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Crippling the Memoir: Unraveling the Discourse Around Disabled Athletes' Identities

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Abstract

This thesis rhetorically examines the discourse surrounding disability and body capabilities. I employ feminist theory, queer theory, disability, theory and performance theory as I analyze the memoirs and media surrounding two disabled elite athletes, Sarah Reinertsen and Mark Zupan. I examine the construction of identity for these athletes and what the language use surrounding these athletes means to the current status of disability discourse. These memoirs have the potential to reach a large lay audience, and therefore, the opportunity to educate and challenge assumptions. My analysis leads me to conclude that the limitations of memoir and societal pressures allow for instances of disability to be challenged only when heteronormative and hegemonic instances of other identities are also upheld.

Crippling the Memoir:
Unraveling the Discourse Around Disabled Athletes' Identities

By

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B.A. Rutgers University, 2012

Thesis

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Chapter 1

Disability Discourse

“I felt more like an object than a human being”
-Sarah Reinertsen, *In a Single Bound*, Pg. 10

What do you visualize when you think of disability? Is it a human being, an object, an unfortunate event, something that needs to be cured? The cultural discourse surrounding disability overwhelmingly associates disability with negativity. The history of disability stems from the freak show (Garland-Thomson, 2002) but the definition continues to be remade each time it is uttered. Discourse, therefore, has the power to change the characteristics associated with disability and allow all disabled beings to feel human, unmarginalized, and unobjectified.

Disabled bodies are often missing from rhetorical scholarship (Lindemann & Cherney, 2008; Lunsford, 2005; Wilson & Lewiecki-Wilson, 2006; Rinaldi, 1996). While this lack of disability discussion is not often intentional, it does not go unnoticed. This lack becomes more apparent as disability becomes more widely understood as an identity category worthy of study. The field of rhetorical studies as a whole regularly touches on the importance of embodiment (Lindemann, 2011; Brouwer, 2006; Hawhee, 2004; Selzer, 1999), but seldom focuses analysis on rhetorical bodies or these bodies' abilities.

The lives and experiences of disabled individuals deserve to be told, and the recognition of disability is integral to our understandings of bodies-- influencing the ways we represent our own bodies and the way we read the bodies of others. While disability is sometimes acknowledged, able-bodiedness/ability is often assumed to be a non-category.

Disability tends to gain acknowledgment only when individuals are seen as differing from “the norm” (Davis, 2005; Siebers, 2008, Garland-Thomson, 2012). Disabled bodies are often essentialized and individuals are assumed to face the same experiences and prejudices as all other disabled bodies, making the individual stories and experiences of disabled individuals novel and important as they disprove this essentialism.

In this thesis I aim to study the representation of *unexpected athletes*. The bodies we culturally attribute with athletic success, which are capable of feats deemed worthy and extraordinary by the general public, are often discussed differently when an aspect of the individual’s body is unanticipated. For example, when female athletes began to gain recognition for their success, they remained differentiated from their male peers in the ways they were discussed. Billie Jean King was always referred to as a woman, while most of her male tennis colleagues were simply alluded to as professionals (Spencer, 2000). Like gender, disability often separates and distinguishes certain athletes from their competitors. I will examine how the intersections of gender, sexuality, and ability affect how a body is represented and responded to. Individuals choose to narrate their bodies and experiences through a variety of media, but one of the most popular contemporary ways to describe and represent oneself is through the memoir (Couser, 2012). Using queer, feminist, and disability theory to analyze the memoirs and the responses to these memoirs can shed light on the discourse surrounding bodies in multiple fields and theories. Because the athletes claim different gender, sexual, and abilities in their identities, many intersections of identity and bodies can be examined.

I will analyze the memoirs and select media around two disabled elite athletes competing in wheelchair rugby or triathlons. Analyzing how these athletes choose to

represent and communicate their gender, sexuality, and disability can shed light on the language surrounding these intersecting identity categories. Examining the discourse created around these unexpected athletes allows the juxtaposition between how these athletes understand and represent themselves and how they are received.

The two memoirs selected for this these are, Sarah Reinertsen's *In a Single Bound: Losing My Leg, Finding Myself, and Training for Life*, and *Gimp: When Life Deals You a Crappy Hand You Can Fold or You Can Play* by Mark Zupan. Both are written by self-identified disabled athletes who have reached elite levels of athletics. While only a few memoirs exist about disabled athletes at this level of play, these particular memoirs were chosen from the few because of the disability pride they each discuss, the resounding identification with disability, and the media success they have both achieved. Mark Zupan was one of the stars of the MTV documentary *Murderball* and Sarah Reinertsen was featured on *The Amazing Race*. Besides these accomplishments, both young adults have gained celebrity status at the time of the disability memoir boom through interviews, appearances on television shows, commercials, newspaper articles, etc. They also both grew up and competed in similar time frames—this post- Americans with Disability Acts success coupled with the rise of attention to the Paralympics impact both of their stories and ultimately the success and recognition they have received.

Embodiment and Body Theory

In order to examine how these athletes construct their bodies and are constructed in media it is necessary to form an understanding of how embodiment is perceived rhetorically. Embodiment is considered by many to be foundational to rhetorical studies

and communication as we use our bodies to communicate for expressive and persuasive purposes. As academia has shifted to a postmodern framework and a future cosmopolitan framework, the body has become increasingly important (Bauman, 2011). The body no longer remains separated and understood as a subordinate characteristic used only for extending arguments from/for the mind, but as significant in its own right (Bordo, 1993; Foucault, 1976; Butler, 1999, Schilling, 2012). Rhetoric has been tied to embodiment from the beginning, as Homer relies on disabled embodiment in book II of *The Iliad* (Houck and Kiewe, 2003; Hawhee, 2004; Selzer & Crowley, 1999). Rhetorical theorist Debra Hawhee concentrates on bodies through a detailed historical examination of the connections between bodies and rhetorics, and shows the role of the body for rhetorical success. Hawhee notes that although contemporary rhetorical work has been undertaken utilizing the embrace of bodies as an avenue for rhetorical critiques of cultures and experiences, she emphasizes that most of the work on bodies stems from “body studies,” a new field comprised of multiple theorists whose work focuses on bodies’ interactions and representations in society (Hawhee, 2004, 10). The key contemporary contributors in body studies such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Susan Bordo are often identified as feminist theorists, sociologists and body scholars.

Contemporary body theorists such as those listed above relied on cultural works from the early/mid-20th century to shape and explicate previous cultural understandings of bodies’ looks, presentations, capabilities, consuming practices, materiality and purposes. These theorists come from fields such as cultural studies, feminist theory/studies, and sociology. In sociology, the body is examined as it relates to the social world and the relations of individuals in power structures. Bodies are primarily

discussed in the ways that they differ from one another and how these differences change the relation of people in social and cultural frames. The power that bodily characteristics possess for the cultural positioning of persons continues to be analyzed as time changes. For sociologist Chris Schilling (2012), the key theorists who have contributed to body theories all claim to address the body in relation to the social and to language. However, he argues that they in fact continue to leave out the body in these discussions. Sociology, in general, concentrates on the mind/body dualism but has increasingly ignored the body. For Schilling, the practices of the body that are related to biology are subsumed in academic discussions that continue only to emphasize the political implications of bodily positioning. In fact, it is the biological body that creates the social world and language that places emphasis on certain bodily characteristics. The experiences, feelings, sensations, etc. of individuals influence the interactions that determine cultural standings and therefore further interactions. It is these characteristics that Schilling emphasizes as key to understanding the world in the shift to a cosmopolitan worldview.

While Schilling concentrates on the history of these theorists and proposes a more accurate examination of the body for the future, feminist theorist Susan Bordo (1993) discusses the shifting emphasis on bodies in the late 20th century. Her work concentrates specifically on gendered characteristics, such as body pressures and aesthetics leading many women to harm their bodies in an effort to achieve an ideal aesthetic, and the social capital that certain bodily characteristics hold and how this has changed. As the ideal bodies shift in time, certain bodily practices become more prevalent. Individuals try to shape their bodies to most closely resemble the current unattainable ideal and the powerful social benefits that accompany the characteristics associated with this ideal.

These characteristics can be harmful to the overall health of many individuals and creates pressures that often subsume one's life and desires.

Performing Embodiment and Identity

Presenting oneself or trying to portray desirable characteristics in order to gain social capital is not a new phenomenon. Erving Goffman discussed these ideas in the mid- 20th century and remains a key player in today's body studies as a pioneer of theorizing the presentation of self/identity through the body (1959; 1963). Goffman discusses agency individual bodies possess in relation to the overwhelming social pressures that ultimately dictate the actions, feelings, and thoughts of these bodies. The public behaviors presented because of these pressures create our social identities. "This is because the social meanings attached to particular bodily forms and performances tend to become internalized, shaping an individual's sense of self-identity" (Shilling, 2012, 86). Classifying the actions/characteristics of others helps one determine and change his or her own social identity.

Goffman explains that individuals perform certain characteristics in order to appear as close to ideal as possible. In order to craft an identity, individuals play into culturally-created scripts of ideal identity performance in their everyday routines (Goffman, 1959, 17). Performance studies, an academic discipline stemming from oral interpretation, attempts to locate these everyday performances and identify what this communicates about individuals and societal expectations. "Performance studies derive from the interpretation of literature and focuses on the performative and aesthetic nature of human discourse. It is based in art, carries epistemological claims, posits methodological procedures, and calls for new pedagogical approaches" (Pelias and

VanOosting, 1987, 219). In performance studies, every utterance or action is potentially theatrical and has the potential to make or remake the self.

While performing one's identity holds vast potential for the crafting of the ideal self, performing an ideal is never truly attainable. One's body becomes discredited when he or she is unable to perform the ideal convincingly and leads to the individuals labeling of "stigma." Goffman defines stigma as "bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier...sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap...an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (1963, 1-3). These signs are aptly compared to handicaps, and are crucial to the cultural connections between disability as defined and conflated with stigma. When one is labeled as having a physically or mentally disabled body, the characteristics understood as atypical are more often than not the cause of stigmatized treatment. The moral and discrediting attributes of stigma refer to the societal perceptions of certain bodies and identities. Individuals who are stigmatized are judged by society for attributes that are seen or perceived by others. A body is judged by the characteristics it portrays and how these characteristics are socially read. This reading is projected and one's identity is either assumed or internalized based on these readings.

Goffman (1963) connects the performances of certain bodily characteristics with how people identify their own bodies and the bodies of others. Categories such as race, gender, disability, sexuality, etc. all have socially constructed characteristics. When one category is preferred over another, individuals can use techniques of performance to downplay and reveal certain characteristics in order to appear closer to the ideal. This presentation of self changes based on social situations and which characteristics are seen

as ideal. When an individual's attributes mesh with a particular category, he or she is associated with the identity of this category. Individuals can choose whether or not to identify with certain characteristics when presenting themselves, but those individuals are often read socially and placed into categories based on visual markers rather than how he or she may choose to perform his or her identity (1963, 48).

When one is unable to perform the ideal identity or one's identity is read as belonging to a category that is considered less ideal, then one is stigmatized by this identity. Goffman discusses the prejudices attributed to certain characteristics in relation to the stigmas of gender, race, and disability (1959, 1963). Women are always considered more discredited than men, as are people of color, and disabled individuals. In order to be perceived as ideal as possible, individuals often downplay the characteristics associated with these less idealized identities

Gender

Because of the societal pressures to maximize one's benefits by performing what is socially considered as "ideal characteristics," one is often discredited when he or she fails to perform this expected identity. Judith Butler, in her theory on gender and performativity (1990, 1993, 1998, 2004) discusses the importance of understanding these actions as performances of an ideal; an ideal that is unattainable. One is often said to be a certain sex or gender, but in fact, "'being' a sex or gender is fundamentally impossible" (1990, 19). This impossibility stems from the idea that the characteristics that make up sex and gender are constructed and fictional; no singular body can ever materialize these ideals or perform all of the characteristics necessary to fully "be" one sex/gender over another.

One may not be able to “be” a sex or gender, but this does not stop sex and gender from being considered material rather than merely intangible ideas. This materiality of sex and gender stems from the actions and assumptions created through the performance of these ideals. Borrowing from J. L. Austin, Butler explains that when performances result in the creation of actions, these utterances are considered performativity. Butler complicates this idea in terms of sex and gender when she writes, “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberative ‘act’, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993, 236). This produced effect is created through the cyclical nature of the ideals.

Materiality is power’s most productive effect. However, the material effects of sex and gender have often assumed gender to be the social construction based on sex. Butler believes that sex itself is socially constructed and is only understood as something tangible because it has continued to be cited and reproduced. Sex is created because it is cited as a norm, but also derives power through the citations it generates (242). While neither sex nor gender are stable categories, the material effects of sex and gender idealization cause individuals to be stigmatized and understood as “other” when they do not perform these ideals as expected, regardless of their impossibility.

It is, however, this impossibility and the requirement of repetition that allows the space for resistance. Butler (1993) explains that there are slippages, “junctures where discourse is renewed,” (2). It is the spaces created through these slippages that allow for agency and change. The performativity enacted through these slippages allows new actions to be created. These new actions hold the possibility for changing the hegemonic discourse around gender and other identity performance.

Sexuality

The repetitions which sustain gender binarism yet hold the possibility for change are echoed in heteronormativity and the performances of sexuality. Sexuality, like gender, remains an impossible and unattainable ideal identity. However, one's sexuality does not have any correlation with one's gender; they are not co-dependent. Butler explains that gender does not determine one's sexuality. "Sexuality does not follow from gender in the sense that what gender you 'are' determines what kind of sexuality you will 'have'" (2007, 16); nor does one's sexuality predetermine one's gender identity and performance (54). J. Halberstam expands upon this by showing that it is not just one's identity that cannot be determined, but that no gender determines the actual acts performed during sexual encounters (1998). Despite the indeterminate identity one's performance of sexuality precludes, heteronormativity remains the dominant discourse.

Much scholarly discourse on sexuality is done through work in queer theory. Karma Chávez and Desiree Rowe explain that queer theory often takes as its starting point the rupturing of binary oppositions. It is these oppositions that most frequently characterize sexual identities culturally. As Sedgwick (1990) argues, "Western culture has placed what it calls sexuality in a more and more distinctively privileged relation to our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth, and knowledge" (3). Furthermore, Sedgwick maintains that sexuality is often assignable through this binary as either homosexuality or heterosexuality. Disability scholar Alison Kafer describes the breaking of this boundary through queer theory's reliance on notions of fluidity. Sexual identities are not static but are ever changing as is the definition of what they encompass (2013, 16). Queerness is then "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and

resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick, 1993, 8). It is the inability to concretely define an individual's sexuality as anything besides a fluid possibility that makes queer theory the appropriate choice for the sexualities described in this thesis and the narratives from which they stem.

Disability

Sex and gender are only two instances of the impossibilities created in identity categories. Ableism, or the way able-bodiedness is culturally valued over impairment, is also an impossible idealization (McRuer, 2006, 9). No individual body is capable of every feat, making able-bodiedness an impossibility, a mere ideal. Like sex, gender, and sexuality, material effects have been created through the discourse and repetition surrounding the ideals of able-bodiedness. Expanding on Butler's theory of gender performativity, sexuality performativity also allows a dominant discourse to remain in power and seem "natural." Robert McRuer capitalizes on Butler's theory by linking disability and sexuality through explaining the fallacies created in the repetition of able-bodiedness. "Able-bodied identity and heterosexual identity are linked in their mutual impossibility" (9).

The discourses and narratives that have created our current understanding of disability stem from the ways disability has been understood in history. Michel Foucault (1974) explains the historical and social genealogy of the category of abnormal individuals. Foucault analyzes the institutions which created the idea of abnormality as a medical and juridical issue that had to be controlled. This need for control created the characterization of the disabled individual as other; these individuals have been excluded,

confined, and put on display in different eras of history, leading to our current occupation of psychiatry and the importance of diagnosing and treating madness (1965). While madness remains a category primarily attributed to mentally disabled individuals, all individuals who were considered “others” were understood as abnormal. This ideological creation of abnormality and deviance caused prejudice to form against disabled or abnormal individuals. It is this “internal racism that permits the screening of every individual within a given society” (317). This “racism” is still present today and a change in the way we perceive and create disability discourse is necessary for this to stop. In this case, although Foucault uses the term “racism,” he is not in fact looking at race, but more generally, at marginalization. Today, members of society continue to examine each other for an abnormal quality, or disability. This constant pressure to appear able-bodied reinforces the idea that disability should be hidden and makes someone different, “non-normal.”

Disability is considered a minority identity and many are discriminated against because of the aspect of their bodies considered less than able. However, “Tired of...claiming disability as a positive identity, people with disabilities insist on the pertinence of disability to the human condition, on the value of disability as a form of diversity, and on the power of disability as a critical concept for thinking about human identity in general” (Siebers, 2008, 3).

Although many identify as disabled, the definition of disability is often contested. Tobin Siebers defines disability by both the medical and cultural models of disabilities. He states, “The medical model defines disability as an individual defect lodged in the person, a defect that must be cured or eliminated if the person is to achieve full capacity

as a human being” (3). In contrast, Siebers and most disability studies scholars use a cultural model of disability to define this concept as, “the product of social injustice, one that requires not the cure or elimination of the defective person but significant changes in the social and built environment,” (3). One way to promote change is through an understanding of the naming power of disability.

Like gender and sex, disability exists because it is routinely named through performance and practice. It is the performance of identities that creates the communication that fosters the disability identity (Lindemann, 2011). The practicing of able-bodied as “natural” because of its reiterated performance places disability as abnormal and creates and maintains the disability category (Lindemann, 2011; Fassett and Morella, 2008). Like anthropologist Victor Turner, communication scholars Deanna Fassett and Dana Morella name the everyday rites and rituals that we use to perform our individual identities as the cause of the category disability. Although the rites and rituals are the foundation for the concept, they also hold the potential for change. The reconfigured performance of disability labeled rites and rituals can alter the associations naming disability (Howard, 2013; Fassett and Morella, 2008; Kuppens, 2003).

It is not only the performance of disability, but the discourse around the performance and the recordings of these performances which propagate disability as inherently negative. Changing the discourse around disability has the potential to alter the material effects produced by society’s current ableist mindset. Rhetorical effects of the discourse surrounding disability often go unnoticed. In fact, many fields continue to apply ableism when discussing differently abled bodies. As Simi Lintin, a prominent disability theorist/activist, suggests, linguistics of the medical community actually help to

create disability by defining the term through a predominantly negative medical lens. These conventions stretch beyond medicine and saturate into all aspects of society, further enhancing stereotypes. James C. Wilson, a scholar of English and disability studies, identifies these problematic terms in the material examples of the discourse of the human genome project. By using rhetoric such as “correcting errors,” researchers are endorsing hegemonic practices of disability exclusion and marginalization. These types of examples need to be highlighted and recognized as instances of the power of language to shape the cultural understandings of disability. While many institutions use language that promotes ableism, the creation of disability memoirs which look at the positives lives many disabled athletes and individuals possess can help counter the negative discourses, challenge language practices, and promote the disability identity.

Race

Race, another important identity factor, impacts the way bodies are discussed and treated in society, impacting an individual’s experiences and identity. While Foucault discussed abnormality, and used the term racism, there was a notable absence in the discussion of societal prejudices toward racial differences. Similar to gender, sexuality, and disability performativity, privileged bodies are seen as “natural” and therefore absent of race. Whiteness is often invisible/silent in scholarship (Nakayama and Krizek (1995); Crenshaw, 1997; Alexander, 2004). As Nakayama and Krizek state, “The invisibility of whiteness has been manifested through its universality...Thus, the experiences and communication patterns of whites are taken as the norm from which Others are marked” (293). When accepted and unchallenged, this privileging of whiteness because of its “normality” (read hierarchical status) continues.

While one often identifies as non-white and therefore has a race, whiteness is not always identified. This invisibility continues, making the absence of racial discussion an assumption of whiteness. “White people do not have to talk about whiteness or question the personal dimensions of racism very often. If we silence talk about race, we will perpetuate whiteness’ silent privilege” (Crenshaw, 1997, 272). Only acknowledging marginalized identity characteristics continues to perpetuate non-marginalized identities as natural and therefore unnecessary identities to disclose, despite the impact these privileged identity markers have on discourse and experiences.

Performing Athleticism

Audiences, rituals, acting out ideals, play: each of these characteristics describes both sport and performance. Performance is such an expansive category that while sport makes up a facet of performance, performance is inherent and subsumes the act of athletics (Schnechner, 2013; Lindemann, 2008; Henderson and Ostrander, 2008; Pelias and VanOosting, 1987). Not only do the practices of sport and performance often intertwine, but the theories of each share many characteristics. “Sport and performance theory have several important yet underdeveloped intersections. Locating these intersections in the properties of play, both areas are particularly useful in examining displays of the disabled body” (Lindemann, 2008, 98). The disabled sporting body is but one type of body that “plays,” any of which can be analyzed by performance and sport theories. Performance studies analyze the way an individual performs identity and has the ability to analyze the performance of sport. Sport as a type of play is similar to theater as it is separate from the everyday, but unique as it holds very real consequences and implications for the players. Sport provides an arena for reflexivity about the self, but

does so in a site separated from everyday reality. Sport challenges the effectiveness of performing identities and these performances hold potential for resistance. Therefore, in this thesis, I will use performance studies to analyze specific instances of sport discourse and the identities presented and perceived by disabled athletes.

Gender and Sport

Sport has historically been analyzed in terms of the policies, practices, and attitudes toward certain bodies. In 1972 Title IX created the legislation necessary for equality of available opportunities in relation to all sectors of education, regardless of gender. This, therefore, demanded the opportunity for women's participation in intercollegiate athletics, participation that was criticized and largely absent prior to this legislation. Although this policy has caused numerous controversies, it remains intact. This legislation states that no one in the United States can be discriminated against based on sex in any educational program (Brake, 1996, 53).

Although female sports participation had been contested before the emergence of the law, the introduction of Title IX caused uproar as many defended their beliefs that deemed sports participation for women as unacceptable. It was commonly thought that sports would cause "the possibility of injury to reproductive functions in women participants, which reflected a larger preoccupation with the threat of athletics to women's femininity. Because competitive sports were such an exclusive male bastion, women who played them were perceived as something less than female" (Brake & Catlin, 1996, 52). The women who did try to play sports were ostracized and treated as incapable of participating in any activity requiring the exertion of effort. Sport Sociology scholar Michael Messner states that "boy's access to sports, coupled with girls' lack of access,

literally shaped our bodies and thus our belief that men were naturally strong and athletic, while women were naturally frail and in need of protection” (Messner, 2007, 2).

Despite Title IX’s involvement in women’s sports for over four decades, inequality still exists. Because of this history, the discourse surrounding women in sport still today generally portrays female athletes as inferior, while highlighting the athletic capabilities and successes performed by males.

The disconnect between the cultural ideal of femininity and practicality of aggressiveness and other characteristics associated with both masculinity and sporting success cause female athletes to “face an intriguing paradox: Western culture emphasizes a feminine ideal body and demeanor that contrast with a sports demeanor. Sportswomen, therefore, live in two cultures . . . wherein social and sport ideals clash” (Krane et al, 2004, 315). These women are constantly faced with this paradox: they are expected to adhere to cultural regulations and perform femininity but femininity is defined as paradoxical to sport and a sporting body.

Although women’s bodies are judged as being incapable of athletic success, the ability of women to transgress these opinions creates a site for social change. Judith Butler questions the gender ideals that are linked to athletic bodies. Athleticism cannot exist without gender; the two concepts are directly connected because of the representation of athletic bodies as inherent in the structure and form of athletic activities. When the body is repeatedly examined as is illustrated throughout sport, the characteristics that are attached to the body (such as gender) continue to be analyzed as well. The new female bodies which have emerged in sport trouble previous conceptions of femininity. By troubling these idealized morphologies, sport causes society to

rearticulate the power of these gendered ideals (Butler, 1998, 103-104). Despite the potential of sport and Title IX providing the legal legislation to expect equal participation in sport regardless of gender, female athletes continue to be considered less successful than males in cultural discourse.

Title IX may only cover the purview of intercollegiate athletics, but the issue of gender equity in athletics does not only pertain to sport at the intercollegiate level. These issues impact the involvement of female athletes in all sectors of athletic participation. While gender has been the dominant struggle for women's participation and appreciation in athletics, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, ability, and all other identity categories also affect the treatment of these athletes.

Sexuality and Sport

Gender and sexuality are often so intertwined that they are difficult to separate, despite the fact that the two are not co-dependent. It is the cultural tendency of heteronormativity that often links these identity categories and conflates one with the other. When one's gender and sexuality do not both conform to heteronormative ideals, athletes (and other individuals) are stigmatized. "Compulsory heterosexuality, hegemonic masculinity and femininity, sexism, and heteronormativity are found to constitute not only homophobia, but also an obdurate sex/gender scheme which stigmatizes athletes who do not fit the stereotypes, such as effeminate men and masculine women" (Eng, 2008, 105). It is not the sexuality of the athlete, but this sexuality coupled with gender performance that causes marginalization.

The performance of masculinity and femininity directly ties into the performance of sexuality. In fact, as sports sociologist Michael Messner states, "it is this performance

that either promotes or counters the heteronormative ideal. In fact, it is common in sports culture for men to use women's bodies to promote their own masculinity and heterosexuality" (2007, 113). One must "perform" heterosexuality through the use of the bodies of others.

Many of the debates around sexuality and sport are not tied to the performance of sexual identity, but to how one is sexually objectified (Hundley and Billings, 2010; Smith and Thomas, 2009; Messner, 2007). Like gender, the media attention toward female athletes and performances of femininity are oftentimes only given coverage because of the sexuality or sexual objectification portrayed. In regards to sports television shows, Messner, Duncan, and Willms note that, "Women appear on these shows primarily as jokes, as sexual objects that prop up the men (e.g., Fox's use of dancing cheerleaders in its ads), or as athletes who fit conventional stereotypes of heterosexual femininity, like tennis player Maria Sharapova" (2007, 163). The gender and sexual identities of these female athletes get conflated and trivialized, allowing the dominance of heterosexuality and masculinity to shine through by marginalizing the success of the female athlete.

Because of the expected heterosexual performance in sport, many queer athletes choose not to come out. Sport, as an institution, so heavily promotes heterosexuality that the pressures to conform are often too intense for many individuals to be open about queer sexuality (Messner, 1996). The lack of counter hegemonic discourses allows sexuality in sport to remain predominantly heteronormative and stigmatizes individuals who do not perform this identity.

Non-normative sexuality is often associated with disability (McRuer, 2006). Many of the discriminations faced by both populations stem from similar histories and

visibility politics. Invisibly disabled individuals often have the choice over coming out, like queer athletes, and can choose whether or not to challenge compulsory able-bodiedness. However, many disabled athletes are visibly disabled and therefore do not have this option. The association of these bodies with sporting success culminates in new sets of challenges.

Disability and Sport

Athletics has culturally been linked to able-bodiedness, causing bodies that are not considered able-bodied to be marginalized; one may be lacking the physical stature, the expected body size, or the assumed ability to be successful in sport. Although the history of disabled sports warrants attention on its own, it is fruitful to provide this history in relation to the performance of gender and sexuality of the bodies affected. “Examining performances of disability in a sport context is useful because disabled sport offers athletes opportunities for reflexive performances of self in a context temporarily removed from able-bodied society” (Lindemann, 2008). Not only does the athlete benefit from this analysis, but an understanding of the way discourse around disability and athletics intersect can enlighten on the ways we culturally understand these unexpected athletes and disability in general.

The Paralympics, the parallel sporting event to the Olympics for physically disabled identified athletes, is considered the most elite sports competition for athletes who identify as disabled. Embodiment becomes a key focus in the discussion of the Paralympics, in ways that would seem futile for the Olympics. There is an assumed able-bodied nature in the athletic success of Olympic athletes, and the fact that the Paralympic athletes are disabled makes the focus of the history, culture placement, and challenges

faced by each individual center around ideas of embodiment and new conceptualizations of athletic success (Howe, 2008).

Although the Paralympics is rising in popularity, it still falls significantly short of the coverage of the Olympics. In the *New York Times* the coverage of the Paralympics between 2008 and 2012 was miniscule in relation to the coverage of the Olympics. There were 82 articles discussing the Paralympics, as opposed to over 2000 covering the Olympics (Tynedal and Wolbring, 2013, 17). Despite the growing interest in the Paralympics, the event is still not granted parallel coverage. Disabled athletes are framed in ways which concentrate on their disabilities and biographical information relating to their bodies (Mastandrea, 2012; Olenik, Matthews, Steadward, 1995). The reporting of the Paralympics also differs as the articles tend to focus on and celebrate individual successes, and concentrates on the performance of specific athletes and their bodies, rather than an overall celebration of sporting success (21).

The bodies of Paralympic athletes are not only deemed as a key concern by society but other aspects of their livelihoods, which are assumed to correlate with this athletically successful body, are also challenged. Male athletes in particular are assumed to have a body that not only performs athletic actions successfully, but can also successfully perform societal expectations of the ideal body. Masculinity is associated with athleticism, and notions of masculinity are challenged by disability and the new conceptualization of bodies that follows (Cherney and Lindemann, 2009). Male disabled athletes therefore feel particular pressures pertaining to their bodies and masculinity. David Howe, a Paralympian and sport sociologist, observes that “The complete and strong, aggressive, muscular body is the most tangible sign of maleness. Sporting bodies

represent a pivotal form of ‘physical capital’ for disabled men, more so than for disabled women, because physicality has traditionally been considered an admired male trait” (Howe, 2008, 105). The measurement for sporting bodies’ lies in the physical capital of embodiment, for the disabled athlete, this measurement becomes an ideal. Emphasizing the association between masculinity as both male success and sport success makes this characteristic even more desirable for disabled male athletes, who often feel compromised in both areas because of the stigma attached to disability.

Bodies that associate with one gender and identify as disabled often perform characteristics that highlight or diminish their gendered performance. One’s ability can often affect how one performs other aspects of his or her identity. In wheelchair rugby or “murderball,” many of the male athletes use the sport in order to highlight their masculinity through “macho” performances (Lindemann and Cherney, 2008). Despite the participation in disabled athletics, the masculine ideals promoted in this particular sport communicate to the able-bodied world that disability is equated with a lack of athletic prowess and masculinity and this must be overcome through exaggerated performances of gender. Even in attempting to promote gender, these athletes cannot separate their sport, bodies, or identities from disability. Understanding how these identity characteristics intersect is necessary for communicating bodies and experiences.

Aggressiveness and masculinity in male athletes, regardless of ability, emphasize notions of heteronormativity. This heteronormativity is often stressed when ability becomes another marginalized identity. Cynthia Barounis highlights this phenomenon when discussing the heteromascularity displayed in *Murderball* (2005), a documentary that captures the lives of members of the United States national wheelchair rugby team.

While this film is a staple in recent disability scholarship, the emphasis on heteronormative sexuality for these athletes is especially pertinent to this discussion. The film highlights multiple instances of the players and others discussing sex and sexuality. The emphasis on being able to perform “normal” sex is a key concern for the players as well as those with whom they have these discussions. Communication scholars James Cherney and Kurt Lindemann also stress the masculinity and its association with heterosexuality in this film, as they discuss the efforts of the players to “normalize” their bodies with hyper masculinity and hyper heterosexuality in order to shy away from the focus on their disabilities (210). Like other heterosexual emphasis, the scenes from the film that explicitly discuss sex concentrate on the player’s abilities to hold erections and penetrate, producing ableist and heteronormative discourses (210).

The heteronormativity highlighted in this film is reinforced by the discussions with other male players as well as heterosexual, able-bodied females. Barounis points out that the journey of the film leaves no room for female disabled athletes (448). Disabled women in sport are particularly stigmatized by both gendered expectations and the marginalization that is often identified with disabled bodies in sport. Disabled women athletes live in a society for which “double jeopardy exists for the athlete who is both female and disabled” (Olenik et al, 1995, 57). Disabled female athletes must continue to stress their disabilities and femininity in order to challenge and avoid marginalization and stereotyping in an effort to achieve recognition for athletic success. The disabled female athlete must then accomplish the task of promoting what her body can accomplish while pushing others to challenge the idea that disabled bodies are “feminized” for their lack of “physical prowess” and reliance on others. The feminizing of disabled bodies is

countered by female disabled athletes who push the expected boundaries of body capability. Denying the feminization generally associated with these bodies often results in a lack of sexualization, equating the disabled body with asexuality. The asexuality associated with disabled women, further distances these athletes from their able-bodied peers, who are overwhelmingly represented as sexualized and whose athletic successes are often trivialized or ignored (Messner, 2007). Even in recent scholarship and popular media of athletics, disability is rarely equated with positive sexuality for women (Scherrer, 2008; Schell and Rodriguez, 2001; Kaminker, 2000).

While athletes' identities are often examined and critiqued solely in regards to gender, sexuality, or disability, it is often impossible to separate these identity characteristics. Individual experiences and the intersection of identity characteristics provide enriched approaches to analyzing the presentation and representation of individual bodies. The experiences faced by marginalized populations can provide insight into the hierarchies of privilege and treatment this has on certain bodies.

Next, I will explain the methods I use to examine these experiences and identity representations. Examining how the disabled athletes choose to disclose, analyze, or promote different aspects of identity in their memoirs can provide insight into the discourses of identity in the sport institution and the greater cultural discourse at large.

Method

Determining the ways that certain bodies are identified and constructed in media relies on close textual analysis of multiple media genres. In this thesis I employ a close textual analysis of two memoirs as well as a thematic analysis of the memoirist's identifications in other media. I use newspapers, interviews, weblogs, reviews, etc. in

order to determine how these individuals are constructed in the media. This methodology follows similar formatting to Sloop (2012)¹.

The second chapter focuses exclusively on the memoirs. I analyze the different and intersecting identities discussed and compare them to one another, finding that the time of disability in one's life and gender were the largest factors in the dissimilarity between the memoirs. Chapter three continues a close textual analysis but does so through media constructions of the two memoirists. In this chapter, the slight differences between intersecting identities yielded nuanced results, results that were most interesting in comparing the two memoirists. The concluding chapter puts the memoirs and media in conversation with one another and discusses what this study shows about the current discourse surrounding disability.

The close textual analysis pinpoints the themes in the body of the discourse- those of gender, athleticism, sexuality, race, and disability. The way these identities are discussed in both the memoirs and media helps determine how these bodies are constructed and what aspects of each individual the author of the media determines as important. The ways these bodies are constructed in memoirs and media show what the discourse surrounding the disabled athlete contains, and therefore how readers will come to understand the capabilities of all bodies and the cultural attitudes attributed to disability.

In order to analyze how athletic bodies are performed and perceived in relation to identity characteristics, I will employ feminist theory, queer/crip theory, performance theory and disability theory. While feminist theory is commonly used in rhetoric and has

¹ Sloop uses formatting which takes close textual analysis of a variety of media and analyzes them through different frameworks of gender.

been defined previously in the introduction of gender and embodiment, analyzing with disability theory is a rarity. Intersecting disability studies, feminist theory, queer/crip theory and performance theory allows for a more nuanced understanding of the rhetorical bodies presented in the memoirs. I will provide a brief introduction to the main theories employed below.

Intersectionality

Individuals do not only associate with a single identity category, but instead often identify with multiple categories at a time. Intersectionality shows that these identities are complex and the unique array of categories each individual belongs to overlaps, causing each aspect of one's identity to affect the others. Kimberle Crenshaw, a critical race theorist and law scholar, introduces the idea of intersectionality when discussing the importance of acknowledging how people can feel marginalization in different ways depending on all aspects of their identity (1989). Crenshaw explains that focusing the attention on the most privileged members of a marginalized group, "marginalizes those who are multiply burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination" (26). Focusing on gender struggles without acknowledging how differently able-bodies are affected limits our understanding of these gender struggles. This assumption of compulsory able-bodiedness is problematic as we culturally ignore bodies that are seen as other or different (McRuer, 2006).

Queer and Crip Theory

In order to effectively analyze sexuality and disability as intersecting identity categories, one must turn to crip theory. Crip theory, coined by the English and Disability scholar Robert McRuer (2002, 2006), accentuates the related discourses between

disability and queer theories, “in fact—compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness and vice versa” (2002, 384). These two identity characteristics have similar histories. Both compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness were pathologized and linked together by Freud (McRuer, 2006, 1) as characteristics of deviance and otherness. In this sense, heterosexuality and able-bodiedness are often seen as “natural,” identities lacking any deviance or pathology. “Able-bodiedness, even more than heterosexuality, still largely masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things” (1). McRuer notes that cultural shifts are beginning in which the population is more keen to understand heterosexuality and especially compulsory heterosexuality as something constructed, but disability is more difficult to understand in terms of construction (2002, 385).

Because this cultural and social construction is less commonly articulated, the dominant culture follows an assumption of compulsory able-bodiedness. “Compulsory able-bodiedness” underscores that the dominant way to view the world is as though everyone is able-bodied and therefore accommodations are unnecessary. They are not even thought of, rendering disability invisible. Like heterosexuality producing a “queer” identity through an understanding of the different and “normal,” compulsory able-bodiedness has produced disability (2). In this production of difference and opposition, systems of choices seem to appear, in “a system in which there actually is no choice” (385). Analyzing the ways compulsory able-bodiedness is practiced in the everyday world allows these practices, and the assumptions that make them seem material, to be contested. Adopting a critically disabled viewpoint means crippling the world around us; we must always be aware of the compulsory able-bodied notions at stake and challenge

these assumptions. Crip theory explains that there are other ways to live than in a compulsory able-bodied world; like the term “queer,” crip does not define what one is, only that one identifies with a characteristic other than the hegemonic norm (2006, 31). In fact, disability and queerness are often linked as they are identities that are often not visible and therefore the individual must choose to “come out” and reveal this identity. Choosing to acknowledge and identify with a crip or non-compulsory able-bodied world allows for productive conversations and the possibility to change the discourse around disability and promote understandings of its socially constructed origins.

Disability Theory

Disability/able-bodiedness, gender, and other identity categories intersect to create nuanced identities. One’s disability identity is always impacted by the intersection of the rest of his or her identity and experiences.

Political Scientist Nancy J. Hirschmann (2012) introduces the concept of disability studies and its relations to gender studies with an example of how disability can thicken and even challenge our current conceptions of interdisciplinary gender studies. She argues that disability studies is the new gender studies because it is the new identity category that must fight its way into mainstream recognition and be noticed for the important potential this theory holds for our understandings of bodies. Disability, however, does something that gender cannot. Disability is the only real identity category where bodies can change overnight, or instantly. This is what often causes the fear and hatred of disabled bodies by those who identify as able-bodied; it is a fear of the possibility of a changing self.

Disability also differs from other identity categories because it is not essentializing bodies. Like the theory of intersectionality, disability theory promotes the uniqueness of bodies and the understanding that multiple characteristics come together to create one's identity. The theory does not assume that all people who claim this identity category are the same and therefore different from those who do not identify as disabled. Disability embraces that all bodies are experiencing different hardships, complexities, and emotions; but instead of using this to distinguish bodies, it challenges these bodies to find both differences and similarities between them. "Disability theory similarly recognizes that the struggles that I encounter in dealing with my body are different from those encountered by a blind person, a person with postpolio syndrome, or a person with only one arm. But it maintains that this difference is precisely what makes me the same as all these others" (Hirschmann, 2012, 403). Identifying with others because of the nuances that makes a person unique carries potential for unifying individuals to act towards certain causes. The intersectionality of identity characteristics is practiced through disability theory, engaging feminist theory and analyzing gender through disability theory can lead to fruitful results.

Employing each of these theories allows a nuanced analysis of gender, sexuality, and ability in disabled athletic memoirs. Placing these theories in conversation with one another can lead to fruitful results as one's identity is examined intersectionally through performance, representation, and how one is perceived.

Rhetoric and Memoir

Memoir is an aspect of rhetoric that aims to take individual stories and communicate a narrative to a large, diverse audience (Couser, 2012). The diverse

audience reached through this genre allows these narratives and identities to reach a larger population than many other forms of rhetoric. The larger the population affected by these memoirs, the more change possible as a larger section of the population gain education about identity and have the opportunity to examine language use, altering this use to better combat disability oppression and marginalization.

All aspects of a memoirist's identity affect the way the narrator understands and represents his or her life writing. Memoirs have become increasingly popular in contemporary literature, overshadowing other genres of life writing. G. Thomas Couser, an English scholar who focuses on memoirs, has described this phenomenon as the "memoir boom." Academia is not the only domain to recognize the popularity of this genre, as *The New York Times Book Review* continues to place memoirs in the top accounts of non-fiction books, and memoirs saw an increase in sales of 400 percent between 2004 and 2008. In fact, in 2010, eleven of the twenty paperback nonfiction bestsellers were memoirs (Couser, 2012). The ways individuals narrate the lives of themselves and others are inherently rhetorical. Many use rhetoric in order to gain a better understanding of the self and as a therapeutic tool (Rinaldi, 1996). These narratives not only create subjects, but also bodies and stories which can be analyzed in order to examine the cultural tendencies of individual narrative and discourse. The popularity of memoirs allows these rhetorical conventions to shape the discourses surrounding individuals, giving it discursive power and importance.

Memoirs—which are categorized as a subgenre of autobiography/biography when not conflated as one in the same—often focus on one aspect of an individual's life instead of an exhaustive chronological recount. Unlike fiction, memoirs have a goal of *doing*

something (Couser, 2009, 2012). The power the memoir has to shape the discourses and perceptions of certain activities, characteristics, identities, etc. rely on the non-fictional and are therefore understood as more “truthful” tellings of narrative and experiences. However, some controversy exists over the “truthfulness” of one’s own story based on the presence of a co-author (Couser, 2004; Lee, 2014). In this type of collaborative life writing, the process is dialogical but the product is monological—only the narrator’s voice is present (Couser, 2004, 35). The tensions around this collaboration often appear when the co-author’s share an imbalance of power. Oftentimes, illness or disability narratives cause the subject to be vulnerable to the writing co-author (37). Another imbalanced partnership often occurs with celebrity memoirs. Although generally “celebrity identity is authored collaboratively and collectively rather than individually. Nevertheless, in the marketplace, celebrities have the advantage of licensing their replication, And in celebrity autobiography, subjects typically outrank writers in wealth and clout” (40). While the factuality of the narratives is often unquestioned, this power should be acknowledged by both writers and critics.

Illness memoirs, one genre of memoir, usually include an “epiphany” of sorts, as one begins to understand his or her body in new ways (Couser, 2009; Frank, 1993). These memoirs are a “significant means for studying the social construction of illness as a rhetorically bounded, discursively formulated phenomenon...illness narratives invoke change, based on understanding illness as a moment at which change is especially possible” (Frank, 1993). The possibility of change in the way the narrator sees his or her own body, story, and life comment on the ways bodies and illness are typically constructed and the epiphanies provide outlets for changes to these cultural thoughts.

Garland-Thomson (2007) notes that “narratives do cultural work. They frame our understandings of raw, unorganized experience, giving it coherent meaning and making it accessible to us through story” (122). As more people with unique experiences begin to create life narratives, new voices, identities and representations come to life and gain recognition.

These identities gain recognition through the claims and experiences made by the memoirists. As one is representing himself or herself in a memoir, he or she is simultaneously claiming an identity. Couser states that, “identity claims are at the core of memoir and autobiography, memoir and autobiography don’t just *entail* identity claims; they *constitute* and are co-extensive with such claims” (2012, 89). The claiming of gender and sexuality in memoirs varies depending on the experiences of the memoirist. However, the increase of memoirs which address issues of identity such as gender and sexuality stem from political movements that placed pride on these characteristics. The women’s liberation movement saw a rise in memoirs such as breast cancer narratives and memoirs on HIV/AIDS stemmed from gay rights movement (150). In fact, sex change narratives have become a recent trend because of a few privileged individuals who have had the opportunity to narrate their stories (150). Political movements by marginalized populations create space for individual stories that can educate and alter cultural discourse.

While some of the lives that gain recognition in memoirs are understood as “somebody memoirs,” those which are written by individuals who have already gained fame in one way or another, others are classified as “nobody memoirs,” those unique and interesting because of circumstances and not a previous affiliation with fame (Couser,

2009, 2012). It is in this non-celebrity genre that most disabled memoirists make their appearance. While some celebrities do identify as disabled in their memoirs, the memoir itself is not usually singularly focused on this disability.

In the past, disabled individuals faced many difficulties in publishing memoirs. This stemmed from the content and creation of these life writings as it was assumed that the lives of disabled individuals were not worthy of being represented, and some disabled individuals faced difficulties in the composition of these texts (Couser, 2001, 2009). Individuals had to show that the experiences they narrated were unique and important but also related to experiences many faced, making them compelling and understandable. Like gender and sexuality, experiences needed to be easily understood and relatable, regardless of the reader's identity. The journey one goes through in a memoir causes a new person to emerge in the end, similar to the narrative arc many face through spans of life (Frank, 1993). Like social movements around gender and sexuality, disability memoirs began to be accessible and appreciated at a politically salient time. Disability law (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) became public at a time that coincides with the memoir boom and this simultaneous creation may have been a cause for the appearance and popularity of disabled memoirs (Ferri, 2011). Not only were disabled bodies more prominent in public spaces but disability identity became more popular and encouraged, creating an audience for disability narratives, experiences, and perspectives.

Narratives surrounding disability often promote the culturally ableist understandings of disability as a concept. However, narrative itself relies on disability. Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, disability theorists, introduce the idea of "narrative prosthesis"; as the term suggests, narratives often use disability as a metaphor to show

difficulty, overcoming, or other powerful narrative arcs (2001). In order to show healthy bodies or other “normal” subjects, disability must be introduced as a counter argument. While disability is not only a trope for creating narratives, a disabled identity is often understood as a trope of negative character (Couser, 2009, 17). This assumption of negative character as inherent to disabled bodies influences the discourse surrounding disabled individuals in contemporary society. Disability is therefore imperative to the very idea of narrative and continuously repeated in discourse, continuing to correlate disability and negative characteristics/morals. Creating memoirs that allow readers to examine bodies they find different from their own has the power to change the perception of these bodies. Identifying as disabled has the potential to change the discourse around certain bodies and alter the ways these bodies are culturally discussed and understood.

While disability identity became an umbrella term to characterize a group, the memoir remained an individualized creation. This individual nature of memoir helps to detach from the essentializing assumptions often found in disability narrative (Couser, 2009, 22). Individuals all have different stories and experience about their bodies and what he or she may have gone through, making each person’s remembrance and narrative remarkable (Frank, 1993). Ferri and Couser suggest the teaching of multiple memoirs in order to capitalize on these different narratives and avoid essentialism (Ferri, 2011; Couser, 2002). While disabled memoirists can discuss the social injustices faced by all disabled individuals, one person cannot represent the entire marginalized population, making each individual memoir unique and worthy of representation.

Case Studies

In order to examine the ways that ability, gender/sexuality, race, and athleticism have been analyzed in different memoirs, I have chosen to examine the memoirs of two individuals who identify as physically disabled athletes. I believe that memoirs about disabled individuals who have gained recognition in the sporting world have unique potential to alter the ways we culturally understand the capabilities of bodies we identify as disabled, and how the audience reacts when the expected narrative of defeat or squashed potential is not what is delivered.

I will analyze how the athletes' identities and experiences are constructed in these memoirs. In addition, I will analyze how the public has received and responded to these identity claims and experiences. I will not only analyze the memoirs and the reviews of these memoirs but also supplement the information with published interviews, web blogs, media coverage, etc.

Disability studies, and other body studies scholarship, have been criticized for the lack of the "body" in these works. As stated earlier, in these texts, the body and the processes, pain, emotions felt, etc. tend to be left out. Although I am analyzing purely text-based documents, the bodies are present in these memoirs. These memoirs vividly describe the processes, pains, and affectual feelings of the memoirists and do not lose the experiences of the bodies when concentrating on the social.

Mark Zupan, a white man who became a quadriplegic after being thrown from a car in an accident, narrates how his body and understanding of athletic success changed throughout his life. He changed from being a division 1 soccer player to experiencing a new body and new ways to understand athletics through the discovery of wheelchair rugby. Wheelchair rugby, or "murderball," as discussed previously, has gained

recognition in the Paralympics as well as through the MTV documentary. In Zupan's own memoir and the documentary, Zupan incessantly emphasizes "masculine" characteristics and his heterosexual relationships and sexual capabilities. Zupan's narrative style continues this heteronormative script as it is written with crude language and masculine assumptions. Despite the heteronormative approach, Zupan acknowledges the marginalization of disabled individuals, particularly athletes, and shows disability pride.

Sarah Reinertsen, a white woman amputee, also emphasizes her disability and the pride she feels at her accomplishments and identity. As a 1992 Paralympian, marathon runner, Ironman champion, and contestant on *The Amazing Race*, Reinertsen has explored running and athleticism in multiple venues. Reinertsen stresses how important athletics are to her identity and how her athletic feats and accomplishments have motivated others and herself. While alluding to her gender (she continually stresses that she is a petite, blonde, girl) and sexuality as she addresses past relationships and configuring sexuality with her prosthetics, these discussions do not overshadow the primary focus on her athletic accomplishments.

Both memoirs are hybrids of celebrity memoirs (somebody memoirs) and disability narratives. While disability narratives usually fall into the category of nobody memoirs, these particular individuals have garnered media attention based on their athletic successes. Both are co-authored and do, therefore, have the potential to be unbalanced and shaped by individuals other than themselves. Although the co-authors are only acknowledged on the covers, it is assumed that the celebrities have interest in promoting accurate stories based on ideas of image branding (Couser, 2004). In addition to co-authorship, the memoirs similarly share focuses on the childhood, upbringing, and

athletic struggles of each individual, as well as life experiences with which they have struggled. Comparing how the memoirists' choose to identify in the unique situations presented to him or her can lead to fruitful discussion in the ways these athletes represent themselves. Tracking the changes in these memoirs and the identification with disability, sexuality/gender, race, and athleticism can offer significant results and counter typical cultural assumptions and expectations around the capabilities and treatment of disabled athletes.

Conclusion

While the individual memoirists all identify as athletes, they are discussed and present themselves in ways that complicate this singular identity. The cultural script of bodies capable of athletic success is challenged in each of these memoirs, holding the potential for this understanding to change. What determines a body's capability? The discourse surrounding disability, gender/sexuality, race and athleticism create material effects, affecting lives. While each memoirist aims to tell his or her individual story, they also contribute to the larger social discourse on athleticism, embodiment, and life narratives. The general reading audience for memoirs is incredibly important to the purpose and consequences of publishing these memoirs. These books aim to reach large, lay audiences, audiences that often do not know the academic discourse surrounding identity characteristics and bodies more generally. Unlike pure academic scholarship, these memoirs have the capability of affecting social discourse to a larger population. We must analyze the ways the memoirists choose to identify themselves in order to shape the way memoirists describe their lives in the future, and therefore how the future discourse on disability and the capabilities of bodies may unfold.

These specific memoirs were chosen out of the small collection of memoirs by individuals who identify as disabled and athletically inclined, because of the level of athleticism they have attained. These two memoirs were chosen because of the recency of the publication and athletic success, and also because of the media buzz they have generated outside of the memoirs. These were the only two athletes who had significant media coverage from multiple sources, and had received recognition before and after the publications of these texts. The ways these memoirs address sexuality, race, athleticism, disability, and gender comment on the ways that we culturally understand the capabilities of certain bodies. The level of athleticism these individuals achieved has made these bodies unique, and has garnered them attention and admiration. Gaining the attention has helped audiences become more inclined to read these specific memoirs, and therefore reach larger audiences and have more potential to alter negative assumptions about disability.

Disabled bodies are primarily defined through the stare, but the act of narrating one's life and experiences and defining one's body in this way holds its own type of visual advocacy. Rhetoric and discourse continually impact the larger visual, written, and spoken cues constructing our social world. "Memoir becomes an intervention into the politics of knowing as well as the politics of representation. As such, memoirs...should be understood as a form of social action for their ability to talk back to dominant scripts and point to a more embodied form of social critique" (Ferri, 2011). Memoirs have the power to challenge dominant scripts around disability in general and have political possibility. Memoirs focusing on the pillars of athleticism, ability, and gender/sexuality,

specifically, hold the potential to alter the discourses surrounding our bodies and change the future direction of embodiment construction.

Chapter 2 Memoirs

It is odd, but the first question I find myself asking when I hear someone speak about disability...is its subjectivity, or what feminist theory calls ‘standpoint.’ Is this one more contribution to the disablist culture which surrounds us?.. I am interested in seeing whether the work contributes to what Honneth calls ‘the moral grammar of social movements’ by making an ethical contribution towards rights, respect, recognition and solidarity.
(Sherry, 2006, 163-164)

Analyzing disabled athletes’ memoirs affords not only contribution to knowledges produced by the pedagogy of standpoints (Rolin, 2009; Harding, 2009; Harding, 2007; Harding, 2002; Hartsock, 1997; Smith, 1997), but also challenges to stereotypical negative discourses surrounding disability. The two memoirs analyzed in this chapter are Sarah Reinertsen’s *In a Single Bound: Losing My Leg, Finding Myself, and Training for Life*, and *Gimp: When Life Deals You a Crappy Hand You Can Fold or You Can Play* by Mark Zupan. Each memoir stresses different aspects of identity and follows different narrative arcs. While both discuss hardships they have faced because of disability, they also celebrate disability and the incredible accomplishments they have done.

Discussing the hardships one faces is a trope found in all narrative. However, disability life writing and disability or illness memoirs in particular often fall into the trap of the “overcoming story.” Simi Linton (1998) introduces this concept, the problems associated with it, stating that the rhetoric of overcoming assumes that overcoming is preferable: the individual able to overcome the disability or difficult situation is therefore better than other disabled individuals (18). This places all of the “responsibility for change on the individual with a disability” (Wood, 2011). This typical form of the genre is especially problematic in disability life writing. Despite being problematic, the

overcoming narrative is similar to characteristic of all memoirs and the tendency to employ confession and recovery (Couser, 2012). As previously stated, the theory of narrative prosthesis claims that disability is integral to narratives as they most commonly follow an arc of finding a problem (such as a disability) and then finding a cure for a “happy ending” (Snyder and Mitchell, 2001). If one does not follow this journey then they often use disability as a counter to the protagonist who in association is seen as “normal” and good (Couser, 2009). The rhetoric of overcoming is a problematic trope that is often still employed in disability life writing, and must be addressed and challenged.

The impact of this overcoming narrative can frame the way audiences understand disability in general, and continue to show disability as something that must be cured or overcome. As memoirs are considered a “truth” genre by audiences (Couser, 2012), the way one chooses to discuss each aspect of his or her identity and how these identities come together is crucial to the way feelings on disability and other marginalized identities are formed. These memoirs are “performative, meaning that the telling of personal narrative creates the teller’s identity as it is told, rather than simply reflecting a static identity. The story is not outside of the body; it intimately involves the body, its perceptions and lived experiences. As such, the telling of personal narratives is necessarily an embodied experience” (Lindemann, 2009, 5). This embodied experience and the way these memoirs are formed persuade the writer and readers on lives, disability identity, and experiences of disability more generally.

Both memoirs follow paths which highlight different aspects of the memoirist’s identity’s and how these identity’s come together to impact the athletes’ stories and

experiences. This performative act of life writing is crucial to the way disability and certain experiences are understood by readers. Mark Sherry (2006) notes that “I recognize that I am a positioned subject—my subjectivity is informed not only by my impairment and disability identities, but my ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, class, religion, and so on. These identities are not static, but fluid” (164). He notes that disability life writing, a genre encompassing all aspects of life writing including memoir, is not only important for analyzing if it portrays disability as negative or positive. “What is missing in such an analysis is an examination of social relations—a focus on the intersections of disability with gender, race, class, ethnicity, and so on...they help us make sense of the power of individuals in the face of wider social structures” (166). Analyzing how these intersecting identities come together to impact the experiences of individuals helps to dismantle essentialized and negative connotations about disability, and help shape attitudes toward body capabilities and challenge cultural constructions around the athletic successes attainable by marginalized individuals.

In this chapter I will show how the multiple intersecting aspects of identity lead to unique experiences and shape the way stories around individual athletic successes are created. The differences and similarities between the memoirs highlight the expected structures of disability life writing, as well as the ways certain identity features are highlighted and ignored based on privilege and marginalizations. The cultural discourses challenged in these memoirs help to combat negative associations with disability and influence disability pride. As with all identity categories, the knowledge gained by individuals’ experiences helps challenge prejudices and show cultural inequalities (Hartsock, 1986; Collins, 1990; Thomas, 1999; Barile, 2013). Rosemarie Garland-

Thomson notes that the surge of disability life writing and memoir can be akin to feminist standpoint theories and practices and can provide the platform for this education to be shared and valued (2005, 1569). Along similar lines, Beth Ferri, a disability scholar, discusses the power of life writing when she notes that “by drawing from a more feminist grounded disability studies, [she] argues that autobiographies of oppressed groups should be read as important sites of intellectual and political resistance” (2011, 2271). Narrating different experiences through memoir has the power to challenge previous cultural discourses and educate on a multitude of identities, and how they intersect and affect perspectives and experiences.

Scholarly debate has arisen around the success of disability memoirs for challenging conventional notions of disability as something inherently negative. Ferri has noted that, “the publishing industry, like the film and television industry, privileges sentimental and emotional stories of individuals overcoming adversity through the sheer force of will or determination” (2011, 2268). Because of the stresses of these industries and the typical structures of memoirs that introduce a problem and then show how this problem has been tackled or eliminated, and specifically disability memoirs, many do “take up dominant notions of disability or enact the overcoming script, as if on cue...More often, however, these memoirs take the form of the person positioning himself or herself up as an exception to the norm by succeeding against the odds, where others presumably fail” (2269). The danger with this type of attitude is that it continues to position disability as a stereotypically negative identity, where only the remarkable few can accomplish certain feats, continuing to place an overwhelming assumption of inability on the masses (Clare, 1999). While both memoirists analyzed do play into the

overcoming story and the pressures of the genre, they do discuss the treatment of disability by society as well as discuss the success of other disabled individuals.

Case Studies

Both memoirs begin with chapters that nicely sum up the themes emphasized in the works. Sarah Reinertsen begins her memoir by discussing a famous moment from the television show, *The Amazing Race*, and her thoughts, feelings, and perspectives on what was occurring. She states, “given the opportunity, would I take on the Great Wall, one-on-one, even though on paper I had no shot of beating it? If I had a chance to scale one of the Seven Wonders of the World, would I go for it? Well, for a million bucks, I’d sure give it my best shot” (VII). The story of her experience on the show and disproving the expectations of others continues to develop throughout the memoir. While primarily a chronological narrative, it does on occasion shift between the more recent present and her childhood. Starting and ending with this show helps give a full picture of Reinertsen’s life so far and shows her emphasis on this and other pivotal moments of her life narrative.

Similarly, Mark Zupan begins with athletics, but quickly segues this into discussions about his injury and the disability status that resulted. He gives a quick preview of his life story, encompassed by and revolving around the accident, and that he “consider[s] myself to be lucky, In fact, I am a goddamn lottery winner” (2, 2007). He touches on sexuality, sport, and being a disabled athlete. Unlike Reinertsen, Zupan bluntly states the objectives of his memoir, the lessons and perceptions he wants to change, when he states: “My goal is that when you read about what I’ve gone through, it will change the way you think about people in chairs, about friendship, and about life, because that’s what it has done for me” (5).

Identifying as Disabled

While comparing the memoirs, I notice the emphasis placed on how each memoirist wants to be defined, and identified in the opening chapters. Reinertsen continually identifies with and stresses athletics as the identity she most vividly constructs, while Zupan touches on all aspects of his identity but spends the majority of the chapter discussing the injury and how it has changed him. Both memoirists are successful athletes, who have been featured in multiple types of media, but Zupan was not born with his disability, unlike Reinertsen, and he plays into the overcoming story from which she tries to distance herself.

The ways each athlete tries to describe his or her physicality differs quite a bit. Not only do they emphasize gender and sexuality differently, but Reinertsen most prominently identifies herself through her petite frame. Reinertsen, who is trim, athletic, and 5 feet tall, is often smaller in comparison with those around her. She continually calls attention to this in relation to how she expects others to perceive her and in contrast how big and tough she believes her personality to be. Her first description of herself in the memoir is “I’m five-foot-nothing, and I weigh ninety-five pounds” (VII) and later as “one little person” (XXIV). These descriptions that just discuss her frame are the exception. She generally describes her body shape/type in reference to her disability, and sometimes to her gender as well. For example she states that she is “a short chick with a prosthetic leg in a high heeled shoe” (132) in reference to difficulties subway surfing, or “a one-legged, ninety five pound girl” (142) in reference to riding a bike in New York City. These discussions of her short stature and light frame as descriptions of her body are incomplete without reference to her gender and ability. Since female athletes are

continuously marginalized in comparison with their male counterparts, not only does her stature make her more vulnerable (or so she assumes), but her disability and her status as a woman also affect her body relations (Messner, 2007).

Zupan also discusses the toughness of his personality, but rarely contrasts this to his body. Instead, he emphasizes his body as tough, despite or because of his disability. "You see, I've been an athlete all my life...you name it, I played it before the accident. Now I've become known as the guy with the goatee, shaved head, and tattoos who plays murderball, also called quadriplegic rugby" (4, 2007). Unlike Reinertsen, Zupan has the ability to discuss his body before and after his injury. In the discussion of his athletic body before the injury, he states, "I was five feet 9, 172 pounds, and strong for my size." (12). Afterwards, he does not describe his physicality solely, except in reference to his legs, the body part most affected by the accident, when he explains that by sight, he has "average 31-year-old legs" (1). Similarly to Reinertsen, Zupan describes himself by his disability explaining that, "while I have impairment in all four of my limbs, which technically makes me a quadriplegic, I'm far from being totally paralyzed" classifying his disability. He continues to identify by his disability by often citing himself as crippled (170, 172, 176) or "the gimp in the chair" (163). In fact, gimp, echoed in the title of the book, is a common identifier for Zupan and his teammates.

Gender and Sexuality

While identifying as disabled is the most prominent descriptions the memoirists give of themselves besides characteristics such as athletics, they rarely only discuss this identity factor. Like in the previous descriptions of her height, it is not unusual for Reinertsen to continue referring to herself by her gender, specifically, as a "girl." In fact,

she more commonly gives this description than that of “woman.” While this may be assumptions of how other people feel about her, her choice of an immature and young term causes the reader to associate different characteristics to her than they may have had she referred to herself as a woman. While she sometimes assumes this gives her power, such as times when she assumes people underestimate her or will not argue with her because she is “a one-legged girl” (XIV), she may be unaware of the naiveté associated with this term.

In a few instances Reinertsen refers to her childhood, and in these cases the term “girl” seems more accurate. In some of these recollections she uses the term girl in order to juxtapose her personality. For instance, she says, “I was a tough little girl” (45). This contradiction between “tough” and “girl” seems purposeful as it gives her behavior more power than attributes culturally given to her body.

Similarly, the few times she does refer to herself as a woman, also seem quite purposeful. In one such example, Reinertsen discusses one of her first relationships. It is the feelings conjured up in relation to another that allows Reinertsen to “feel like a whole woman” (57). Choosing to identify as a woman in this recollection associates her body with more autonomy and maturity, something one would expect in a sexual relationship. These contrast with a previous description of a time when she professes to have “felt whole” (read as “normal”) in relation to her introduction to track as an adolescent when she says, “For the first time in my life, I felt like I was whole” (27). Reinertsen’s age, innocence, and hope in this situation would seem out of place in reference to herself as a “woman,” unlike the logical identification happening a few years later. In each of these instances, the discursive choice to identify as gendered or not in the situation has the

possibility to affect how the audience understands her thoughts and feelings in those moments.

Zupan never describes himself by his gender, or discusses masculinity on its own. Instead, Zupan's ideas of masculinity and his own identification are made in conjunction with descriptions of sports and sexuality. Lindemann and Cherney theorize this conjunction as a trend for male wheelchair athletes. They discuss how certain characteristics of the sport such as the intensity and willingness to sacrifice their bodies are, "viewed as part of a 'macho' and masculine image, wheelchair athletes can be viewed as using sport to communicate to ableist society that they are not weak, passive or frail" (2008, 108). The masculine characteristics associated with the sport continuously entangles gender/sexuality with athletics. All of these intertwining identities can best be uncovered through a description Zupan gives of two of his murderball teammates. He states, "They had good jobs, and girlfriends. They were men to me. Role models. I aspired to be like them. They had a certain swagger, and they casually referred to each other as gimps, co-opting what had once been a derogatory term for disabled people and defusing it by making it their own" (211) The politics of language are often used in life writing to challenge oppressive terms. Butler (1993, 263) notes that words are often redeployed and used in this way as forms of political strategies. In this case, Zupan looks up to the men for being able to co-opt the meaning of these words. Stating that these two teammates were "men to me," shows the importance of dating women, refusing to be seen as less than for their disabilities, and to sports defining what makes something masculine.

Both Reinertsen and Zupan identify using gender and sexuality. Reinertsen's linguistic choice to identify herself as a woman appears in close proximity to writing herself as a sexual being, with desires and apprehensions. As Kafer (2013) notes, one of the key ways to employ queer theory is to identify outside of the binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality. Since neither Reinertsen nor Zupan identify specifically as heterosexual or homosexual, it would seem as though they were promoting instances of queer theory. In actuality, she and Zupan do not blatantly disclose a sexual identity at all because of the privilege and naturalization attributed to heterosexuality. Despite this lack of disclosure, the audience can gather that they identify as heterosexual through their discussions of all sexual partners as a certain gender—and perhaps therefore believe this identity to be natural/invisible and not in need of defining (McRuer, 2006).

Instead of identifying sexuality in or outside of the binary, Reinertsen, and to some extent Zupan, defines her sexuality in terms of her disability. She was dumped by her first boyfriend, and later learned that this happened because of bullying she received based on her prosthetic (46). This early relationship was only discussed in terms of first crushes and other passive language. A few pages later, the audience is introduced to the first person Reinertsen truly desires. In these few pages the audience is not only introduced to plot thickening, but to a maturing of Reinertsen herself.

Reinertsen discusses her relationship with David by disclosing her desire, comparing their relationship to movies, and describing her first sexual acts—those she thinks about before their relationship progresses, and those that actually occur. It is in the disclosure of what occurs that the audience sees its first taste of intimacy and the sexuality with which one learns to understand pieces of themselves and others.

Reinertsen describes falling into bed with David and “passionately making out. [She] was totally in the moment...or *almost* totally in the moment. [She] couldn’t let [herself] go completely because in the back of [her] head, [she] just kept thinking. *You’re going to have to take off the leg*” (55). This is the first time Reinertsen discloses her conflated disabled and sexual identities. While she previously mentions the story about how she assumed her first boyfriend felt in relation to her disability, it was not how she herself conflated these identities. Reinertsen’s disability is what is of chief importance to her in this moment, not her race, gender, etc. It is her disabled identity that becomes most important to her in relation to sexuality. Later, Reinertsen describes that both she and David passed the test and she felt comfortable intertwining these identities, allowing the intimacy and privacy around parts of her disability to overlap with her sexuality and relations to others.

Although Reinertsen feels intimate with David in terms of sexuality and disability, she immediately discusses this in terms to her own feelings about her body’s attractiveness. Not only does she later reveal that she only ever felt 100% comfortable being naked with one other person (85) but she discusses her tendency to cover up her stump at the beach because to “show[s] the stump isn’t attractive...the simple fact is I don’t like the way it looks” (56). In this regard, Reinertsen reveals her own insecurities in terms of her intersecting disability and sexuality.

Zupan often talks crudely about sexuality and does not always relate this to disability (or himself), but instead, changes the way he discusses both sexuality and intimacy prior to the injury. In the early chapters of the memoir, Zupan often defines himself in relation to his first girlfriend, Kati, and how they were affected after his

accident. He talks about Kati, and other women, in terms of sexuality—often objectifying them, before the accident. Afterwards, he talks about the “unspoken intimacy in the way she cared for me...I felt lucky to have her in my life. If I didn’t get better, no girl was going to want to go out with me. Women as pretty as Kati don’t dream about hanging out with crippled guys” (121). Not only does the way Zupan discusses their relationship change, but even though Kati is caring for him, he still discusses her in terms of her looks. The self-deprecation he confesses after the accident continues to shape the way he understands his sexuality and relationships with others. One of his biggest concerns after the accident is being able to have sex. He discloses the importance of sex to his life, “All my friends used to talk about were playing sports, drinking beer, and getting laid. But what if I could get hard but couldn’t bust a nut? I had been sexually active for a couple of years with Kati...” (144). Identifying the importance of sexuality to his relationships with his friends was important, but he later admits how much sexuality affects how he intersectionally identifies himself. “Being able to have sex with a woman was the way I defined my manhood. Without it what would I be? The only answer I could think of was ‘less than a man’” (145). Not only does Zupan intertwine sex and gender in typical heteronormative fashion, but also assumes he loses part of his sexualized and gendered identity because of his disability.

Zupan’s intersecting sexual and disabled identities continued to bring him questions as he progressed in rehabilitation. He worries about what sexual activities he will be able to do, and after a detailed telling of the first masturbation after the accident, he has one time complications with orgasming, which even after a doctor’s green light still makes him feel awkward and hesitant in performing sexually (157-158). When his

relationship with Kati ends, he blames the disability and sexuality mix, and thinks to himself, “*You’re so delusional, you think that she actually enjoys having sex with you. You know when she closes her eyes she’s fantasizing about fucking other guys. Maybe she’s right. You are pathetic*” (163). This blame on a linked sexuality and disability weakens his confidence and affects much of how he previously identified.

It is not until the reintroduction of sports (chapter 12) that Zupan begins to have confidence in his sexuality again. Sports, and an athletic body, were integral to the way Zupan identified all aspects of himself. In fact, he links sport and sexuality quite clearly when he states, “The release I felt as we slammed together was immediate and satisfying. Yes, I know it sounds like I’m describing something sexual. I’m doing it on purpose. For me, playing sports again was almost as good as having sex. Almost” (206). Disability sport is intimately tied with sexuality and brings Zupan back to the confident man he was before the accident. However, his sexuality is altered and he describes himself as a “different kind of lover” (226) and his new preferences after being in the chair.

Disability, sexuality, and sports are all key components to the intersecting identity of Zupan. This intersection is common in many sports, but wheelchair rugby can specifically emphasize not only compulsory heterosexuality, but ableism as well.

“Ablebodied rugby is particularly associated with masculine characteristics. Wheelchair rugby players likely reify heterosexist and ableist notions of what it means to be a ‘man’ and how to appear ‘manly.’ Quad rugby players, then, contest stereotypical notions of disability while simultaneously accepting and reifying ableist values” (Lindemann and Cherney, 2008, 110). Zupan’s sexuality is constantly entwined with his athleticism, and much of this stems from the cultural associations of masculinity, heterosexuality, and

sport. While attempting to be seen as more “athletic” by highlighting masculinity through a participation in heterosexist language and actions, quad rugby players promote ableism while trying to counter stereotypes. Intertwining sexuality and sport is what brings back Zupan’s confidence, but he does so by participating in the same sports culture he and other disability activists try to combat.

Race

The discourses surrounding memoirists’ gender, sexual actions/feelings, and disabilities are repeatedly mentioned in multiple situations. However, their identities are never mentioned in terms of race. Like heterosexuality, whiteness is heteronormatively seen as “natural” and therefore not in need of definition.

That whiteness frequently operates invisibly as an unexamined normative discourse is also powerfully evident in the taken-for-granted assumptions that ‘race’ is equated with people of color and that Whites somehow exist as raceless beings outside of the process of racialization. Dominant notions of ‘racelessness’ encourage Whites to view race relations and racial disparities as something that is not nor should not be part of their everyday concerns (McDonald, 2010, 157).

These dominant notions of White privilege make race practically invisible in these memoirs. While some of the lack of discussions of race could be attributed to pressures from the publishers and the scope of what is possible to talk about in one memoir, the amount of other identity work in these memoirs make the absence of race particularly noticeable. Ferri notes that this is a common trend as “the proliferation of disability life writing continues to privilege White bodies” (Ferri, 2011). In these specific instances of life writing Zupan never mentions race, and Reinertsen refers to herself as blonde on multiple occasions, hinting at cultural privileges and race, but never stating these outright. Instead, these references are made in collaboration with other identity factors such as short and disabled, making them less about race and more about overcoming

stereotypical associations with her body and athletic success (XXI, 116). Aside from hair color, race is absent from Reinertsen's narrative except for one story that could be analyzed in terms of her skin color. In the first chapter of the book, Reinertsen describes journeying to Spanish Harlem with her family in order to get her first pair of prosthetics made. She says, "Coming from suburban Long Island in our tan 1980 Volkswagen Rabbit, we stood out like four lily-white sore thumbs" (3). This implication of her race was only made apparent and important in relation to the race of others, not to the way she identifies her race. This absence of race shows the lack of importance she places on this characteristic to her identity.

Similarly, race is only mentioned in *Gimp* in one small section where Zupan compares race and disability. "The other thing I've read about myself is that I play quad rugby with so much intensity that people forget I'm disabled. This bothers me a little bit. I get what they are trying to say and thank them for the compliment, but the two concepts aren't mutually exclusive. That's like saying that Denzel Washington is such a good actor that you forget he's black. I can be disabled and still play really fucking hard. Apologies. I should have warned you that I'm not the most politically correct guy in a chair" (7). Like Reinertsen, this discussion of race is not to identify himself, but instead compare cultural marginalizations. This lack of discussion of race can leave the audiences with questions about the memoirist's privileges and how these have afforded and affected many of their stories, regardless of struggles faced along the way.

Marginalization

While Reinertsen does not mention race, she often does talk about class and the importance of money in her suburban upbringing and the tensions caused by her family's

monetary struggles. These continue to be disclosed in terms of her education, her family's changes through divorce, etc, and her jobs and need of sponsors in terms of athletic training and travel. While Reinertsen never once discloses these issues in terms of her own identity or how she chooses to define herself, she does discuss the pressures related to the lack of security or necessary work the money troubles cause.

While Reinertsen does not identify based on class and race and the privileges and disadvantages these culturally construe, she does discuss the marginalization of disabled individuals, a category with which she continually identifies. Interestingly, her biggest discussion of disability marginalization happens as she explains that all of her assigned roommates at college also happened to be disabled. This discussion is done through comparison with racial struggles for equality. She states, "We were like African-Americans, circa Jim Crow. Delilah, Donna and I were being segregated and ghettoized. Did the school put all the Asians in one room, and all the Hispanics in another? All my other friends rooms seemed to be mixed, why wasn't ours?" (80). This is the first time Reinertsen discusses disability as a collective identity. It is not just her, or on occasion other athletes, but the entire disability community that is marginalized without thought or knowledge of the ethical problems of this segregation and marginalization.

Zupan discusses disability marginalization through a newfound awareness following his injury regarding the lack of disability accessibility and the objectification of disabled bodies. In leaving his rehabilitation center at the hospital, Zupan has trouble finding a section of sidewalk slanted enough to allow his wheelchair to get onto the street. "This was the first time that I noticed the almost invisible world of handicap accessibility" (130). Even at a rehabilitation hospital, this accessibility did not exist. It

also was unnoticeable to Zupan until, he himself, was marginalized in this way. Although this experience was enlightening in terms of political marginalization, it was not discussed again. Instead, Zupan chose to discuss the social marginalization of disabled individuals. He states, “One thing I could never get used to is the steady erosion of dignity that comes with an injury like mine. The doctors and nurses would constantly poke and prod me and roughly insert various object into different orifices and veins without so much as asking my permission” (109). This objectification was also personalized as Zupan marginalized himself though referring to his paralysis as a problem (120) and himself as a “freak show” (130) and lame (163). Perhaps it was this denigration of himself after the accident that encouraged him to deny his disability (108, 134). As he continually emphasized, it was athletics that changed these feelings and ultimately credits murderball as “more than a game. It's the sport that saved my life” (4). It was athletics that allowed him to accept his disability and gain disability pride.

Reinertsen not only highlights feeling marginalized and objectified by her disability, but refers to her prosthetic as something non-human, making her in part, something other than (read less-than) human. In reference to being fitted for a new prosthetic, Reinertsen indicates that she “felt more like an object than a human being” (10). Being defined by her disability and being seen for only her prosthetic made her feel as though she was something to be stared at and controlled, not human. While this instance discusses her disability as being the only aspect of her identity seen by others, at the end of the memoir she states, “Yes, I would always be part animal, part machine, but knowing that I conquered Kona [The Ironman course] helped meld those two parts into a single, fulfilled, satisfied unit” (214). Reinertsen sees her prosthetics as part machine, but

through the accomplishment of certain tasks, she feels as though that portion of her body is melded with the rest of her identity, bringing her satisfaction. However, she must accomplish certain tasks seen as unfeasible for disabled individuals before she feels as though her disability is more organically part of her body.

Reinertsen, however, did not have an accident that changed her perceptions of her identity and body. Organically accomplishing tasks that are culturally assumed to be unimaginable for disabled individuals is further enhanced because of her gender. In the field of athletics, female athletes are already contested (Krane, 2001), but disabled female athletes are even more scrutinized. Disabled female athletes live in a society for which “double jeopardy exists for the athlete who is both female and disabled” (Olenik et al, 1995, 57). Disabled female athletes must continue to stress their disabilities and femininity in order to challenge and avoid marginalization and stereotyping in an effort to achieve recognition for athletic success. This could be why Reinertsen continually stresses her athletic successes and defines herself as an athlete first and foremost.

Although Reinertsen is constantly juxtaposing the ability of her body to that which is culturally assumed, she discusses the marginalization of female disabled athletes as a whole in terms of the availability of elite competition. In international competition, this lack of availability was often due to the lack of female disabled athletes in many other countries (39). In reference to the Junior World Disabled Championships, She states:

It wasn't a fair race—it was kind of a stupid race when you think about it—but at least there *was* a race. This sort of thing continued to be a problem for over a decade; as recently as 2004, female classifications were similarly combined at the Paralympics...It became next to impossible to recruit other women to race, because how can you tell somebody that there was a chance that they'd train for

four years and end up racing against people who are considerable more and/or less able than them? (39-40).

This type of marginalization based on the previous denial of female able-bodied athletics has negatively impacted disabled athletics for years. Reinertsen's own Paralympics experience was lessened based on the different abilities of the other female runners. She states, "What was supposed to be an equal opportunity event turned out to be an unfairly weighted fiasco. I also felt for all the other girls, because I thought we women were being marginalized" (62). In this instance, Reinertsen realized the impact that gender has on the level and appreciation for disabled athletics. In her epilogue, she confronts not only the stereotypes of gendered athletics, but that of gendered disabled athletics: "I suppose I've always been trying to make up for the athlete I was told I couldn't be when I was six, trying to prove that a woman with a disability deserves her race at the Paralympics, trying to demonstrate that a woman with a disability can finish an ironman, and should be welcome on the soccer pitch, softball field, or swimming pool" (221). It is not only her marginalization that she counters through this memoir, but that of disabled athletes (especially disabled female athletes) in general.

It is the marginalization of disabled individuals that pinpoint many of the reasons a disabled individual might look upon his or her disability as a hindrance or disadvantage, such as was discussed previously in regards to Zupan. Reinertsen, however, takes action and attempts to pass as able bodied. Reinertsen discusses passing in terms of a strategic advantage during the orientations for *The Amazing Race*. In this instance, she used long pants to cover up her disability so that she could keep this hidden from the other contestants as nobody disclosed their identities. While passing may have provided her

benefits because she could keep this aspect of her identity hidden, her attitude towards her disability was that of a hindrance and disadvantage, not something positive that makes her unique. She discusses technical issues with her prosthetic as one of the hydraulics does not properly function and states, “It was another pre-*Race* hiccup, but it was what it was, and I had to accept and deal with it. I’d been in dozens of competitions where I was the only disabled woman, so I was used to being at a disadvantage” (XIII). Rather than having pride in her disability or seeing it as an advantage, she identifies her disability as a disadvantage. This type of attitude often comes from the compulsory able-bodied attitudes discussed by McRuer (2006). Reinertsen participates in the stereotype, “a system of compulsory able-bodiedness repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the question, ‘yes, but in the end, wouldn’t you rather be more like me?’” (McRuer, 2006, 9). By stating her disability as a disadvantage, Reinertsen allows her readers to assume a “yes” to this question, one that disability scholars, activists, and theorists continually combat. Even though Reinertsen did not change from able-bodied to disabled after an injury, it is the cultural assumption that disability is inherently negative that causes Reinertsen to feel as though she is less able and therefore less capable than her competitors.

Disability Pride

Reinertsen discusses defeating Kona and other accomplishments in terms of pride and happiness with the ability of her body, and the book in general lends an overall tone of courage, inspiration and success. However, Reinertsen only admits disability pride outright on one occasion. Reinertsen’s prosthetics were made for the intention of passing, but did not do the job well. While narrating wardrobe difficulties in high school, she

declared that she likes the shiny metal and “was satisfied with [her] handiwork. It was a pivotal, burning-of-the-bra kind of moment. For the first time, I truly owned my disability. I was proud of my body... even the metal parts” (31). This discourse of disability pride allows the reader to see Reinertsen as not pitying herself for her disability or falling into the cultural tendency to equate disability with the negative and marginalized, but instead to own this aspect of her identity and be proud.

While Zupan is more forthright about his disability pride, the majority of the memoir focuses on the accident and being in denial of the injury. It is only the first and last few chapters in which Zupan associates his injury with benefits. In the first chapter he states:

In truth, my accident has been the best thing that could have happened to me...it has been the single most defining event of my life. And without it, I wouldn't have seen the things I've seen, done the things I've done, and met so many incredible people. I wouldn't have become a world class athlete. I wouldn't have come to understand and cherish my family and friends the way I do, and feel the kind of love they have for me and I have for them. In other words, I wouldn't be me, plain and simple (6).

While these statements focus on the experiences he has been able to have after the accident, the reader might wonder how he would have felt toward his disability if he had not have those experiences or if he had been born disabled. Typical of many illness narratives, Zupan's accident acts as an epiphany moment. As sociologist Arthur Frank says, “Almost every narrative contains some reference to the ‘new’ person that illness has produced out of the old self” (1993, 40). Through the art of life narrative, people are able to remake themselves rhetorically into whom they want to be. This performative act is reflected in Zupan's story as he follows this arc by talking about the negative traits he had

before his accident and transitions into the successful person he has become because of this journey.

Conclusion

Reinertsen was unable to have a defining moment such as Zupan's injury. She was not able to see how the world treated her before and after becoming disabled, or see what she may have been capable of, and who she would have been if she had been able-bodied. This significant difference in the two memoirists' work not only structures their attitudes and the ways they discuss prejudices and pride, but also informs the structure of their stories. While both Reinertsen and Zupan triumphed athletically and had interesting experiences to share, the timing of disability marks the ways the memoirs are perceived and what identities they most highlight.

Zupan continues to use crude humor and emphasizes the importance of sexuality and masculinity to athletics. Overall, he concentrates on repairing the sexual and "masculine" identity he sees as demolished after the injury, in order to become the person he needs to be to succeed in elite athletics. Reinertsen emphasizes her height and gender, but rarely discusses her sexuality in terms of defining herself. Her height and gender counter the expected idealized athletic body, whether disabled or able-bodied. It is this contrast that is most highlighted and makes her athletic success memoir-worthy. While she too plays into the overcoming story so common of disability narratives (Ferri, 2011; Couser, 2012), her memoir tries to balance this with tales of her athletic success, and determination. Zupan's memoir, on the other hand, frames its entire structure on an overcoming narrative. He lists all of his accomplishments at the beginning of the book, and then spends the rest of the memoir showing how he got to the place he was when it

was written. The timing of Zupan's becoming disabled is the factor that most differs from the narrative created in Reinertsen's memoir.

The other large difference is that of gender. Regardless of the timing of disability, would the two middle-class, white, athletes have similar experiences with disability sport had they been a different gender? The Paralympics concerns Reinertsen faced because of gender were not as big of a concern for male disabled athletes. Similarly, her need to show her athletic success capabilities despite the projections initially placed onto her body, could be considered less of a contrast were she a man. Reinertsen's memoir concentrates on countering this image against herself because of her disability, size, and gender. Without having to combat negative issues of gender bias in athletics, her narrative would not be as strong, nor would she be considered as impressive.

The way identities are discussed rhetorically in these memoirs depends on many intersecting factors, including the time of disability status. While this is generally not included in the way one defines himself or herself, it leads, in large part, to the stories created and shared. All of the intersections of identity at work in these memoirs hold pedagogical possibility, but the act of creating a memoir holds performative possibility for the memoirist and can cause readers to reflect on their own embodied experiences and identities.

The discourses surrounding disabled bodies and the bodies of disabled athletes in particular, are scarce, placing higher importance on the few works available. The way identities are narrated and constructed in these works not only emphasizes the overall goal of the books and memoirs and the patterns they employ, but also helps to combat negative associations surrounding disability and the capabilities of disabled individuals.

“Playing and winning in sport decouples ableist associations of disability and incapacity, for participation provides visible and tangible evidence of persons with disabilities performing with athletic skill and prowess. These messages are communicated as much to the players themselves as to spectators, and they inform the rehabilitation of identity from self-loathing and stigma to acceptance and pride” (Lindemann and Cherney, 2008, 120). By narrating their life experiences, the memoirists are able to provide the evidence that counters ableist assumptions of capability and promotes disability pride.

Although both memoirists are exceptional athletes, and are culturally understood as unexpected in idealized notions of sport, they do not share essentialized experiences. Both athletes notice prejudices against disability, and both surmount multiple obstacles to get to the level of success they have attained. However, the amount of differences and the individualized nature of each memoirist’s experiences help counter the assumed essentialized notion often faced by disabled individuals (Garland-Thomson, 2012).

Although Zupan employs moments of overcoming as a large structure of the book, he does discuss the successes of other disabled athletes as well as promotes the goal of changing societal perceptions of disability. Therefore, although he engages with the typical disability overcoming narrative, he refuses to let himself be seen as the only exception to the stereotypical portrayals of disability as one essentialized story. In fact, the overall message of his book is not of overcoming disability itself, but rather of embracing the change and claiming the preference for disability (Wood, 2011).

Consequently, although his memoir, and parts of Reinertsen’s memoir, show an issue and then explain how they overcame the issue, it is not the focus of either work. Instead, the

positive emphasis on disability and their accomplishments make these memoirs atypical of the genre and instead promote aspects of disability theory and rights.

The ways bodies are culturally seen as capable of certain feats create material effects. These individual memoirs help add to the literature and discourse around body capabilities and the importance of acknowledging all factors of one's identity, not essentializing them based on how able-bodied or not an individual is defined culturally. The sexual, gendered, racialized, classed, and disabled bodies all impact the individual story of each memoirist, and affect the athletic successes they were able to achieve. Narrating these identities through memoir allows the audience to challenge previous conceptions and discourses surrounding the capabilities of all bodies.

Chapter 3

Media Constructions

This chapter examines multiple media sources that describe and/or identify Sarah Reinertsen and Mark Zupan. The athletes are featured in multiple U.S. news and media sources ranging from national and local newspapers, web blogs, interviews and book/film reviews (This methodology follows similar formatting to Sloop, 2012). While most were written in the last 10 years, they range from 1999 to 2014. Zupan's media is concentrated most highly in 2005, after the release of the documentary *Murderball*, and Reinertsen's highest concentration of press ranges from 2007-2013.

The memoirists are identified and discussed in multiple ways. While some of these identities and descriptions seem similar, the subtle differences between them mark their importance in the intersectionality employed and the overall construction of these individuals. For example, describing someone as disabled and athletic may produce an overall similar statement to describing the same individual as disabled, athletic, and gendered. However, the political and historical implications of gender and sport make this difference crucial to the overall pictures of disabled athletes in media.

I will describe the different media sources' identifications in multiple themes: that of single category—where Reinertsen and/or Zupan are described by only one identifying characteristic; disability and athletics; disability, athletics and gender; The least common instances—those which discuss the outliers to the otherwise common descriptions; and sexuality. While no identifier determines everything that was discussed in a given media instance, the descriptions and identifiers directly linked to each memoirist impacts which

terms the writers most associate with these individuals, affecting the way these bodies are understood by readers.

Single Categories

In some instances, the media only identifies Reinertsen or Zupan based on one identifying characteristic. Throughout the memoirs, Reinertsen and Zupan continuously define themselves as athletes. In Reinertsen's case, the overwhelming emphasis is on defining and therefore legitimizing herself as an athlete first and foremost. Out of the supplemental material, Zupan is identified or described four times as an athlete or by athletic achievement exclusively. This is about 8% of all identifiers analyzed for him. Reinertsen, in turn, is described exclusively by athletic status three times, making this about 6% of all of her descriptors or identifiers.

Reinertsen is described as a "cyclist" (philly.com, 2012); a Nike sponsored athlete (Orange County Register, 2012); and an athlete in a list of other occupations (CNN, 2011). Zupan makes a guest appearance on the television show *Miami Ink*, being identified as a "world class athlete" (2010). He continues to be identified as an athlete, specifically "a fiercely competitive American" (*The Advertiser*, 2005); "Austin quad rugby player" (*Austin Chronicles*, 2005); and as "probably the best player in the sport today" by acclaimed critic Roger Ebert (*New York Times*, 2005). He also is identified by his position on the team as "U.S. Paralympic Rugby captain" (*Chicago Tribune*, 2005). While Reinertsen is associated with Nike and therefore assumed to be an elite athlete, this is not explicitly stated. Zupan, in contrast, is often described as more than just an athlete—whether this be by his status as one of the best, or by describing him with the characteristic of "fierce" which rhetorically helps associate Zupan with characteristics

associated with athletic success. Both athletes have achieved extreme success in their chosen sports, but the majority of Zupan's descriptions throughout the supplemental material emphasize characteristics that help the audience associate him with high levels of athletic success.

Unlike Zupan, Reinertsen is described only by her disability. In two very different instances, Reinertsen is noted and defined based solely on this status. The *Wall Street Journal* states, "Born with a tissue disorder, Ms. Reinertsen, 37 years old, had her leg amputated at NYU hospital when she was 7" (2012). While this quote does use descriptors such as "her" and "Ms.," she is not defined by her gender, simply named and discussed by pronouns. The *Orange County Register* more simply introduces Reinertsen as "an above-the-knee amputee" (2008). Defining Reinertsen based on her disability and/or her impairment at birth is only focusing on one aspect of her identity and leaves out her accomplishments and the other identity factors which impact her experiences.

Reinertsen is also defined solely by her gender. A segment on fox4news describes her as a woman twice (2012). Although they later discuss her accomplishments, these are not stated as characteristics, only accomplishments. For example, she is not defined as a runner, but instead someone who has participated in races. Instead of describing her based on her accomplishments, her gender is what is emphasized, as if calling to the fact that her accomplishments are more newsworthy because she is a woman, and therefore less expected for athletic success. This may stem from women's athletic media coverage. Female athletes are given significantly less coverage than male athletes, Michael Messner states that "The mass media's continued marginalization of women's sports serves to maintain the myth that sports are exclusively by, about, and for men. Women's athletics

is booming as never before. However, if it is not covered in the mass media, we can conclude that in a very real way, it simply did not ‘happen’” (Messner, 2007, 158). The amount of media coverage designated to disabled athletes is miniscule compared to able-bodied athletes; female disabled athletes only receive a small portion of the already insufficient amount of coverage (Tynedal and Wolbring, 17-21). Since the coverage of Reinertsen and other female disabled athletes is already so rare, there is increased importance on the way these athletes are described, identified and framed in these media portrayals. It is noteworthy that none of the supplemental material refers to Zupan only by his gender, since that is not newsworthy at all, and is instead the expected gender needed for performing athletic success.

Unlike being defined based solely on his gender, Zupan’s only other instance of being singularly defined is based on his masculinity. As Gard and Fitzgerald say in their critique of Murderball, “Indeed, whatever else may be said about Murderball, it is first and foremost, a story about the performance of masculinity” (2008, 133). These discussions of Zupan, specifically, comment on his physique and attitude. They are not based on his disability, but instead feature characteristics associated with masculinity and therefore commenting on a combination of his gender and sexuality. This is such an important description of Zupan that is awarded almost 25% of all his media descriptors and identifiers. One instance describes his sexuality explicitly with this masculinity as he’s stated as “Hardpartying Zupan...a ladies man...’These guys are sexual beings...in fact, they’re hypermasculine’” (*The New York Post*, 2005). Garland-Thomson emphasizes this trend stating, “sport culture typically provides men with a masculine heterosexual identity...For the murderballers, disability intensifies rather than attenuates these anchors

of masculinity...virile and vibrant heterosexuality also defines the masculine athlete” (Garland-Thomson, 2007, 115-116). Masculinity and sexuality become incredibly important identity characteristics for these athletes because of their gender and disability, this emphasis is recognized and echoed in the media coverage.

Zupan is described by only his masculinity thirteen times. His masculinity is defined or alluded to by descriptions of his hard-hitting attitude and/or his hair and the culture significance we have given to certain facial hair styles and body art. In *Maxim* he is described as “a red-headed Texan with mean tattoos and a matching attitude” (2002). The *Lincoln Journal Star* identifies him as “tattooed and goateed” (2007). This is expanded by the A.V. club which describes him as “Aggressive, tattooed Texan” (2005). The *Intelligence Journal* of Lancaster goes into even more detail—“With his fiery goatee, blunt sense of humor and game-scarred chair, he’s an intimidating site” (2006). Similarly, in the documentary *Murderball*, Zupan is described by the narrator as “the tattoos up his arm and the goatee, he’s intimidating” (2005). In these instances, his characteristics are not only assumed to be intimidating and therefore hegemonically masculine, but are stated outright.

Descriptions of Zupan as masculine continue as he’s described simply as a “cocksure punk” by the *Birmingham Post* (2006); and a “tattooed hot shot” (*Oakland Tribune*, 2005). Roger Ebert, renowned film critic describes him as “a goateed and tattooed All-American, who is an engineer in his day job” (2005). A movie review from *toldeblade.com* states “With his red hair and intricate tattoos, Zupan in a force of nature” (2005); “With his shaved head, copious tattoos and long goatees, Zupan—fiercely opinionated and candid—is a documentary star for people who hate documentaries” (*The*

Advertiser, 2005). Not only are these “masculine” characteristics, but characteristics which are to be assumed to be positive and will create a common bond between unlikely documentary viewers and Zupan himself. These characteristics are “intimidating” yet also alluring. “Zupan—gruff, tattooed and goateed—is a deceptively thoughtful guy” (*Tulsa World*, 2005). This deceptive thoughtfulness is only mentioned in this one instance, making his allure stem from the masculine characteristics and looks, not the surprise behind them. This allure seems strange when Zupan is described as “a tough-as-nails man with a bristly goatee and a tattooed hide” (*The Santa Fe New Mexican*, 2005), and “emblazoned with tattoos, his strong face turned demonic by the addition of a long, flame-red goatee, his will and energy relentless, and his willingness to scream obscenities...endless” (*Washington Post*, 2005). These tough characteristics are received positively because of their association with masculinity. Connell (1990) defines hegemonic masculinity as “the culturally idealized form of masculine character which emphasizes the connecting of masculinity to toughness and competitiveness” (83). According to Trujillo (1991, 290), masculinity becomes hegemonic in American culture when it encompasses “1. Physical force and control, 2. Occupational achievement, 3. Familial patriarchy, 4. Frontiership, and 5. Heterosexuality.” Trujillo goes on to say that sport has been the dominant institution for enforcing and reproducing this idealization of masculinity (291).

Bryan Denham and Andrea Duke show that these mediated assumptions between characteristics of masculinity and athletic success constantly reproduce the stereotypical assumptions about the capabilities of different bodies. “This dominant conception of maleness—a conception generally referred to as *hegemonic masculinity*—rewards

athletes who ‘hit like a man’ and ‘withstand punishment’ in sacrificing their physical well-being for the greater cause of a team or nation...sports characterized as masculine tend to involve danger, risk, violence, speed and endurance” (2010, 111). As the media continues to reward athletes for these characteristics (and punish those who do not exhibit such characteristics), they get associated positively with male bodies and athletic success (Trujillo, 291). This can have consequences for female athletes who exhibit these characteristics. Marie Hardin and Erin Whiteside note that “hegemonic masculinity dictates sports as ‘naturally’ and exclusively a male pursuit, making the image of a woman in sports a contradiction—rife with too much dissonance” (2010, 19). While Reinertsen is not punished for her success and the attributes she possesses that help her gain her levels of achievement, the media does not place these characteristics onto her body in ways they do for Zupan.

Disability and Athletics

The intersection of disability and athletics is crucial to the way these athletes and their accomplishments are understood in our society. Disability and athleticism is a common combination of identifiers for Reinertsen, in particular. Many of her most fame worthy accomplishments stem from her success as a disabled athlete, therefore, this common qualifier describes her on 17 occasions, roughly 35%. On many occasions she is described exclusively as a disabled or amputee triathlete (*Star Phoenix*, 2013; inspiremykids.com, 2012; whatdisability.com, 2010; *New York Times*, 2009; *Contra Costa Times*, 2007; *The New York Times*, 2007; *El Paso Times*, 2006; *Lowell Sun*, 2006; *The New York Post*, 1999). These nine times Reinertsen is discussed by her sporting event and disabled status, without indications of her specific accomplishments and

awards. Sometimes she is noted for her accomplishment of the Ironman triathlon (*The Valdosta Daily Times*, 2011; *St. Petersburg Times*, 2009; triclubsandiego.com, 2004) while another article only describes her athleticism and disability based on her appearance on “The Amazing Race” (*Philadelphia Daily News*, 2011) and yet another only by her appearance as a competitor and finalist in the Paralympics (“*The Village Voice*”, 2000).

Still others expand on her select athletic achievements and mention her as an ESPY award winner, Paralympian, Ironman, contestant on “The Amazing Race,” world record holder, motivational speaker, etc. (speakinc.com, 2014; [competitor radio](http://competitorradio.com), 2012; verytalentedperson.org, 2011; *Orange County Register*, 2009). The last instances describe Reinertsen by more than her athletic accomplishments and disability, The San Diego Sigma Chi Alumni Chapter describes her as “a magnetic woman with a potent message of strength and perseverance...a motivational speaker, athlete and mentor” (2009). *The Los Angeles Times* mentions Reinertsen as a disabled athlete, world record holder, and marathon runner, but also describes her positive and competitive attitude: “The attitude is typical of the vivacious Reinertsen, who though petite, has a powerful lean body” (2005). These are the only instances where Reinertsen is described by characteristics more than her athletic achievements and the latter is the only article that discusses her body and attitude as positive, beyond her disability.

Zupan is described much less often by his athleticism and disability. These markers are only attributed to him 6 times, making them about 12% of his coverage, almost 1/3 of that attributed to Reinertsen. In all but one instance Zupan is described as either the captain and/or player on the “Murderball” or wheelchair rugby US team, or a

wheelchair rugby player in general (barrierfreefitness.com, 2014; “One Bourbon, One Scotch, and One Bear”, 2012; *Omaha World-Herald*, 2007; *Austin American-Statesman*, 2007, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 2006). The TV pilot for the television documentary program that did not fully come to fruition, “Zupan Can” describes Zupan as “a Paralympic athlete, motivational speaker, author, and engineer” (2011). He is not only noted for his Paralympic accomplishments but also as successful outside of this realm.

Disability, Athletics, and Gender

As previously emphasized, the historical and societal implications of gender and athletics as well as gender, disability, and athletics make this differentiation from descriptions involving only disability and athletics worthwhile. Reinertsen is most prominently described through intersections of her disability, athletic success, and gender. Much of this stems from the fact that Reinertsen was the first female amputee to complete the Ironman triathlon. Many of the articles identify her based on accomplishing this particular athletic feat (sneakerreport.com, 2013; *Tribune Business News*, 2013; *Austin-American Statesman*, 2013; *Tribune Business News*, 2012; *Tampa Bay Times*, 2010; *Contra Costa Times*, 2009; *The New York Times*, 2007; *The Tampa Tribune*, 2007; *The Denver Post*, 2007; *Constitution*, 2006; *San Jose Mercury News*, 2006; *Akron Beacon Journal*, 2006; *New York Daily News*, 2005). These 13 instances make up just over ¼ of all identifiers given to Reinertsen. She continues to be identified based on her athletics, gender, and disability as she is defined not only by her success in the Ironman championship but with other accomplishments as well. Reinertsen is The “Amazing Race’ star and first female leg-amputee to finish the Ironman World Championship”

(*New York Daily News*, 2013); “The Ironman triathlete and Paralympian” (newcaptextri.com, 2013); “a multi-time Ironman (first female IM finisher on prosthetic leg), marathoner, record-setting track runner, and participant on CBS’s ‘The Amazing Race’” (cortthesport.com, 2013); “a woman who has an artificial leg—recent ESPY award winner” (*Akron Beacon Journal*, 2006); and “a world-record-holding female amputee” (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2001).

Still others describe Reinertsen by more than her accomplishments, while still defining her through gender, athletics, and disability. *Austin Fit* magazine notes Reinertsen is more than just an amputee athlete “the lady runs fast. After all, she’s an elite athlete, a 37-year-old marathoner and Ironman” (2013). Calling Reinertsen a lady not only identifies her gender, but also serves to contradict the typical associations between successful bodies of elite athletes and her own. Fitness.com also differs from others identifying Reinertsen by her gender, disability, and athletic success by stating “this 34 year old inspiration to all amputees. What makes her unique is that she is a one legged triathlete training for a two legged marathon. Reinertsen is the first female amputee to have ever won an Ironman. But this is only one of her many accomplishments” (2009). Not only is she given the characteristic of “inspiring” but this characteristic is only assumed to be valid between amputees. Why is she only an inspiration for disabled athletes? Is she only remarkable because she is disabled but participates in able-bodied races? Many disability studies scholars critique memoirs and other depictions of disabled individuals that fall into the trap of “inspiration.” These are often referred to as the “supercrip” narrative and feature someone (such as a disabled athlete) who is able to overcome obstacles and gain success (Couser, 2012, 33). These are

often the only types of stories heard and therefore are critiqued for not only pigeonholing one's experiences into one set of accomplishments, essentializing experiences, and ignoring privileges, but also for misrepresenting the lives of most disabled individuals. Since Reinertsen and Zupan could easily fall into this common narrative, it is important that this is not the only way they discuss their experiences in their memoirs. Also, it is positive that this is the only instance in which the media describes either of them in this way.

Mark Zupan identifies as male, therefore his gender is less highlighted than Reinertsen because he is the expected gender for athletic success (Messner, 2007). He also did not have a singular achievement based on being the first of his gender to accomplish a specific feat. Therefore, it is not unusual that Zupan is not identified in any instance by an intersection of gender, disability, and athleticism specifically. Instead, Zupan is described on multiple occasions by disability, athleticism, and masculinity. It is not his gender, but characteristics which enhance his masculinity that garner attention.

In about 1/5 of all descriptions, Zupan is identified based on masculinity and disability. He is often described by his status as either the captain, or a member of, the US wheelchair rugby team. In the instances that name his disability and athleticism in this way, he is also described as “tattooed Texan” (*USA Today*, 2008); “a tough guy” (attilacsordas.wordpress.com, 2007); “a wiry knot of muscle with a skinhead ‘do, a Mephistophelian goatee and the tattoos of a Maori warrior” (*Monterey County Herald*, 2005); “tattooed star” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2005); “tattooed and goateed and plain-spoken” (*Florida Times-Union*, 2005); “the bearded, buzz-cut, tattooed star” (*The Berkshire Eagle*, 2005); “maniacal-looking, tattooed, goateed” (*Palm Beach Post*, 2005);

“charismatic tattooed jock” (Entertainment Weekly, 2005); “the team’s death-metal-intense spokesman” (*The Orange County Register*, 2005); “tattooed...crass, funny and totally fearless...When he’s not competing, Zupan...can be just as much of a player” (*New York Post*, 2005). These six instances vary drastically as some describe him primarily by attitude, and others by physical appearance. However, all of them play into describing Zupan as masculine and a successful athlete. One instance is similar to the way Zupan describes sexuality in his memoir, and uses this masculinity to talk about sexuality, connecting his athletics and sexuality by describing him as “a player” in both senses.

Cynthia Barounis highlights this phenomenon when discussing the heteromascularity displayed in *Murderball* (2005). While this film is a staple in recent disability film, perhaps because “bodies shaped by sport are usually the most regularized we encounter, the particular inflections of these rugby players’ impairments add unexpected variegation to both their appearance and functioning” (Garland-Thomson, 2007), the emphasis on heteronormative sexuality for these athletes is especially pertinent to this discussion. The film highlights multiple instances of the players and others discussing sex and sexuality. The emphasis on being able to perform “normal” sex is a key concern for the players as well as those they with whom they have these discussions. The players continue to produce the heteronormative binary which queer theory attempts to dismantle. Cherney and Lindemann also stress the masculinity and its association with heterosexuality in this film, as they discuss the efforts of the players to “normalize” their bodies with hyper masculinity and hyper heterosexuality in order to shy away from the focus on their disabilities (210). As noted previously, the scenes from the film that

explicitly discuss sex concentrate on the player's abilities to hold erections and penetrate, producing ableist and heteronormative discourses (210). Gard and Fitzgerald state the point of the film is to "establish its characters as 'real sporting men.' That is, addressing the question of heterosexual functioning makes symbolic sense alongside the claim that these men are tough, cool, masculine men...these men are 'normal,' 'typical' sporting jocks" (2007, 135). Not only are the men emphasizing heterosexuality to mask cultural assumptions of disability but also to make them appear masculine, therefore exhibiting behavior typical of jocks. Masculinity, and therefore a rejection of identifying as anything other than heterosexual, is assumed to be key to the disabled men being seen as successful athletes.

Three instances which do not mention Zupan's status on the team echo similar masculine descriptions. A film review identifies him as "a muscular gladiator who lives to play quad rugby" (spiritualityandpractice.com, 2005), "Proud, Profane wheelchair athlete" (*Tampa Bay Times*, 2007) and the *New York Times* critics' pick identifies him as "a tattooed sitting gladiator with reddish hair, a goatee and a smoldering glare" (2005). These instances are similar to those above and continue to emphasize his passion for the sport, his physicality and his attitude. The other instance that describes Zupan in masculinity, disability and athleticism do not mention his position on the team, but instead focuses on other interests as well, and is the only article to do so. On MTV.com, Mark Zupan's "Murderball" journal introduces him as a "world-class athlete, beer aficionado and, for the time being, highly effective movie promoter...He's a music fan (Anthrax, Slayer, Jack Johnson, Modest Mouse). He's an all-star Paralympics Murderball player" (2005). In this instance it is not Zupan's physical characteristics or attitude that

identify him, but instead his interest in beer and taste in music which continue to make him appear masculine and therefore more likely to be associated with athletic success.

The Least Common Identifiers

Not every media instance fell easily into descriptions of athletics, gender, sexuality, or disability. As previously noted, most of Zupan's identifications come from descriptions of masculinity. Similar to the previous identifications, Zupan is noted for his disability and masculinity without mention of his athleticism in only two instances. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* notes him as "the muscled wheelchair poster boy for the headbanging documentary, 'Murderball'" (2005) and *Wisconsin State Journal* describes him in slightly more detail as "muscled, tattooed, wild goateed—and wheelchair-bound" (2005). Similarly, instead of describing him as in a wheelchair though still stating his athletic success, *The St. Petersburg Times* notes "his irreverent, occasionally profane attitude, his tattoos and grunge rocker beard... [He's a] world class athlete with a rock star personality" (2005). Regardless of mentioning his disability and/or athletic successes, in each instance the way Zupan's masculinity is described and identified paints a picture in the audience's mind which makes associating him with the aggressive, and intimidating characteristic associated with masculinity and therefore athletic success, easy to connect.

In rare instances, Reinertsen and Zupan are described by characteristics that do not discuss their gender, sexuality, disability and/or masculinity. Reinertsen is described solely on her location and new employment as a spokesperson for Ossur, which could associate her with athletics based on the company (*Orange County Register*, 2005). Zupan is described by multiple characteristics, but does not mention the identities

analyzed except for athletics. He is stated as “a movie star and an author, a public speaker and a civil engineer. He is a former soccer player, a current world-class rugby player, an alumnus of Georgia Tech University” (*Tampa Bay Times*, 2007). These instances are not common and are surprising since the fame of these memoirists rely on their accomplishments in disabled athletics.

Sexuality

In an ever rarer and strikingly dissimilar instance, Reinertsen is described based on sexuality from an ESPN magazine’s “body issue” where she adorns the cover nude, and has an interview. The Smithsonian Institute hosts an event titled “Everybody: An Artifact History of Disability in America” which discusses this issue of ESPN stating, “This ESPN magazine cover features runner Sarah Reinertsen, who has long blonde hair, a sprint leg, and is nude but seated demurely” (2014). This description of the magazine and the interview itself are the only instances that describe Reinertsen by her sexuality. This describes her blonde hair and physical characteristics as well as sexual attitude by the description of “demurely.” The interview goes into more detail as it begins by telling the audience to look at her right leg (the non-disabled leg) and quoting at length:

Just look at it. Look at the shape, the structure, the beauty, the thickness. When you look at Sarah Reinertsen, don't pay attention to the mechanically constructed leg that is partially responsible for making her famous -- look at the "other" one... But it doesn't stop there. It extends. Her arms, her hands, her feet, the arch in her back, her breasts, her butt. Yes, I wrote that. Because when discussing the body of this world-class athlete (2005 Ironman World Championship finisher, five-time amputee world-record holder, 2006 ESPY Award winner for Best Female Athlete with a Disability), it is necessary to accentuate the positive. And in Sarah's case, the positive is all over her... she might be one of the sexiest athletes in the world... There's a sex appeal to your whole body (2009).

This obviously sexual article is the only one that describes Reinertsen’s body in this detail and mentions her athleticism, gender, disability and a host of accomplishments but

does not focus on these descriptions. Describing Reinertsen by her sexuality is an outlier. Historically, when female athletes are described by their sexuality, they are trivialized and ignored for their athletic successes, resulting in the majority of media attention diminishing connections between these bodies and attributes associated with athletic success (Mean, 2010; Messner, 2007). However, the rarity of this instance shows that the reference to Reinertsen's sexuality does not fall into this pool.

Perhaps, this differentiation stems from her disability. Disability is often considered feminized. Schell and Rodriguez point out that, "prevailing stereotypes about disability and gender interpret female and disabled as synonymous terms...gender is a key factor to consider when examining disability sport because female bodies, like so-called broken bodies or disabled bodies, are believed to be restrictive and incapable of meaningful corporeality, including participation in sport" (2001, 128). The feminizing of disabled bodies is countered by female disabled athletes, such as Reinertsen, who push the expected boundaries of body capability. Denying the feminization generally associated with these bodies often results in a lack of sexualization, equating the disabled body with asexuality. The asexuality associated with disabled women further distances these athletes from their able-bodied peers (Scherrer, 2008; Schell and Rodriguez, 2001; Kaminker, 2000).

As discussed previously, perhaps the association of disability and asexuality explains why Zupan, and the rest of the Murderball crew rely so heavily on heterosexuality. They try to emphasize heterosexuality in order to be associated more clearly with athletic success. Participation in this sport is itself "a communicative act challenging ableist views of disability, and that the behavior of wheelchair rugby players

transforms the stigma associated with their condition via enactments of hypermasculinity” (Lindemann and Cherney, 2008, 107). The heteronormativity and hypermasculinity highlighted in this film are reinforced by the discussions with other players as well as heterosexual, able-bodied females. Barounis points out that the journey of the film leaves no room for female disabled athletes (448). Disabled women in sport are particularly stigmatized by both gendered expectations and the transgression that is often identified with disabled bodies in sport. This film is iconic to interpretations of disability and sport, making Reinertsen’s article in ESPN even more unusual and progressive because of its juxtaposition to the typical displays of asexuality and disability despite its repetition of heteronormativity.

A more common way to analyze prosthetized bodies is to see them as technologized. Reinertsen’s body, and those of other disabled individuals, is often looked at as cyborgian (Haraway, 1985). Her appearance for an ad for the car manufacturer Lincoln is analyzed and this half woman half machine attitude from Reinertsen’s memoir is echoed (Booher, 2010). She is not sexualized, but instead is noted as having parts of her body seen as technological and juxtaposed against the parts considered “natural.” The discussion of the car being agile and responsive is mimicked in the presentation of Reinertsen running, therefore, “she is technologized” (69). In this sense, Reinertsen is not sexualized, but seen as something other than natural and therefore other than human, a more common interpretation of prosthetized bodies. Similarly, Zupan and his teammates are described by Garland-Thomson as “cyborgs composed of steel fused with flesh...these men perform ultra-masculinity with disabled bodies, working against the stereotype of sidelined and dejected injured athletes” (2007, 115). She later states that

they are not described as succeeding despite disability but because of it, as both athletes and men (115). Interestingly, the stereotype of disability asexualizes and feminizes all bodies regardless of gender. It is the portrayal of these bodies in the documentary that frame them as hypermasculine through their cyborg like technology.

Absence of Race

Aside from sexuality being so prevalent for Zupan and virtually non-existent for Reinertsen, the other notable identity category that is missing in any of the coverage is race. As previously discussed, the rarity of whiteness being identified and described in media continues to be problematic. This trend is exacerbated in sports media coverage. Whiteness is “normalized” and stereotypes abound such as the fact that “sport journalists and broadcasters continue to promote essentialistic thinking by disproportionately praising white athletes as possessing outstanding intellect and industriousness and black athletes as possessing the presumed ‘natural’ talents of quickness, physical strength, speed, jumping ability and force” (McDonald, 160). In this particular study, the athletes are not defined at all by race and there is no comparison between media coverage based on race. However, it is interesting to note that perhaps this is challenged due to disability. While neither athlete is praised for intellect, they are both discussed at times in terms of quickness/speed and in Zupan’s case, physical strength and force. Does the appearance of disability challenge stereotypical notions about how the athletes are racially defined? Would the two memoirists have been defined differently if they were not white? Unfortunately, no cases of non-white disabled athlete’s memoirs have received the type of coverage afforded to Zupan and Reinertsen, so a comparison is unavailable. Unlike the media coverage trend, the characteristics attributed to the memoirists are not seen as

natural talents, and instead are seen as extraordinary because they are unexpected in disabled individuals.

Conclusion

Both memoirists are described based on their athletic achievements on multiple occasions. They are also both likely to be defined by disability in multiple ways, and because of the differences in their impairments, dissimilarities in these descriptions are expected. It is the way they are differentiated based on gender and appearance that are most staggering.

Although Reinertsen does have select few instances of being described by characteristics or her body/sexuality, these are rare and she is much more likely to be described by her achievements. Zupan, on the other hand, is most often described based on characteristics defined by masculinity, whether in appearance or attitude. While he is also described based on achievements, this is not his primary focus. Some of this stems from the portrayal of the U.S. wheelchair rugby team and specifically Zupan in *Murderball*, and this is crucial to the way Zupan's image is formed. The way Zupan emphasizes himself in both his memoir and the documentary gets noticed and reiterated by the multitude of sources identifying and describing him. The nature of wheelchair rugby makes a difference to the way we associate Zupan and masculinity, since it possesses multiple of the "hard-hitting" characteristics associated with male sport. However, speed and endurance are emphasized in hegemonic masculinity and Reinertsen possesses these characteristics but is rarely recognized for them.

Reinertsen is not often sexualized and/or trivialized by the media, breaking the cycle typically attributed to female athletes, but in comparison with Zupan, she is still not

perceived by the media to possess the characteristics necessary to be associated with athletic success. Describing her achievements and attributing characteristics synonymous with athletic success to her body are different. Inherently possessing these characteristics make one more likely to be identified as an athlete, something Reinertsen stresses in her memoir, not someone who merely participates in athletics.

These characteristics emphasize how the media perceives these athletes and the rhetoric surrounding bodies that are not typically associated with athletic success. The way these bodies are identified is crucial to not only the images of these individuals, but the ways we culturally understand the capabilities of all bodies. It is important to note that no instance of the media promotes anything other than a heteronormative identity for these athletes. Like their memoirs, Reinertsen and Zupan are never constructed as having a sexuality or gender that could be identified as outside of stereotypical binaries. While attempting to progressively change associations of disability, they continue to emphasize heteronormative ideals. I want to reiterate with the repetition of this quote. “Playing and winning in sport decouples ableist associations of disability and incapacity, for participation provides visible and tangible evidence of persons with disabilities performing with athletic skill and prowess. These messages are communicated as much to the players themselves as to spectators, and they inform the rehabilitation of identity from self-loathing and stigma to acceptance and pride” (Lindemann and Cherney, 2008, 120).

Chapter 4 Conclusion

The construction of identities in media helps determine the way these identities are understood, acknowledged, and discussed. The discourse surrounding disability and body capabilities often promotes ableist assumptions and negative associations with athletic success. Because of the lack of significant mainstream media attention, when disabled athletes do garner media attention, the ways they are constructed are crucial to the discourses surrounding disability and therefore hold possibility for change. Sarah Reinertsen and Mark Zupan wrote memoirs that discuss disability and the stereotypes surrounding it, as well as promote disability pride and body capability. Through their unique stories they are able to disrupt essentialist thinking and expand the dialogue around the possibility for disabled athletic success.

This analysis can be expanded to encapsulate the experiences of multiple disabled individuals. Perhaps individuals who have different impairments will express disability pride in additional ways. Although analyzing athletes seen at elite level of plays was purposeful for this particular study, not all disabilities are represented in this level of athletics, and all bodies should be given voice, not only those who prove capable in ways deemed impressive by able-bodied society. The inclusion of cognitive and mental disability would be an excellent addition to this type of work and may lead to fruitful results of constructions and discourses.

In this particular study, the way that the memoirists assumedly construct their own identities (with all pressures of the genre and co-writers) in the memoirs differs from the way they are constructed by others. While a media writer cannot describe everything

discussed in the memoirs, what they do choose to describe the individuals in some way. How they choose to identify these memoirists leads to a more thorough understanding of how gender, sexuality, athleticism, and disability are being constructed in society today. The individuals constructed through memoir and through media are discussing the same individual; however, this description is rarely equal.

In her memoir, Reinertsen emphasizes her athleticism above all else. She stresses this identity factor and then slightly less often, describes her physicality as petite, sometimes including gender and disability in these constructions. Her memoir continuously stresses how people view her body and the expectations of ability they assume, versus how tough and athletically successful she constructs her body.

Similarly, Reinertsen is described by the media most often as an athlete. This description is coupled with descriptions of her gender and/or disability, but rather than emphasizing gender to make her accomplishments seem more impressive and unexpected, they overwhelmingly do so because her gender and disability is what has made her the first female amputee Ironman. When she is not described by this particular athletic feat, she is still highlighted based on her identification as an athlete, and a triathlete or marathoner particularly. There are a few instances where she is characterized by these achievements, such as labeling her a world-record holder or elite athlete. These instances put her achievements into perspective and show the level of success and the sheer number of successes she has attained.

Although the media and Reinertsen's memoir both construct her as an athlete, she is rarely characterized by descriptors of athletic success, or as someone who has had important life experiences that have led her to these successes. While this could be due to

the length of the media instances in comparison with the memoir, it also could be because of the assumptions placed on disabled individuals capabilities. Rather than state her petite frame and the life experiences she has had in order to contrast these to her athletic success and make her attitude and determination what identifies her, the media may be assuming that the reader will already be surprised and awed by her successes simply because she is a disabled woman. Since this is not the idealized male athletic body (Cherney and Lindemann, 2009), she is doubly marginalized and assumed to be incapable of such feats (Olenik et al, 1995), making her successes out to be impressive and ground breaking. Because of the societal discourse surrounding disability and body capabilities, Reinertsen is already an assumed inspiration and supercrip, continuing the overcoming script and falling into the disabled tropes so dangerous to cultural understandings of disability.

The way Reinertsen is constructed in this media can really be understood when compared to the construction of others in media, specifically the construction of Zupan. Unlike Reinertsen, Zupan is constructed most often based on masculinity and characteristics associated with athletic success. While some media simply list his accomplishments and leave the understanding of his levels of success to the reader, they mostly attribute descriptions and identities to Zupan that further concretize this connection.

Zupan spends less time in his memoir describing or justifying his athletic successes. Instead, he mostly described the transition from being an able-bodied athlete to a disabled athlete, while also promoting his sexuality and talking in “typical jock culture” (Lindemann and Cherney, 2008). It is the intersection of sexuality and sport that leads

him to feel confident again, despite and because of his disability. Being able to once again identify as a sexual and athletic man allows Zupan to continue describing and identifying himself as the aggressive, arrogant, and tough man echoed in the media's constructions.

For both memoirists, the majority of the media's descriptions construct their identities in similar ways to the constructions of identity in their memoirs. Like Sloop (2012), these media were constructed through a close textual analysis. However, I expanded upon this method as Sloop uses frameworks of gender to differentiate the media and in this specific analysis, the interjection of intersecting identities was most important, rather than differentiating between frameworks of each identity category. Each identity was discussed in a variety of ways, but the most salient analysis showed how the media identified multiple aspects of a person's identity in one medium. I found this expansion beneficial and would advocate for the intersecting analysis as it shows more nuanced but distinct and important differences. While the media does not go into the vast detail of the memoirs, Reinertsen is described most often by her athletic successes, and Zupan as a successful and masculine athlete. However, it is comparison with one another that we see the differences attributed by the media based on gender. Reinertsen's memoir may be constructing her as an athlete first, and this may be the prime descriptor of her in the media, but it is lacking in the intensity and characteristics of athletic success seen in media of Zupan.

Perhaps the implications of these gendered differences can be best highlighted in terms of sexuality. For Zupan, the goal is to describe his masculinity and sexuality by his ability to have sex—a performance. For Reinertsen, it is about being seen as a desirable

subject. Although it is not unusual to want to be seen as desirable, this is very static compared to Zupan and shows the differences they experience in terms of gender and disability. Reinertsen being seen as desirable is something she discusses in her memoir and is discussed in the ESPN magazine article/cover. This is progressive for her because of the asexuality disability assumes, and the importance of disability being seen as something desirable. However, in order to promote herself as desirable, Reinertsen must fall into stereotypical heteronormative portrayals of female athletes. She must display her femininity in order to be equal to these athletes, all while continuing to be seen as less athletically successful than male athletes.

Similarly, in order to appear as “normal” and therefore as desirable as possible, both memoirists promote heteronormative tendencies. The expectancies exhibited by the genres of memoirs and athletics do not allow much room for bodies which are not seen as conventionally “normal.” Therefore, because these bodies are already disabled, they face more pressure to conform in all other identifications in order to most closely resemble the typical athlete or memoirist.

There were opportunities for these memoirs to open up and have queer potential, but these opportunities were not taken. Some of these opportunities include Reinertsen’s first discussion of her sexuality and taking off her leg. By discussing how the flux she was experiencing as she tried to make sense of her body and gender, brief moments could exist where her sexuality may have been forming as well. However, she stresses the heteronormative object of her desire and how he feels about her body. Zupan, on the other hand, could have experienced queerness as he continually intertwines his sexuality and sport. In this regard, he is experiencing release he attributes to his sexuality with his

teammates. However, the crude heteronormative language he uses and the ways he addresses the women in his life diminishes any possibilities of this sexuality being anything but heterosexual. These opportunities may have been missed because of the pressures of these genres or a host of other reasons which are dictated by societal norms. The heteronormativity exhibited by both Zupan and Reinertsen are typical of athletic culture. In order to play into this culture these memoirists must squash any questions about their particular sexuality because of the historical and/or contemporary links between queerness and disability.

Like gender stereotypes, disabled athletes often sought after recognition seen as stereotypical and unequal in able-bodied society. The constructions of these individuals in media still promote overcoming scripts, but do so to challenge negative portrayals of disability. Of course, only narrating the experiences of the extraordinary continues the assumption that disability is inherently negative and only the exceptional can achieve success. It is noteworthy that, like the memoirs, not all media continued this overcoming script and that some celebrated disability or acknowledged the athletes for more than their disabilities, instead. It is important to continue similar analysis to see if the passage of time shows differences to the way disability is described in the media and to analyze if the discourse around disability changes from this media and the publication of more memoirs. Disability pride is shown in the memoirs and the more literature such as these is promoted, the more possibility to alter the discourse around disability more generally.

Although the memoirs promote disability pride, they are by no means perfect. Like the media constructions of the memoirists, neither memoir acknowledges race and both assume compulsory heteronormativity. They challenge stereotypes surrounding

disability, and in Reinertsen's case, gender, but do not take on intersections of class, race, or sexuality to large degrees. In fact, the only progressive discussions towards sexuality promote ableist and/or heteronormative ideals while stressing the capabilities of performing sex as disabled. The dominant discourses surrounding disability are mentioned and tackled, though both have moments that engage in problematic scripts such as that of the supercrip or overcoming script. They crip the world around us and illuminate issues of injustice and inaccessibility, but do not acknowledge historical or political issues nor do they promote alternative genders, sexualities, races, etc. The memoirs are successful, however, in challenging assumptions of body capabilities and addressing societal prejudices and issues surrounding disability equality.

Like all performances, the construction of these individuals in the memoirs and the media hold potential for the memoirists to be remade. The construction of their identity can be altered based on each utterance which performs an aspect of identity (Pelias and VanOosting, 1987). Each of these performing utterances is performative. The memoirists may not be able to "be" the perfect gendered and/or disabled individual, but the performative effect of their text helps construct them in ways that deconstruct the problematic idealized forms. The way they are constructed is key to the success of their performance and the ability of this performance to change the discourse around disability and body capabilities.

While both memoirists were and continue to obtain elite athletic success despite and/or because of their disability, the idealized body remains an impossibility. The memoirs and to some extent the media construct these bodies to be as ideal as possible, regardless of this impossibility. In order to distance from the assumed stigma of

disability, the memoirs construct the individuals to be as “normal” as possible in other contexts (Goffman, 1963). Although Reinertsen does push boundaries regarding the assumption of female athletes as being less capable than male athletes, she does not particularly challenge gender assumptions in general. She is only ever constructed as a girl or woman, and challenges typical associations of femininity with characterizes she assumes to be masculine such as “tough” without challenging what defines masculinity or femininity. Both Zupan and Reinertsen continue to emphasize heteronormatively in regards to gender, sexuality, and race. They attempt to dissolve stereotypes of disability but do so while trying to appear as “normal” (heteronormative) as possible in all other aspects of identity. It is in the construction of their identities as gendered, sexual and athletic disabled beings that hold the potential for change, potential which is not achieved by either the memoirs or the media for any identity other than disability.

Despite the lack of ruptures in regards to gender, sexuality, and race, both memoirists help to change the negative discourse around disability, and should be celebrated for these achievements. It is in the slippages or the dismantling of the expected story or capabilities of bodies that resist dominant scripts that portray disability as inherently negative becomes possible. Narrating experiences allow for constructions of identities to be created which alter typical associations of body capabilities. Both memoirists are celebrated in the memoirs and other media, and express pride in their disability and accomplishments. These positive associations add to the discourse surrounding disability and counter negative portrayals. These countering narratives have material consequences as discourse surrounding disabled individuals is challenged.

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Vita

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