experiences of Para sport athletes.

2.5 Research Surrounding Athlete Experiences with Classification

There are very few scholars that have explored the classification experiences of Para sport athletes. Van Dornick and Spencer (2020) explored classification experiences of para-swimmers by employing interpretive description. The findings of this study highlighted both positives and negatives of classification from the athlete perspective. For instance, being classified allowed athletes to connect emotionally and socially with other athletes of similar abilities. However, the participants commented that being given a sport class caused questions of fairness because they began comparing themselves to other athletes within their class who appeared more or less abled. For example, one participant recalled “I do remember feeling more aware of myself and some limitations and... you think you know your body pretty well” (p. 8).

Van Dornick and Spencer (2020) further discovered that athletes were unsatisfied with the level of subjectivity surrounding the classification system. Recognizing that there is complexity involved with categorizing athletes, specifically those who have more specific disabilities require more interpretation and subjectivity from classifiers. “It wasn’t a formula they were applying to a person; it was somebody’s opinion” (p. 10). These inconsistencies caused discomfort and lack of confidence in the fairness of the system among athletes. This can be seen in the following quote from a participant: “the system is broken, but no one knows how to fix it, because it’s impossible to make something completely fair for everyone” (p. 9). In summary, although this participant sample indicated some positive aspects of classification, most of them were able to recognize that the system in place is not as flawless as it may appear.

Another example of existing literature surround classification experiences can be found in Powis and Macbeth’s (2019) summarize two qualitative studies they conducted with the England Cricket Team in 2014 and multiple footballers from both grassroots and elite levels in 2017. The purpose of this study was to examine how classification is experienced and regarded by athletes with visual impairments. Like Peers (2012), the findings of this study recognized that sport classes become a social identifier for athletes. Further, athletes are forced to adapt their abilities, so they do not appear ‘too abled’ to be in their class. Players are placing unrealistic limitations on their abilities to fit into the “one size fits all classification system” (Powis & Macbeth, 2019, p. 597). An example of this can be seen by an athlete who has been accused of cheating the system by teammates: “It is frustrating at times... why would anybody pretend that they couldn’t see to play blind cricket?” (p. 596).

Additionally, participants in this study commented on the disconnect between domestic and international competitions. At the domestic level, in both partially sighted football and visual impaired cricket, they combine classes to address low participation levels. However, these classes do not exist internationally, and therefore prevent some athletes from competing at the high level (Powis & Macbeth, 2019). Further, combining classes at the domestic level can prevent athletes that would be classifiable out of competition. “Combining classes works to ensure viable competition on the one hand, it also contravenes notions of equity and inclusion for many B2 players” (p. 595). In summary, the participants in this study exhibited a lack of faith in the classification system, although they recognize that sport depends on classification to ensure equity and success.

A third study by Patatas et al., (2020) investigating stakeholder’s perceptions of athletic pathways in paralympic sport aimed to identify disability specific characteristics that influence athlete development in different phases of existing sport models. After conducting interviews with 32 parasport stakeholders, Patatas et al., (2020) discovered that classification may act as a primary factor that influences para-athlete development. Sport class allocation may directly impact an athlete and can determine their pathway in sport. For example, “a correct classification at the beginning of an athlete’s career can facilitate the pathway progression and can have a positive influence in the transition from the foundation to the elite level” (Patatas et al., 2020, p. 13). Additionally, if athletes are allocated to a class with few competitors, they are more likely to skip steps and progress through the development pathway quickly. However, classification can also cause athletes to involuntarily retire or terminate their participation in high level Para sport. If

an athlete's sport class changes due to their disability progressing or a change in classification rules, they will likely be forced to remove themselves from competition. Further, classification has been considered a non-inclusive process due to its focus on prioritizing certain disability types over others and this can prevent entry into high-level competition (Hammond & Jeanes, 2017). In summary, it appears as though classification acts as a gateway into high level competition in Para sport for some sport classes. But it may also prevent an athlete from entering high level competition, specifically the Paralympics as they are deemed unclassifiable in the current system. What is less understood from the aforementioned research is how these systems and processes impact internal understandings of the bodily experience of classification.

2.6 Embodiment Framework

This study is guided by the embodiment framework (Leigh, 2021). I chose this theory to help further examinations of classification experiences of parasport athletes for four reasons. First, this theory helps situate the history and current concepts surrounding the body and how we perceive our experiences from our bodies. Second, understanding the quality of embodied lives and having awareness of bodily sensations can have a great effect on one's well-being (Hudak et al., 2007). Third, the body is the pre-understanding for all the physical and mental interactions we experience in the world (Mackenzie & Leach Scully, 2007). As a researcher, I am interested in considering the power dynamics of classification for Para sport athletes and what the potential impact that has on their embodied experiences as an athlete.

Embodiment is a term that is largely contested and constantly changing (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015). Researchers studying embodiment often pull information from multiple

perspectives, therefore, it is important to provide definitions that represent what the embodiment framework means in this study. According to Piran (2016), embodiment refers to the lived experience of engagement of the body in the world. Using an embodied approach emphasizes the experiences of the body, feelings, and physiological states of individuals. Further, embodiment incorporates a conscious self-awareness of feelings, emotions, information, and sensations that arise from the body and the mind (Leigh, 2021). It is important to highlight that some definitions emphasize that embodiment incorporates the human experience of having and being a body. For example, Fuchs and Schlimme (2009) note that we are the subjects of our own existence (also called the *subject body*), and we observe ourselves (the *object body*).

Embodiment includes the body that is pre-reflectively lived (lived or subject body) and the body that you perceive or is perceived by others (object body) (Fuchs & Schlimme, 2009;). The subject body is the backbone of our experiences, and it operates in every action and interaction without requiring explicit attention (Blankenburg, 2001; Stanghellini, 2009). Our subject body understands the environment as a space for engagement. For example, eating, writing, grasping objects, etc. These abilities are neither representation or rules but exist in our life in a tacit or implicit mode prior to reflecting on the experience. Alternatively, the object body means the body has conscious attention, most known when we are unable to perform tasks due to fatigue, illness, lack of capacity, etc., (Leder, 1992). When the body becomes an object for others, we often feel exposed and in turn, can disturb the body's ability to perform. When there are disturbances of embodiment, also called disembodiment, feelings of alienation and intersubjectivity exist. Meaning, the basic sense of being with others is replaced with

detachment. Disturbances to embodiment also occur in individuals with disruptions to their subject body. For example, physical or cognitive disabilities can weaken the basic sense of self and interrupt bodily functioning.

Understanding how Para sport athletes experience classification through an embodied lens enabled me to attempt to interpret and understand how their experiences in the world shape their perspectives towards the process of classification. As part of the disability movement, embodiment recognizes that disability is experienced in, on, and through the body and shapes their personal and cultural narratives that help to constitute its meaning (Hughes & Patterson, 2006). However, most of the research surrounding embodiment used a critical feminist positionality that mainly explores behavioral disruptions that more commonly occur in girls and women (Piran, 2016). Notably disability research has been used in connection to feminist approaches due to their commitments to inclusiveness and ethical background (Silvers, 2021). In addition, critical and feminist theories emphasize that the body is a site of social control (Honkatukia & Keskinen, 2017). For example, Piran (2016) used a feminist approach to interview girls, young women, and older women who reflected on their constructed meanings of embodiment and social experiences from their lived experiences. From that study, Piran (2016) found five constructs of positive and negative experiences of embodiment. The first being body connection and comfort vs. disrupted body connection and comfort which addresses how women experience the engagement of their bodies in the world as either comfortable or problematic. Second, positive agency and functionality vs. restricted agency and functionality, that describes how we act in and on the world physically with agency and power or reduced functionality and competence. Next is experience and expression of desire vs. disrupted

connection to desire regarding appetite and sexual desire. Fourth is attuned self-care vs. disrupted attunement and self-harm, meaning how well we pay attention to our internal needs as we engage in an environment (e.g., emotional, relational needs). Lastly, they found inhabiting body subjectively vs. inhabiting the body objectively in relation to external gaze, meaning the way in which individuals view themselves from the outside. Positively, this construct included narratives of defiance toward pressures of adopting an external gaze, and rather view it from the perspective of their appearance. Negatively however, women adopted a gaze towards the body that looked from the outside-in and altered their appearance to fit in with objectified expectations. This negative perspective caused a disruption to comfort, confidence, safety, and outlook on life. Another aspect of the developmental theory of embodiment from Piran (2016) includes an abundance of social experiences that shape female body experiences. In total, there were three core pathways in the social domain: physical, mental, and social power.

Embodiment concepts have also been used to understand experiences of illness and healthcare (Fernandez, 2020). Hall and Rhodes (2021) used an embodiment framework to help injured runners conceptualize their experiences to resist dualisms that exist in medical discourses. Lape and colleagues (2019) wanted to understand the experiences of patients that underwent total joint replacements. Embodied research has also been applied to disability studies as Loja et al., (2013) searched for an understanding of the psychosocial experience of disability, experiences of disabled embodiment, identity and its relation to embodiment, and the politics of disability and empowerment. Findings from that study showed that there is a concept of normality embedded from the medical

model that has shaped the understanding of disability as physical, moral, emotional, mental, and spiritual deficit.

In most cases, qualitative researchers doing embodiment research adapt contemporary phenomenological concepts. For example, researchers used embodied concepts of the subject and objective body to understand how women experience their scars post-breast cancer surgery (Slatman et al., 2016). One participant noted that they wear prosthetics around other people because they recognize that their body can show up in a negative and disturbing way, even though she is unphased by her appearance. Slatman et al., (2016) connected this to the phenomenological concept of social dys-appearance, meaning the body appears to oneself as an object which often takes place when the body is ill or in pain.

Although embodiment has been applied to many different contexts, it can be used to explore alterations in one's sense of self and in relation to others (Fernandez, 2020). By focusing on each aspect of experience individually, researchers will have the opportunity to explore specific aspects of a phenomenon in depth. Therefore, using embodiment to explore the classification experiences of Para sport athletes will provide a greater understanding of how the lived bodily experiences shape the minds of individuals undergoing classification.

Chapter 3

3 Methods

This chapter explains the methodology and design of the study. In this chapter I discuss the design of the study, sampling and participants, data collection and procedures, the interview guide, and data analysis. Specifically, I explain interpretive content analysis and why I chose this as my methodology for this study.

3.1 Design

Philosophically, this study was informed by interpretivism, based on a relativist ontological perspective, and epistemological subjectivism/transactionalism (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). As an interpretivist, I recognize that knowledge is constructed and learned through individual experiences, and that reality is subjective, therefore each participant and researcher will have their own view and reality on classification (Elliot et al., 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Epistemologically, knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and participants, and information in this study will be a result of interactions between participants and the researcher, and the interpretations made during these interactions (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). It is important to recognize that I have never experienced Para sport classification as I identify as a non-disabled individual. Therefore, I attempted to understand this process through the experiences of others and worked to appreciate the power relations with an understanding that my life experiences influenced the way I approached and interpreted this research. In this case, I used a semi-structured interview qualitative interview approach to explore the parasport classification experiences of athletes with disabilities. Specifically, interpretation was used to explore

classification experiences from the perspective of those who have lived it while recognizing that my understanding and prior knowledge are integrated into the interpretation of the findings of this study (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015).

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected for this study using purposive sampling, meaning individuals are carefully selected based on specific criteria that can provide an optimal perspective for the phenomena of interest (Abrams, 2010). To be recruited for this study, participants needed to meet the following requirements: individuals must be a minimum of 18 years of age. This age restriction was selected for two reasons; first, was to ensure that participants would have the capacity to consent and would not require parental consent, and secondly, athletes under the age of 18+ are more likely to be in the grassroots or developmental stages of Para sport, whereas we were interested in high performance Para sport athletes. Additionally, participants needed to have either a congenital or acquired disabilities, be Canadian and have participated in Para sport classification at least twice throughout their athletic career. Additionally, these athletes must have been classified in one of the following sports: para-swimming, para-cycling, para-athletics, para-rowing, sitting volleyball, and wheelchair basketball. Further, athletes who are visually impaired are not included in this study, as the process of classification is primarily medical in nature thus different from the visceral experience under exploration. I chose these specific sports as each classification process is overly body-focused, meaning classifiers are focused on sport-specific movements and skills the body can perform. For instance, goalball athletes do not fit into this study as their classification does not depend on technical aspects and rather is based on medical confirmation of

visual impairment. Therefore, body-focused classification sports have been selected. When recruiting for this study, I recognized that given the strict selection criteria, it was difficult to find the desired number of participants. However, recruitment efforts resulted in five total participants who participated in two virtual interviews each.

Participants were recruited via email. I found contact information online for different sport clubs or organizations that offered one of the six possible Para sports within Canada. This included private and recreational clubs, as well as each provincial government sporting organization. Each club received an initial recruitment email that described the study and selection criteria. I attached a letter that the sport clubs/organizations could send to athletes within their organization. Within the letter, there was a Qualtrics screening survey that asked general screening questions to determine if athletes were eligible to participate in the study. The potential participants were asked to complete this survey if they wish to participate in this study. Please see appendix C for the screening survey questions. All participants that were eligible for this study based on their survey responses were contacted directly via email to confirm their interest in participation and began scheduling interview times. One of the participants was recruited via snowball sampling, as a previous participant in the study kindly connected us through email (SAGE Research Methods, 2018). See the table below for a summary of participants in this study.

Table 1: Participant Sample

Participant Pseudonym	Para sport	Number of Classification Experiences
Erin	Wheelchair Basketball	3

Riley	Athletics	5
Reese	Para-Rowing Para-Swimming	2
Logan	Para-Rowing	4
Charlie	Athletics	3

To keep the confidentiality of participants, each participant was provided with a gender-neutral pseudonym. I chose not to clarify the pronouns of participants, and therefore chose to use gender neutral pronouns in the presentation of the data. To further preserve the confidentiality of participants, I chose not to share their sport class status they could be readily identifiable. Individual support needs can dictate classification status without exposing the identity of participants in this study. Therefore, instead of providing sport class status, to make sense of the findings I indicate the support needs of these individuals when it is necessary to understand the findings. Meaning, individuals with high support needs will be classed lower compared to individuals with low support needs who are in higher sport classes. Individual support needs can dictate classification status without exposing the identity of participants in this study.

3.3 Data Collection/Procedure

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with the participants. Due to the uncertainty of Covid-19 and accessibility reasons, semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded via Western University approved virtual platform Zoom. This allowed me to reach participants outside of my current geographic location (i.e., outside of Ontario). During each interview, I was an ‘active listener’ and prompted participants to

elaborate further on their experiences in their own words. Following Hollway and Jefferson (2000), I avoided asking questions about life stories and instead asked about experiences surrounding their involvement in Para sport classification. Because participants had multiple experiences of being classified, I asked them to share stories from each of their experiences.

Participants in this study were asked to be involved in two interviews. The first interview ranged from 45-75 minutes (average 56 minutes). The second interview was shorter in duration (average 50 minutes) as it was a chance for the researcher to ask further questions or seek clarification regarding the participants' previously mentioned experiences. Using two interviews allowed a level of trust to develop between myself as the researcher and the interviewee and had the potential to lead to a more detailed explanation of the participants experiences with parasport classification. For consent, participants were required to verbally consent at the beginning of each interview to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. Please see appendix D for the verbal consent script used prior to each interview.

The interview structure followed the four sections as described by Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016). The first section was used for introductions and explaining the research process, and to confirm consent. The second section consisted of the narrative. This section is where the interviewee shared their experiences while the interviewer gives non-verbal encouragement to help further smooth conversation. Next, the questioning section of the interview in which I attempted to fill in any gaps in conversation by revisiting subjects or asking about the before/after of an event. Finally, the last section was the conclusion of the interview. In this section, I explained the next steps in the

process and what happened with the data collected. Topics in the interview covered the participant's experiences of classification at both the national and international level prior to competition in the Paralympics. Each participant had the chance to share their story, while I listened and used probing questions to further the conversation. I created and followed an interview guide (see appendix E) to indicate areas of interest, although I was accepting of the unpredictable stories that arise from semi-structured interviews and allowed participants to share their experiences without interruption (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

3.4 Interview Guide

Athletes were asked to reflect of their previous experiences with classification through a series of pre-determined open-ended interview questions with the opportunity for questions to emerge based on the dialogue between the interviewee and interviewer (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to discover the meaning of an individual's social and personal matters. Using a semi-structured approach allowed me to explore the meaning of the participants experiences with Para sport classification and allowed the participants to introduce things on their own account related to the topic under investigation. Following Knapik (2006), I recognized that the respondents in the interviews are considered the experts on their classification experiences and were allowed the maximum opportunity to share their own stories.

When conducting semi-structured interviews, it was essential to develop a positive relationship with the interviewee, as well as create a comfortable and safe environment (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). To establish a trusting relationship with

participants, I followed the stages to developing rapport as described by Spradley (1979). According to Spradley (1979), there are four phases to developing rapport: apprehension, exploration, co-operation, and participation. During the apprehension phase the goal is to create casual conversation by asking broad open-ended questions that are related to the research and are non-threatening. Using the prompt “can you tell me about your history and involvement in Para sport?” was used to generate easy conversation with the participant, while it also provided the researcher with relevant information. The second phase is the exploration phase. In this phase, I encouraged the interviewee to dive into deeper conversation while I listened and learned and encouraged sharing more information. Questions such as “how did you feel when you first learned about classification?” helped interviewees share more intimate details and further develop trust and rapport with the interviewer. Throughout the interview, unplanned follow-up questions were asked to prompt further conversation and encourage the participant to share more information. The co-operative phase is where comfort is often achieved during the interview. I clarified important points with the interviewee and asked any necessary sensitive questions if it was deemed appropriate in the moment. For example, “what impact did classification have on you and your participation in sport after receiving your first sport class?” The final stage is the participation stage, which may not occur within the time frame for the interview. This stage occurs when there is a high level of rapport and trust between the interviewee and interviewer, and the interviewee leads the conversation – teaching the interviewer throughout the process. I noticed during the second half of interview number two with participants that most of them were comfortable enough to introduce new topics that we had not yet discussed and lead the

conversation. This allowed participants to highlight their experiences further and discuss sensitive topics due to an appropriate level of comfort achieved over the interview process.

Following interpretive content analysis, questions in the interview guides were not only “how” or “what” questions, but also “why” and “to what affect” as it allows researchers to go beyond descriptive questions and explore what the experience of something is and what it means to those who experience it (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). For example, questions like “how do you feel when talking about classification with others, such as coaches, teammates, family, etc.?” were used to understand the feelings associated with the experience of talking about classification. Please see Appendix C for the interview guide for this study.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using interpretive content analysis as outlined by Drisko and Maschi (2015) and Schreir (2014). Interpretive content analysis is a research technique used to make inferences from texts or other sets of data (Krippendorff, 2013). Further, it is often used to make sense about intentions, thoughts, and feelings of a participant sample. In line with this study, content analysis can help researchers inform, describe, evaluate, summarize, and advocate for action for individuals (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). Content analysis became a recognized methodology in the 19th century when scholars became interested in analyzing written communications (Rosenthal, 2018). Like other qualitative research methods, content analysts believe in multiple realities (Cho & Lee, 2014). There is a strong emphasis on interpretation and in-depth understanding of phenomena. Overall, there is a commitment to understanding and communicating participant viewpoints

through a reiterative data-driven analysis. Ultimately, interpretive content analysis focuses on thick descriptions and interpretation (Fuad Selvi, 2019). When analyzing data, we used an inductive approach. Inductive approaches are suited for cases in which the topics and themes that emerge from the data are not well known in research (Mayring, 2000). The classification experiences of Para sport athletes have been well explored, however very few researchers have applied an embodied lens when trying to understand these experiences.

In this case, interpretive content analysis is being used to understand Para sport athletes' experiences and thoughts towards Para sport classification as it is intended to understand what each participant thinks or believes. This process required me to use reflexivity to recognize the impact I have on the data while interpreting the experiences of the participants. When data collection began during the first interview, I was reflecting on essential themes of participant experiences with classification, while simultaneously reflecting on my own experience while interviewing (Neubauer et al., 2019). Being reflexive allowed me to understand how parts of the data contributed to my overall interpretation of the common themes that emerged in the analysis.

Content analysis can be used both qualitatively and quantitatively. For this study, I used qualitative content analysis and followed the following steps (Drisko & Maschi, 2015; Schreir, 2014). First, interviews were transcribed verbatim. To develop familiarity with the data, I read each individual transcript 2-3 times while making note of any interesting or significant themes in the margins of the transcripts. This is when I made comments such as loose annotations or descriptive comments focusing on the content of what the participant was talking about rather than codes. The second step involved the

coding of data. Typically, researchers use software programming to assist with the coding of data. However, due to the limited number of participants, data was manually coded. During this phase, I made note of interesting phrases that were similar and represented large sections of data to allow for theoretical connections to emerge. I organized my data on an excel document by placing quotes from participants under potential theoretical concepts and reviewed the data and how well relevant data related to each concept. After further analysis, subcategories were established. The subsequent steps involve defining each main category and providing specific examples from the text. In this study, we chose to use short quotes from participants to label each category and provided a brief description of the meaning behind each quote. During this step, I discarded a few concepts and began to arrange the order in which I wanted to introduce the findings. When I reviewed transcripts, I paid attention to the richness of the narratives being told rather than the prevalence of the concepts being mentioned. By doing so, I was able to decide on what important concepts to include or remove based on their contribution to the development of the participant stories in the data. Lastly, we began to write the analysis. Herein I attempted to share participant stories and provide ample quotations to represent the theoretical concepts that represent the data.

Prior to writing the analysis, I used a critical friend as described by Smith and McGannon (2018). A critical friend is an individual who is not involved with the data collection process, and therefore can provide an outsider perspective and help resolve any discrepancies that might appear during the coding process. For this study, my supervisor was not directly involved with the data collection, but acted as a critical friend and helped

improve the trustworthiness of the findings by reviewing the transcripts, discussing themes and going through reflexive processes (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

3.6 Reflexive Practices

While using interpretations doing semi-structured interviews, I recognize that my values and lived experiences impacted the research process and of the findings. My pre-understandings required me to reflect upon how my experiences influenced the interpretations made (Dowling, 2007). To ensure sincerity was met, I was self-reflexive before and during the study. Self-reflexivity encourages writers to be honest about their strengths and shortcomings throughout the research process (Tracy, 2010). I kept a reflexive journal that noted my pre-understandings of this topic, as this allowed me to recognize my understandings and orientation with classification. The reflexive journal was also a tool used for reflection and interpretation.

While doing qualitative research it is important to remember that the story is an experience of the participants. I aspired to understand and interpret each story to the best of my ability but recognize the importance of re-visiting some topics if I needed further clarification. Prior to conducting the second interview in the data collection process with participants, I made sure to transcribe the first interview and read the transcript, making note of any questions and curiosity that appeared. I was able to question and/or confirm my interpretation of the stories being told by the participants by seeking clarification on previously discussed topics during the second interview.

Chapter 4

4 Findings

Using interpretive content analysis, I interpreted the classification experiences of the five athletes through the lens of embodiment. There are two sections presented in the findings. The first section highlights the fundamental classification experiences for the athletes. The second section addresses how athletes construct their understanding of classification. Rather than using a few key words to summarize the major themes that came to surface during the analysis, I chose to use quotations from participants to introduce theoretical concepts relevant to embodiment. Using quotations to introduce and describe each concept allowed for participant voices to be represented in the findings, and further highlights their experiences with classification.

4.1 Classification Experiences of Para Sport Athletes

To understand the classification of Para sport athletes, there were generally three variations of experiences interpreted in the data analysis. First, some athletes going through classification appeared to be accepting of the process. These athletes viewed classification as a process that represented as a gateway into their legitimization in Para sport. Additionally, athletes expressed a level of comfort while interacting with personnel involved in the classification process such as classifiers or team doctors. The second type of experience was a representation of the power imbalance that exists in classification. The power dynamic present in the classification process came to light when athletes discussed their experiences of having an advocate attend their sport class allocation. Finally, the third interpretation of athlete experiences was the disruption to self that

occurred in athletes who felt as though classification was largely subjective, repetitive, or if participants felt like a fraud trying to prove their disability.

4.1.1 Acceptance and Comfort: "... the [doctor] came with me and it was pretty straightforward. She (*the classifier*) looked at me for two minutes and said 'you're a (*sport class*)'"

When athletes appeared to be accepting of classification, they often did not show any resistance or discomfort with the process. As described by Riley, being examined by classifiers was "pretty straightforward." Riley is an individual with low support needs, and therefore is in a higher sport class. While being classified, Riley did not require a long evaluation period as their disability is less complex than those in lower sport classes. Going through classification without hiccups likely contributed to Riley having a greater appreciation for classification in comparison to athletes who experienced hardship or complications when being classified. By not having to appeal their sport class status, or worry about being wrongly classed, Riley was less aware of their body during classification as it was not being questioned or judged in a way that contradicted how they viewed themselves. Therefore, during each discussion regarding Riley's classification experiences it appeared as though Riley was accepting of classification.

Another factor that contributed to athletes being accepting of their classification experiences occurs when their allocated sport class was where they thought they belonged. For example, before Charlie's first international classification, they were worried that their sport class could change and would be too competitive, and in the worst case resulting in them being forced out of Para sport. However, after receiving an international sport class and competing against other athletes of similar ability, Charlie

was more confident in the classifier's decision regarding their sport class and believed in the legitimacy of classification: "I felt – I did feel great. I also felt like I was definitely – once I competed – the first time I competed internationally... they definitely did a good job and I'm definitely in the right class." Having confidence in their sport class seemed to allow them to trust classification and be more accepting of the process for future classifications. This confidence allowed Charlie to feel comfortable during evaluations.

Although athletes expressed that they often felt nervous and worried about their sport class designation, when classifiers were friendly, easygoing, and understanding of athlete needs, it became apparent that the participants were comfortable during their sport class allocation. Further, comfort appeared to be achieved when classifiers provided explanations or words of encouragement. For example:

"Going into it (classification) in 2010 it was kind of like – I was nervous like I was looking everything up the night before and I was sweating bullets. The lady that was doing it from Canada, she said, 'relax, like you don't have to worry about it.' They knew right off the bat that I was (sport class)." - Riley

In this case, the classifier contributed to Riley's experience. It is foreseeable that having classifiers that are open and willing to explain the process and answer questions with doctors and medical staff in attendance with the athlete resulted in a comfortable experience. Having responses to questions creates further understanding of classification for the athletes and can improve the athlete-classifier relationship. This can be seen further in the following quote: "I was a carded athlete with Athletics Canada, so if they had any questions for [doctor] she can answer them. But I was comfortable with the

medical staff that we had, and I, as I said, I feel comfortable every time that I ever had classification.”

When talking about their first classification experiences, some athletes were very young. Although the process was somewhat informal and has changed significantly since then, athletes recognized that being young and carefree significantly contributed to their acceptance towards classification. When they were younger, the participants did not appear to be consciously aware of their disability and were more focused on participating in sport. For example, as a young athlete going through classification, Erin was just happy to be classified and allowed to compete in wheelchair basketball. To Erin, classification was seen as another step in the process of being a Para sport athlete and a gateway to participation in sport: “I just was like ‘alright, I’m a class 1.0, let's go.’” This can be interpreted as Erin accepting classification, as they became legitimized in Para sport for the first time. Being successfully classified submerges athletes into high-performance Para sport. Regardless of age, receiving the stamp of approval from classification confirms that athletes are part of the pathway to the Paralympics. Research by Pullen and colleagues (2019) found that classification can include, but also exclude athletes that do not have the right kind of disability in Para sport. Receiving a sport class is confirmation that athletes can continue along the Para sport pathway. At a young age, Erin appeared to be happy that they were classifiable and were comfortable with the process. However, this was later followed up with recognition that older athletes being classified for the first time would face a lot more pressure and feelings of uncertainty:

“If I was older and I knew what was at stake, then maybe [classification] would have been a completely different process, you know. Like if I was injured when I

was 18, and I had aspirations to make the national team and they put me in that same process, I'm probably super anxious." - Erin

In this excerpt, Erin commented on individuals who become impaired later in life and transition to Para sport with dreams of reaching a high level would have different experiences. This is because in this study, those that acquired their impairments later in life were less comfortable and accepting of classification as they have a lot of pressure riding on their sport class allocations. There would also be a level of discomfort for first time classifications that occur in older athletes compared to younger athletes because it is possible that they have a greater understanding of the impact classification can have on their career as a Para sport athlete. This can be seen further in the following quote that highlights how being classified as a young kid resulted in acceptance of the process due to the participant not having a full understanding of what they were doing and why it was required of them:

"I didn't know what was going on and why they're doing all these tests on me. And my parents are kind of explaining to me. At the time I was so young, that you know, this was so that I can compete, and this is just an extra thing I had to do. And I think that I was kind of unaware of all the different – I didn't know anything about the classifications, when I was young." - Charlie

Being young and not having a full understanding of the classification system did not result in frustration or disappointment when being allocated a class for their sport. Rather, it was a gateway to high performance competition in their sport and therefore there was little to no resistance from participants who experienced their first classification at a young age.

4.1.2 Power Dynamic: "...it definitely felt like I had somebody that was there to kind of support me"

The presence of an advocate during the classification process is not uncommon. For most national and international classifications, it is a requirement to have an advocate present. It means that an athlete has someone to help speak on their behalf and support the inherent power imbalance. All five athletes, to some degree, spoke on how their evaluation experiences differed when an advocate attended their classification. An advocate, or support person is an individual that is permitted to attend classification alongside the athlete to help support the athlete during the process (IPC, 2015). This can be a coach, parent, interpreter, doctor, etc. Most commonly, each athlete chose to bring their personal or team doctor with them for their classification as the doctors had the greatest understanding of their disability and would be able to answer any medical questions on behalf of the athletes. However, this can cause problems for athletes that do not have access to team doctors or support personnel during their classification. Having the opportunity to bring an advocate can be an issue of privilege for those athletes that do not have access to a team doctor. Further, this represents a power imbalance, in which athletes appear to have the weakest voice in the room regarding the decision being made about their body. Overall, classifiers have the most power as they make the final decision regarding an athlete's sport class allocation. Next, doctors and other advocates present during the evaluation are more likely to be listened to and can discuss controversial aspects of the evaluation. Although an athlete can speak on their behalf, the presence of an advocate – and the type of advocate lessens the power of their voice.

Logan was appreciative of having a doctor present during their classification. Having someone there to support them and communicate in medical terms with the classifiers provided a sense of security and relief to them as Logan was often faced with questions that they felt they were unable to answer:

“I mean it definitely felt like I had somebody that was there to kind of support me, and if there were any issues that came up that I didn't necessarily know the answer to, I knew that he [doctor] was able to jump in and kind of help you.” - Logan

Specifically, Logan had the opportunity to receive a confirmed sport class status, meaning they would no longer have to be classified for competitions unless the classification rules changed. When the classifiers asked Logan to provide documents from specific medical tests, they were unsure on how to go about that in the moment. Although athletes know their disability and themselves better than anyone, in this situation, Logan was unable to understand the medical terms being used in the classification room. This can cause problems for athletes that do not have an advocate present or a doctor that can respond to medical questions appropriately. This essentially renders them powerless. To highlight the importance of having access to a doctor, the following example is from Logan:

“... he [doctor] actually spoke with them [classifiers] and said, like yeah like well when we get back to Canada, I will book one. Like sort of almost talked them through like because he was aware of the process, right? So, he was like ‘yeah like we'll do it within this amount of time and get it to you guys and blah blah blah’ and like I wouldn't have been able to give that answer so it was nice to have someone that could.” - Logan

In this moment, Logan did not have the requisite knowledge, power, or authority to communicate on behalf of themselves, and therefore relied on the support of someone with that power. Classifiers held the greatest level of power in this environment, and without the doctor, Logan reported that they would likely not have received the same outcome during their classification.

The power imbalance was present in various ways for each athlete, especially from participants who recounted their experiences without an advocate during classification. For example, Reese faced a situation in which the team doctor was unable to attend their classification: “our team doctor couldn't be there for all of my evaluations, so I felt like I didn't have the support or backup to be properly classified.” It was common for the participants to comment on the support they felt from doctors when they attended classification, especially in the unfortunate circumstance that the classifiers missed something. Reese, who was competing in multiple Para sports at the Invictus games happened to be classified incorrectly. At the time, the team doctor was not present during Reese's classification, leaving them to feel as though they did not have support or a voice to fight for them. However, the team doctor was able to later assist Reese in appealing the class which originally prevented them from being able to compete in that sport:

“When they misclassified me, he [doctor] went and advocated. I didn't have to do anything, he like went to the meeting with the classification team and came back and he told me you're back to where you were because I pointed out this that and this and they agreed.” - Reese

Although the doctor was able to fight for Reese and get them placed in the correct sport class, it demonstrates the power of the medical professional in the process where the

athletes remain a silent bystander while they are examined in classification. Reese was unable to convince classifiers of the error, however when the doctor communicated the same information in the error to classifiers, the sport class changed. Based on these findings, athletes were rendered powerless during the evaluation of their bodies.

External support was also provided by coaches during some athletes' classification process. Having a coach present offered important psychological support for many of the athletes, because coaches work closely with them and understand the constraints and limitations of their bodies. Classification is an unfamiliar process that has a lot at stake for athletes, therefore it was common for athletes like Riley to recognize the feelings of comfort associated with coaches being present during evaluations: "I was more relaxed with the coach than I would be if I was just in a room, and we're going to do these tests and not knowing anything and just be my own my own." Having someone there to support you during classification could provide a lot of benefit. When nervous, Riley found it hard to perform certain tasks: "when I get nervous, my – you can really tell my [disability] comes out. I tightened right up." This can make it difficult to do what the classifiers ask and could potentially lead to an incorrect sport class allocation.

4.1.3 Disruption to Self: "I was working hard to optimize my performance, and I felt like it was something that was completely out of my control"

When discussing classification experiences, there were many participants that expressed feelings of stress, discomfort, anger, and confusion when being classified. These feelings seemed to occur when athletes felt that classification was subjective, if athletes disagreed with certain aspects of classification, and/or if their classification did

not go as expected. In these situations, participants appeared to have experienced a disruption to themselves. Meaning, when their identities as individuals with disabilities were being tested and questioned by classifiers who were most commonly non-disabled, it often resulted in a negative experience for participants.

Athletes experienced discomfort and disruption to self when they were aware of the potential subjectivity of the classification process. Although some participants understood that the subjective pieces to classification were out of their control and were rather unbothered by it, others seemed to be greatly impacted by the subjectivity present in their classifications. For example:

“They [classifiers] can't obviously mirror the same thing, they have their own biases, their own interpretations of the athlete when you're there, and so you're always looking around like ‘is that person in the right classification, are they the same as me...’ is it unfair to me that I’m competing against a person who may be was over classified for their disability level? So, the subjectivity of it is challenging.” - Reese

This excerpt from Reese highlights the frustration that they felt when they didn’t fully trust that the classifiers were following the best methods to eliminate their biases and interpretations. This experience seemed to affect Reese, who then became more consciously aware of their disability and worrisome that they would be competing against individuals in the incorrect class. From this study, when athletes that felt that classification was subjective, they began to question other athletes in their class and appeared to be less confident in the credibility of classifiers. However, it was noted among participants when asked what they think should change in classification to help eliminate some of the subjectivity, that there wasn’t much to be done:

“This [classification] is really subjective like I know they try and make it as objective as they can, but like it's they can't. Like you can't unless you have a machine that's like physically measuring the strength that your left leg is putting out and the strength of your right leg is putting out or whatever like it's very hard to be objective.” - Logan

Logan also experienced a level of subjectivity when comparing their domestic and international classification experiences. Specifically, they felt as though the classifiers were on significantly different pages: “the one distinct thing I remember was, at least in rowing and I don't know if it's like this across the board with all sports in Canada, but domestic classifiers are a lot more strict than international classifiers.” Logan commented that they lost a greater number of points during their international classification in comparison to their domestic classification. Although they ended up in the same sport class, it was a prime example of how different each classifier treats the process and the potential impact it can have on the athletes if they do end up changing sport classes. Experiencing this caused Logan to question his own disability and whether they belonged in Para sport. They are an individual with little to no support needs and often feel too able to be a Para sport athlete. When their international and domestic classification evaluations differed, it further caused a disruption to self as Logan questioned their legitimacy in Para sport.

Another aspect of classification that insinuated bodily discomfort occurred when athletes felt that they had to prove their disability to the classifiers. Meaning, when athletes were being evaluated, it seemed as though the classifiers did not believe them when they were completing tests. This can be seen in the following quote from Reese:

“it’s almost like a *moral injury* when you're already disabled to have to go and fight for some able body person to be able to see what you're talking about what your disability level is and where you should be placed.” - Reese

Athletes know their own bodies the best, and generally have the best idea of where they think they should be classified. When Reese described the experience of convincing the classifiers of their disability, they used the term ‘moral injury’ to summarize the negative feelings associated with convincing others of who they are. This was elaborated on further:

“Mentally it's stressful it's like when you go into it, you know where you're at because you know your own body, but somebody is going to tell you if you're better or worse, and how competition is going to look for you and that's troubling.” - Reese

As a high-performance competitive athlete, Reese struggled to accept that their fate in Para sport was to be determined by classifiers. Depending on the classifier and their level of interpretation during classification can dictate the competition for athletes. Similar to Reese, Logan reported that they needed to prove their disability to classifiers and was struggling with the concept of feeling like a fraud:

“I kind of felt like a bit of a fraud like, is this real is this really like for me.... So, I think, for me it was like until I got that international classification or stamp of approval of like this is your sport class. I don't think I fully believed it right?” - Logan

As previously mentioned, Logan was in a situation in which they were unsure if they were eligible for classification. Being an athlete in the highest class for para-rowing,

Logan was worried that they were not impaired enough to participate in Para sport. Leading up to their international classification, Logan appeared to experience confusion and struggled to understand who they were as an athlete with a disability. Having to go through classification and feel out of place while doing so, was a difficult thing to process.

A final piece to classification experiences that caused discomfort, occurred when there was poor communication between the classifiers and the athlete. Specifically, Logan experienced a time which the classifiers spoke a different language, which made it difficult to ask questions and answer questions that were imperative to receiving the correct sport class:

“There was also – not that there was a language barrier between myself and the classifier, but English was not their first language right – and so when they were asking me to do things, or when I was explaining certain things to them, I had to be very careful in the choice of words that you use to make sure that they understood what I was saying, right?” - Logan

Not being able to provide the right information and answer questions appropriately appeared to weigh heavily on Logan’s mind while being classified as they ran the risk of being classed incorrectly. This can cause athletes to stress and feel anxious, overall causing a disruption to self. This further compromised this participant’s experience with classification and made it difficult to be accepting of the process.

4.2 How Athletes Construct Their Understanding of Classification

The findings demonstrate that athletes constructed their understanding of classification by interpreting their classification experiences in three ways. First, through their knowledge of the classification system and their designated sport class. Second, their identity as an individual with a disability and the impact their disability has had on their lives. Lastly, their identity as an athlete and their understanding of their ability, effort, and potential in sport.

4.2.1 Knowledge and Education: “Classification serves to kind of like bracket you into what the most appropriate class for you to participate or come in, but... it has its limitations”

The first way in which athletes construct their understanding of classification can be understood through their education and pre-understandings of classification prior to being classified. It was important to discuss with the athletes about their knowledge of classification and the purpose it is intended to serve. The initial quote provides a great summary of most participants' general understanding of the classification system. Most commonly, participants seemed to be able to recognize that the classification system is intended to make things as fair as possible and provide an equal playing field with athletes of similar abilities. However, most participants also recognized or believed there are limitations within the classification system. This can be seen in the following quote from Logan:

“I think my understanding of classification is the original intent way back when it became a thing was to try and level the playing right? And so, like I guess you can look at it in principle and say like it's good, because it levels the playing field. But in reality, I think it just you know, Para sport is so unique in that light. No one body type is the same as another and so like we're trying to almost slot in or categorize athletes based - into different classifications - based on sort of their bodies, right? I don't know it's almost like in some ways it tries to be specific, but it will never get anywhere as close to the specificity of any individual person.” - Logan

In this excerpt, it is recognized that the general principle of classification is beneficial and provides Para sport athletes a chance to compete with others of similar abilities. This can be seen further in the following quote from Reese: “Before I found para-rowing was, I would just compete in able bodied sports and be terrible and so that [classification] gave an opportunity to actually be able to achieve something from that sport.” However, it was recognized that everyone is unique and therefore it is very difficult to categorize each individual athlete and compare them to others, despite having the Paralympic movement which acknowledges that each athlete is different in their own way. Some athletes appeared to be more accepting of the notion that Para sport is regulated through classification process for fair competition. For example, Charlie recognizes that they want sport to be fair, and classification is one the ways it is possible to provide a fair competition pool: “I believe it should be fair for - our sport should always be fair. So, in that way, I think it's definitely a positive thing and definitely you need to be classified.” Without classification, Para sport athletes might not have the best opportunity to be successful in their sport.

To further grasp how athletes created an understanding of the classification system, we discussed how much education athletes received about classification as well as where the information came from. For some athletes who were classified at a young age, there was not a great understanding of what the classification system was and how the process worked. But, getting that first initial classification experience helped athletes learn more about themselves and the process:

“I didn't really know what it was. I didn't know anything about classes, and then, once you go through the process and you realize, you know, the more disabled people - more than in my category... the lower the classes are, like in a wheelchair, or you know, or some people are more affected. It made me actually learn a bit more about [specific disability]” - Charlie

After being classified, and seeing the different sport classes that existed, Charlie was able to understand how their disability can impact individuals differently. Classification seemed to not only provide information on classification, but also knowledge about disability itself. Additionally, it was also common for athletes to learn about classification through internet searches:

“It wasn't until I became like – I was told this is something you may want to pursue, that I actively did a Google search and was like ‘Oh, how does this thing [classification] work?’ And trying to kind of educate myself about it.” - Logan

Logan spent a lot of time researching classification in para-rowing because they were unsure about the eligibility requirements and whether they would be allowed to participate in Para sport at a high level. Without proper education and looking into classification, Logan would likely never have competed in Para sport. As mentioned

earlier, Logan said they felt like a fraud and was worried they were not disabled enough to be classified in para-rowing. However, once they were internationally classified and saw other athletes in their class, Logan was able to learn more about the different sport classes and where they felt they belonged in their sport:

“I looked around in the athlete park and was like oh man like okay I’m way more disabled in some of these people here like I guess I do belong in that almost like, for me it was like this topic of like you know classifications of a system of determines like who belongs here and who doesn’t, and it was kind of like this weird thing for me.” - Logan

Although Logan appeared to become more consciously aware of their disability in this situation, they were able to learn more about classification in the process and further developed their understanding of the purpose of classification.

Another way education constructs athletes' understandings of classification is by taking personal experiences and educating others. For example, Erin played wheelchair basketball and was typically classed as the lowest class, meaning their disability was more severe compared to the other athletes. Now, as a coach in wheelchair basketball, Erin understands the misconceptions associated with lower sport classes and takes it upon themselves to educate other athletes on the role that lower classed athletes play and their importance in Para sport.

“...there's a stereotype for classification if you're low classification you're not a good player and I tell them that's again, not correct. Like your classification doesn't dictate the way you play it's not how skilled you are right? So, through lot of hard work, you can do whatever you want.” - Erin

Further, Erin's experiences as a lower-class athlete left them feeling down when they were being compared to other athletes of higher classes in team sports. These experiences have made them a better coach and gave them a platform to help others understand the classification system: "I think that's the biggest misconception of classification is the – you know, like all the best players are the highest classes and that's just – it's quite honestly, not true."

4.2.2 Disability Identity: "I remember when I was really small, I used to say to my own parents; 'am I the only one?'"

Exploring the experiences participants had while growing up with a disability is critical to understanding their knowledge and feelings towards classification. This section focuses on the disability identities of the participants and aims to describe how living with a congenital disability, or an acquired disability appeared to impact each athlete's approach to classification and Para sport.

For most athletes, Para sport provides them with an opportunity to connect with individuals with similar disabilities and gives the athletes a sense of belonging and community through sport. Specifically, one participant who grew up with a disability in a smaller community often felt alienated and confused as to why they were the only individual living with a disability. Once this athlete began competing in Para sport, they immediately felt a sense of belonging and connected with other athletes. The following excerpt provides a summary of Charlie's experiences living in a small town:

"I felt like I was the only one that had this happen to me, you know? When I was very small, I didn't understand the whole [disability] thing and that it's part of life and all that I was. So, I decided – I remember I was really depressed for a long time, and I

gone to my mom, and I said, 'why did this happen to me?' It was awful, you know, that was the end of the world, I guess. Then that's when we kind of got into this [parasport], we got into the sport and then I met a lot of people that were like me... I really enjoy it because they can just sort of – you're around people that are like you, and we can just like pick up conversations over the years if we don't see each other and we're always glad to see each other.” - Charlie

Having the opportunity to connect with individuals who have similar disability experiences provided Charlie with a sense of appreciation for Para sport. When asked about classification, Charlie was quick to respond about the opportunity it provides and the equal playing field. It allowed them a chance to compete in sport with others of similar ability and classification is just a small step in the process of being a high-performance Para sport athlete:

“It [classification] gives you a chance to sort of excel at an event and maybe see the world and compete against the best athletes in the world. And you're playing where it's an equal playing field. So, I think, for me it's been an amazing experience.” - Charlie

After competing against non-disabled athletes at a young age, classification provided Charlie the opportunity to compete against individuals with similar abilities and excel in sport. Further, participating in Para sport changed Charlie's perspective of their disability: “I'm proud that I have a disability, because if didn't have a disability, I won't be able to do what I'm doing.” This participant's experiences demonstrate the social benefits that are connected to classification and contribute to the Paralympic movement's objective of creating safe and equitable sport environments for individuals with

disabilities. Being able to connect and relate to others through sport is one of the benefits that classification can provide. This acts as a gateway into high performance sport and social belonging.

Like Charlie, Riley was not estranged by the classification process. Riley compared classification to the many medical appointments they attended over their lifetime while having a disability. From birth, Riley visited many doctors and specialists, and even compared the classification tests to things they have done in physical therapy. For example:

“I’ve been to every speech pathologist from orthopedic surgeon... I’ve been in the hospital medical field for 37 years of my life, so it wasn’t – I knew what was coming. It’s a regular doctor physical that they’re going to do, and actually some of the stuff that they do for classification is like stuff that I had growing up and getting physicals from specialists.” – Riley

Having previous experience with medical doctors and physical therapy appointments led Riley to see classification as a part of Para sport that was required and rather easy to go through. Athletes noted that being comfortable in a doctor’s office and having familiarity with the tests provided comfort during classification. To further understand Riley’s identity with a disability and how they understand Para sport and classification, it is important to note that Riley originally began participating in sport to be more active and lessen the impact of their disability. Para sport was a way in which they could use athletics as physical therapy and get involved in the community: “I had good support from my family, my parents – everyone in the community. But I just wanted to be more active because I was active but not the way that could help my [disability].” With the

mindset that participation in sport was for health and physical activity, it was noticeable that Riley was unbothered by the designation of sport classes and was not worried about the repercussions of their sport class potentially changing.

For athletes like Logan and Reese, their experiences with disability are very different than Riley and Charlie. As previously mentioned, Riley and Charlie were diagnosed with their disabilities shortly after birth, meaning they have lived with their disabilities their whole life. Logan and Reese have different stories and life experience as they both acquired their disabilities later in life, meaning they once lived a life as a non-disabled individual. Because of this, their experiences with disability and understanding of classification were approached from a different perspective.

Logan was a competitive high-performance athlete prior to being impaired. When making a shift from non-disabled sport to Para sport, Logan struggled to believe that they were impaired and therefore did not think they were eligible to be classified:

“Well, my initial thought was I didn’t know if I would classify... I had no idea like – and I think I was also at a point where I was just trying to convince myself, that like I don't have a disability, like I’m okay. So, I think part of me was like ‘oh I don't even know if I’ll classify, but we'll see.’” - Logan

From this excerpt, we see that Logan was still not convinced of their disability and the impact it had on their body. Having this mindset made it very difficult for them to believe that they could fit into the classification system and that they belonged in Para sport. Part of this belief can be because Logan was eventually classified into the highest sport class, meaning they are the in the least impaired category compared to the other classes in para-rowing. When Logan compared themselves to other para-rowers, they articulated feeling

like a fraud and like they did not belong in Para sport. However, Logan mentioned that the process of being classified served as a reminder of their disability: “The classification system itself – I think it served as like a short-term reminder of like – who I am now – versus like who I was, or what I what I was capable of before versus what I’m capable of now.”

When asked about the classification system, Logan appeared to be frustrated about certain aspects of the process and the measurements that are used to classify athletes: “I think sometimes in Para sport we tend to define speed or power or whatever metric you're measuring in that sport, based on how disabled a person is if that makes sense.” Having a disability that was acquired later in life likely attributed to Logan feeling as though classifiers measured based on how impaired an individual is rather than what they can do. When originally injured, Logan spent a lot of time being medically assessed by doctors, and was constantly compared to the non-disabled population:

“I went through a bunch of like – not classifications, but almost like medical assessments to sort of figure out what was the extent of damage and stuff like that. Because they need to figure out like – how is insurance going to figure out what they support me with in terms of my rehab and things like that... In all of that stuff, they always compare you to what the average person is right? Because that's just how they go about it, and so I think I went into classification with that mindset initially.” - Logan

Like Logan, Reese was a competitive non-disabled athlete prior to being diagnosed with their disability as an adult: “prior to my [disability], I was a marathon runner, long distance runner. Then I was no longer able to run because of the symptoms

of [disability] so I was interested in finding a sport to sort of replace that.” Through physical therapy and rehabilitation efforts, Reese came across para-rowing. Being a non-disabled individual for most of their life, Reese recognized that they struggled to accept their disability. Going through a medical diagnosis was a “terrible situation” and the process of classification caused similar feelings: “Having [disability] and having to dredge everything up to sort of try and convince people, that is the moral injury. Convincing people of your disability is very problematic to me.” This articulation highlights the disruption to the self-noted by several the interviewees.

4.2.3 Athletic Identity: “I was nervous for it, thinking ‘do they think that I am what I think I am?’”

To further understand how athletes construct their understanding of classification experiences, it is important to discuss the athletic identity of each participant. Specifically, how each participant perceives their ability as a high-performance Para sport athlete and how classification could potentially impact their success in sport. For most participants, there was some amount of worry that the classifiers would not see the participants ability or disabilities the same way they do. For example:

“When you're doing it for the first time, the classification, you don't really know what they think you are... We don't know what they're going to think... Are they going to think you have the same abilities that you do have?” - Charlie

This quote from Charlie summarizes common feelings from most participants. Athletes know their body and their athletic ability the best, and it was a big fear that the classifiers

would not see them for who they think they are and see what they are capable or not capable of. Unfortunately, Reese struggled with presenting their abilities to classifiers:

“Do I have to act more disabled to have them be able to clearly see what the deficits are? Or should I act as normally as possible, or should I give my best? Like if you do your best, you're going to be risking appearing too abled and being placed in a category that is unfair for you competitively.”- Reese

When being classified, Reese was conflicted between who they were as an athlete and who they were as an athlete with a disability. As an athlete, Reese claimed to be very strong and capable of many things, but if this strength was present during classification, there was a fear that it could result in Reese being classed higher than where they thought they should be placed. Battling between an athletic identity and a disability identity was difficult for participants: “Even if you're happy with your classification as an athlete, you're always trying to optimize – but don't optimize too much, because then you could impact your ability to compete.” There is a conflict of trying to appear more abled in everyday life skills all while trying to be impaired enough to classify.

Another aspect of recognizing one's athletic ability occurred for Erin in the way they articulated the value of each player on a team. Erin spent a lot of time preaching that low classed athletes in wheelchair basketball are the most important athletes on a team, and should be able to defend, pass, and score on the court. They were very adamant on the fact that as a coach, Erin taught athletes that class does not define skill. However, Erin recognized that their own athletic abilities were not as impressive as they would have liked:

“As a player, I think the reason why I became a coach was that I wasn't really- I didn't enjoy it that much as a player. Because I knew - I was very self-aware that I was never the worst player on the floor or best player on the floor, and I kind of knew that the writing was on the wall, so I think that's why I got into coaching is because it better suited my skill set.” - Erin

When being classified, Erin knew they would only ever be a class 1.0 in wheelchair basketball, so they did not experience any nervous feelings when being classified.

Classification was not going to determine their participation in Para sport. If classed higher or out of the sport entirely, meaning the player did not meet the standards for a class 1.0 classification, Erin would still be in the same position today playing recreational wheelchair basketball and coaching.

Logan's understanding of classification based on their athletic identity came from their experiences as an able body athlete prior to being impaired:

“When I was able bodied, I used to be a lightweight, which is another subclass of rowing. There's heavy weight, there's lightweight right? So, I was a lightweight as my subclass. Whereas now, I have para and that's by subclass. But at the end of the day, I'm just trying to make a boat go fast.” - Logan

Having previous experience being classed based on weight as a non-disabled rower made the transition into Para sport somewhat easier for Logan. Now, being an impaired athlete, they are still classed and categorized, but under the parasport umbrella. However, Logan struggled to accept that they belonged in Para sport. Being a non-disabled rower prior to joining Para sport left Logan feeling like a fraud and as though they had an advantage, and like they should not fit into the categories of classification:

“I had an abled body rowing experience, and I don't want to toot my own horn or anything. But I was pretty confident to begin with when I started rowing. I was competing against teammates who I was just way faster, and I think for the longest time I felt like a fraud because I was like well, maybe like I don't actually have as much of a disability as they do, and so like do I deserve to be here?” - Logan

Another way in which athletes constructed their understanding of classification through their athletic identity came from the idea that Para sport gave them the confidence to be a better athlete. Therefore, classification was not a worry of the athletes who enjoyed competing to feel as though they belonged to something and participate in sport with others of similar abilities. For example:

“When you have a disability, you always feel like you are kind of not as good as the other people right? You always feel like maybe people are looking down on you thinking, ‘are you able to do this?’ Or can you really with your physical disability, can you actually do this, or can you do that? So, it [Para sport] actually gave me more confidence of being around people that are like me.” - Charlie

Once Charlie was classified and participated in high level Para sport, they recognized that they belonged and had positive experiences meeting others of similar abilities.

Classification did not take away from their athletic experience and provided further opportunity for Charlie to be successful in Para sport.

Chapter 5

5 Discussion

In this chapter, I present my interpretation for the findings of this study. This research aimed to contribute to the gap in literature surrounding Para sport classification.

Specifically, the study aimed to explore the classification experiences of Canadian Para sport athletes, the impact classification had on athlete development, and how was the classification process informed athlete embodied perceptions of themselves through interpretive content analysis. In the first section I connect the findings to existing research. Then, I present the findings in relation to the embodied concepts. The final section of this chapter will discuss several practical and empirical implications for researchers and personnel involved with the classification of Para sport athletes.

5.1 Athlete Experiences with Classification

Athletes involved in this study had multiple and multi-layered experiences with classification. Their stories reflect the ways in which they internalized the process and demonstrated how these internalizations represented their understandings of themselves and their bodies in sport. The classification process is clearly wrought with tensions and opportunity, as athletes saw it both as site of bodily contestation, and site of opportunity for inclusion. Specifically, while being classified, some athletes were accepting of the process as a necessary and important milestone in sport, whereas others were more conflicted about the process based on feelings of discomfort over judgements being made about their abilities and their disagreement with how they were classified in the sport. The role of the advocate in the classification process was underscored by all participants

as it provided comfort and support during the process. Of the perspectives, a sense of relief and comfort with the advocate present demonstrates the power dynamic ever present within the classification process. Moreover, the power imbalance between athletes, classifiers, and doctors/support personnel is connected to participants bodily comfort and disruptions to the self.

5.1.1 Acceptance and Comfort

Like participants in this study, Howe (2008) and Peers (2012) recognized that classification is a process that is necessary for equity in Para sport, however they identified that the process has differing impacts on athletes. This is reflected in participants knowledge and acceptance of the classification process. For participants in this study, they recognized that classification is a necessary process to complete to be able to compete in high performance Para sport. Classification serves as a gateway for athletes and is one piece of the process that legitimizes their participation in Para sport. Thus, some of the athletes in this study did not reflect the critical perspective provided by others such as Howe (2008) and Peers (2012) as they saw it as an important point of being accepted into the high-performance landscape. It also helped legitimize their bodies as relevant in the sporting space.

Athletes that demonstrated acceptance of classification process experienced feelings of bodily comfort with the classifiers and the process. From the embodiment framework, bodily comfort occurs when individuals experience their bodies as a comfortable site in which they engage in their world (Piran, 2016). For example, when Erin discussed their first classification experience at a very young age, they were very comfortable in their body and were unaware of what the classification process meant.

Therefore, they were comfortable and confident in their body when they experienced their first classification. It is important to recognize that each participant interpreted their classification experiences differently in relation to their body. From this example, Erin is an individual with a congenital disability, meaning they have spent a significant amount of time in medical appointments and communicating with doctors. Therefore, their acceptance and comfort associated with classification likely stems from their experiences as a patient being examined by doctors. This was different from perspectives like Reese, who acquired their disability at a later age. Although Reese has experienced many medical appointments, they have experienced a 'normal' life for a significant amount of time. It is foreseeable that their experiences in a doctor's office supported their self-acceptance while also reflecting upon their lives as a non-disabled individual. Therefore, classification likely served as a reminder of the transition their body went through, and therefore was disruption to that process of acceptance of the self.

5.1.2 Disruption to Self

Alternative to bodily comfort, is bodily discomfort and disruption to the self. Piran (2016) described this as feeling negative emotions such as shame, fear, or anger, while their body is engaging in the world. In this study, participants were uncomfortable with non-disabled classifiers being responsible for their Para sport experience. This appeared to leave participants feeling judged by non-disabled individuals without the lived experience of impairment, who are responsible for determining where they fit in sport. Participants also experienced frustration and anger with the subjectivity in classification, knowing that their sport class was decided on by subjective measurements and ultimately the opinions of the classifiers.

In existing literature, Howe's (2008) ethnographic report of classification also demonstrated how dehumanizing classification felt when classifiers were determining what category they belonged to based on the listed eligible impairments defined by Paralympic governing bodies. Peers (2012) also articulated feelings of vulnerability and felt judged through the classification process. This is comparable to the 'moral injury' comments from Reese who felt as though they needed to prove their disability to classifiers. Reese had to fight to show that they belonged in Para sport and was often worried about the judgement from classifiers if they tried too hard or not hard enough as it could impact their sport class, and ultimately whether or where they might fit in high performance sport. Experiencing discomfort, worry, and frustration are all a disruption to self and can greatly impact the Para sport experience for participants. This disruption to self can lead to negative experiences for athletes mentally and can likely cause problems during training or the lead up to competition. For example, Logan experienced a disruption to self-prior to their international classification. They did not feel as though they belonged in Para sport until they were classified. Constantly worrying about your position in Para sport can create a poor training mentality and therefore diminish the performance of athletes.

Research by van Dornick and Spencer (2019) examining classification experiences of Canadian para-swimmers found participants had supportive experiences when they felt as though classification provided them with access to high-performance sport. Further, classification connected athletes to others of similar ability. In my study, Charlie provided an example of his recollection of feeling as though classification gave them a purpose in Para sport and showed them that there are other individuals with

disabilities with similar interests. The process offered important connections to similar individuals and created a positive self-affect for these athletes. Positive self-affect refers to the amount in which somebody experiences positive moods subjectively and how they interact with others (Miller, 2011).

On the other hand, experiences such as disruption to self and discomfort found in this study are consistent with those described in the study by van Dornick and Spencer (2019). Specifically, participants feeling as though the level of subjectivity associated with classification deeply impacted their experiences. In this study, both Logan and Reese were very articulate about the concerns with the subjectiveness. They recognize the classification system requires interpretation by all classifiers, but the subjective nature of the process leaves open many possibilities for ableist understandings of the body to misinterpretations of the self to become a key element.

5.1.3 Power Dynamic

Athletes in this study articulated the clear power dynamic in the process of classification that both supported and disrupted their perspectives of the self. Specifically, the relationship between classifiers, athletes, and their support personnel represented a hierarchy of power. Power can be defined as an authority and influence over others in a controlling manner (Merriam-Webster, n.d). Participant reflections on the classification process demonstrated a sense of powerlessness during the process. For example, while athletes noted a feeling of comfort when they brought an advocate to speak on their behalf during the process, this rendered the athletes silent and created an imbalance of power. Classifiers clearly wield significant power during the process which resulted in disruptions to athlete's own self-understanding. This power dynamic puts athletes in a

position in which they need to trust the advocate to represent their abilities properly. Meaning, if the chosen advocate is a coach, it is important that the coach is fully understanding of the athlete's disability and their sport class. This is because the advocates voice is valued over the athletes in the classification process. Research by Culver and Werthner (2018) examined the characteristics of a successful coach from the perspective of athletes with disabilities. In this study, Para athletes voiced the importance of having a coach that recognizes their unique strengths and realities as an athlete with a disability. Additionally, the participants in their study noted that coaches can play a pivotal role in providing support for athletes. One of these supporting roles can be advocating for their athletes during classification.

The decision of each athlete's sport class is decided upon by classifiers which is a power imbalance. The power imbalance is exacerbated whereby athletes' voices are silenced in the presence of medical or supportive personnel. The process itself, which aims to support equity, re-emphasizes the tensions of power where participants described the important role of an advocate for their sense of safety, but it also further marginalizes their autonomy. Athlete voices in Para sport are recognized as being important, however their perspectives are often too quiet and missing from important conversations in Para sport (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). Being and feeling powerless can cause a disruption to self as the athletes worried that they could not provide classifiers with appropriate responses to medical questions. They further highlighted this disruption in noting that they were unable to fight for themselves in the classification process, and the advocate with power was necessary to ensure their perspective was heard and understood in the process.

5.2 How Athletes Construct their Understanding of Classification

When discussing how athletes construct their understanding of classification, there were three factors that contributed to participants' knowledge and feelings towards classification. First being the knowledge and education that athletes had of the classification system and the sport classes. Second, the disability identity of participants. Lastly, their identity as an athlete with disabilities.

5.2.1 Knowledge and Education

From this study, it was evident that education is an important part of classification. More specifically, education and knowledge are sources of power. In this study, knowledge and power became apparent when athletes discussed their classification experiences that occurred at a young age compared to an older age. For athletes who joined Para sport at a younger age, they did not appear to have a lot of knowledge on what classification was or how the process would unfold. Not being fully informed allowed athletes to feel more comfortable and accepting of their classification experiences. Further, being classified at a young age gave athletes earlier access to high-performance Para sport and connected athletes with others of similar abilities and empowered them as athletes and individuals with a disability. This process highlighted their legitimacy in sport. Further, for the athletes that joined Para sport later in their life, their first classification experience occurred at an older age. At this time, these athletes had more knowledge and education. Having a greater understanding of the process and knowledge of themselves causes athletes to experience a greater disruption in their self.

This is likely due to the pressure athletes face having their first classification at an older age as it is the deciding factor that legitimizes their participation in Para sport.

5.2.2 Identity

Some findings from this study reflect those of Powis and Macbeth (2019) in relation to the athletic identity of participants. They noted that athletes identified a need to reflect upon their own 'abilities' to properly fit into their sport classes, thus never really presenting as their true self. They found that athletes set limitations on themselves to fit into the defined sport classes and focused on regulating their identity to ensure they did not appear 'too abled'. Athletes in my study demonstrated a sense of self outside the sport process, knowing their own abilities better than anyone, but they also found it difficult to present these abilities to classifiers because of the nature of fitting in to Para sport. Participants often felt as though they needed to convince classifiers of their disability. This was particularly true for athletes in the higher sport classes, meaning they are less impaired in comparison to the lower sport classes. They too articulated the struggle to not appear 'too able', otherwise they might not get classified properly for their sport.

According to Johnstone (2004), disability as an identity is typically a personal construction and a purposeful attempt to make meaning of the self in the world. Further, identity exists on a personal and societal level, meaning it is empowering when it is self-described and defined as an individual experience. Regarding each participants disability identity, it was evident that their experiences with disability had a great impact on their classification experiences. When talking about identity from an embodied perspective, having a well-developed body awareness increases self-satisfaction and increased ability

to do what you want based on your identity (Lundvik Gyllensten et al., 2010). On the other hand, having a poor identity and awareness can cause individuals to feel as though they are missing something or misunderstood (Lundvik Gyllensten et al., 2010). Like the analysis made on knowledge and education, it appears as though age is an important indication for identity. Meaning, as athletes become more mature, they become more aware of their identity. Further, it is possible that classification helped individuals form a stronger disability identity. Research by Bundon and colleagues (2017) found that Para sport helped their participants become more comfortable with identifying as a person with a disability. From this study, Charlie's identity as an individual with disability developed as they felt a sense of belonging and connection to others of similar ability when they were placed in a sport class.

Individuals view their disabilities differently based on how personal interactions in society have shaped their experiences (Darling, 2013). When interpreting and then comparing the experiences of participants with congenital disabilities and acquired disabilities regarding each participant's disability identity, the participants with acquired disabilities viewed classification in a more negative lens. Participants with congenital disabilities equated classification to many of the medical appointments they have experienced from a young age. Classifiers used similar tests and measurements to those seen at physiotherapy appointments, and therefore classification was not unusual or worrisome for these participants. Thus, the acceptance of bodily judgment was a frequent experience with the ongoing medicalization of the disabled body. From the perspective of age, with congenital disabilities, individuals are less informed of their identity at a young age both athletically and as an individual. In turn, they are less likely to experience bodily

disruption as their identity has not fully developed. Alternatively, participants who acquired their disabilities in recent years found classification an arduous process. These participants felt the need to prove their disabilities to non-disabled individuals and used words such as “moral injury” and “feeling like a fraud” to describe how they felt during classification. As previously mentioned, these feelings are a disruption to the bodily self. Viewing your body as a problematic site to engage in the world can cause individuals to feel a disconnect from their body, experiencing the body as a separate entity to which they judge (Piran, 2016). Acquiring a disability at a mature age can lead to a developed disability identity that is easily disturbed when being examined by classifiers.

Participants in this study readily identified with their athletic identity, which is a component of self-concept that is affected by experiences, relationships, and involvement in sport activities (Edison et al., 2021). Identity can be psychologically and socially ascribed, so an athlete’s motivation, self-esteem, and outlook all depend on their athletic identity. For participant athletic identity, the participants had a strong understanding of their athletic abilities and where they believed they should be classed. Although classification is an integral part of Para sport, it appears to be destructive to athlete identity. In this study, participants with a greater sense of self and awareness of ability seemed to show more resistance to the classification process. More specifically, they were less approving of classification when there were concerns associated with classifiers not seeing the same ability that the athletes saw in themselves. Further, for athletes like Reese who appear to have a stronger athletic identity that consists of their competitive attitude, classification was viewed as a process that threatened their participation and success in Para sport.

Interestingly, Para sport classification was able to increase awareness of athletic identity in some participants. For example, Charlie was able to connect with others of similar abilities after being allocated a sport class. Having this connection increased their overall self-confidence as an athlete and further confirmed that they belonged to Para sport. Having this increase in self-awareness and understanding of the self, appeared to increase bodily comfort and a greater acceptance and appreciation of classification.

5.3 Implications

The existing literature on classification has been from both personal accounts and participant interviews (Howe, 2008; Peers, 2012; van Dornick & Spencer, 2019; Powis & Macbeth, 2019; Patatas et al., 2020). Like this research study, these studies focused on the classification experiences of Para sport athletes. However, this study went one step further and explored the embodied experiences that contribute to each individual classification experience. Currently, classification experiences are a continuously growing body of research as our knowledge surrounding classification is limited. Therefore, this study further contributes to what we already know about classification experiences, whilst adding additional pieces that had yet to be considered.

The empirical implications for this study provide us with greater insight on Para sport athletes experiences with classification, and how they created an understanding towards classification. Understanding each participants identity as an athlete with a disability, their disability identity, and their previous knowledge on classification allowed us to interpret their experiences and how they contributed to each participants classification experiences. Interestingly, participants in this study reported that most, if not all classifiers are non-disabled individuals. Although it is difficult to assume this, as not all

disabilities are visible, athletes articulated feeling judged by classifiers that had not experienced disability. This caused a disruption to the participants sense of self. From this information, it is important for individuals with disabilities to be part of classification. More specifically, it is important to have classifiers who have experienced classification themselves, thus there is a need to consider how classifiers are recruited and supported in their roles. One approach might be to actively recruit retired Para sport athletes to become classifiers. Having the perspective of an individual with disabilities during classification can help current athletes feel more comfortable and will give retired athletes an opportunity to remain involved in sport. Additionally, for those classifiers who have not had a first-hand experience with classification, we can recommend training for classifiers to ensure they are fostering a safe space for athletes. Training can include accessibility awareness training, sensitivity training, disability inclusion education, etc. Further, athletes in this study mentioned that they felt as though their voices were not heard when there was an advocate present in the room. Participants in this study reported that classifiers would often communicate with the doctor during classification. Instead, classifiers need to ensure that they communicate with the participant first. Additionally, classifiers should communicate in lay terms so participants can understand. Advocates should be used for clarification purposes only.

Based on this research, an additional practical implication includes increasing the educational resources available on classification, specifically for Para sport coaches. Often, athletes had to take it upon themselves to search the internet and learn about sport classes and the process itself. Coaches need to properly understand classification and provide athletes with resources to help improve the knowledge and confidence of athletes

going into their first classification. Further, participants in this study felt as though they were being compared to non-disabled individuals. The structure and categories in which classification has been built should be reviewed continuously to be updated on different impairments and the standards at which Para sport athletes compete at. Although classification has transitioned from a medical based model to an evidence-based approach, we need to consider developing the evidence-based approach further to ensure that the goal of equity through classification is met. There are ample amounts of resources and knowledge surrounding disabilities that are continuously growing as we become more informed. Therefore, classification should continue to grow with this knowledge as it becomes available.

Chapter 6

6 Conclusion

From this study, the findings demonstrate that the experiences of Para sport athletes contribute to their classification experiences. Using the embodiment framework (Leigh, 2021) we were able to further understand the embodied experiences of Para sport athletes. During classification, athletes experienced different levels of comfort or discomfort and disruption to the self. Feelings of comfort and acceptance of classification appeared when participants recognized that classification acts as their gateway into high-performance Para sport. Further, both the disabled identity and athletic identity of participants largely contributed to their understandings of their classification experiences. For athletes who live with congenital disabilities and were introduced to classification at a young age, their identity and sense of self were less developed. Therefore, when being classified, these participants appeared to be more accepting and comfortable with classification. Opposingly athletes who acquired their disabilities were more aware of their identity as mature athletes. These individuals experienced discomfort when being questioned and examined by classifiers.

Although the classification experiences of Para sport athletes have been explored, existing literature has focused on individual accounts of negative experiences (Howe, 2008; Peers, 2012). Findings from this study advanced our knowledge on classification and the experiences of Para sport athletes and how they experience their bodies during classification. More specifically, this study identified the silencing of Para sport athlete voices. This silencing occurs when advocates attend classification alongside the athletes. When this happens, the athletes' voice is rendered powerless as the classifiers are more

likely to listen and communicate with the advocate. The silencing of Para sport athlete voices during classification is a representation of a power imbalance. This power imbalance is more likely to cause athletes to experience a disruption to the self as they are unable to advocate for themselves effectively.

The analysis demonstrated that the embodied experiences of Para sport athletes shape their classification experiences through three ways. First, the knowledge and education surrounding classification prior to being classified. Second, the disability identity of each participant, meaning the identity constructed through their experiences with disabilities, specifically those with a congenital disability appeared to be more comfortable with the classification process as it mirrored the multiple medical appointments they attended throughout their lives. On the other hand, participants who have lived as a non-disabled individual prior to being diagnosed with their disability had a negative approach towards classification. Lastly, each participant's identity as an athlete helped construct their understanding of classification. For example, how each athlete perceived their ability as an athlete and where they believe themselves to fit into sport classes impacted their classification. If classifiers did not appear to reach the same conclusion about the athlete's abilities, they were more likely to experience frustration and view their bodies differently.

6.1 Strengths and Limitations

There are both strengths and limitations present in this study. The semi-structured interview method used for data collection allowed participants to guide conversations with the researcher. Using open-ended questions as expressed by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) allowed participants to guide the conversation and share their lived

experiences and classification experiences. Allowing participants to have control in interviews lead to richer data collection (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). Another strength of this study was conducting interviews online via Zoom. Using online methods allowed me to connect with participants across Canada and allowed for a greater selection of participants. Furthermore, existing classification research focused on single-sport classification experiences (van Dornick & Spencer, 2019; Powis & Macbeth, 2019). However, this study explored athletes from multiple Para sports, therefore offering a wider range of classification experiences.

Although this study provided a deep and meaningful look into participants classification experiences through semi-structured interviews, it should be noted that the small participant sample is a limitation of this study. With a small sample size, these findings must be interpreted with caution as the findings might not be transferrable. Additionally, the sample criteria for this study provided a wide range of perspectives as we interviewed both males and females, who were a minimum of 18 years of age and from multiple Para sports within Canada. Therefore, this sample size excluded grassroots and developmental Para sport participants who would provide a very important perspective on classification.

6.2 Future Research

This study provided insight into classification experiences of Para sport athletes within Canada. The participants in this study were required to be a minimum of 18 years of age, been nationally and/or internationally classified at least two times and participate in one of the following Para sports; para-swimming, wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, para-athletics, para-rowing, and para-cycling. Even though the participants in

this study came from four of the six listed Para sports, future researchers should investigate classification experiences of athletes in each Para sport. Van Dornick and Spencer (2019) have previously explored para-swimming; however, it is important to further our understanding of classification experiences in all Para sports.

Another consideration for future research should be to explore the classification experiences of athletes with an acquired disability in comparison to athletes with a congenital disability. This study suggests there could be important differences in classification experiences between these two groups of individuals, however the sample size of this study does not allow for conclusions to be made regarding this area of interest. Additionally, future research should explore the classification experiences among multiple participant demographics. For example, examining the intersections of race, gender, and disabilities can further develop our understanding of classification experiences.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Eligible Impairments for Para Sport Classification

Impairment Type	Description
Impaired muscle power	<p>A reduction or elimination of the ability to voluntarily contract muscles to move or generate force.</p> <p>Examples: Spinal cord injury, muscular dystrophy, post-polio syndrome, spina bifida.</p>
Impaired passive range of motion	<p>A restriction of passive movement in one or more joints.</p> <p>Examples: Arthrogyrosis, or trauma affecting a joint.</p>
Limb deficiency	<p>Total or partial absence of bones or joints resulting from trauma, illness, or congenital limb deficiency.</p> <p>Examples: Amputation, dysmelia.</p>
Leg length difference	<p>Difference in leg length because of trauma or a disturbance in limb growth.</p>
Short Stature	<p>Reduced length of bones in upper limbs, lower limbs, and/or trunk.</p> <p>Examples: Achondroplasia, disruption in growth hormone, osteogenesis imperfecta.</p>
Hypertonia	<p>Increase in muscle tension caused by damage to the central nervous system.</p> <p>Examples: Cerebral palsy, stroke, traumatic brain injury.</p>
Ataxia	<p>Uncoordinated movements caused by damage to the central</p>

	<p>nervous system.</p> <p>Examples: Multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, stroke, traumatic brain injury.</p>
Athetosis	<p>Continual slow involuntary movements.</p> <p>Examples: Cerebral palsy, stroke, traumatic brain injury.</p>
Vision Impairment	<p>Reduced or no vision caused by damage to eye structure, optic nerves or pathways, or visual cortex of the brain.</p> <p>Examples: Retinitis pigmentosa, diabetic retinopathy.</p>
Intellectual Impairment	<p>A restriction in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior that affects conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills used in everyday life.</p>

Appendix B: Sport Classes

Parasport	Sport Class	Type of Impairment
Para-Swimming	S1-S10/SB1-SB10	Physical Impairment
	S11-13/SB11-13	Visual Impairment
	S14/SB14	Intellectual Impairment
Para-Cycling	B1-B3 (Tandem)	Visual Impairment
	C1-C5 (Bicycle)	Physical Impairment
	H1-H4 (Handcycling – reclined)	Physical Impairment
	H5 (Handcycling – kneeling)	Physical Impairment
	T1-T2 (Tricycle)	Physical Impairment
Para-Rowing	PR1/AS	Physical Impairment – arms only
	PR2/TA	Physical Impairment – trunk/arms
	PR3/LTA-PD/VD	Physical or Visual Impairment
Para-Athletics	T/F11-T/F13	Visual Impairment
	T/F20	Intellectual Impairment
	F31, T/F32-T/F34	Physical Impairment – seated
	T/F34-T/F38	Physical Impairment – ambulatory
	T/F40-T/F41	Physical Impairment – short stature
	T/F42-T/F44	Physical Impairment – lower limb
	T/F45-T/F4, T47	Physical Impairment – upper limb
	T51-T54	Physical Impairment – racing
	F51-F54	wheelchair Physical Impairment – throwing chair

Sitting	MD	Physical Impairment – less severe
Volleyball	D	Physical Impairment – more severe
Wheelchair	1	No trunk control
Basketball	2	Minimal trunk control
	3	Trunk rotation, no sideways movement
	4	Trunk rotation, forwards and sideways
	1.5/2.5/3.5/4.5	Players who fit between sport classes

Appendix C: Qualtrics Screening Survey Questionnaire

Q1 This is a screening survey to determine your eligibility for involvement in a study on Understanding the Disability Sport Classification Experiences of Para sport athletes. The information collected herein will be used for eligibility screening purposes only and will remain confidential to the researcher.

This study is part of a student's master's Thesis at Western University.

Q2 What year were you born?

Q3 Are you a permanent resident of Canada?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q4 Do you identify having a physical impairment/disability?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Q5 If yes, please specify what type of physical impairment/disability you have (can select multiple).

- Paraplegia (1)
- Quadriplegia (2)
- Hemiplegia (3)
- Multiple Sclerosis (MS) (4)
- Cerebral Palsy (CP) (5)
- Absent limb/reduced limb function (6)
- Dystrophy (7)
- Polio (8)
- Visual impairment (9)
- Hearing impairment (10)
- Other (please specify) (11)

Q6 Please indicate what sport(s) you participate in:

- Para-swimming (4)
 - Para-cycling (5)
 - Para-rowing (6)
 - Sitting Volleyball (7)
 - Wheelchair Basketball (8)
 - Other (please specify) (9)
-

Q7 How many times have you been nationally or internationally classified for your sport(s)?

- Zero to one time (0-1) (1)
- Two times (2) (2)
- Three to five times (3-5) (3)
- Five or more times (5+) (4)

Q8 Would you be interested in discussing your experiences of disability sport classification further?

- Yes (1)
- Maybe, but I need more information first. (2)
- No (3)

Q9 Great, we look forward to connecting with you! Please provide your email so the researcher can get in touch with you to further discuss the details of participating in this study.

Appendix D: Verbal Consent Script

Before beginning our interview today, I want to let you know that I am recording the audio of our conversation for a record of your consent to participate. If you do not wish to have the interview recorded, however, it does not need to be.

First, can you confirm your name for the record?

[Participant response]

Thank you, [participant name]. Do I have your permission to audio-record this conversation today? Please note that only the audio recording will be used for the data analysis of this study.

[Participant response]

Next, I would like to confirm that you have read the letter of information for the research study that you received via email prior to scheduling the interview?

[Participant response]

Do you have any questions about the study that were unanswered in the letter of information?

[Participant response]

Please confirm that you understand that you may stop participation at any time, even after the interview begins.

[Participant response]

And please confirm that you understand that the information that you provide will not be used in any other ways except this study.

[Participant response]

Do I have your permission use direct quotes in written materials resulting from this study?

[Participant response]

Thank you, [participant name]. Now we can begin the interview

Appendix E: Interview Guides

Interview Guide 1

Introductory script: *To begin, I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. The purpose of today's interview is to get a background of your experience in sport and discuss your experiences with classification. During this process, I will ask you questions that are relevant to the information you provide me. You may add in any information that you think is important at any point in time. this interview will be video recorded, but as a reminder, your recording will not be used for anything, including in the review of data – only your audio recording will be used and transcribed for data analysis.*

These interviews are a chance for you to tell your story and experiences with classification. Most of these questions are open ended and provide you an opportunity to share your feelings and experiences.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

- 1) Can you tell me about your history and involvement in parasport?
 - a) When did you begin participating in sport?
 - b) How do you feel when you compete in your sport?
- 2) In your own words, what does it mean to be a parasport athlete?
- 3) When did you first learn about classification and sport classes?
 - a) How did you feel when you first heard about the classification process?
 - b) What does classification mean to you and your participation in sport?
- 4) How often does classification “come-up” in conversation with teammates, coaches, family, and friends?
 - a) How do you feel when talking about classification with others?
- 5) Tell me about your first classification experience.
 - a) How did you feel leading up to your first classification?
 - b) What happened, and how did you feel during these moments?
 - c) What did you feel when you were given your first sport class?
 - d) What impact did this classification have on you and your participation in sport after receiving your first sport class?
- 6) During your first classification experience, did you bring an individual with you to be your advocate?
 - a) Why did you bring this individual?
 - b) How did you feel having somebody with you during the classification process?
 - c) What type of impact did your advocate have on your experience with classification?

This is the end of the first interview. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me, I really appreciate you taking the time to chat. Before we take off today, do you have any questions for me?

I will review this information carefully prior to our next discussion. The second interview is scheduled for _____. During this interview we will revisit some topics we have discussed today and dive deeper into your experiences with classification. Over the next few days if there is anything you think of that relates to our conversation today or your personal classification experiences, jot them down on a piece of paper for us to discuss during the second interview!

Thanks again and take care!

Interview Guide 2

Welcome to the second interview in this study. I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me to further discuss your experiences with disability sport classification. Today's interview will dive deeper into each of your classification experiences, the feelings associated with classification and the process to get classified in your sport. This interview will be video recorded, but as a reminder, your recording will not be used for anything, including in the review of data – only your audio recording will be used and transcribed for data analysis. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me regarding today's interview or about the study in general?

Since our last interview, is there anything that you have thought of and would like to discuss or review before I ask any questions?

- 1) Tell me about your second classification experience.
 - a) How did you feel leading up to your second classification?
 - b) Did you bring in an advocate with you? Who and why?
 - c) How did you feel having this individual with you during your classification?
 - d) What impact did this classification have on you and your sport after receiving this sport class?
 - e) If it changed from previous class allocations, how did you feel?

- 2) Tell me about your most recent classification experience. *(If not the same as above)*
 - a) How did you feel leading up to this classification?
 - b) How would you describe your interaction and relationship with the classifiers?
 - c) How do you feel this impacted your experience?
 - d) What impact did this classification have on you and your sport after receiving this sport class?
 - e) If it changed from previous class allocations, how did you feel?

- 3) Have you ever had to appeal one of your sport class allocations?
 - a) How did you feel when given that sport class?
 - b) During the appeal process, what kind of impact did that have on you and your sport?
 - c) How did you feel during the appeal process? Was it successful? How did it make you feel?

- 4) How has classification impacted your everyday life as a high-performance athlete?
 - a) What is positive/negative about classification in your eyes?
- 5) How would you describe your relationship with classifiers?
 - a) How do you feel when they are conducting the tests?
- 6) Is there anything else regarding your classification experiences that we haven't discussed that you would like to share with me?
- 7) Do you have any questions before we end this interview?

This is the end of the second interview. I want to thank you again for taking the time to chat with me about your experiences with classification. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via the email used to schedule the interviews. Thank-you

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