

A Qualitative Study in the Development of Self-Advocacy and Independence Through Symbolic Interaction: A Focus on Wheelchair Basketball Athletes

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Introduction

World War II was the catalyst for the development of wheelchair basketball, and it successfully served the athletes by providing therapy, distraction, fitness, and a sense of normalcy. Ludwig Guttman is often referred to as the father of wheelchair basketball. His patients were Holocaust survivors and World War II veterans.

Numerous teams began surfacing across the United States. As wheelchair basketball became popular, the sport evolved and teams combined to form the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA).

Today, in the United States, there are 13 competitive collegiate wheelchair basketball at nine universities. These students graduate at three times more often than other students with physical disabilities.

Questions

- 1. What are the lived experiences of students regarding self-advocacy and independence as a college student and inter-collegiate wheelchair
- 2. What are the perceptions of students regarding whether athletics is the best resource, or one of many effective resources, which teach the participant to mediate barriers and facilitate

Independence

Being able to do some things on one's own or with the assistance of another person. Wheelchair basketball made a positive physical or mental impact

I think I might be able to do more self-care on my own if I lose a little more weight... I have become stronger to do more things for my own care. I see Class 1's that don't need assistance, and that would be complete independence for me (Gwen, 2012).

Arizona women block a shot by Wisconsin.

They're [coaches] sure not all squishy soft and feely, but they are there for the players whether it has anything to do with the game or not... (Travis, 2013).

Support Systems

I hang out with some music folks and filmmakers... I'm not always talking basketball or sports. I guess I prefer to hang out with them so it's not always about the chair (John, 2012).

Choice and Opportunity

Mindy was introduced to basketball after choosing a different sport – women's traditional golf. Having the ability to participate in both sports gave her the opportunity to try out for the Paralympics. (Mindy, 2012).

Tyler dreamed of being an Olympic gymnast. The opportunity to play basketball kept that dream alive via the Paralympics (Tyler, 2012).

Trying New Things

My parents have been really insistent I do whatever my brothers do... I know I have support when I need it, but I am also free to try things, even if I don't succeed... I feel absolutely free that if I planned it out right, I am free to go anywhere and do anything I want to do... I've watched some of my friends with disabilities' parents just crush all their dreams because they can't let go like my parents did (Gwen, 2012).

Player Classification System

Little or no trunk movement or rotation. Balance is impaired, rely on arms to return to the upright position.

Some partially controlled trunk movement. Has upper trunk rotation but poor lower trunk rotation.

Good trunk movement and upper trunk rotation, but no controlled sideways movement.

Normal trunk movement, but has difficulty with

controlled sideways movement to one side.

4.5-point: Normal trunk movement in all directions and able to

reach the side with no limitation.

Tyler (Class 2)

- 21 year old junior
- Sports Psychology
- Spinal Cord Injury

Gwen (Class 1)

- 20 year old junior
- Music Education

Vertebrae Deformity

Swimming

Stephanie (Class 2)

- 23 year old senior
- pre-pharmacy
- Spinal Cord Injury

John (Class 1)

- 28 year old sophomore
- Film and Visual Arts
- Spinal Cord Injury Plays for fun

Abby (Class 1) • 24 year old fresh

- Chemistry
- Cheffine
 Spinal Cord Tumor
 Paralympian, tennis

Travis (Class 2)

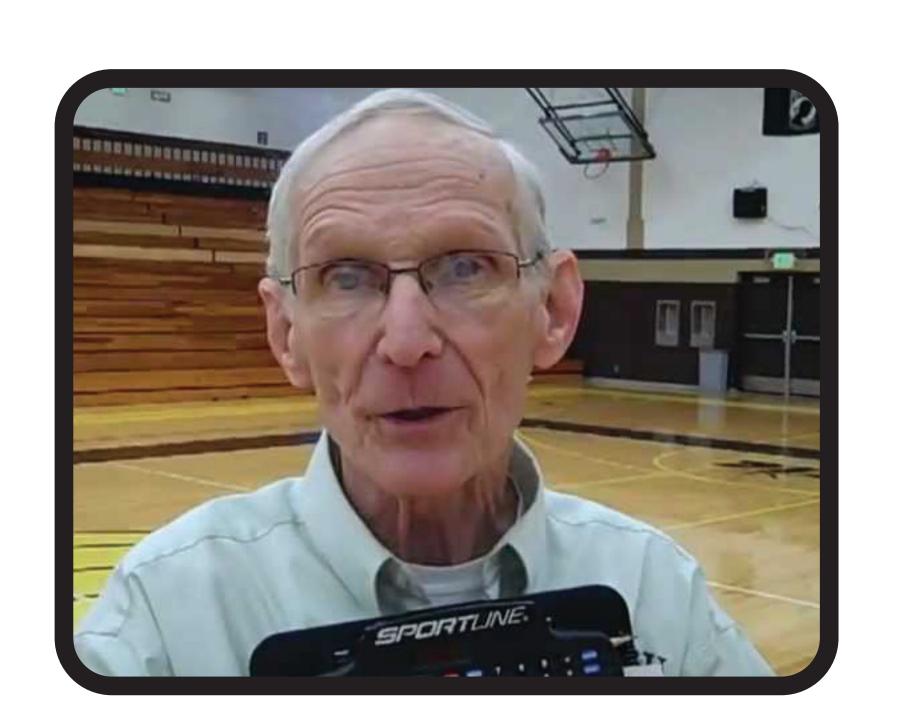
- 33 year old junior Advertising
- Spinal Cord Injury

Basketball

Mindy (Class 4)

- 19 year old sophomore
- Sociology
- Born with one lea

(Hendrickson, Boundless Determination, NCAA.com, 2013)



Wheelchair basketball

offered an antidote.

It reinforced players'

self-esteem and reduced

problems with depression

and obesity.

Academic performances

improved, and

their perception of

disabilities upended.

Shaver states the

impact bluntly:

"We save lives," he said.

Lew Shaver is the coach for collegiate wheelchair basketball at

- athlete?
- academic success?

Advocacy

Being able to make informed decisions, understand legal rights, and ask for assistance in ways that meet the needs of a given situation. Wheelchair basketball made a positive physical or mental impact on participants.

I'm more willing to go to professors and fight for what I need. At first I was scared they could give me bad grades just because they could, but they aren't like high school teachers ...they actually will usually hear me out and think about what I'm asking for (Abby, 2012).

Navigating Barriers

People I play with are very helpful and kind about doing things you need them to do, but they really force you to think about ways to get what you need or want on your own (Tyler, 2012).

I look at how my teammates brainstorm solutions... it makes me very aware of the fact that I shouldn't say I can't, when I see the things other players navigate (Mindy, 2012)

Role Models

I think we challenge what people think people with disabilities are able to do, but we are certainly far from perfect... (Abby, 2012).

I think from the first day on campus, the other players have been most helpful. They have taken my chair apart and told me best ways to be fast or get through mud and snow (John, 2012).

Asking for Help

I think if you asked any vet, it would be really hard... We have it pounded into our brains to be able to take care of things, and to give that up and let somebody else help you is a real challenge... (Travis, 2013).

Most of the time, I know that when I ask for help, I really do need it (Gwen, 2012).

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