

**SEEING WITHOUT SIGHT: AN EXPLORATION OF THE ATHLETE – GUIDE  
PARTNERSHIP IN HIGH-PERFORMANCE PARASPORT**

by

Staci Mannella

B.A., Dartmouth College, 2019

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Kinesiology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
(Vancouver)

August 2021

© Staci Mannella, 2021

The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the thesis entitled:

Seeing Without Sight: An Exploration of the Athlete – Guide Partnership in High-Performance Paraspport

Submitted by Staci Mannella in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Kinesiology.

**Examining Committee:**

Andrea Bundon, Professor, School of Kinesiology, University of British Columbia  
Supervisor

Mark Beauchamp, Professor, School of Kinesiology, University of British Columbia  
Supervisory Committee Member

Laura Hurd, Professor, School of Kinesiology, University of British Columbia  
Supervisory Committee Member

## **Abstract**

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired compete in Paralympic sports with the help of their sighted guides. The guide participates alongside the athlete, and the pair seek to achieve optimal performance together. The partnership transforms many sports such as athletics, cycling, skiing, and triathlon, which are typically understood to be individual, into team sports dependent on communication and rapport. The purpose of this study was to explore how the athlete – guide partnership is experienced in high-performance parasport. More specifically, the study sought to identify how interdependence is experienced within these partnerships and how the athlete – guide partnership challenges and/or reproduces normative assumptions of bodies, abilities, and sport. The study was informed by a critical interpretivist paradigm and included 12 semi-structured interviews with both the athletes and the guides from six high-performance athlete – guide pairs. The data were analyzed through a reflexive thematic analysis and four themes were constructed: “You Live as a Team, You Die as a Team” captured the unique benefits and challenges of working as a team in the athlete – guide partnership. The theme Better Together was guided by Poczwadowski et al.’s (2019) 5C’s model of interdependence and represents how athletes and guides uniquely experienced compatibility, closeness, commitment, complementarity, and coorientation. The next theme, Building Bridges: Connecting and Embracing Differences illustrates how the athlete – guide partnership can be used as a tool to challenge normative assumptions of dis/abilities, ab/normalities, and sport. Finally, The Uphill Battle describes how the partnership reproduces negative understandings of disability and sport. The study provides novel insights into how these partnerships are experienced and the ways in which interdependent relationships shape experiences and understandings of disability in the context of high-performance sport. Recommendations for sport psychologists and other sport professionals who support these partnerships are provided.

## **Lay Summary**

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired compete in Paralympic sports with the help of their sighted guides. The guide participates alongside the athlete, and the pair seek to achieve optimal performance together. The athlete – guide partnership was explored in this research through interviews with both the athletes and the guides. The findings suggest that there are advantages and challenges to shared sport experiences, and that athletes and guides uniquely rely on one another to achieve optimal performance together. The athlete – guide partnership provides a unique opportunity to reimagine normative understandings of bodies, sport, and ability.

## **Preface**

This research was approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioral Research ethics board (BREB number H19-03342). I conceptualized, designed, and carried out this work with the support of my research supervisor Dr. Andrea Bundon. A version of this research will be submitted for publication in the future.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Lay Summary</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>Dedication</b> .....	<b>x</b>
<b>Chapter I: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter II: Literature Review</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter Overview</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Theoretical Approach</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Research Areas</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Disability Sport.....	8
Conceptualizing Interdependence.....	11
<b>Justification and Relevance</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Chapter III: Methods</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter Overview</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Qualitative Research Methods</b> .....	<b>20</b>
Individual Interviews.....	20
Qualitative Research and Academic Rigor.....	22
<b>Participants</b> .....	<b>23</b>
Eligibility Criteria.....	23
Recruitment.....	23
Sample.....	25
<b>Data Collection</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Individual Interviews.....	28
<b>Data Analysis</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Ethical Considerations</b> .....	<b>34</b>
Researcher Reflexivity.....	36
<b>Chapter IV: Findings</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>“You Live as a Team, You Die as a Team”</b> .....	<b>42</b>
There is No ‘I’ in Team.....	42
Communication is Key.....	44
“A Work in Progress”.....	47

<b>Better Together .....</b>	<b>49</b>
“You Just Need to Click” .....	50
The Power of a Complement.....	53
Like One Person: Synchronicity in the Athlete – Guide Partnership .....	55
<b>Building Bridges: Connecting and Embracing Differences .....</b>	<b>56</b>
Parasport Culture .....	56
Writing New Narratives.....	58
<b>The Uphill Battle .....</b>	<b>61</b>
A Shot in The Dark: The Paradox of an Inclusive and Exclusive Sport System.....	62
Out of Our Hands: Agency in the Athlete – Guide Partnership .....	65
<b><i>Chapter V: Discussion .....</i></b>	<b><i>68</i></b>
<b>A ‘Critical’ Choice: Paradigmatic Alignment and Justification .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Interdependence .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Culture Clash: Wins and Loses of High-performance Disability Sport .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Disability Sport Narratives .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Practical Implications.....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Limitations.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Future Research.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Closing Remarks.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b><i>References.....</i></b>	<b><i>80</i></b>
<b><i>Appendices.....</i></b>	<b><i>87</i></b>
<b>Appendix A: Social Media Advertisement .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Appendix B: Consent Form.....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Appendix C: Demographic Form.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Appendix D: Interview Guide (Athletes).....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Appendix E: Interview Guide (Guides).....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Appendix F: Thematic Map .....</b>	<b>99</b>

## List of Tables

<b>Table 1:</b> Participant Demographics.....	25
<b>Table 2:</b> Athlete Experiences .....	26
<b>Table 3:</b> Athlete - Guide Partnerships.....	27
<b>Table 4:</b> <i>Themes and Subthemes</i> .....	41



## Acknowledgements

Should you choose to take on the endeavor of reading the following document, what I hope you will begin to see is the profound strengths we can find in one another when we choose to embrace difference rather than fight it. Like my own experiences in sport which are detailed in this document, this research was made possible because of the support of many people who have stepped up and chosen to guide me along the way. Thank you for graciously being my eyes, holding my hands, lending me your friendship, and inspiring me to be better and think differently.

More specifically, thank you to the twelve participants for your time, insights, and trust in me to share your stories. Also, thank you to the many people I have gotten to share mine with; Notably, my family: Mom, Dad, Matthew, Rachel, Liz, and Danny, my two guides: Kim and Sadie, and my incredible friends. You are the type of people who say you will change the world and actually do.

At the moment I am writing from Hanover, New Hampshire which, given the challenges of the past year, feels a bit like warmth after a storm. I have come full circle – perfectly imperfect – a place I have felt both utterly alone in my experiences, but also a strong, undeniable sense of belonging which would not have been possible without the support of many people who believed in me when I did not believe in myself. All of this is to say, strong mentorship matters and it has been a pleasure and a privilege to learn from several outstanding academics who made this path that at once seemed to be overwhelmed with obstacles feel a bit more manageable. While I can't list them all, the conception of this project began here in the Department of Anthropology at Dartmouth College over two years ago where I began to learn and feel how research can perpetuate mercy and kindness (Prince, 2010). Thank you Elizabeth Carpenter-Song for sharing your empathy and compassion, your openness to answer my endless questions, and your support in allowing me to explore some of my ideas that became the foundation of this work.

While the past two years wasn't quite what anyone expected, I am so grateful for the support and opportunities I have been given at the University of British Columbia. First and foremost, my research supervisor Dr. Andrea Bundon. The day we met I knew we *needed* to work together – We are cut from the same stone, and I truly could not think of a more appropriate advisor for this work. Thank you for supporting my career and inspiring me with your own, for leading me to doors I did not know existed, and for gifting me the language and resources to explore topics we are both so passionate about. Thank you to my research committee, Dr. Mark Beauchamp and Dr. Laura Hurd, for supporting my work and pushing me to make this research the best it could be. Finally, special thanks to Dr. Erica Bennett and Dr. Delphine Labbé. I know your time is valuable, so thank you for being gracious with it and supporting me through some of my more vulnerable moments. It has been quite the journey and I appreciate everyone who has been a part of it!

## **Dedication**

Dedicated to my first guide dog, Smidge. The most loyal and longest guide I have worked with but ironically not included in this document. You have quite literally brought the world to my fingertips. As the most educated dog I know, it is hard to believe that while I am at the very start of my career you are nearing the end of yours. Thank you for your service and friendship.

## Chapter I: Introduction

The International Paralympic Committee is the governing body of Paralympic sport. The word “para” means alongside and encourages people to think of the Paralympics as an equal to the Olympics, but for athletes with a variety of physical disabilities. The goal of the International Paralympic Committee is to create sporting opportunities for individuals with physical disabilities and to drive social inclusion through athletic excellence (Paralympic History, n.d.). The Paralympics and the culture surrounding disabled sports provides a unique framework for understanding the intersections of physicality, high performance sport, bodies, and impairments (Howe, 2008).

Though the Paralympics represent a wide range of physical disabilities within each sport, this research focused on the experiences of high-performance athletes with visual impairments. For the purpose of this study high-performance athletes included individuals who had experience competing in internationally recognized competitions. At the Paralympics, individuals with low vision or no vision compete in a number of sports including athletics, alpine skiing, cycling, nordic skiing (cross country and biathlon), and triathlon with the assistance of sighted guides. The guides run or swim alongside, ski in front of, or pilot tandem bikes for their visually impaired partners<sup>1</sup>. The pair communicate back and forth to achieve optimal performance as a team, and when medals are won, they stand on the podium together, creating a unique, shared experience unlike any other partnership in sport. These partnerships

---

<sup>1</sup> In some sports and classes, visually impaired athlete are ‘permitted’ but not ‘required’ to have a guide as is the case for athletes classified as B3 in nordic skiing. In other sports, the use of a guide is mandatory. This is in the case for all visually impaired athletes competing in cycling – the events for visually impaired athletes all involve the use of a tandem bike and sighted pilot.

transform many sports traditionally understood to be individual events into team events dependent on communication, trust, and rapport.

As a two-time Paralympian (Sochi 2014, PyeongChang 2018) I have witnessed just how remarkably close and unique the athlete – guide partnership is. Throughout my sport career I worked with two long-term guides. I started working with my first guide, Kim, in 2009 having minimal understanding of the adventures, opportunities, and adversities we would encounter together. At that point in my life, I needed a parent-like figure to travel with, a coach to teach me what it meant to be a high-performance athlete, and a guide to be my eyes on the mountain. Kim stepped up into all of those roles and, in return, I gave her an opportunity to be a ski racer in a completely new way. Together we traveled all over the world; I grew up alongside her and navigated my place in the world as a person with a disability. We set lofty goals as a team and, six years later, competed together at the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Games. After the Games, Kim decided to retire, so in 2015 I started skiing with a new guide, Sadie. We began our career together as strangers, but in our first season we quickly became friends and experienced almost immediate success. We won all three races in our debut series on the world cup circuit, settled into a routine of living out of suitcases, and learned to enjoy each other's company. My dreams became hers and, over the next three years, we learned to navigate our partnership through the wins and losses both on and off the slopes. We complemented each other with unwavering loyalty, brutal honesty, and the occasional tough love when necessary. She gave me the opportunity to do what I love and compete on an international stage, but our relationship goes far beyond what we accomplished together on the slopes. I had a long career as an athlete competing in several world cups, world championships, and two Paralympic Games, but my success was made possible because of the dedication and sacrifices of the guides I had the privilege of

following. My positionality and past experiences as an athlete provide me with a unique perspective to contribute meaningfully to this body of scholarship.

Like my partnerships with Kim and Sadie, the partnerships formed between other visually impaired athletes and sighted guides typically go well beyond their performances together. Despite the central role these partnerships have in enabling the participation and performance of athletes with visual impairments in high-performance parasport, they are not acknowledged in the academic literature beyond a few brief mentions of guides as modifications needed to support athletes (Mann & Ravensbergen, 2018; Slocum et al., 2018), or in relation to the classification system where visually impaired athletes qualify to participate with a guide in the first place (Patatas et al., 2020; Patatas et al., 2018). Therefore, this study sought to explore high-performance athlete – guide partnerships<sup>2</sup> through individual interviews with both athletes and sighted guides. The research highlights the lived experiences of athletes and guides and specifically focuses on the dynamic, intimate, and unique aspects of these sport relationships.

The project was guided by the following research questions; R1: How is the athlete - guide partnership experienced in high-performance parasport? More specifically, this research sought to answer two sub questions R2: How is interdependence experienced and understood within these partnerships? and R3: How does the athlete - guide partnership challenge and/or reproduce normative assumptions of bodies, abilities, and sport?

---

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the text I refer to athletes with visual impairments as ‘athletes’ and their sighted partners as ‘guides’ – such terminology is not to imply that sighted guides are not *also* athletes but rather a language choice to distinguish between the roles in these partnerships. This terminology is also consistent with how the pairs competing in these events are commonly referred to in selection documents and when reporting on event results.

The following document will start by providing a detailed literature review of the theoretical foundations and relevant scholarship that has informed this study. Next, I account the methods utilized to address the research questions before sharing the findings of the study organized in four constructed themes: “You Live as a Team, You Die as a Team”, Better Together, Building Bridges: Connecting and Embracing Differences, and The Uphill Battle. Finally, in the discussion I draw on relevant literature to explain the importance of the findings, the limitations of this study, and the implications for future research.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **Chapter Overview**

In this chapter I provide an overview of the relevant scholarship that has informed this research. I start with the theoretical approach of the study to explain how knowledge has been understood and constructed. Next, I provide context for this research by exploring relevant research topics including disability sport and interdependent relationships in sport. Finally, I draw on existing literature to justify the importance of exploring the athlete – guide partnership.

### **Theoretical Approach**

This research utilized a critical interpretivist paradigm to address the research questions. Interpretivism understands reality as multiple, subjective, and dependent on who views it (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Qualitative research utilizing an interpretivist perspective acknowledges and reports differences in understandings of reality (Smith, Sparkes, Phoenix & Kirkby, 2012). The key component that critical theory adds to an interpretivist paradigm is an emphasis on “action” research to address oppression, negotiations of power, and problems faced by marginalized populations (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). At the forefront of critical theory is an emancipation from hegemonic and hierarchical ideologies and radical reflexivity that continuously evolves to shed light on new theoretical perspectives. The goal in using critical theory was to find a balance between accessible conceptualizations of information, while still acknowledging the complexities and power dynamics of constantly changing human societies (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2017). The call to action and consideration of the systemic and structural factors that often perpetuate inequalities helps to highlight the ways in which disability sport culture can challenge and reproduce normative cultural understandings of ability (Smith et al., 2012).

To bridge critical interpretivism to the relevant research areas, the theoretical framework for this study was positioned in Critical Disability Studies. “Critical” in regards to disability studies conveys self-reflexivity and a rethinking of the historical, present day, and future conventions, assumptions, and objectives of research, theory, and activism pertaining to people with disabilities (Smith & Perrier, 2015). A transdisciplinary space for disability-related research questions, Critical Disability Studies aims to dismantle boundaries between disciplines in order to develop an intertwining of theory and activism (Goodley, 2013). Using the term Critical Disability Studies implies a struggle for social justice that goes beyond economic and political considerations and acknowledges the psychological and cultural implications of disability (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). There is a desire to go beyond simply contributing to the theoretical interests of academics, and instead Critical Disability Studies offers a platform to think through, act, engage, and resist forms of oppression and discrimination (Goodley, 2013). Scholars seek to explain how conditions of dominance interact in ways that promote value but also perpetuate forms of oppression (Goodley, 2013). The goal is to create new ways of conceptualizing diversity through the restructuring of cultural meaning and social processes (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2017). Critical Disability Studies starts with disability but ultimately strives to move beyond it, and use disability as a tool to think through political, theoretical, and practical challenges that will positively impact everyone (Goodley, 2013).

In recognizing the shortcomings of conceptualizing disability as an individual problem, Critical Disability Studies creates dialogue that challenges notions of ableism, disablism, and the normative understandings of bodies (Smith & Bundon, 2018). According to Goodley (2017), ableism is the stifling practices of society that promotes typical able-bodiedness as the ideal of contributing citizens. No one can ever live up to such standards so unpacking ableism highlights



the ways in which some bodies have been deemed worth fighting for, while others are consistently marginalized (Goodley, 2017). Disablism is a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions on people with impairments, and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional wellbeing (Smith & Bundon, 2018). Social oppression is situational and includes imbalanced personal relationships, social exclusion, restricted autonomy, and limited opportunities for people with disabilities (Smith & Perrier, 2015). All of this is to say, the ways in which bodies are divided into “normal” and “abnormal” have the power to dictate access, choice, and the right to participation in society (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Bodies that challenge normative understandings of ability provoke reflections on experiences of embodiment and demands new and inclusive responses from others (Goodley, 2013).

While such a theoretical approach draws on diverse branches of academic inquiry, there are several common values that connect these fields together. Critical Disability Studies scholars are united by the assumption that disabled people are undervalued and discriminated against (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009), and favor collaborating with people with disabilities rather than speaking for them (Misener et al., 2018). Researchers are encouraged to take on a critical attitude toward dominant societal beliefs in order to recognize the power inequities and taken for granted assumptions that are often pervasive within research (Smith & Perrier, 2015). According to Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009), critical theory views society and culture as dynamic and often favors qualitative research methods to capture the lived experiences of individuals, the processes and cultural meanings that guide social participation, and avenues for change in the future. Without reflexivity regarding theoretical choices, there is danger of conducting research that is constructed with conceptual contradictions (Smith & Bundon, 2018). Therefore, I

continuously revisit the theoretical approach throughout this document to justify the methodological choices, reflexivity, and construction of knowledge in this research.

### **Research Areas**

The aim of this research was to explore how individuals experienced the athlete – guide partnership. This is a dyadic partnership situated in the context of disability sport. Kelley and Thibaut (1978) defined a dyadic relationship as the situation in which two people’s behaviors, emotions, and thoughts are mutually and causally interdependent (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Kelley et al, 1983). Interdependence itself can further be defined as the coordination needed to work with others in order to achieve a desired outcome (Bandura, 2001). With that in mind, this work was situated in and guided by the relevant existing literature in disability sport and the psychological and sociological conceptualizations of interdependent relationships. More specifically, this work was informed by the relevant literature that utilized these understandings of interdependence to explore relationships in sport. The project sought to complement previous academic work and provide novel perspectives with regard to the research areas.

### ***Disability Sport***

Even though 20% of the population is considered to have a disability (Goodley, 2011), it is often assumed that individuals with disabilities have a poor quality of life (Guerrero & Martin, 2018). People with disabilities are perceived as disqualified from full social acceptance and that is evident in sport, where there are still barriers to participation (Pack et al., 2017). Historically, people with disabilities were excluded because they did not meet the socially constructed ideals of sport (DePauw, 1995). However, disability sport became more popular after World War II as a form of rehabilitation for injured veterans. At first, the movement was focused on providing opportunities for participation, but since then disability sport has adopted a high-performance model of sporting practice (Howe, 2008).

In the past decades, the Paralympic Games have begun to bring more awareness to disability (Goodley, 2011). The Paralympic Games is a global, multi-sports competition for individuals with certain impairments, and it is organized by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). The IPC is the global governing body of parasport and emphasizes high-performance athleticism rather than disability (Purdue & Howe 2012). Their vision is “to make an inclusive world through sport” (International Paralympic Committee Strategic Plan, 2019). The IPC contributes to the Paralympic movement and disability sport broadly by empowering disabled athletes from their entrance into sport through and including the Paralympic Games (Howe & Silva, 2018).

According to DePauw (1995), sport as a practice is socially constructed and any interpretation of it must be grounded in an understanding of power and privilege. Traditionally, sport has privileged primarily white, heterosexual, able-bodied men. Studying the body in relation to sport provides an opportunity to highlight the ways in which sport reproduces social inequality by promoting norms of ability. Critical Disability Studies provides a unique framework for understanding inclusion, exclusion, and how spaces of power and privilege reproduce norms of ability in disability sport (Misener et al., 2018). The bodies of impaired athletes are highly visible and “othered” because the distinct differences are often thought of as abnormalities when compared to able-bodied athletes (Howe, 2008). The revisioning of disability sport depends on the “action” piece of critical theory to address oppression and negotiation of power through systemic change. Using Critical Disability Studies as a lens illuminates the problematic nature of sport, and provides an opportunity to create avenues for alternative constructions, actions, and solutions (DePauw, 1995).

More specifically, at present there is a growing body of literature exploring the experiences of people who are blind or visually impaired, and their participation in disability sport. The majority of literature has focused on recreational opportunities and access to physical activity specifically looking at the initiation of blind and visually impaired people into sport (Macbeth, 2009; Macbeth & Magee, 2006), the barriers and facilitators of participation (Jaarasma et al., 2014), and how physical activity impacts factors such as resiliency (Jessup et al., 2010) and social engagement (Oh et al., 2004). One particularly relevant study by Hammer (2015) ethnographically explored how notions of difference and interdependency shaped the experiences of recreational blind and visually impaired tandem cyclists. The study elaborates on the unique intersensory experiences of cycling for people who are blind or visually impaired, and the complex intertwinement of physical, emotional, and social collaborations between able-bodied tandem bicycle pilots and cyclists who are blind or visually impaired. Despite their differences, group members were attuned to the needs of themselves and their teammates (Hammer, 2015).

In addition, researchers have also begun to explore the experiences of high-performance visually impaired athletes. The majority of work has focused on embodiment of visually impaired athletes and their unique and sensuous experiences in sport. Powis (2020) explored the experiences of high performance visually impaired and blind cricket players to gain a better understanding of the unique ways blind and visually impaired athletes experience embodiment and challenge binaries through sport participation. Other research has also looked at high-performance visually impaired athletes and the trajectories of their athletic careers (Macbeth & Magee, 2006), perspectives on classification (Powis & Macbeth, 2020), and the representation of blind, high-performance sport in the media (De Haan et al., 2015). Building on the disability

sport literature discussion broadly and, as illustrated by Powis (2020), exploring the experiences of high-performance visually impaired athletes provides unique opportunities to consider high-performance disability sport culture as a tool to deconstruct binaries of dis/ability and ab/normality.

### ***Conceptualizing Interdependence***

Considering this research explored the athlete – guide partnership, a dyadic relationship situated in a disability sport context, concepts of interdependence are relevant to consider. Interdependence can be conceptualized through psychological and sociological perspectives, and both of these understandings are useful when considering the findings of this study.

**A Psychological Perspective.** In psychology, concepts of interdependence have often been explored within relationships because it provides a platform from which other psychological processes can occur (Jowett, 2007). In reference to work by Rusbult and Van Lange (2008), interdependence provides a unique framework for understanding and interpreting interpersonal relationships. Interdependence is the interpersonal reality within which cognition, affect, and motivation transpire and adapt. Interdependence theory<sup>3</sup> characterizes relationships between individuals in terms of the ways in which interactions cause partners to experience good or bad outcomes. Interactions are dependent on the situation, such as the topics being discussed or the power dynamics at play, and the needs thoughts and motives of both individuals (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). The outcome of an interaction can be defined in terms of rewards, or positive consequences of an interaction, and costs, or negative consequences of an interaction

---

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘theory’ is widely used and understood differently across disciplines. Interdependence ‘theory’ is deliberately referred to here because that is the terminology used regularly in psychological literature. In this context ‘theory’ is a way of grouping together information and providing some explanatory model for how interdependence operates from a psychological perspective. This is not to be confused with the ‘theoretical framework’ of this project which situates the work in Critical Disabilities Studies.

(Jowett, 2007). Establishing a relationship involves individual and joint development of rewards and costs that neither person can create independently (Kelly, 1979). Within relationships, people seek to obtain rewards and avoid costs individually and together (Jowett, 2007).

To provide a foundation for understanding interdependence, it is important to explore how Kelley and Thibaut (1978) conceptualized the interdependence structure in dyadic relationships. Dyadic relationships can be understood using interdependence theory by examining the main effects and interaction of each member's behaviors including how personal actions shape individual outcomes (actor effects), how a partner's actions shape individual outcomes (partner control), and how interactions of both partners shape outcomes together (joint control) (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Building on these ideas, researchers utilizing interdependence theory have considered the degree of dependence (the degree to which one partner's outcomes are influenced by the other's actions), mutuality of dependence (the degree to which both partners are mutually dependent on one another), basis of dependence (whether or not dependence is from partner control or joint control), and correspondence of interests (the extent to which each individuals' actions benefit one another in similar or different ways), as important components in the structure of interdependence to conceptualize a variety of models described in more detail below (Jowett, 2007).

***Models of Interdependence in Athlete – Athlete Dyads.*** Considering the athlete – guide partnership is a relationship between two athletes, this study contributes to psychological literature on athlete -athlete dyadic relationships. To provide context for this work, below I present several models that have been used to explore athlete-athlete dyads, and then I will outline the relevant existing research that uses psychological conceptualizations of interdependence theory.

Drawing on interdependence theory, several models have been used to study athlete-athlete dyads. According to Kenney (1996), the Actor Partner model of interdependence is a static approach to exploring dyadic partnerships that assumes relationships are established and fixed. The consistency of behaviors of a person from one group to another is called an actor effect and the consistency of behaviors the partner of a person displays is called a partner effect. Actor and partner effects may be correlated. For example, actor effects might influence partner effects and vice versa (Kenney, 1996).

Furthermore, researchers have also utilized the 3 + ICs model of interdependence in the context of athletic dyads to operationalize feelings, thoughts, and behaviors relative to interdependence and relationship functioning (Poczwardowski et al., 2019). Such interactions can be measured and explored through constructs of closeness, commitment, and complementarity (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). Closeness characterizes affective components of the relationships and is reflected in mutual feelings of trust and respect. Commitment characterizes the cognitive components of the relationship and accounts for the thoughts, attachment, and motivation to continue the relationship. Finally, complementarity recognizes the behavioral element of the relationship and reflects the athletes' abilities to work cooperatively (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). In effect, these three components make up Jowett's 3+ICs model of interdependence (Jowett, 2007).

***Applications of Psychological Conceptualizations of Interdependence*** While several researchers have used a variety of models to explore interdependent relationships in sport, particularly relevant for this study is Poczwardowski et al.'s 5C's model of interdependence. In their study, Poczwardowski and colleagues (2019) utilized qualitative research methods and Jowett's (2007) 3 + IC's model of interdependence to explore personal components that

contribute to international success in athlete-athlete dyads. Four interviews were conducted individually with internationally recognized high-performance beach volleyball athletes. Building on the 3 + IC's model, a 5Cs model of interdependence, including compatibility, commitment, complementarity, coorientation, and closeness, was developed to represent components of successful athletic dyads. The study indicates that successful athletes in dyadic partnerships have aligned goals, strong communication skills, and trust in their partners. The findings illustrate the importance of athletes valuing shared successes over individual benefits and having interpersonal awareness to allow athletes to distinguish between personal needs and the needs of the team. The study suggests that because the experiences of athletic dyads fits the theory of interdependence set forth by Rusbult et al. (2004) and elaborated on by Jowett's (2007) 3 + IC's model, it can be assumed that athlete-athlete partnerships with higher degrees of interdependence are more likely to experience positive relationship outcomes (Poczwardowski et al., 2019). Considering the 5C's model of interdependence was designed specifically to capture the experiences of high-performance athletic dyads, the model was chosen deliberately to inform the analysis for the research at hand which explored the experiences of participants in high-performance athlete – guide partnerships.

**A Sociological Perspective.** To complement the psychological understanding of interdependence, this study also utilized a sociological perspective to reflect interdependence as a means to pursue physical and social inclusion in communities (Goodwin, 2008). In reference to ideas from Goodwin (2008), interdependence fosters relationships of mutual acceptance and respect for diversity. Completely accepting one another allows people to come together and create an environment that enables full participation. It is problematic to dichotomize dependence and independence because humans innately strive for interdependent relationships



grounded in partnerships. Seeking and accepting help from others is a social relationship based on a mutual understanding of goals and control of the support being provided (Goodwin, 2008). This section will illustrate the ways in which sociological conceptualizations of interdependence are relevant for understanding relationships in disability sport.

Interdependence is particularly useful when understanding experiences of disability. According to Goodley (2013), an important component of the oppression of individuals with disabilities relates to moments in which they are judged for failing to match up to the ideal individual. Ableist assumptions, which favors independence, frames people with disabilities as burdensome, incapable, and inadequate. Experiences of impairments are complicated and intricately connected to relationships with others. For example, the embodiment of a blind person and their guide dog often become so deeply intertwined that the relationship actually reshapes experiences of impairments (Goodley, 2013). With that in mind, the athlete – guide partnership challenges normative understandings of ability by redefining independence and changing the experiences of impairments for athletes who are blind or visually impaired. Through interdependent relationships, there is an increase in awareness of the physical and socio-cultural barriers faced by people with disabilities. The person with a disability is allowed to define the problem and take control of the situation by seeking support from others (Goodwin, 2008). Instead of cultivating an environment that strives for independence, athletes and guides must mutually rely on support from their partners in order to redefine the standard of full participation.

*Applications of Sociological Conceptualizations of Interdependence.* Although there is minimal research that has explored the athlete – guide partnership specifically, there is a significant amount of literature that indirectly references sociological concepts of interdependence and how roles within disability sport are defined through interactions with

others. Townsend et al. (2020) explored the social construction of disability through the athlete – coach relationship. Interactions with coaches shaped athletes’ understandings of who they are and how they experience their impairments. For example, the study revealed that coaches often understand ‘disability’ and ‘athlete’ as binaries that are mutually exclusive. Some disability sport coaches believe in order to effectively do their jobs, they need to reject disability and therefore assumptions of incompetency. Athletes are prescribed aspects of identity through their interactions with coaches that are intended to create empowerment by rejecting notions of disability and embracing athletic identities instead. Such views are problematic because they perpetuate ableist assumptions about disabled bodies and impose understandings of identity upon athletes that strips them of their agency and cultivates a hierarchy of power within the structure of high-performance sport. By neglecting to recognize that ‘disability’ and ‘athlete’ can coexist, the athlete – coach relationship reinforces social divisions between ability and disability (Townsend et al., 2020).

Furthermore, in their autoethnographic account of understanding and navigating personal experiences of disability and impairment in sport, Danielle Peers (2012) elegantly described the process of becoming familiar with their internal narratives and the perceived dichotomy of ability and disability. Peers recalls how interactions with people such as sport classifiers, coaches, teammates, and doctors shaped their understanding of their own disability origin story and how these disability sport narratives – which favor quantifiable measurements, inspirational accounts of overcoming, and singular truths – are created and shape how athletes with disabilities understand themselves and the spaces they occupy. How bodies are subjected to “surveillance” by others inevitably influences how athletes with disabilities understand who they are and what they are capable of achieving. Peers’ accounts of struggling to reconcile

circumstances in which they are too disabled but also not quite disabled enough is a powerful example of the ways in which interactions reinforce social roles and shape experiences of disability. In these moments, disability is created and reproduced through the ways in which people ask questions, tell stories, and interact with one another (Peers, 2012).

Telling coherent stories is culturally imperative to inhabit orderly and coherent identities. Peers (2012) argues that athletes with disabilities compose stories that are illustrative of biomedical anomalies, supercrips, inspiration, and normalcy that is categorically different than those who have not overcome. These stories:

*Make others feel comfortable: they allow others to more cohesively compose themselves as disability experts, as benevolent helpers, as coherently able-bodied and as comparatively normal. We compose disability, through these stories. We compose disabled people. We compose ableism (Peers, 2012, 186).*

As Peers recognizes, disability sport narratives can be detrimental and there is a need to reconceptualize these seemingly coherent narratives in ways that challenge ableism and embrace difference. Denaturalizing the story of disability itself will help break down the imperative for athletes to articulate and embody conforming and coherent disabled selves (Peers, 2012). The research at hand sought to reimagine narratives of disability sport through the athlete – guide partnership. In doing so, this study attempts to reconstruct traditional portrayals of disability sport narratives by challenging understandings of dependence and independence through the experiences of disabled athletes and their relationships with sighted guides.

### **Justification and Relevance**

While the research presented above provides contextual understanding of disability sport and offers unique insights into how interdependence is experienced in sport relationships, the omission of research on athlete – guide partnerships has several implications. First, not acknowledging these partnerships contributes to the ongoing erasure of athletes with disabilities

(and specifically athletes with visual impairments) by obscuring *how* they engage in sports and making their performances invisible. Second, it represents a failed opportunity to interrogate how these partnerships might challenge binary divides of able and disabled as well as normative notions of ability and athleticism. By not providing adequate attention to these partnerships and other ‘differences’ in sport experiences, there is a risk of perpetuating ableist understandings of who a high-performance athlete is and how sport should be done. Through recognizing and normalizing the narratives of disabled athletes, there is an opportunity to begin to redefine athleticism and to acknowledge that the “sporting body” should include bodies with impairments (DePauw, 1995). This research begins to highlight the diversities within the sport experience and the ways in which disability sport can erode traditional barriers of participation embedded within sport systems. The athlete – guide partnership specifically provides unique insights into the social inequities faced by individuals who are blind or visually impaired and how the formation of these partnership alters their experiences of impairments.

As Poczwardowski et al. (2019) identified, there is a need for more work which aims to understand athletes’ experiences of athletically and personally meaningful relationships in sport from the perspectives of both partners within dyads. With that in mind, the presented research sought to contribute to scholarship on disability sport and athlete – athlete relationships by exploring the experiences of both athletes and guides in high performance athlete – guide partnerships. There is also a need to create critical dialogue and accurately represent the narratives of Paralympic athletes in order to utilize disability sport as a foundation for social change (Bush et al., 2013). This research is the first of its kind to offer insights into the athlete – guide partnership in high performance disability sport, and provides a useful example to explore the limitations of binaries such as able/ disabled and normal/ abnormal sport experiences. Such

knowledge can provide insights to facilitate stronger partnerships and inform sport professionals on how to best support visually impaired athletes and their sighted guides. In the following chapter, I will go on to discuss the methods employed to accomplish these tasks.

## **Chapter III: Methods**

### **Chapter Overview**

Below you will find a detailed explanation of the methods used to carry out this project. I will start with an overview of how the study implemented qualitative methods. Next, I provide a description of recruitment and sample for the study, followed by descriptions of the data collection and analysis. Finally, the chapter ends with the ethical implications and specifically how I engaged in reflexivity throughout the project.

### **Qualitative Research Methods**

This study utilized qualitative methods, and more specifically, individual semi-structured interviews to gain a better understanding of both the experiences of the athlete and the guide in athlete – guide partnerships. For this project, qualitative methods were chosen to align with the theoretical framework, which positions this research in Critical Disability Studies. Qualitative research methods are useful because they allow researchers to gain a better understanding of the social realities of individuals, cultures, and lived experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Given the critical interpretivist paradigm adopted for this research, knowledge was understood to be constructed through interactions with the researcher and participants (Nathan et al., 2019). Qualitative methods allows researchers to explore problems or topics that are not easily measured by other methods (Liamputtong, 2019). Using qualitative methods for the purpose of this research provided a foundation to value and share the stories and voices of participants who are often marginalized.

### ***Individual Interviews***

Qualitative interviewing can be used as a tool to curate culturally specific insights about subjective experiences and perspectives (Nathan et al., 2019). The purpose of conducting

qualitative interviews is to create a conversation that invites participants to share their stories (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Interviews provide researchers with depth rather than breadth of knowledge, and flexibility for researchers to ask probing questions and clarify meaning when necessary (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Qualitative interviews are particularly valuable for exploring topics for which little is known or complex social issues (Nathan et al., 2019). Considering the exploratory nature of the study and the fact that little was known about the athlete – guide partnership prior to this research, interviews were deemed an appropriate form of data collection as they provided an opportunity to capture the unique and intimate aspects of the athlete – guide partnership.

Athletes and guides were recruited dyadically for this study to explore the experiences of both the athlete and the guide in each athlete – guide partnership. Upon careful consideration, I decided to interview athletes and guides individually rather than together. According to Morgan (2016), there is minimal data to make a conclusive judgment about the differences between interviewing relationship-based dyads together or separately. While interviewing together may provide some benefits such as a more complete account of events, clarification of relevant points, and insights into relationship dynamics that otherwise might not be seen, dyadic interviews can also pose difficulties such as unequal participation from both partners, desirability biases, and issues discussing challenges within the relationship (Morgan, 2016).

Given the theoretical approach and research questions for this work, individual semi-structured interviews were deemed advantageous. Considering this project utilized an interpretivist epistemological approach which understands knowledge as subjective, a complete account of events was not necessarily important. Conducting individual semi-structured interviews allowed participants to provide their accounts of personal experiences without fear of

contradiction from their partners. Furthermore, individual interviews gave participants the freedom to discuss more challenging parts of their relationships and an opportunity to openly account how each person accommodates the other (Morgan, 2016). Considering the distinguishable roles in the dyad, where the athlete has lived experiences of disability while the guide likely does not, interviewing participants separately gave them space to discuss challenging topics honestly without questioning how their responses might negatively impact their partners.

### ***Qualitative Research and Academic Rigor***

Considering this research utilized a critical interpretivist paradigm where knowledge is considered to be subjective, a rigid criterion for judging qualitative research has been deemed inappropriate (Burke, 2016). However, the evaluation of the quality of the current study was guided by the criteria set forth by Tracy (2010) through the worthiness of the topic, the sincerity of the work, the ethical considerations, the meaningful coherence of the project, and the significant contribution it makes to existing research. To start off, as mentioned previously the athlete – guide partnership is not currently represented in existing academic literature and not representing these unique sport partnerships contributes to the erasure of the diverse experiences of athletes with disabilities. The sincerity of the work and ethical considerations are further described below. However, given my positionality as a visually impaired Paralympic Alpine skier, I have deliberately engaged in self-reflexivity throughout the research process to thoughtfully consider the strengths and weaknesses of my own positionality and how it has impacted this research. Throughout this process, relational ethics was prioritized by considering how my actions and understandings of the topic impacted the participants. The design and implementation of this research is meaningful and cohesive which is illustrated throughout the



document. Each aspect of the research process has been deliberate and informed by subsequent theoretical and methodological decisions to adequately explore each of the proposed research questions. Finally, this research makes a significant contribution to academic literature by introducing the athlete – guide partnership and providing a unique conceptualization of interdependence and sport experiences (Tracy, 2010).

## **Participants**

### ***Eligibility Criteria***

The participants in this study included high-performance visually impaired athletes and their sighted guides. To be eligible to participate, both the athlete and the guide were required to agree to be a part of the study to capture the experiences and perspectives of both members of each dyad. Furthermore, the visually impaired athletes had to have competed in an internationally recognized competition as of the 2017/ 2018 competition season to ensure their experiences were recent and relevant to the current context and practice of disability sport. Finally, all participants were required to speak fluent English.

### ***Recruitment***

After obtaining institutional ethical approval from the University of British Columbia on November 17, 2020 I began recruiting eligible participants for the study. I utilized three types of purposive sampling to strategically recruit high-performance visually impaired athletes and their guides (Bryman, 2016). Recognizing that various demographics may influence the athlete – guide partnership, I first sought maximum variation sampling to deliberately draw from a range of perspectives as much as possible (Smith & Sparkes, 2013). Throughout the data collection process, I constantly thought about how to recruit more diverse participants to account for experiences in different sports, countries, genders, and other intersecting identities. However,

because of the small number of internationally recognized visually impaired athletes and the confinements of the eligibility criteria which sought only English-speaking participants, maximum variation sampling was particularly challenging. I began recruitment identifying potential participants by reviewing the race results from world cup and world championship events in Paralympic alpine skiing, athletics, cycling, nordic skiing, and triathlon. Eligible participants were contacted on social media platforms via direct messaging that included a description of the study and a social media advertisement (See appendix A). I sent a follow up message to individuals that did not respond approximately one month after initial contact. However, because of the limited number of eligible participants I also employed convenience sampling and recruited athletes that were easily accessible (Smith & Sparkes, 2013). The social media advertisement was shared amongst a variety of networks including on personal social media accounts and groups which included, among others, visually impaired athletes, and disability sport coaches. Several blind sport organizations shared the study advertisement including the United States Association for Blind Athletes and the Canadian Blind Sports Association. Even still, recruitment proved to be challenging, so to supplement these strategies, I also utilized snowball sampling and after each interview requested that participants share the study information with others who were eligible if they were comfortable doing so (Smith & Sparkes, 2013).

Interested participants responded to social media messages via email to inquire about the study. Upon receiving interest from both the athlete and the guide in a partnership, I emailed each individual a copy of the consent form (See Appendix B) and demographic form (See Appendix C). Even though the study entailed dyadic recruitment, each participant individually consented before taking part in the research. All interviews took place remotely, and after

agreeing on a time that was mutually convenient, I emailed each participant a zoom link and offered to answer any questions they might have about the study.

### ***Sample***

The study consisted of six athlete – guide pairs for a total of 12 individual interviews. Participants ranged in age from 19 – 50 and included 11 men and one woman. Eleven of the participants identified as white, while one identified as black. The participants competed in four Paralympic sports including alpine skiing, athletics, cycling, and triathlon representing three countries including Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

**Table 1:**

#### *Participant Demographics*

Characteristic	Participant (N = 12)
Age	
<20 - 29	5
30 - 39	3
40 – 49+	4
Gender	
Men	11
Ethnicity	
White	11
Black	1
Sport	
Alpine Skiing	4
Athletics	2

Cycling	2
Triathlon	4
Country	
Canada	4
United Kingdom	4
United States	4

The visually impaired athletes had diverse experiences and perspectives to offer the study. They experienced a range of vision loss; the sample was comprised of individuals from all three classifications of visual impairments encompassing a spectrum from legally blind to totally blind. These visual classes are universal across visually impaired sport and are based off visual acuity and visual field (Powis, 2020). B1 athletes are totally blind, B2 athletes are visually impaired with less sight, and B3 athletes are visually impaired with the most sight of eligible athletes. Furthermore, participants had hereditary as well as acquired or degenerative conditions, and a variety of experiences in Paralympic sport. Two participants had never competed at a Paralympic Games and four had competed in at least one Paralympic Games prior to taking part in the study. Three of the six participants were dual sport athletes and had competed in other Paralympic sports before the sport they were competing in during the time of data collection. Collectively, the participants have won 11 Paralympic medals.

**Table 2:**

*Athlete Experiences*

Characteristic	Participant (N = 6)
Visual Impairment Classification	
B1 – Totally Blind	3

B2 – Partially Blind (Less sighted)	1
B3 – Partially Blind (More sighted)	2
Type of Visual Impairment	
Hereditary	3
Acquired/ Degenerative	3
Previous Paralympic Games	
0	2
1 – 2	1
3 – 5	3

**Table 3:**

*Athlete - Guide Partnerships*

Length of current athlete – guide Partnership	Pairs (N = 6)
1 – 3 years	3
4 – 6 years	2
>6 years	1

Furthermore, the six pairs that participated had spent a variation of time working together ranging from one year as a team to more than 12 years training and competing together.

Research is a pragmatic process, shaped and constrained by time and resources among other things (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The sample size for this research was small enough to manage given the time constraint of a master’s thesis, but also able to provide a rich understanding of experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Furthermore, because the study utilized reflexive thematic analysis, the purpose of the study, diversity of the sample, and depth of the

interviews were considered when judging appropriate sample size (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Even though this work consisted of only 12 interviews, given the small number of eligible participants, relative diversity of the sample, and richness of the interviews completed, 12 participants provided data to sufficiently answer the proposed research questions and fulfill the purpose of this study.

## **Data Collection**

### ***Individual Interviews***

At the start of each interview, I reviewed the consent form with each participant; I reminded them that their participation was completely voluntary, that they could choose to stop or skip questions at any time should they become uncomfortable, and that I would do everything I could to keep their participation confidential. Before starting the interview, I checked with each participant to see if they had any questions, and deliberately asked if they were comfortable with me recording the interview. Upon completion of the interview, I checked in again with each participant to see if they had any questions and followed up by email to thank them for their participation.

Each participant completed one individual, semi-structured interview between December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Interviews ranged from 47 to 127 minutes with an average of 74 minutes per interview. The audio and video were recorded from each interview. Upon the completion of the interview, the video was immediately deleted, and the audio was saved on a secure, password protected drive. There was a total of 885 minutes of data which yielded 240 pages of single-spaced transcripts. To maintain anonymity, each dyadic partnership was given a random study number. To distinguish between the interviews with athletes and the interviews with guides, study numbers began with A or G respectively.

Athletes and guides were asked similar, but separate interview questions; the interview guides (see appendix D and E) were comprised of a variety of questions to understand the participants' experiences working with their partners. Topics discussed included their initiation into Paralympic sport, the evolution of their partnerships, the benefits and challenges of working with a partner, as well as their broader perspectives of disability and sport. The questions aimed to offer insights into athlete – guide partnerships, and to highlight how interdependence is experienced. Conducting semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility during the interview to deviate from the interview guide, and provided participants with agency to direct the conversation. When appropriate, I used probing questions to allow participants to share about aspects of their experiences that seemed most meaningful to them, which in turn provided deeper knowledge of their lived experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Upon completion of each interview and throughout data collection and data analysis, I engaged in a variety of reflexive writing which provided an opportunity for me to examine my own assumptions, rapport with participants, research questions, methods, paradigmatic choices, analytical strategies and writing styles (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). I further discuss my positionality and reflexivity later in this chapter.

### **Data Analysis**

A Reflexive Thematic Analysis was utilized to express views, perspectives, and experiences of participants (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). Using reflexive thematic analysis provides researchers with flexibility to make a variety of decisions about the research and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, the term reflexivity is referred to in reflexive thematic analysis to emphasize the values of a qualitative paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2020), and therefore interpretations mandate theoretical knowingness and transparency (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This study utilized a critical interpretivist paradigm which understands knowledge as

created intersubjectively, but also values ‘action’ to emphasize oppression and inequities. Reflexive thematic analysis was appropriate because it is able to capture how individuals make meaning of their experiences and how broader social contexts shape those meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study aimed to privilege the voices and experiences of athletes and guides. Unlike some other forms of analysis, the findings of this study are presented deliberately to shy away from academic jargon, and to make the findings easily understandable for athletes, guides, and others who might find them insightful and useful.

The data were analyzed using both inductive and deductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning means going from the specific to the general and is a “bottom up” approach to producing descriptions and explanations (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). The content itself guides the analysis and codes are data-driven while still considering theoretical and epistemological assumptions (Braun et al., 2016). Considering that the athlete – guide partnership is not currently represented in existing literature, inductive analysis was important. While some existing literature presented earlier helped guide the design and analysis for this research, it was also important to recognize the novelties in the athlete – guide partnership identified. With that in mind, the inductive analysis was guided by and attentive to sociological conceptualizations of interdependence, marginalization, and the reproduction of normalized understandings of bodies.

On the other hand, the analysis was also driven by deductive reasoning. Deductive inquiry is a “top down” approach where the analytic process is informed by theoretical understanding beyond the data set (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Deductive coding provided an opportunity to build on existing knowledge of interdependence theory presented above. Drawing from Poczwardowski et al.’s (2019) 5C’s model of interdependence in athlete – athlete dyads, some of the data analysis was driven by deductive reasoning to account for various components



of interdependence including compatibility, commitment, complementarity, coorientation, and closeness (Poczwadowski et al., 2019). Taken together, understanding the data from both inductive and deductive methods provided a unique opportunity to explore both the psychological and sociological concepts presented in the literature review.

Referring to work by Eisikovits and Koren (2010), qualitative dyadic studies should always have a focus on relationships, and that should be evident in the interpretations of the data. Conducting individual interviews with both members of each athlete – guide partnership provided an opportunity to analyze the data on individual and dyadic levels to explore the individual and joint aspects of their experiences. Specifically, when analyzing the data across dyads, I was cognizant of overlaps in their stories as well as contrasting perspectives among individuals (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). Considering the uniqueness and intimacy of the athlete – guide partnership, discussing narratives from the athletes and the guides in each partnership provided novel insights to explore these relationships across the sample and within the dyads.

The analysis was directed by Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2012) six - step guide to thematic analysis. Rather than a linear process, reflexive thematic analysis is recursive and requires researchers to move back and forth between the phases throughout the process. It is important to be explicit and illustrate a clear alignment of the theoretical assumptions, research questions, and methods in the application of the analysis because the meaning of the data resides within the interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2006). With that in mind, I began data analysis by transcribing each interview verbatim and familiarizing myself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smith and Sparkes, 2016). Once I had read through the transcripts, I uploaded the data into NVivo qualitative data analysis software and began the initial coding process, to capture the patterns and diversities across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). I took

care in paying equal attention to each interview, and I moved back and forth within the data set, refining codes as necessary to be as thorough, inclusive, and comprehensive as possible (Braun et al., 2016). As the coding process evolved, I noticed a shift in my coding from what started as primarily semantic, or explicit within the data, to latent coding which examines the underlying ideas, and assumptions beyond the explicit content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). More specifically, as I started to consider the construction of themes and reporting of ‘stories’ the data could tell, I began to refine and interpret the codes to move beyond explicitly what participants had stated.

Throughout the process of coding, I continuously used reflexive writing to refine the codes and think critically about how each contributed to the overall story the data might tell.

Below is an example of some of the free writing I completed while coding the data:

*Code: Enjoyment*

*Participants found that they enjoyed sport more because they had a partner to do it with. The shared experiences were valuable for each partner. For the visually impaired athletes this aspect of enjoyment was experienced by being able to participate in sport, the freedom to do the activities they wanted to do, and the privilege to enjoy it with another person. However, for the guides that enjoyment piece was often more of a friendship; they enjoyed the company of the other person, the altruism of their roles (doing something that's helping someone else), and their ability to participate in sport in a new way. High-performance sport culture sometimes prioritizes performance rather than enjoyment. We see this in the data when participants speak about how sport organizations often control the guides that are paired with visually impaired athletes. When participants didn't have control over who they worked with it took away from the enjoyment of the experience for both partners.*

*“It is kind of fun to share something that you love with somebody else that loves it too” (A4).*

*“I like helping individuals and I also like running, so it is something that I just do out of enjoyment” (G3).*

*Code: Familiarity and understanding*

*Overtime the athletes and the guides became more familiar with each other evolving the partnership. It was helpful for participants to understand their partners and how they might react in a variety of different circumstances. When*

*there is familiarity and understanding between partners, they were better equipped to support one another when adversities arose.*

*“we know when to take our time from each other, and when to talk to each other to resolve an issue and that obviously makes it a lot easier with the guide athlete relationship since there is less risk of falling out than if you didn’t know someone as well” (A2).*

*“I feel like it’s the hours and hours and hours of training, readjusting, and we just, I know what he is going to do before he does it or I can hear it in his voice”(A4).*

Writing and reflecting on the codes, illustrated many situations where my ideas overlapped and intersected. Writing provided an opportunity to refine and amalgamate the codes to be more distinct. Such an approach to the data analysis aligns well with reflexive thematic analysis which understands coding to be a dynamic and evolving process that allows researchers to refine and reflect on codes as their familiarity and engagement with the data deepens (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

After initial codes had been identified and refined in each interview, I began to consider the analysis more broadly to develop themes within the data. Themes are stories developed through and from the codes about specific patterns of shared meaning across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Given the critical interpretivist paradigm, the themes sought to capture the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions that shape individual experiences rather than focusing on individual psychologies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In sum, the final analysis which is shared in the findings section of this document is a product of deep data immersion, reflection, and an active and generative understanding of the data that will continue to evolve over time (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Four themes were constructed to share the findings of the study including “You Live as a Team, You Die as a Team”, Better Together, Building Bridges: Connecting and Embracing

Differences, and The Uphill Battle. Each theme was generated to tell a distinct story, so while there was some intersecting ideas and codes that informed the themes, the findings are presented to minimize overlap and to address the specific research questions. As such, the first theme “You Live as a Team, You Die as a Team” addresses research question one which sought to explore how the athlete – guide partnership is experienced in high performance parasport. The findings provide a context to understand these partnerships broadly. The second theme, Better Together, addresses research question two which aimed to understand how interdependence is experienced in athlete – guide partnerships. The theme specifically addresses interactions between athletes and guides and the unique ways interdependence is experienced specifically within athlete-guide partnerships where one individual has lived experience of disability while the other likely does not. Although many of the concepts and ideas shared in the first two themes overlap, for clarity they have been presented as two distinct narratives. Finally, the themes Building Bridges: Connecting and Embracing Differences and The Uphill Battle address research question three which aimed to explore how the athlete – guide partnership challenges and reproduces normative assumptions of bodies, abilities, and sport. For more information on overlapping ideas and how individual codes informed the themes and subthemes please see the thematic map (Appendix F).

### **Ethical Considerations**

While the study at hand was considered low risk, it is important to recognize the ethical considerations and the steps taken to ensure the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of the people and community impacted by this research (Bryman, 2016). I obtained informed consent from each participant prior to the start of interviews to ensure each participant had knowledge of the nature of the study and were actively choosing to be a part of it (Palmer, 2016; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). After starting the interview, I reviewed the consent form with the participants

and reminded them that their participation in the study was voluntary. Interviewers are ethically obligated to respect participants by avoiding deception, and being honest about who they are, the intentions of the project, and the outcomes of the research (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Before starting each interview, I was deliberately honest with the participant about my own experiences as a visually impaired Paralympic skier, and my intentions of conducting this project as a means of acquiring a master's degree.

Considering this research employed dyadic recruitment to obtain the perspectives from both the athletes and guides in each athlete – guide partnership, confidentiality was of particular importance when considering the ethics of the study. Prior to the interview, I also reminded participants that their names would not be included in the study, that I would protect their privacy as much as possible, but that absolute confidentiality could not be guaranteed because of the small number of international visually impaired athletes and the fact that many of these athletes are relatively well known to the public (Smith and Sparkes, 2016). Although participants consented to take part in the study individually, they all had knowledge of their partner's participation in the study as well. In order to protect their confidentiality, participants did not have access to the audio or content of their partners' interviews, and I was careful to keep all information from interviews confidential when speaking with each partner. For example, when participants asked if their partner had shared a specific anecdote with me during their interview, I would reply without affirming or denying. Instead, I would ask the participant if I could hear about the story from their perspective. Aligned with these ethical considerations, the names of participants have been omitted from the write up of the findings and no identifying information such as their specific nationalities or sports they participate in have been included (Sparkes and Smith, 2016). Furthermore, because interviews were done individually, I was deliberate and

careful about the details included when analyzing the data dyadically in order to safeguard the participants in the study (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010).

### ***Researcher Reflexivity***

When addressing ethical considerations, it is imperative for researchers to go beyond what is institutionally mandated, and to critically reflect on their own values, beliefs, and positionalities (Palmer, 2016). Engaging in reflexivity provides an opportunity to clearly articulate the implications, possibilities, and limitations of approaching a research topic in a particular way (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020). Reflecting on the researcher's positionality is important because it impacts the construction of data and ultimately the knowledge being shared (Smith, 2006). According to Smith and Sparkes (2013), a researcher's positionality can and should influence their work. My positionality has been integral in generating insights about the athlete – guide partnership and the research questions I sought to explore for this project (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020).

I consider myself, among other things, to be a product of the Paralympic sport system. I write that deliberately because unlike most of the athletes I have encountered – in this research and in my personal life – who have either acquired disabilities or found disability sport later in life, I grew up as a high-performance disabled athlete. My visual impairment has impacted my life since birth, and I spent the majority of my young adolescent years immersed in disability sport culture which dramatically shaped how I understand myself and my space in the world as a woman with a disability. At the same time, my privilege as a highly educated researcher has provided me with the ability to think critically about my experiences and the experiences of others with disabilities. My research is personal – I am able to notice the socio-cultural politics

which have shaped the Paralympic movement, and I recognize the inequities in a sport system constructed by able-bodied individuals for people with disabilities (Peers, 2012). I have thought critically about the detrimental ways the Paralympic movement is often portrayed and can advocate for rearticulating sporting bodies to better acknowledge the accomplishments of high-performance athletes with disabilities (Purdue & Howe, 2012). In recognizing that the vast majority of research about disability is conducted by able-bodied scholars (Olkin & Pledger, 2003), it was important for me to give back to the community that has given me so much by contributing to this body of scholarship (Brighton & Williams, 2019).

I began ski racing in 2009 when I was about 12 years old. I quickly fell in love – the mountains, the freedom, the dream – it was addicting, and I continued competing for over a decade spending much of my time in high school and college as a high-performance athlete. I traveled the world, worked hard to be the best I could be, and competed at two Paralympic Games, but of course I could not have been successful as an athlete without the dedication and sacrifice of the two guides who I had the privilege of following along the journey. My relationships with each of these women continue to be incredibly close; while it wasn't always easy, both of my guides supported me when I needed them most and taught me a variety of lessons.

Epistemological reflexivity refers to how the researcher's values and assumptions influence their methodological decision making and theoretical commitments (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020). Throughout this research I sought to engage in reflexive ethics, which began by deliberately choosing to utilize interviews as a method of inquiry that fit with the theoretical framework for this study. Interviews are suggested to be a powerful tool that aligns with the

emancipatory research paradigm of Critical Disabilities Studies because they provide an opportunity to explore the realities of disabled participants (Brighton & Williams, 2019). Throughout the interview process I sought to be sensitive to the reactions of participants during interviews, and, when necessary, I adapted my interview strategies with consideration for the participant's safety, privacy, dignity, and autonomy (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

According to Rubin and Rubin (2011), having a strong affiliation with a research topic can be incredibly beneficial because it provides researchers with unique empathy for participants. Openness on the part of the interviewer helps participants to feel more protected and less exposed (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). To gain trust with my participants, I chose to be open and honest with them about my previous experiences as a visually impaired athlete. My positionality was helpful because it provided me with the networks and social connections to aid with recruitment. I was able to share the study on my personal social media accounts and reach out to contacts I already knew prior to the study to inquire about potential participants. Furthermore, participants seemed more likely to respond and choose to be a part of the study after learning about my background. Many participants expressed appreciation for my experiences as a Paralympian, and recognized how my positionality would be beneficial in sharing these stories; this trust likely made them feel more comfortable talking with me considering some of our shared experiences. My perspectives undoubtedly influenced how I responded to participants as my own experiences shaped how and when I probed participants to share more about their own stories.

At the same time, being so close and familiar with the topic also created some challenges. Because of our shared experiences it was important for me to be aware of the evidence and



details in the data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Often instead of explaining stories in their entirety, participants would only explain part of the story, assuming I would understand because of my background. Throughout data collection I tried to be aware of this, and often addressed these challenges by being honest with participants, explaining to them that I might know what they were referring to, but that for the sake of the research I would appreciate hearing it in their own words. While some challenges arose because of my closeness to the topic, overall, my positionality was beneficial in connecting with participants.

Beyond positionality, reflexivity is about the role of the researcher as an active agent in the production of knowledge (Trainor & Bundon, 2020). Referring to Richardson (1998), throughout the research process I used writing as a method of inquiry to provide insights about myself and the topic. After each interview, I engaged in reflexive free writing to examine my assumptions, rapport with participants, research questions, methods, paradigmatic choices, analytical strategies and writing styles (Smith & Sparkes, 2013). Writing throughout the research process gave me permission to explore the data more fully and think about it critically in the context of my own experiences. Ultimately, writing allowed me to more fully understand my own experiences and the topic broadly. Such insights were beneficial in informing how knowledge has been constructed and the stories being told in the findings section of this document.

Like David Howe (2008; 2), a Paralympian and academic, I felt I was “ideally positioned to tell this story”. While my background was helpful in providing me insights for this study, it did not come without its challenges. Before starting this research, I was warned about the emotional burden that comes with researching a personally meaningful topic, and throughout the

research process I began to recognize the often very blurred boundaries between my personal life and the construction of knowledge for the purpose of this research. A topic that at once felt grounded in context – colorful, and full of emotion – now sometimes feels black and white, bound to the margins of this document. The research forced me to step back and reflect on my own relationships with my guides, which brought back positive and negative emotions. These stories of shared triumphs, failures, opportunities, and adversities always felt insular and dramatically different than the experiences of most of my teammates who participated in sport independently. Engaging in reflexivity throughout the research provided an opportunity to explore how I fit into and am intertwined with the experiences of participants (Smith, 2006). Through research we “seek a mirror to one’s personal experiences”; in writing about what we see in the mirror, it provides an opportunity to make sense of the world and who we are in relation to our beginnings (Prince, 2010 p.57). Throughout my career I felt alone but together. I experienced sport so intimately with my guides, but often these narratives were not represented or shared. If nothing else, I hope this study makes visually impaired athletes and guides feel less alone in their experiences.

## Chapter IV: Findings

### Chapter Overview

In this chapter I describe the themes constructed from participant interviews as they pertain to each of the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012). I will start with research question one: How is the athlete - guide partnership experienced in high-performance parasport? The findings provide a foundation and context for understanding the athlete – guide partnership and how it is experienced through the theme “You Live as a Team, You Die as a Team”. Next, I will move on to discuss research question two: How is interdependence experienced and understood within these partnerships? The findings draw on the 5C’s model of interdependence to provide a better understanding of how interdependence is experienced in this unique athlete – athlete dyadic relationship. The theme, Better Together, has been generated to further explore interdependence within the athlete – guide partnership. Finally, research question three: How does the athlete - guide partnership challenge and reproduce normative assumptions of bodies, abilities, and sport? The findings provide insights into how these partnerships are positioned within the sociocultural contexts and includes two themes, Building Bridges: Connecting and Embracing Differences and The Uphill Battle. The themes, and subthemes are provided in the table below.

**Table 4:**

*Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes
<b>1. “You Live as a Team, You Die as a Team”</b>	a. There is No ‘I’ in Team b. Communication is Key c. A Work in Progress
<b>2. Better Together</b>	a. “You Just Need to Click” b. The Power of a Complement

	c. Like One Person: Synchronicity in the Athlete – Guide Partnership
<b>3. Building Bridges: Connecting and Embracing Differences</b>	a. Parasport Culture b. Writing a New Narrative
<b>4. The Uphill Battle</b>	a. A Shot in The Dark: The Paradox of an Inclusive and Exclusive Sport System b. Out of Our Hands: Agency in the Athlete – Guide Partnership

Through sharing these findings, the hope is to begin to shed light on the athlete – guide partnership, the experiences of these unique sport dyads, and to reimagine sport narratives to be more inclusive and accepting of different experiences.

**“You Live as a Team, You Die as a Team”**

All the participants spoke about their shared experiences in sport; from enjoying the opportunities and privileges that come with being high performance athletes (like travel and access to services) to overcoming adversities together (such as injury or performance setbacks), partners found comfort and challenge in working as a team. The theme was further divided into three subthemes: 1a) There is no ‘I’ in team, 1b) Communication is Key, and 1c) A Work in Progress.

***There is No ‘I’ in Team***

Athletes and guides function as one unit in order to make progress together. While each partner brings unique skill sets, life experiences, and even athletic careers, one cannot function without the other and athletes and guides must learn to navigate how they each individually contribute to the overall team. Eleven participants mentioned the benefits of working with a partner, and they spoke of the comfort and pride they get from competing together. For example, one athlete who lost his vision later in life and therefore had experience competing as an

individual, recalled how it felt to always have someone supporting him. Even when he started to lose faith in his own abilities, he found it rewarding to participate alongside his guide.

*“I think [working with a guide] is a little bit more rewarding where it is kind of this cool commiseration that happens where. . . someone is right here with me literally stride for stride and they want to win just as bad as you do and you kind of feel like I don’t want to let [G5] down . . . Having been an individual athlete for a long, long time I think there is a lot of reward for being right there on the course with another athlete, kind of doing it as a team. It doesn’t feel as lonely” (A5).*

Consistently having a training partner was seen as beneficial because it holds athletes’ and guides’ accountable. When training and competing becomes challenging, participants experienced a sense of comfort knowing they could lean on their partners for support.

While working together empowered both athletes and guides, four participants spoke about their experiences sacrificing their individual expectations and desires in order to prioritize their partners’ needs. As illustrated by the experience of the pair below, both partners have learned what they each individually are able to bring to the team. The guide remembered navigating his own competitive drive with his responsibilities to support his athlete while competing in a qualifying event. Even though he was capable of running faster, he had to slow down to accommodate his athlete and recalled the challenges of watching other racers pull in front of him and his partner:

*“At the end of the day, it is not my race - Yes we are a team, yes we support each other, and we succeed and fail together, but. . . to be in say a world Championships or a Paralympic test event and I am jogging easy and. . . watching funding, and qualification, and just those spots, and being beaten - because I am so competitive – that has been the hardest part. . . is to kind of put my competitive drive, and my investment that I have made a little bit on the back burner” (G1).*

This guide’s sacrifice for the sake of the team was seen and felt by the athlete who was held accountable, supported, and appreciative of his guide. The athlete noted:

*“When we race poorly, I feel bad because I know how much he invests in us, and honestly when we race poorly it is because of me, it is not because of him. So I feel bad*

*about that, but again, you live as a team, you die as a team” (A1).*

The experiences of these individuals and how they accommodate their partners needs in order to become stronger together illustrates the profound importance of teamwork in the context of the athlete – guide partnership.

However, great sacrifices also come with rewards. When teams do work well together, they experienced a sense of pride for their partner’s hard work and for what they had been able to accomplish together:

*“If I am really honest when I think back about times that I have been on the podium it can be a bit of a blur you know because things happen so fast. . . [but] I do remember. . . being on the podium together and it was just a very, very proud moment because. . . I was really cognizant of how hard we had worked” (A3).*

These experiences of accomplishment are special because they are shared – both athletes and guides witnessed the commitment and sacrifice their partners endured. While working as a team can be challenging, it also provided immense reward when success was experienced together.

### ***Communication is Key***

Participants revisited time and time again the importance of strong, honest communication between them and their partners to achieve optimal performance. In fact, all 12 participants mentioned communication as an important aspect of their partnerships. Participant A3 reflected on his ability to communicate with his guide *“He wants me to succeed and he wants us to succeed together. . . I think we both have been able to say things that have helped the other person and also not say things too”*. Communication between athletes and guides can take place in a variety of different ways and participants recalled the explicit and the subtle forms of communication they used with their partners. As athletes and guides became more familiar with one another, they were able to deliberately choose how and when to best communicate with their partners.

While training and competing, participant A2 referred to communication with his guide as, “*short and snappy*”. Multiple participants spoke about the need for communication to be concise so that athletes and guides could easily understand their partners and how to most effectively optimize their performance together. In fact, two participants preferred less communication while competing as A5 said recalling a previous race, “*all I needed was a little bit. I think that is when I know it is going really well is when communication is at a minimum*”. Nonetheless, strategic communication was important because as one athlete mentioned:

*“There is lots of dynamics and lots of things happening really quickly and so I think for the guide its, its being ready to, being really ready for anything and also just the rapport we have and the communication between us to be able to react and interact in that situation” (A3).*

Communication and rapport between athletes and guides allowed them to communicate clearly and effectively in a variety of circumstances while training and competing.

While all the participants spoke about the importance of communication with their partners, the needs of the athletes varied depending on their visual impairments. Athletes who were classified as B1 (blind) often had much higher support needs than those who were classified as B2 or B3 (visually impaired). One athlete who is blind recalled the types of communication he needed from his guide. He said:

*“If there is a place where you are transitioning from a sidewalk to asphalt, or if there is a speed bump, or something along those lines the guide has to. . . say, “hey, speed bump coming up in three, two, one, step”. That kind of thing. Now, your communication can be quick, but it needs to be in advance, it needs to give me time to think about it, and it needs to give me time to, you know, avoid that in a way that I am not going to stumble or {fall} down. . . . Where there are obstacles, you know, make sure you proactively communicate that to me in a way that we can kind of get through it together while optimizing speed” (A5).*

Because the participant had no usable vision, he needed very specific and strategically timed communication from his guide. On the other hand, one guide recalled the communication he

used with his athlete who was classified as a B3 athlete and therefore had more usable vision. He said, “*The main thing is just giving him warning so he is ready for when something is changing*” (G2). While the information communicated between athletes and guides are similar, there is significant variation in the details and timing of communication depending on the athletes’ individual needs and the nature of their visual impairments.

While sometimes communication was explicit, after spending a significant amount of time together, participants were able to learn and understand more subtle cues from their partners such as tone. For example, one participant mentioned:

*“If we are having a good run I [can] tell in his voice. I literally can pick up when [G4] is slowing down, I can pick up when [G4] is excited. . . Like he can change his voice just an octave and I know what the hell is going on” (A4).*

Here, familiarity with her partner allowed her to understand his communication through a subtle change in the tone of his voice. Interestingly, she goes on to say:

*“If I can feel either he thinks [training] is not right, or it is not going [well], I will change my voice or my communication and try to make it a more positive run for him too. Like I have to give back as much as he gives and vice versa” (A4).*

As the participant recalled, she could influence her partner through small adjustments in how she was communicating with him. The example illustrates how communication in the athlete – guide partnership is dynamic and bidirectional.

Even with the large amount of time athletes and guides spent together, interestingly few shared stories about resolving major conflicts within their partnerships. However, one pair spoke about the need for open and honest dialogue to address any issues when they came up rather than leaving the disagreements to fester. The guide said:

*“We don’t really hold back. Like if I think he messed something up and needs to be better at something I am going to call him on it and same thing with if he thinks I have done something that needs improvement. . . .When we kind of give each other feedback like*



*that we don't take it personally. . . . I think between the two of us it is yea, communication. You have an issue, talk about it, and you problem solve together. We are team" (G1).*

Honest communication between the athlete and guide ensured that they each understood the needs and expectations of their partner. These conversations played out in a variety of ways as seen by the example below. The athlete echoed his guide and said:

*"Maybe we are on a bike ride and we just have a chat or maybe on a run we just have a chat about something that has come up. There is never any hostility, or any embarrassment, or anything like that . . . we are both very open to dialogue" (A1).*

Making space for deliberate dialogue was found to be important amongst participants because open communication enabled cohesion and alignment of other aspects of the relationship as well. For example, one participant spoke about navigating different goals within her partnership:

*"We talked about what we are going to work on before and we had two different directions. . . so we had to sit and talk about it and be like okay how about we do this and then we found something that we could focus on together" (A4).*

The deliberate conversation with her guide helped align their goals and ensure they were working effectively together.

### ***"A Work in Progress"***

Athlete – guide partnerships were continuously evolving as athletes and guides spent time together, and partners became more familiar with one another. As partners gained understanding of each other, they learned how to best support one another in a variety of situations. For example, one athlete who has worked with the same guide for over a decade described how their relationship has strengthened over time, *"I feel like it's the hours and hours and hours of training, readjusting, and we just, I know what he is going to do before he does it" (A4).*

Similarly, her guide acknowledged that even though they have worked together for so long, they

are constantly striving to be better, “*we have had to evolve over time just like everything else but like I said it is still a work in progress. Always trying new stuff*” (G4).

Like all relationships, work is needed to maintain and strengthen these partnerships over time. Participants spoke about taking space from each other, prioritizing enjoyment, and being deliberate about communication to maintain and grow their partnership throughout their time together. Nine participants mentioned acting in deliberate ways (both together and individually) to maintain their relationships with their partners. In the example below, one athlete recalled navigating challenges within the training environment with her partner. The athlete was able to overcome the frustrations of difficult training sessions by relying on her guide not for coaching, but rather for support to access the enjoyment of participating in sport:

*“We could be [training] and I am just frustrated, I am not getting anything right, and I feel like it is his fault - but maybe it really isn’t his fault - and I will be like can we just go ski it out because I have more fun skiing it out. . . You could lose sight of that very quickly in becoming a professional athlete. . . . I need to just go ski. Don’t tell me I am doing anything wrong, just let me ski. Don’t be my coach, just guide me down the mountain and let me ski” (A4).*

In the example above, the guide was able to provide the athlete with the freedom to enjoy the sport even when the pressures of training and competing as a high-performance athlete became challenging. By deliberately creating opportunities to enjoy the sport, the athlete and guide maintained their relationship with one another through the adversities and challenges they faced as a team.

On the other hand, maintenance of the athlete – guide partnership was also seen in individual actions as mentioned by the guide below:

*“I try after every race - good or bad - to go for a run myself or go do something on my own. . . What motivates me is challenging myself to be better, and when I race personally what I love about crossing that finish line is knowing that you have given everything you possibly can and there is absolutely nothing left. . . if I am in the shape that I should be in*

*to [guide], the [race] should still be easy for me, and so you kind of get the anticlimactic feeling like you cross that finish line and you are like great. . . so I try to go out and go for a hard run or something like that afterwards” (G1).*

After competing with his athlete, the guide deliberately took some space and prioritized doing a challenging workout in order to maintain his motivation and ability to support his athlete. By choosing to put himself first in some situations, he was able to preserve his love for the sport, his ability to guide effectively, and his relationship with his athlete. Considering the amount of time athletes and guides spend together, it is important to recognize the dynamic nature of this partnership because situations are always changing, partners are challenged to overcome adversities together and as individuals, and therefore their relationships need to develop overtime as well.

### **Better Together**

To address the second research question and explore how interdependence is experienced in the athlete – guide partnership the following sections was guided by the 5C’s model of interdependence. The athlete – guide partnership was mutually beneficial for athletes and guides and all the participants spoke about various reasons why working with a partner was beneficial. These partnerships challenged dichotomies of dependent and independent because athletes and guides experienced interdependence by relying on their partner’s strengths and supporting each other’s weaknesses. To further explain interdependence in the context of the athlete – guide partnership, the components of the Poczwardowski and colleague’s (2019) 5C’s model of interdependence including compatibility, closeness, commitment, complementarity, and coorientation were further explored in the context of these unique sport dyads. However, these components were experienced differently within the context of the athlete – guide partnership because of the distinct roles – where one individual has lived experience of disability and the

other presumably does not. The theme has been further divided into subthemes including 2a) “You Just Need to Click”, 2b) The Power of a Complement, and 2c) Like One Person: Synchronicity in the Athlete – Guide Partnership.

### ***“You Just Need to Click”***

Eight participants spoke about the *compatibility* of their personalities and a need to “click” with their partners to be successful. While athletes and guides often differed in their social identities like age, race, or sex, participants spoke about the importance of compatibility with respect to their values and motivations for pursuing sport. For example, A3 mentioned how despite their differences, he had a shared love of the sport with his guide. He said, *“you know, there is an age difference between us, but I think there is also common ground and common appreciation for [sport] and life”*. Furthermore, with the added pressures of competing there was a need to consider the energy compatibility of athletes and guides. For example, four participants spoke about the importance of their partners having similar mind-sets about competing. One athlete shared some insights about the dynamics between him and his guide when they prepared to compete:

*“He does not get flapped, he doesn’t get amped up, he is very measured in the way that he goes about his preparation and that is a comfort to me because it allows me to be in my energy space” (A5).*

The athlete and guide experienced compatible energy levels during races. The athlete felt comfort in knowing his guide would be consistent, which allowed him to prepare for the race in the way that was most appropriate for him, without having to manage the emotions of his guide.

Alternatively, when partners were incompatible it created challenges. Three athletes recalled experiences working with guides who did not have the same intentions and mindsets as they did. At best, these situations led to difficult conversations, heightened anxiety, or mutual

agreements to end the partnership. At worst, incompatibility in the athlete – guide partnership had severe consequences to self-esteem and wellbeing as one athlete recalled an experience working with a previous guide:

*“I mean it tears you apart and takes away your independence and makes you feel not worthy. A person can really destroy you. . . and give you self-doubt. Unless that common goals is there, and that collaboration, and the guide truly believing that what you guys are doing is possible, and encouraging you, and supporting you, and the team it is detrimental” (A4).*

When the compatibility between partners was off and mutual support for the goals of the team were not present, the athlete began to feel self-doubt illustrating how incompatibility within the athlete – guide partnership can shift a relationship that is often empowering for athletes into one that is toxic and detrimental to the athlete’s wellbeing.

Building on compatibility, partners often evolved to experience a sense of *closeness* with each other. As G1 put it, *“I think just because we have such compatible personalities. We are both pretty laid back, we both have obviously similar interests in athletics, we are friends now”*. Athletes and guides spoke about how their partnerships extended beyond the field of play, and nine participants explicitly mentioned the friendships they had cultivated with their partners. One athlete said:

*“The guiding relationship is. . . I mean, you are friends, and it is really important to be able to laugh together. . . You share a lot of life, you know? So it is important to have that sort of rapport” (A3).*

Without strong rapport and friendship between athletes and guides, the shared sport experience was much less enjoyable for the athlete.

Similarly, while some guides spoke about the altruistic nature of their partnerships, many also expressed gratitude for the close relationships they had built with their athletes. In this case, the guide echoed his partner’s feelings of profound respect and friendship:

*“I see [A3] as not just a running buddy, but also a best friend. Somebody that I can just kind of talk to about just life. . . I consider it as being a family kind of relationship” (G3).*

As these partners illustrated, many athletes and guides experienced a strong friendship that impacted their relationships beyond sport.

The sense of closeness in the athlete – guide partnership was unique because of the mutual trust between athletes and guides. Athletes who are blind and visually impaired place implicit trust in their guides that goes beyond the collaborations seen in typical athlete – athlete dyads. Athletes trust their guides to be their eyes – to prioritize their safety and communicate effectively – in order to allow athletes to compete unrestricted. As one athlete mentioned:

*“When you are [competing] without vision and your guide is your sighted eyes. . . to be able to give 100% of your athleticism you have to have that trust in the person who is [competing] in front of you” (A4).*

All six athletes spoke about the limitations they often faced when participating in sports because of environmental barriers such as uneven footing or changes in conditions. However, when they could trust their guides to keep them safe, athletes were able to participate unrestricted and this contributed to their sense of closeness with their partners.

Guides acknowledged the immense trust athletes put in them and experienced their own sense of trust with their athletes that related to their *commitment* to the partnership. Considering the time guides invested in training and competing with their athletes, they needed to be able to trust that the athletes would be supportive of them. As G4 puts it, *“I wouldn’t be doing this without her”*. The guides expressed a sense of trust in their athletes to show up prepared, communicate their needs, and be considerate of the guide’s dedication to the partnership, which allowed the guides to become committed to their roles. For example, one guide spoke about how his commitment to his athlete and their partnership has increased over time.

*“The more I have [guided] the more it has meant to me. The longer I have been invested in this – and especially now that we seem to be going faster – you really believe that actually you can turn this around. . . it is really on now” (G6).*

As the guide spent more time working with his athlete, he became more committed to their goals as a team because he was able to trust that his athlete would support him and continue to want to work with him. Athletes and guides referenced *compatibility*, *closeness*, and *commitment* as key components in their partnerships.

### ***The Power of a Complement***

All 12 participants mentioned various aspects of *complementarity* in their partnerships – magnifying each other’s strengths, while supporting each other’s weaknesses. Like many dyadic athlete – athlete relationships, partners complemented each other in their roles, decision making, and negotiation of power within the partnership. However, what distinguished complementarity in the athlete – guide partnership was the need to compensate for the limitations of living with a visual impairment. Even though each partnership navigated their roles and responsibilities differently, in these distinguishable dyads, guides regularly took on responsibilities to complement their partners and support them by alleviating some of the challenges athletes faced because of their visual impairments. For example, as one athlete described:

*“The guide should not be focused on maxing out their effort. The guide should be focused on safety, positioning, matching gates, you know, race updates and strategy, thinking about where we are, being aware of where we are. . . their heads should be at the strategic level” (A5).*

His guide took on a variety of responsibilities that the athlete likely would not have been able to do on his own. Often guides were responsible for not only navigating the athlete safely, but also for making tactical decisions that allowed the pair to compete most efficiently.

While it might be misconstrued that these partnerships are unequal in nature seeing as the guides are supporting the performance of the athletes, the partnership was seen to be mutually

beneficial for athletes and guides. Working within the partnership often created a sense of comradery and support that held participants accountable to their training, and provided a unique and shared sport experience neither would be a part of without their partners. As G3 says, “*I mean I am helping somebody, but at the same time that person is also helping me in a way*”.

Partnerships were beneficial for guides because it extended their athletic career, motivated them to maintain their personal fitness levels, provided them with a new perspective on sport, and even gave some an opportunity to fulfill their own Olympic dreams. As one guide noted:

*“I sort of accepted that [competing] was kind of over for me. . . but then when I got asked to guide it was a chance to race again, it was a chance to [participate] again, and it was different enough that I was enjoying it a lot more” (G2).*

Furthermore, guides found meaning in the altruism of their roles which also cultivated a sense of empathy for their athletes and people with disabilities broadly. As one guide mentioned:

*“I kind of fell in love with the goal and helping someone else achieve their goals. . . . to be involved in something bigger than yourself and your sport, I think sport can be very selfish and I am not a selfish person, and so to be able to compete at a higher level but also be able to feel like you are doing this really cool kind of altruistic thing has been amazing” (G1).*

The guide felt pride in his role on the team, his ability to support his athlete, and the opportunities he had been provided because of their work together. Interestingly, the pride this guide felt was met with satisfaction from his athlete who said:

*“I think I give him maybe a bit of purpose. I think guiding a blind athlete has allowed him to experience things that he might not have experienced on his own, and he has told me this, that guiding me makes him feel good because he knows he is helping me achieve something that I really want and he wants that as well” (A1).*

Knowing that his guide also benefited from their partnership and how they were each able to complement each other in different ways made the relationship more equal. While on the surface the athlete – guide partnership might appear unidirectional, complementary roles fostered an environment that promoted true partnership that was mutually beneficial.



### ***Like One Person: Synchronicity in the Athlete – Guide Partnership***

*Coorientation* refers to the perceptual congruence and intentional collaborations of individuals in dyadic partnerships. Athletes and guides spoke about the importance of coorientation with their partners. Specifically, all 12 participants mentioned coorientation with respect to alignment of goals with their partners. As one athlete mentioned:

*“You both have to want the same outcome. You have to set the same goals, or you have got to have goals to be able to achieve. . . You want that person to be guiding you because they want to be a Paralympic guide. They want to win a medal, they have to have the same goal as you do to continue” (A4).*

For the athletes, their goals and ability to perform in sport were dependent on support from their guides. However, it was the athlete’s career the partners were fulfilling together, and while some athletes viewed decisions entirely as a team, others maintained a certain sense of agency over the goals they chose to set for themselves and their partnerships. One athlete said:

*“Within Paralympic competition I think there needs to be a space for that VI athlete to kind of realize their goals and the guides goals might need to be subsidiary. . . . [G5] has been very good to sort of allow me to set the tone with the goals. . . I do think he views himself as sort of a fulfiller or a mechanism by which those goals can be achieved” (A5).*

Visually impaired athletes do not always have the freedom to choose how they participate in sport, so having the agency to make certain decisions within the athlete – guide partnership can be empowering.

Furthermore, athletes and guides experienced coorientation uniquely in their physical congruence with their partners. Nine participants recalled intentional collaborations with their partners that led to unique experiences of synchronicity in the context of the athlete – guide partnership. As athletes became more familiar with one another, it was easier to feel entuned with their partners. An athlete and her guide both recalled experiencing synchronicity at a World Cup race they competed in together:

*“It was like we were [competing] as one person. . . It is something you can’t replicate for every [competition]. It was the craziest feeling of just everything felt like we were just connected and solid as a team” (A4).*

*“Everything comes together, and it is like everything is almost in slow motion and it is easy and flows and super fun and it is hard to make that happen every single time but when it happens all the sudden you are like wow” (G4).*

The pair spoke about a specific instance when everything came together, and they felt seamlessly connected. Participants explained synchronicity as a flow with their partners that was evident to both athletes and guides.

On the other hand, it was also evident to participants when they were out of synch with their partners. As one athlete recalled a race he competed in with a previous guide:

*“I am constantly adjusting to him, he is clearly not paying attention to me, we are out of synch. . . it wasn’t a communication thing, it was we were just definitely physically out of synch and that killed that [competition]” (A5).*

When athletes and guides were not in synch with one another, it was obvious in their ability to collaborate and perform well. In the context of the athlete – guide partnership individual alignment of goals and intentional collaboration contributed to experiences of coorientation. Congruency and synchronicity allowed individuals to come together as a team.

### **Building Bridges: Connecting and Embracing Differences**

The athlete – guide partnership provides unique opportunities to challenge normative assumptions of dis/abilities, ab/normalities, and sport. To further illustrate the context of these partnerships and the ways in which they challenge us to think differently, this theme has been further divided into two subthemes: 3a) Parasport Culture and 3b) Writing New Narratives.

#### ***Parasport Culture***

To understand the experiences of athletes and guides in the athlete – guide partnership, it is important to recognize that this partnership is situated within the unique culture of high-

performance parasport. The atmosphere in parasport was described by participants as “friendly”, “welcoming”, and “inclusive”, which opposed what several participants had experienced in able-bodied sport. One athlete recalled his initial reactions when he first started competing in parasport races. He said, “*everyone was willing to speak to you and help you out with issues that you may have had and just wanting to chat, and they were just a lot more relaxed than the able-bodied side of things*” (A2). Four participants who had experiences in able-bodied high-performance sport prior to competing in parasport appreciated the culture of parasport. Because the numbers in parasport were smaller and there were generally fewer athletes involved, the small community fostered more opportunities for collaboration and less pressure to perform. One guide said:

*“It is just fun – It is a lot more chilled out than the Olympic side. . . It is not as toxic an environment as well because it can get really competitive you know between the guys or the girls or whatever on the Olympic side, whereas it is not quite the same over on the Paralympic side” (G6).*

The collaborative nature of parasport culture created opportunities for athletes to learn from one another and connect over sport and their shared lived experiences of impairments. In fact, parasport culture and being surrounded by athletes with various (dis)abilities shaped how athletes and guides understood themselves and disability broadly. As one athlete noted:

*“When I started getting involved competitively and actually surrounded myself. . . with people with disabilities it was one of the greatest wake up calls because. . . finding that community and our path with these other people with disabilities opened the doors for even more possibilities. . . it is super freaking incredible. . . Those are the people that inspired me to be my best self – like the other athletes, the relationships” (A4)*

Being around other people with disabilities in the context of sport was empowering for athletes because they saw their teammates accomplish a variety of tasks – within sport but also in their personal lives – and they began to believe there were possibilities for them as well.

The inspiration felt by athletes and guides was undeniable. Like the athlete's experience shared above, guides spoke about how interacting and getting to know their athletes and teammates inspired them to be better. One guide said,

*"I think 'inspiring' is often overused as kind of a cliché in the para world, but definitively inspiring. . . As an able bodied individual it kind of puts any excuse that I have ever told myself to rest because. . . these other athletes literally have every excuse in the world not to do this but they have found a way to do it, and they are doing it really well. Like they are fast! And it is incredible to see the level of athleticism and ingenuity amongst all these other athletes no matter what their disability" (G1).*

The guide's inspiration did not just stem from overcoming disability related challenges. He goes on to say:

*"[A1] is so inspiring. . . if we don't come out with the result that I was hoping for I tend to beat myself up about it and get pissed off about it, but [A1] is just like a picture of optimism. . . he never falters which is really inspiring for me" (G1).*

Working closely with his athlete also inspired him to be more optimistic and to think differently about what success in sport truly means. As one participant said, parasport is unique because it is *"establishing this culture that is built around navigating challenges and always succeeding despite them" (A5)*. While differences and challenges are evident, athletes and guides found parasport culture to be a unique and valuable space to examine their assumptions about themselves and others.

### ***Writing New Narratives***

The athlete – guide partnership challenges dominant narratives about disability and high-performance sport. While individuals with disabilities are frequently portrayed in society in ways that highlight their inabilities and dependence on others, high-performance athletes are commonly described in terms that emphasize their abilities and reinforce notions that they are independent and individually responsible for their own performances. The athlete – guide

relationship disrupts both these narratives by altering the experiences of athletes with visual impairments and challenging dominant societal understandings of what people with disabilities are capable of.

Participating with a guide altered how athletes experienced their impairments because it provided them with the ability to participate fully on and off the field of play. As mentioned previously, all six athletes recalled challenges they faced in sport because of their impairments.

One athlete said:

*“I am a realist and I realize there are things a cannot do independently so it does frustrate me sometimes knowing that I can only properly [train] if I rely on somebody else” (A1).*

Athletes desired independence but recognized their limitations. Participants spoke about the difficulties such as finding consistent guides to train with, inconsistent training conditions (such as snow conditions or footing), and needing to advocate for themselves to educate coaching and high-performance staff who are often unfamiliar with the logistics of working with blind or visually impaired athletes.

However, when the athletes did have consistent and supportive guides to work with it altered how they experienced their impairments by alleviating some of these challenges. One athlete says:

*“I grew up in a day of age where you really didn’t talk about your disability. Like it wasn’t socially acceptable. It was kind of like if you were disabled you had a disease and it was contagious and people did not want to know about it so when [I participated] for the first time and [someone] guided me I really honestly did feel this sense of – oh shit, there are possibilities out their waiting for me in this world – and I know it sounds crazy but one day of [participating] did transition my whole mind set of what people can do with disabilities. . . . I am comfortable with [my visual impairment]. I sure wish I could see the smile on somebody’s face, but I wouldn’t trade where I am today to have it back because I feel like I found my true self through my journey” (A4).*

Initially the participant understood herself, and people with disabilities more broadly, as incapable and limited in what they were able to accomplish. Working with a guide she felt capable and it allowed her to more fully accept herself – including her disability.

In fact, three athletes spoke about how working with their guides altered how they experienced their disability because along with providing them freedom to participate, athletes also experienced several social benefits. One athlete said:

*“Even within a friendly space like the Paralympics I have at times felt like a burden. . . Even amongst a group of people with very diverse disabilities I feel like sometimes blind people are like an additional burden. . . I am kind of constantly waiting for someone to guide me around and you know everybody is really friendly about making sure that I am helped out, but I do feel sometimes like a little bit of a burden. Moving into a sport. . . where I come with my guide and we travel together, and we live in the same room, and it doesn’t seem, it is not as burdensome to me I don’t think. Like it makes sense for us to be together” (A5).*

The athlete shared some of the anxiety and limitations he faced when navigating new spaces as a person who is blind. However, when he was with his guide there was always someone to help and he was able to do many tasks – which were often daunting – without difficulty.

Moreover, the exposure to athletes with disabilities altered the assumptions guides had about people with disabilities. One guide said:

*“Until you see it firsthand, I guess you don’t really realize how much [people with disabilities] can do for themselves whereas I think you would sort of initially jump to, well they would struggle with that. . . but in reality they live their own life everyday so they get pretty damn good at the stuff that they do and just because they got a certain disability doesn’t mean they can do any lesser. They just maybe - they do it slightly differently” (G6).*

Through working as a guide, the participant began to think critically about disability. Originally, he assumed disabilities, or differences, would cause people to struggle, but after spending time with athletes with disabilities he saw these differences as an avenue for accomplishment rather than a limitation. Like this participant, all six of the guides spoke about how their roles and

exposure to athletes with disabilities reshaped their understandings and assumptions of disability broadly.

Paralympic sport and the athlete – guide partnership also provided an opportunity to challenge normative assumptions about sport. One athlete recalled how his experiences pushed him to reconceptualize sport. He starts by saying:

*“When I started [competing]. . . I wanted to kind of grow this ability to be committed, to be motivated, to be honorable, all that sort of stuff so it was like this mechanism of individual development and specifically self-dominance”*

The participant recalled that when he was a child and able-bodied, he understood sport to be an individual pursuit and platform to assert dominance. However, when he lost his vision and began competing in Paralympic sport his perceptions and understandings of sport and its broader implications changed dramatically. He goes on to say:

*“Participating in Paralympics has given sport such a broader meaning; sport inspires the community, sport shows other folks what it means to pursue excellence, and make yourself better. . . Parasport has the power to reconceptualize for a lot of people what disability looks like, and then it doesn’t stop at disability then, you know, it is a powerful narrative. . . Sport at the very very face level just looks like people running around a track or swimming back and forth but I do think it has . . . this real depth to it that can be very important and not everybody gets that out of it but some people do and that is important” (A5).*

Not only does Paralympic sport have the power for people with disabilities to alter the ways they understand themselves and their spaces in the world, as this athlete illustrated, it can also be a platform to help reconceptualize disability and social identities broadly.

### **The Uphill Battle**

While there are many ways in which the athlete – guide partnership is able to challenge normative understandings of disability and sport, the truth is, this partnership can also be used to reproduce harmful and misunderstood assumptions. The following section has been broken

down into two subthemes: 4a) A Shot in the Dark: The Paradox of an Inclusive and Exclusive Sport System and 4b) Out of Our Hands: Agency in the Athlete – Guide Partnership.

### ***A Shot in The Dark: The Paradox of an Inclusive and Exclusive Sport System***

Although guides support visually impaired athletes in five recognized Paralympic sports, there are still inconsistencies and confusion about how to address these partnerships within the sport system. Athletes and guides – individually and together – must navigate a sport system that is designed to support individual, able-bodied athletes rather than pairs.

While disability sport can positively impact athletes, it is not excluded from the toxic aspects of high-performance sport systems that are often detrimental. As one athlete recalled:

*“I was not enjoying everything around me which gave me negative vibes and self-esteem issues and it was my surroundings. Assholes around me – coaches and athletes and toxic environments. The only time I was enjoying it is when I left the start and not when I came through the finish line because I would be knowing somebody, some asshole, has something to say about it” (A4).*

The athlete experienced burnout from an unsupportive sport environment. Despite the unique culture of parasport, high-performance disability sport and the systems it exists in have been modeled by able-bodied sport systems, and therefore, high-performance disability sport has inherited some of the negative aspects of high-performance sport culture which too often prioritizes performance rather than athlete wellbeing. The realization of exclusivity in high-performance disability sport was recognized by one guide who said:

*“Now that I kind of pulled back the veil on what high performance sport is truly. . . It is not glorious. It is not glamorous. It is a lot of blood, sweat, and tears. . . . It is quite exclusive. . . . There is this kind of elitist attitude of the coaches and staff in that like – we know best, you don’t. Just sit down quiet, appreciate that you are on this team, and you get all these things, and don’t ask questions, and do as we say. If we say jump, you say how high. Because [A1] was never targeted as a podium potential, he was always targeted as maybe a top ten at the games or a qualifier, it really seemed like our opinions didn’t matter” (G1).*



The guide expressed his frustrations about the elitist culture of high-performance sport and the challenges he faced navigating an unequal power dynamic between the athletes and the coaches on his team. Like many high-performance athletes, the guide struggled feeling heard within the team environment, and did not have the agency or the means to advocate for him and his athlete. These tensions ultimately led to the pair separating from their governing body.

More specific to the athlete – guide partnership, participants did not always feel adequately supported by their coaches and support staff. While most participants spoke about experiences with knowledgeable and understanding coaches, two athletes discussed the challenges they encountered working with coaches who had minimal experience with visually impaired athletes. Because some Paralympic sports are so new, athletes and guides found it difficult to receive adequate information on best practices. For example, one athlete recalled his initial experience when he started participating:

*“There wasn’t a playbook. . . it was kind of like a here’s a way to do it and if you want to figure out a different way, go for it. It is a little bit like the wild west – and I think I found that to be frustrating because, you know, I frequently knew there must be a better way to do this but I can’t see the way other athletes are doing it, there is not a lot of coaches who coach VI athletes. Aside from [G5] I didn’t really know anyone who was guiding, so there is not a lot of widespread information or knowledge within our sport currently” (A5).*

The athlete was discouraged by the lack of information and knowledge accessible to him. He had to work with his guide and rely on the knowledge and skills between the two of them to figure out what worked best for them as a pair.

The reality is the majority of coaches working with high-performance athletes with disabilities do not have much experience with people who are blind or visually impaired. The same athlete went on to say:

*“There is kind of a constant sort of re-education within our space to say you know this is what I can do, this is what I can’t do. I don’t think everyone always knows what tools are*

*available. I don't think everyone always knows what techniques are out there, and then as that plays into guiding, you know, every guide is sort of finding their own way into it. There is not a lot of coaching" (A5).*

The athlete experienced a lack of direction and understanding of best practices for athletes with visual impairments among his team. In fact, several participants spoke about having to figure out techniques on their own, and specifically four guides recounted being thrown into training and even races with minimal knowledge of the sport and their roles as guides. Overall, athletes and guides felt there was sometimes minimal understanding of the needs and dynamics of their partnership within the team environment.

With the transformation of sports which are typically understood to be individual sports into team sports, there is a lack of understanding as to where the guides should fit in, the support they should receive, and how to recognize their performances. Participants spoke about the various ways they took on the role of an athlete on the team (for example, their physical fitness requirements or their time commitment to the team), but three guides also mentioned instances they were not acknowledged and excluded from aspects of the sport experience such as not having their name included on the scoreboard, being referred to as “just a piece of adaptive equipment” rather than as an athlete, or even circumstances when they were not recognized for their contributions as in the case of the example below:

*“He got nominated for the [award]. . . . I was recognized but at the same time not really. Like I was mentioned but the award is to [A2], not to us as a pair if that makes sense which happens quite a lot with guiding relationships” (G2).*

The participant mentioned that guides were often not recognized for their contributions to the sport team because they were ultimately facilitating the careers of their athletes. While it did not bother most guides when they were not recognized, by not acknowledging the work and

commitment of guides it perpetuates normative understandings of how sport is done and what it should look like.

With the lack of understanding in some instances also came a lack of support. There is an added financial burden for athletes and guides because instead of traveling with one individual, now there are expenses for two. Financial support for visually impaired athletes and guides varied across sports and countries. One pair spoke about advocating for themselves and other visually impaired athletes to receive equal support, recognition, and funding for both the athlete and the guide. The clear but not always visible differences between individual athletes and athlete – guide partnerships was challenging to navigate for participants. As one athlete mentioned:

*“I have always felt being visually impaired, because it’s not a physical disability, it feels like you have to try harder. . . . To be fair, you don’t see many visually impaired people represented. . . It would be nice to see, but then your flip side of it is that people won’t know that [I am] para. . . Which would annoy them so. . . I mean you give them glasses and a stick and it’s like oh okay, perfect, but right, I don’t have that so I can’t, it is not as easy” (A6).*

The athlete referenced the invisibility of his disability and the challenges he faced getting sponsorship and recognition. While participants experienced sport differently than individual athletes their physical appearances were not always obvious and therefore, their stories and experiences in sport were easily overlooked.

### ***Out of Our Hands: Agency in the Athlete – Guide Partnership***

Considering the close and personal nature of the athlete – guide partnership described above, surprisingly six athletes and guides spoke about instances where they had minimal agency over who they worked with. The agency athletes and guides had in selecting who they worked with varied depending on the sport and country they were representing. Five athletes found their

guides through word of mouth and support from coaches, but one participant had less say in who he was partnered with. He said:

*“I have had quite a few [guides] now because they keep. . . swapping us around. . . We tried like all combinations [of athletes and guides] after [the Paralympics] to try and get the best outcome. . . they have made a decision now with [G6]. . . we have all these selection and trials and stuff. . . and I just basically said I don’t know, it is a lot easier to compete and get the results you want if you get on with the guide” (A6).*

The above quote illustrates how the athlete had almost no agency in who he was matched with. The athlete recognized the value in having a strong relationship with his guide, but he was not given the opportunity to make that decision for himself. Instead, his sport organization made it for him intending to optimize his performance without recognizing the importance of compatibility and cohesion of the pair.

Furthermore, three athletes spoke about the lack of support and apprehension they felt about finding and recruiting appropriate guides. For example, one athlete mentioned:

*“One of the issues actually with the program is there is no guide recruiting program, so if [G1] ever broke his leg tomorrow for example, I would be screwed. Other sports, other countries I know have guide recruitment programs. We don’t, but that is a federation problem. That is a shortcoming for sure” (A1).*

There are several factors that need to be considered when finding an appropriate guide. Athletes need to find someone that *“has the same values, and wants the same things, and is a good friend, and can communicate, and [they] can trust”*(A4). Finding someone with all of these attributes is challenging, and athletes did not always feel supported in their pursuits. Moreover, athletes were stripped of their agency when making these decisions because there were usually few people qualified and interested in taking on these roles. One athlete envisioned the future for Paralympic sport differently. He said:

*“As more and more guides get involved you should have the ability to have an elevated high performance race team who also gets along. So you shouldn’t feel forced like I have to work with this guide because they are literally the only one who can compete at this level” (A5).*

The lack of agency in choosing and being part of the athlete – guide partnership was also felt by some guides. Above I have discussed the discrepancies within sport systems to accommodate these partnerships. Another example is the inconsistencies pertaining to criteria for how guides are selected for prestigious events. After working with an athlete for several years, one guide mentioned his disappointment when the athlete chose to compete with a different guide at the Paralympics:

*"The athlete has to make the best decision for them, so not having that opportunity to go to [the Paralympics]. . . was kind of, I would say, a little bit of a letdown if I am going to be completely honest" (G5).*

Considering the commitment guides invested in their training and partnerships, not having explicit criteria and formal affiliations with the team left the guide in a vulnerable situation where his ability to participate was at the mercy of decisions made by his athlete and sport organization. A variety of circumstances restricted the agency of athletes and guides and created power imbalances in athlete – guide partnerships. In these situations, participants were left with a lack of autonomy to make decisions about their relationships and how they engaged in sport.

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

### **Chapter Overview**

This study was the first of its kind to explore the experiences of high-performance visually impaired athletes and their sighted guides. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with current athletes and guides from six high-performance pairs. To share these findings, four themes were constructed including “You Live as a Team, You Die as a Team”, Better Together, Building Bridges: Connecting and Embracing Differences, and The Uphill Battle. The findings illustrate the rewards and challenges of working with a partner, the unique ways athletes and guides experience interdependency in these relationships, and the ways in which the athlete – guide partnership can both challenge and reproduce normative understandings of disability and sport. The following chapter discusses the previously presented findings in the context of the relevant literature, the practical implications of these findings, and the limitations and future directions for research.

### **A ‘Critical’ Choice: Paradigmatic Alignment and Justification**

The study utilized a critical interpretivist paradigm which acknowledges reality to be multiple, subjective, and shaped through lived experiences while still addressing the ways in which systems create advantages and disadvantages (Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). Adopting aspects of interpretivism was important because this research sought to share and prioritize the various experiences and voices of participants. Acknowledging the lived experiences of people with disabilities is appropriate given the Critical Disability Studies theoretical framework which favors collaborating with people with disabilities rather than speaking for them (Misener et al., 2018). Furthermore, the study drew on critical theory to recognize how mainstream social practices, specifically how we understand sport and disability, can perpetuate inequalities (Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). Critical Disability Studies seeks to acknowledge dominant

societal beliefs and taken for granted assumptions (Smith & Perrier, 2015). The findings of this research highlights that even within spaces that we often assume to be inclusive, in this case high – performance disability sport, certain individuals (for example, athletes with high support needs such as athletes with visual impairments) continue to experience exclusion and marginalization.

In line with the critical interpretivist paradigm and Critical Disabilities Studies theoretical framework, reflexive free writing was used throughout data collection and data analysis to examine my assumptions, methods, paradigmatic choices, and analytical strategies (Smith & Sparkes, 2013). Considering my own positionality and personal experiences as a person with a visual impairment and Paralympic skier, reflexive writing helped me parse through how my own experiences intertwined with the experiences of participants (Smith, 2006). More specifically, throughout data analysis I used reflexive writing to think critically about the importance of each of the codes and how they fit into the broader narratives the data could tell. Writing was helpful because it allowed me to recognize how the codes overlapped and connected with one another. Through writing I was able to refine the codes and begin to think about the stories within the data and how those stories could be told in distinct, cohesive, and valuable ways.

### **Interdependence**

Athletes and guides experienced components of Poczwardowski et al.'s (2019) 5C's model of interdependence. The theme Better Together reflected the compatibility, commitment, closeness, complementarity, and coorientation experienced by athletes and guides. Although the 5C's model of interdependence had relevance to the athlete – guide partnership and helped explore the experiences of individuals in these relationships, there were also several aspects of the partnership that it did not capture. Therefore, some components of sociological understandings of interdependence were helpful for further exploration of participants' experiences. At the foundation of these unique and distinguishable partnerships are lived

experiences of impairments, which creates a unique sense of interdependency for athletes and guides. According to Goodwin (2008) interdependence in relationships fosters full participation when there is mutual respect and acceptance of diversity. The findings of this study support this understanding of interdependence in the athlete – guide partnership where diverse individuals come together to work towards common goals. Athletes spoke about how working with a guide allowed them to achieve full participation both in their ability to participate freely – unincumbered by the restrictions and limitations of their visual impairments - but also because of the social benefits that come with working closely with a partner. Athletes discussed how working with a guide made them feel less burdensome because there was always someone there to help them navigate new spaces while traveling, training, and competing. Having a person whose dedicated role was to help alleviate some of these challenges for athletes reduced their stress and gave them the ability to participate fully.

People who are blind and visually impaired often face substantial limitations due to socially constructed expectations and stereotypes which impacts their ability to access fundamental human rights such as education, employment, and recreation (Stenross and Vaughan, 1999). In fact, many people with disabilities experience reduced agency because of restricted choices due to cultural, social, and political barriers (Clouder et al., 2019). The athlete – guide partnership in some instances challenged these limitations and presents an opportunity for athletes to take agency over their athletic careers. For people with disabilities seeking and accepting help when necessary, fosters relationships and control of the support being provided (Goodwin, 2008). When athletes were given the agency to make choices such as who they worked with, how they trained, and the goals of their partnerships, it was empowering because they were often limited in regard to the choices they could make outside of sport. Furthermore,



as athletes and guides became more familiar with one another, it became easier for them to understand their partners needs and support each other in ways that were mutual, inclusive, and comfortable.

On the other hand, there were also a variety of ways participants recalled feeling stripped of their agency within these partnerships. Given the close nature and often personal support provided within athlete – guide partnerships, it was particularly interesting that some participants had little agency over who they were partnered with. Participants spoke about how their guides were selected by their coaches with little input from the athletes themselves and no consideration for the compatibility and cohesion of the partnership. When athletes are not given agency over who they work with, it contradicts relevant literature which recognizes the importance of people with disabilities having the opportunity to define their needs and seek help (Goodwin, 2008).

### **Culture Clash: Wins and Loses of High-performance Disability Sport**

As the participants shared, para – sport culture was in many ways empowering, inclusive, and unique. Supporting research by Powis (2020), athletes used their participation in sport as a catalyst to reconceptualize their understandings of themselves. They spoke about the value of sharing sport with other athletes with disabilities and how these interactions were meaningful – positively impacting their confidence in themselves within and outside of sport. These findings are in line with what Powis (2020) referred to as a collective team identity that centered around a shared love for sport rather than disability. Athletes and guides are willing to try new things, be creative, and are not afraid to lean on teammates when appropriate. The shared interests built a mutual respect for one another that fostered a unique sense of community for athletes and guides to enhance their athletic skills and collaborate with their teammates about best practices and accessibility within and outside of sport. These results, which acknowledge shared interests without denying the relevance of disability, challenge the strategic priorities of the IPC which

favors an ‘athlete first’ mentality that focuses on Paralympians as athletes first and individuals with disabilities second rather than acknowledging the intersectionalities of these various identities (Hellwege & Hallmann, 2020). Similarly, the results are at odds with some literature which has found that athletes with disabilities tend to reject disability identities in favor of athletic identities (Pack et al., 2017).

Furthermore, in the past several decades there has been a push in high-performance disability sport to emulate mainstream sport and therefore emphasize performance rather than inclusivity (Powis, 2020). As seen by the experiences of some participants in this study, prioritizing’ performance above all else has also created exclusion and intolerance of differences. While it may appear that disability sport is inclusive, participants recognized the exclusivity that characterizes most high-performance sport spaces. These experiences are aligned with what Slocum et al. (2018) refer to as tension between competitive, high-performance sport and the Paralympic ethos of inclusion. For example, one participant mentioned that, “*even amongst a group of people with very diverse disabilities I feel like sometimes blind people are like an additional burden*” (A5). The same participant went on to say, “*There is kind of a constant sort of re-education within our space to say you know this is what I can do, this is what I can’t do*” (A5). He recalled feeling burdensome and exhausted from repetitively needing to educate others and access knowledge about best sporting practices. These experiences are consistent with the literature which notes that limited access to coaching resources, skills training, and role models often negatively impact athletes with high support needs such as those with visual impairments (Slocum et al., 2018). While there are some benefits to adopting a high-performance sporting model, the athlete – guide partnership prominently illustrates the challenges that have evolved by privileging performances rather than inclusion in high-performance disability sport culture. In

the future it will be imperative for the movement to provide equitable opportunities for impairments across the disability spectrum (Howe, 2008).

### **Disability Sport Narratives**

In addition, culture is regularly inscribed on disabled bodies through public and personal narratives (Couser, 2005). At present, Paralympic sport is characterized by narratives of overcoming adversities (Silva & Howe, 2012), and inspiration (Pullen et al., 2020). However, the athlete – guide partnership provides a unique opportunity to reimagine disability sport narrative as a shared sport experience rather than an individual endeavor.

Paralympic athletes are often portrayed as individually overcoming adversities to find success. However, such narratives ignore the complexities of the disability experience and perpetuates the misunderstanding that disability is an individual problem (Silva & Howe, 2012). Furthermore, athletes with disabilities often reject narratives of overcoming because many feel they are simply doing the best they can provided the circumstances (Purdue & Howe, 2012). The findings of this study provide a unique example to challenge these narratives as athletes and guides described overcoming adversities and finding success together. Athletes and guides could not fulfill their roles without working collaboratively with their partners, which challenges dominant understandings that Paralympic athletes overcome disability and are individually responsible for their success.

Portraying Paralympians as inspirational can be detrimental because it perpetuates the idea that the Paralympics are a celebration of individual heroism and courage rather than a global sporting event (Smith & Bundon, 2018). Typically referred to as inspiration porn, people with disabilities are often labeled as inspirational for completing ordinary tasks which perpetuates differences as abnormal (Powis, 2020; Silva & Howe, 2012). Despite the detrimental narrative of

inspiration in Paralympic sport, interestingly both the athletes and the guides in the study undoubtedly were inspired by their experiences working together. For both athletes and guides working closely with people who had a variety of disabilities inspired them to think differently about themselves and disability broadly. Although collectively external narratives of inspiration have been disempowering and detrimental to disability and Paralympic sport, the findings of this study suggest that the inspiration experienced by individuals within the movement can be beneficial and empowering.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings of this study illustrate the interpersonal dynamics in athlete – guide partnerships. Athletes and guides benefitted from and encountered difficulties working as a team, uniquely experienced interdependence together, and encountered challenges navigating a sport system that traditionally accommodates individual athletes. Counseling psychology positions disability knowledge and skills as components of multicultural competency for practitioners, yet little has been published about disability outside of the rehabilitation context (Foley – Nicpon, 2012). The athlete – guide partnership provides an opportunity to challenge implications of disability as an individual detriment, and instead considers experiences of impairments and the ways individuals fit into relationships and teams more broadly. In the minimal literature on applied sport psychology for athletes who are blind or visually impaired, practitioners are guided on best practices for understanding visual impairments, communication tactics for working with these athletes, and tips for addressing anxiety related to navigating new spaces (Vose et al., 2010). However, the literature makes no mention of the athlete – guide partnership and how practitioners can best support these relationships. Sport psychologists and high-performance professionals should consider the intricacies of these partnerships when working with the athletes and guides individually and together.

With that aim in mind, these findings do offer some insights on how to better support athletes and guides by encouraging open and productive dialogue. Participants spoke about how effective partnerships maintained a certain synchrony – both with respect to physical synchrony while participating, but perhaps even more importantly, was an alignment of intentions, goals, and commitment to the partnership. The findings indicate that it might be beneficial for athletes and guides to explicitly discuss topics such as their individual and collective goals, their ability to commit to the partnership, coping strategies, and responsibilities within the partnership at the beginning and throughout their time working together.

### **Limitations**

Even though this study made significant contributions to existing literature, there were still several limitations that should be acknowledged and considered when reflecting on the findings. To start off, even though several methods were employed to achieve max variation, the sample was relatively homogenous most notably with respect to gender and race. The sample consisted of 11 men and one woman as well as 11 participants who identified as white and one participant who identified as black. While the homogeneity in the sample was disappointing it was not entirely surprising. Considering the eligibility criteria which sought to interview high-performance athletes and guides who spoke fluent English, the number of eligible participants was very small. For example, originally the aim was to include athletes and guides who participated in Nordic skiing, but because we were seeking English speaking participants who had competed internationally, we were unable to include any participants from Nordic skiing. At the time of data collection there were only three eligible participants, and none were interested in being part of the study. Furthermore, prior to collecting data for this study, a pilot study was conducted which included seven athletes and nine guides from alpine skiing. The sample was recruited through personal networks and consisted of nine men and seven women. Although the

pilot study helped inform the design of the current study, interviewing several alpine skiers prior to this study in some ways exhausted the field of who could take part. Considering the small number of eligible participants, the fact that seven women took part in interviews prior to this study dramatically decreased the number of eligible women that could participate. Finally, sport has historically been dominated by white, upper-class men, and while there has been a push in the past several decades to increase representation and acknowledge intersecting identities, discrepancies still exist today (DePauw, 1995). Women are dramatically underrepresented in Paralympic sport and the compound discrimination on the basis of ability and gender creates social, cultural, and environmental barriers to participation for women in high-performance disability sport (Dean et al., in press; Slocum et al., 2018). Furthermore, minimal research has explored the intersections of race and ability in Paralympic sport, but historically individuals from minority race and ethnicity groups face barriers to sport participation, and these inequities are reflected in the sample (Tandon et al., 2021). All of this is to say, while the lack of diversity in the sample is unsurprising it is nonetheless disappointing and moving forward it is imperative for the Paralympic movement to strategically balance prioritizing high performance while also striving for inclusion of athletes from a variety of backgrounds (Slocum et al., 2018).

Another limitation of this study was the timing of the data collection. The interviews were completed between December 2020 and March of 2021 in the midst of the global COVID 19 pandemic. While restrictions to travel, training, and competing were likely advantageous with recruitment because participants had extra time and less commitments, these conditions substantially shaped the data. Many of the participants who under normal circumstances would spend a significant amount of time training, competing, and sometimes living with their partners, instead had spent several months apart adjusting to the new “normal” and experiencing their

partnerships remotely. Although all of the participants were current athletes, the pandemic dramatically shaped their partnerships. Some pairs had only been working together for a short amount of time and had little understanding of what it would be like to train and compete in a post-pandemic world, others spent much of the interview recalling their experiences prior to the pandemic and reflecting on the ways the pandemic had made training and competing challenging. Overall, the outstanding circumstances of the global pandemic during data collection for this research impacted the experiences of the participants and richness of the data.

### **Future Research**

The current study contributed to research pertaining to high-performance disability sport and athlete – athlete relationships. The findings highlighted several avenues for future research pertaining to the athlete – guide partnership and high-performance disability sport broadly. To start out, as mentioned previously the homogenous sample of this study was a limitation. Given the call for more research on how gender and other variables impact athletic dyads (Poczwadowski et al., 2019), it would be valuable in the future to explore how intersecting identities such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, and age impact these partnerships. Furthermore, the study at hand explored the experiences of athletes and guides across a variety of sports. While the data provides some insights on how these experiences might vary, in the future it would be productive to collect data in a singular sport to provide richer insights into specific experiences rather than a broad overview.

Beyond the athlete – guide partnership, there is a need for future research exploring the experiences of women and athletes with high support needs such as people who are blind or visually impaired in Paralympic sport. As the findings highlighted, variations in functional vision impacted the experiences of visually impaired participants. Future research should seek to further explore the experiences of visually impaired athletes with the lowest sight because they likely

have the highest support needs and therefore their experiences might be the most different because of their reliance on others. Furthermore, research should focus on athletes' perceptions of classification systems, disability advocacy, and the impacts and representations of disability sport narratives. Considering the increasing use of social media, which has created new modes of engaging with and consuming disability sport media (French et al., 2018), future research should explore how athletes interpret, internalize, and construct their own disability sport narratives. While there has been some research pertaining to applied sport psychology and athletes with disabilities (Hanrahan, 2015; Martin, 1999; Vose et al., 2010), there is a need for research that goes beyond mental skills and performance to consider counseling for athletes with disabilities that recognizes para –sport culture and lived experiences of impairments.

### **Closing Remarks**

The athlete – guide partnership is a unique relationship unlike other dyadic partnerships in sport. This research has explored the experiences of both athletes and guides within these partnerships, and the findings illustrate the value and challenges that come with shared sporting experiences. While the practice of sport can magnify the distinctions between disabled and non-disabled people (Howe, 2008), the athlete – guide partnership bridges the two reconceptualizing alternative narratives where ability, in this case sight, is not prioritized (Powis, 2020). Instead, the partnership highlights the unique and intimate ways we rely on others to accomplish our goals, and rather than difference being marginalizing, vulnerability is celebrated and embraced (Howe, 2018). As Bundon & Smith (2016) remind us, stories are not static – they move from person to person, and they move people to understand more fully and to act differently. The athlete - guide partnership and the experiences of the participants in this study have been shared with the hope that these stories will move readers to think differently about dichotomies of dependence and independence, to reconceptualize alternative ways of participating in sport, and



to encourage us to reflect on the value and strength we can find in one another through supportive relationships.

## References

- Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection: Perceptions and experiences of researchers and participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 18*.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*(1), 1-26.
- Bundon, A. & Smith, B. (2016). From inspired to inspiring: Community-based research, digital storytelling, and a networked Paralympic Movement. In *Sharing Qualitative Research* (pp. 10-24). Routledge.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2020). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 17*(1), 1-25.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589-597
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.
- Braun, V. Clarke, V. & Weate, P. (2016). Thematic analysis. In *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 191-205). Routledge.
- Brighton, J., & Williams, T. L. (2018). Using interviews to explore experiences of disability in sport and physical activity. In *Researching difference in sport and physical activity* (pp. 25-40). Routledge.
- Bryman, A. (2016). Sampling in qualitative research. In A. Bryman, *Social research methods* (pp. 407-421). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burke, S. (2016). Rethinking 'validity' and 'trustworthiness' in qualitative inquiry: How might we judge the quality of qualitative research in sport and exercise sciences. In *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 352-362). Routledge.
- Bush, A., Silk, M., Porter, J., & Howe, P. D. (2013). Disability [sport] and discourse: Stories within the paralympic legacy. *Reflective Practice, 14*(5), 632-647.
- Clouder, L., Cawston, J., Wimpenny, K., Mehanna, A. K. A., Hdouch, Y., Raissouni, I., & Selmaoui, K. (2019). The role of assistive technology in renegotiating the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education in North Africa. *Studies in Higher Education, 44*(8), 1344-1357.
- Couser, G. (2005). Disability, Life Narrative, and Representation. *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, 120*(2), 602-606.

- Dean, D., Bundon, A., Howe, P.D. & Abele, N. (in press) Gender Parity, False Starts and Promising Practices in the Paralympic Movement. *Sociology of Sport Journal*.
- De Haan, D., Osborne, A. and Sherry, E. (2015). Satire or Send-Up? Paddy Power and Blind Football: A Case for Managing Public Relations for Disability Sport. *Communication and Sport*, 3(4), 411-133.
- DePauw, K. P. (1995). The (1n) visibility of disability: cultural contexts and “sporting bodies”. *Quest*, 49(4), 416-430.
- Foley-Nicpon, M., & Lee, S. (2012). Disability research in counseling psychology journals: A 20-year content analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 59(3), 392-398.
- French, L., & Le Clair, J. M. (2018). Game changer? social media, representations of disability and the paralympic games. In *The Palgrave handbook of paralympic studies* (pp. 99-121). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Eisikovits, Z., & Koren, C. (2010). Approaches to and outcomes of dyadic interview analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20(12), 1642-1655.
- Goodley, D. (2011). Intersections: Diverse Disability Studies. *Disability studies: An interdisciplinary introduction* (pp.33-47). Sage.
- Goodley, D. (2012). The Psychology of Disability. In Watson., A. Roulstone, and C. Thomas (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies* (pp. 362-376). Online.
- Goodley, D. (2013). Dis/entangling critical disability studies. *Disability & Society*, 28(5), 631-644.
- Goodley, D. (2017). *Disability studies: An interdisciplinary introduction* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Goodwin, D. L. (2008). Self-regulated dependency: Ethical reflections on interdependence and help in adapted physical activity. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 2(2), 172-184.
- Guerrero, M. Martin, J (2018). Para Sport Athletic Identity from Competition to Retirement: A Brief Review and Future Research Directions. *Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics of North America*, 29(2). 387-396,
- Hammer, G. (2015). Pedaling in Pairs toward a “Dialogical Performance”: Partnerships and the Sensory Body within a Tandem Cycling Group. *Ethnography*, 16(4): 503-522.
- Hanrahan, S. J. (2015). Psychological skills training for athletes with disabilities. *Australian Psychologist*, 50(2), 102-105.
- Hellwege, A., & Hallmann, K. (2020). The image of paralympic athletes: Comparing the desired

- and perceived image of paralympic athletes. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 5(2), 128-146.
- Howe, D. (2008). *The Cultural Politics of the Paralympic Movement: Through the Anthropological Lens*. Routledge.
- Howe, P. D. (2018). Athlete, anthropologist and advocate: Moving towards a lifeworld where difference is celebrated. *Sport in Society*, 21(4), 678-688.
- Howe, P. D., & Kitchin, P. J. (2017). Managing Paralympic bodies: The technology of classification and its impact on (dis)abled athletes. In *Managing the Paralympics* (pp. 113-131). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Howe, P., & Silva, C.F. (2017). Challenging ‘normalcy’: possibilities and pitfalls of paralympic bodies. *South African Journal for Research in Sport Physical Education and Recreation*, 39(1:2), 191-204.
- Howe, P. D., & Silva, C. F. (2018). The fiddle of using the Paralympic Games as a vehicle for expanding [dis] ability sport participation. *Sport in Society*, 21(1), 125-136.
- International Paralympic Committee Strategic Plan (2019). Paralympic.org. Retrieved from [https://www.paralympic.org/sites/default/files/document/190704145051100\\_2019\\_07+IPC+Strategic+Plan\\_web.pdf](https://www.paralympic.org/sites/default/files/document/190704145051100_2019_07+IPC+Strategic+Plan_web.pdf)
- Jaarsma, E. A., Dekker, R., Koopmans, S. A., Dijkstra, P. U., & Geertzen, J. H. B. (2014). Barriers to and facilitators of sports participation in people with visual impairments. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 31(3), 240–264.
- Jessup, G.M., Cornell, E. and Bundy, A.C. (2010). The Treasure in Leisure Activities: Fostering Resilience in Young People Who Are Blind. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 104(7), 419-430.
- Jowett, S. (2007). Interdependence analysis and the 3 + ICs in the coach-athlete relationship. In S. Jowett & D. Lavallee (Eds.), *Social psychology in sport* (pp. 15-27). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Jowett, S., & Cockerill, I. M. (2003). Olympic Medalists’ perspective of the athlete- coach relationship. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 4(4), 313-331.
- Jowett, S., & Meek, G. A. (2000). Coach-athlete relationship in married couples: Exploratory content analysis. *The Sport Psychologist*, 14(2), 157-175.
- Jowett, S., & Ntoumanis, N. (2004). The Coach–Athlete relationship questionnaire (CART-Q): Development and initial validation. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, 14(4), 245-257.

- Kelley, H. H., Berscheid, E., Christensen, A., Harvey, H. H., Huston, T. L., Levinger, G., McClintock, E., Peplau, L. A., Peterson, D. R. (1983). *Close relationships* (pp. 265-314). New York: Freeman.
- Kelley, H. H., & Thibaut, J. W. (1978). *Interpersonal relations: A theory of interdependence*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Kenny, D. A. (1996). The design and analysis of social-interaction research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 47(1), 59-86.
- Kenny, D. A., & Cook, W. (1999). Partner effects in relationship research: Conceptual issues, analytic difficulties, and illustrations. *Personal Relationships*, 6(4), 433-448.
- Lazard, L., & McAvoy, J. (2020). Doing reflexivity in psychological research: What's the point? what's the practice? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 17(2), 159-177.
- Liamputtong P. (2019). Qualitative Inquiry. In Liamputtong P. (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*. Springer, Singapore
- Macbeth, J.L. (2009). Restrictions of Activity in Partially Sighted Football: Experiences of Grassroots Players. *Leisure Studies*, 28(4): 455-467.
- Macbeth, J.L. and Magee, J. (2006). "Captain England? Maybe One Day I Will": Career Paths of Elite Partially Sighted Footballers. *Sport in Society*, 9(3), 444-462.
- Mann, D. L., & Ravensbergen, H. J. C. (2018). International paralympic committee (IPC) and international blind sports federation (IBSA) joint position stand on the sport-specific classification of athletes with vision impairment. *Sports Medicine*, 48(9), 2011-2023.
- Martin, J. J. (1999). A personal development model of sport psychology for athletes with disabilities. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 11(2), 181-193.
- Meekosha, H., & Shuttleworth, R. (2009). What's so 'critical' about critical disability studies? *Australian Journal of Human Rights: Special Issue on Human Rights and Disability*, 15(1), 47-75.
- Misener, L., McPherson, G., McGillivray, D., & Legg, D. (2018). *Leveraging disability sport events: Impacts, promises, and possibilities*.
- Morgan, D. L. (2016). *Essentials of dyadic interviewing* (Vol. 13). Routledge.
- Nathan S., Newman C., Lancaster K. (2019). Qualitative Interviewing. In Liamputtong P. (eds) *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*. Springer, Singapore.
- Oh, H.-K., Ozturk, M. A., & Kozub, F. M. (2004). Physical Activity and Social Engagement

- Patterns During Physical Education of Youth With Visual Impairments. *Rehabilitation and Education for Blindness and Visual Impairment*, 36(1), 39–48.
- Olkin, R., & Pledger, C. (2003). Can disability studies and psychology join hands? *The American Psychologist*, 58(4), 296-304
- Pack, S. Kelly, S. & Arvinen-Barrow, M. (2017). “I think I became a swimmer rather than just someone with a disability swimming up and down:” paralympic athletes perceptions of self and identity development. *Disability and rehabilitation*, 39(20), 2063-2070.
- Palmer, C. (2016). Ethics in sport and exercise research: From ethics committees to ethics in the field. In B. Smith & A. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 355-366).
- Paralympics History - History of the Paralympic Movement. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.paralympic.org/the-ipc/history-of-the-movement>
- Patatas, J. M., De Bosscher, V., Derom, I., & Winckler, C. (2020). Stakeholders’ perceptions of athletic career pathways in paralympic sport: From participation to excellence. *Sport in Society*, 1-22.
- Patatas, J. M., De Bosscher, V., & Legg, D. (2018). Understanding parasport: An analysis of the differences between able-bodied and parasport from a sport policy perspective. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 10(2), 235-254.
- Peers, D. (2012). Interrogating disability: The (de)composition of a recovering paralympian. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 4(2), 175-188.
- Poczwadowski, A., Lamphere, B., Allen, K., Marican, R., Haberl, P. (2019). The 5c’s Model of Successful Partnerships in Elite Beach Volleyball Dyads. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 32(5), 476-494.
- Powis, B., (2020). *Embodiment, identity and disability sport: An ethnography of elite visually impaired athletes*. Routledge.
- Powis, B., & Macbeth, J. L. (2020). “We know who is a cheat and who is not. but what can you do?”: Athletes’ perspectives on classification in visually impaired sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 55(5), 588-602.
- Prince, DE., (2010). An exceptional path: an ethnographic narrative reflecting on autistic parenthood from evolutionary, cultural, and spiritual perspectives. *Ethos*, 38(1), 56-68.
- Pullen, E., Jackson, D., Silk, M., Howe, P. D., & Silva, C. F. (2020). Extraordinary normalcy, ableist rehabilitation, and sporting ablenationalism: The cultural (re)production of paralympic disability narratives. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 1-9.

- Purdue, D. & Howe, D. (2012). See the sport, not the disability? – Exploring the paralympic paradox. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 4(2), 189-205.
- Richardson, L. (1998). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 345-371). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Robène, L., Howe, P. D., & Silva, C. F. (2017). The cyborgification of paralympic sport. *Movement & Sport Sciences*, (97), 17-25.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. sage.
- Rubin, H.J., & Rubin, I.S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. London: Sage.
- Rusbult, C. E., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (2008). Why we need interdependence theory. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(5), 2049-2070.
- Silva, C. F., & Howe, P. D. (2012). The (in)validity of supercrip representation of paralympian athletes. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 36(2), 174-194.
- Slocum, C., Kim, S., & Blauwet, C. (2018). Women and athletes with high support needs in paralympic sport: progress and further opportunities for underrepresented populations. In *The Palgrave handbook of paralympic studies* (pp. 371-388). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Smith, S. (2006). Encouraging the use of reflexivity in the writing up of qualitative research. *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation*, 13(5), 209-215.
- Smith, B. & Bundon, A. (2018). Disability models: Explaining and understanding disability sport. In I. Brittain & A. Beacom (Eds.). *Palgrave Handbook of Paralympic Studies*. Palgrave (pp. 15-34).
- Smith, B., & Perrier, M. J. (2014). Disability, sport, and impaired bodies: A critical approach. In *The Psychology of Sub-Culture in Sport and Physical Activity* (pp. 95-106). Routledge.
- Smith, B., Sparkes, A., Phoenix, C., & Kirkby, J. (2012). Qualitative research in physical therapy: A critical discussion on mixed-method research. *Physical Therapy Reviews: Qualitative Research in Physical Therapy*, 17(6), 374-381.
- Smith, B. & Sparkes, A. (2016). Interviews: Qualitative interviewing in the sport and exercise sciences. In B. Smith & A. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 103-123). New York: Routledge.
- Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2013). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product*. Routledge.

- Stenross, B., & Vaughan, C. E. (1999). *Social and cultural perspectives on blindness: Barriers to community integration*. American Sociological Association.
- Tamminen, K. A., & Poucher, Z. A. (2020). Research philosophies. In D. Hackfort & R. Schinke (Eds.), *The Routledge international encyclopedia of sport and exercise psychology* (vol.1: Theoretical and methodological concepts). Routledge.
- Tandon, P. S., Kroshus, E., Olsen, K., Garrett, K., Qu, P., & McCleery, J. (2021). Socioeconomic Inequities in Youth Participation in Physical Activity and Sports. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(13), 6946.
- Townsend, R. C., Huntley, T., Cushion, C. J., & Fitzgerald, H. (2020). ‘It’s not about disability, I want to win as many medals as possible’: The social construction of disability in high-performance coaching. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 55(3), 344-360.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “Big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851.
- Trainor, L. R., & Bundon, A. (2020). Developing the craft: reflexive accounts of doing reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 1-22.
- Vose, J. E., Clark, R. A., & Sachs, M. L. (2010). Athletes who are blind/visually impaired or deaf/hard of hearing. In S. J. Hanrahan & M. B. Andersen (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of applied sport psychology* (pp. 450–459). London: Routledge.
- Wickwire, T.L.; Bloom, Gordon A.; and Loughead, Todd M.. (2004). The environment, structure, and interaction process of elite same-sex dyadic sport teams. *Sport Psychologist*, 18(4), 381-396.



## Appendices

### Appendix A: Social Media Advertisement

*The text below will be used to advertise the research study in private messages to potential participants and individuals who may know potential participants on various social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)*

Attention Visually Impaired Athletes and Sighted Guides!

Principal investigator, Dr. Andrea Bundon, and graduate student researcher, Staci Mannella, from the University of British Columbia are seeking participants for a research study. The project is investigating the partnership between high-performance visually impaired athletes and their sighted guides. We invite internationally recognized visually impaired athletes and their sighted guides to participate in one individual interview that will last approximately 45 mins with the student researcher.

To Participate:

- Both the athlete and the guide in high-performance athlete – guide partnerships must agree to take part in the study.
- The pair must have competed in at least one internationally recognized competition during or after the 2017/18 competitive season.
- Participants must be fluent in English

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please send us an email at [andrea.bundon@ubc.ca](mailto:andrea.bundon@ubc.ca)  
Note: By liking or sharing this post you may be publicly identified with this study even if you do not wish to participate.

## Appendix B: Consent Form

### Informed Consent Form Non-Interventional Study

**STUDY TITLE:** Seeing Without Sight

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Principal Investigator:  
Andrea Bundon, PhD, Assistant Professor,  
School of Kinesiology, UBC.  
156F Auditorium Annex  
1924 West Mall  
Vancouver British, Columbia, V6T 1Z2  
Phone:  
Email:

**CO-INVESTIGATOR:** Staci Mannella, Graduate Student Researcher  
School of Kinesiology, UBC.  
Email:

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to better understand the lived experiences of high-performance visually impaired athletes and the partnerships they form with their sighted guides.

You are being asked to consider taking part in this study because you have competed as a sighted guide for a visually impaired athlete in an internationally recognized competition during or after the 2018/2019 ski season. It is anticipated that 6-8 guides will take part in this study.

#### Study Procedures

You will participate in one, 45 minutes interview. This interview will be carried out by the co-investigator, Staci Mannella, and the interview will take place either remotely (via phone or video call) or at a location of your convenience.

You will be asked a series of questions pertaining to you experiences as a sighted guide. Some questions may be about how you first became a guide and specific details about your partnership with a visually impaired athlete.

#### Potential Risks

There are is little to no risk associated with this study. You will be asked a series of questions, some of which could make you feel slightly uncomfortable. You are not required to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering and may pass on any question should you

choose to do so. As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, we are taking measures to minimize the risk.

### **Potential Benefits**

Although there are no direct benefits, by participating in this study, you would be providing information that allows for a better understanding the partnership between visually impaired athletes and their sighted guides. The information in this study will be used to facilitate stronger partnerships and educate sports professionals on ways to better support visually impaired athletes and their guides.

### **What Happens at the End of the Study?**

It is anticipated that the findings of this study will be published and presented in a variety of settings. In any publication or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified. If you also want to receive a copy, you may request a copy from the co-investigator.

### **Disclosure Regarding Rights of Subject to Withdraw from the Research**

Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part or withdraw from the study at any time. You do not have to provide any reasons for your decision. Data collected up to the point of your withdrawal from the study will be kept for data analysis purposes.

### **Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality will be respected. No information or records that disclose your identity will be published without your consent, nor will any information or records that disclose your identity be removed or released without your consent unless required by law. Because of the limited number of guides eligible to participate, there may be some risk that you may be identified based off of the information you provide during the interview. However, precautions will be taken to protect your privacy as much as possible.

You will be assigned a unique study number as a participant in this study. This number will not include any personal information that could identify you (e.g., it will not include your Personal Health Number, SIN, or your initials, etc.). Only this number will be used on any research-related information collected about you during the course of this study, so that your identity will be kept confidential. Information that contains your identity will remain only with the Principal Investigator and/or designate. The list that matches your name to the unique study number that is used on your research-related information will not be removed or released without your consent unless required by law. Even though the risk of identifying you from the study data is very small, it can never be completely eliminated.

By signing this form, you do not give up any of your legal rights and you do not release the principal investigator, participating institutions, or anyone else from their legal and professional duties

You have the right to be informed of the findings of this study once the entire study is complete.

**Who do I contact if I have questions about the study during my participation?**

If you have any questions or desire further information about this study before or during participation, you can contact Dr. Andrea Bundon at.

**Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the University of British Columbia Office of Research Ethics by e-mail at [RSIL@ors.ubc.ca](mailto:RSIL@ors.ubc.ca) or by phone at 604-822-8598 (Toll Free: 1-877-822-8598).

## Participant Consent

### *Seeing Without Sight*

Your signature below indicates that you have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature does not waive any of your legal rights.

My signature on this consent form means:

- I have read and understood the information in this consent form.
- I have been able to ask questions and have had satisfactory responses to my questions.
- I understand that all of the information collected will be kept confidential and that the findings will only be used for scientific purposes.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary.
- I understand that I am completely free at any time to refuse to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time, and that this will not change the quality of care that I receive.
- I understand that I am not waiving any of my legal rights as a result of signing this consent form.

I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my own records.

I consent to participate in this study.

<i>Signature of Participant</i>	<i>Name (printed)</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Date (Y/M/D)</i>
<i>Signature of Person Conducting Consent Discussion</i>	<i>Name (printed)</i>	<i>Study Role (RA, etc.)</i>	<i>Date (Y/M/D)</i>

**Contact information**

Participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone #: Home: \_\_\_\_\_  
Work: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cell: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Study participation:**

Yes, I would be interested in being contacted about future studies

**Study results:**

Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study results.

Please indicate your preferred method for receiving the summary: Email / Post

## Appendix C: Demographic Form

If you would like to create your own pseudonym (fake name for confidentiality purposes), please include it here:

Note that a pseudonym will be created for you if you do not provide one – this will help promote confidentiality.

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the primary language that you speak at home? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your ethnicity?

Caucasian or White
East Asian
South Asian or Indian
Hispanic or Latino
Black
Other (Please specify) _____
I prefer not to answer

6. I am a

Visually impaired athlete (Please indicate your classification) _____
Sighted Guide

7. Please indicate what sport you compete in

Alpine Skiing
Athletics
Cycling
Nordic Skiing
Triathlon
Other (Please specify) _____

8. How long have you competed in international disability sport competitions? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What country do you represent in international sport competitions? \_\_\_\_\_
10. How long have you competed with your partner (i.e., visually impaired athlete or sighted guide) \_\_\_\_\_
11. Approximately how many world cups have you competed in? \_\_\_\_\_

12. How many World Championships have you competed in? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Please indicate the Paralympic Games you have competed in

N/A
PyeongChang 2018
Rio 2016
Sochi 2014
London 2012
Vancouver 2010
Beijing 2008
Other (please specify) _____

14. If you would like to provide any more information about yourself, please do so below:



## Appendix D: Interview Guide (Athletes)

1. Can you start by telling me a bit about your athletic background?
  - How did you get involved in sport?
  - Can you tell me about some of your experiences in sport?
  - Can you speak more about your vision and its impacts on your engagement in sport?
2. (R1, R3) Can you talk to me about your partnership with your current guide?
  - How did you start working with your guide?
  - How long have you been working together?
  - What are some indicators when the partnership is going well?
  - What are some indicators when the partnership is going poorly?
3. (R1, R3) What is your relationship like with your guide?
  - Tell me about how your relationship has developed?
  - Can you describe some key moments in building your relationship?
  - How do you maintain your relationship?
  - How would you describe your communication style?
  - Has there been any conflict in your relationship? Can you tell me about that?
  - How has your relationship changed over time?
4. (R1, R3) What are some of your most memorable moments with your guide?
  - Consider training, racing, and outside of sport.
5. (R1, R3) What are some of the most challenging moments with your guide?
  - Consider training, racing, and outside of sport
6. (R1, R3) Can you describe the roles and responsibilities of you and your guide within the partnership?
  - In what ways do you rely on your guide?
  - In what ways does your guide rely on you?
  - Consider training, racing, and outside of sport
  - Have the roles and responsibilities changed over time?
  - Do you and your partner explicitly discuss the roles and responsibilities within your relationship?
7. (R1, R3) Can you talk to me about the goals within your partnership?
  - Do you ever have different goals than your partner? Can you talk to me about that?
8. (R2) Are there benefits to working with a guide? If so, please explain.
  - Consider training, racing, and outside of sport.
  - Do you feel valued within the partnership?

9. (R2) Are there any negative aspects of working with a guide? If so, please explain.
  - Consider training, racing, and outside of sport.
  - Have you ever worked with a guide that didn't work out? Can you tell me more about that?
  
10. (R2) How do you feel the athlete – guide partnership is understood by others?
  - Team
  - Coaches
  - High performance staff
  - Media
  - Consider valued and devalued roles and identities
  
11. (R2) How has being an athlete informed your perceptions of disability?
  
12. (R2) How has being an athlete informed your perceptions of sport?
  
13. Is there anything else you would like to include that we have not discussed?

## Appendix E: Interview Guide (Guides)

1. Can you start by talking to me about your athletic background and how you got involved in guiding?
  - How were you introduced to disability sport?
  - What were your first impressions?
2. (R1, R3) Can you talk to me about your partnership with your current athlete?
  - How did you start working with your athlete?
  - How long have you been working together?
  - What are some indicators when the partnership is going well?
  - What are some indicators when the partnership is going poorly?
3. (R1, R3) What is your relationship like with your athlete?
  - Can you tell me about how your relationship developed?
  - Can you describe some key moments in building your relationship?
  - How do you maintain your relationship?
  - How would you describe your communication style?
  - Has there been any conflict in your relationship? Can you tell me about that?
  - How has your relationship changed over time?
4. (R1, R3) What are some of your most memorable moments with your athlete?
  - Consider training, racing, and outside of sport
5. (R1, R3) What are some of the most challenging moments with your athlete?
  - Consider training, racing, and outside of sport
6. (R1, R3) Can you describe the roles and responsibilities of you and your athlete within the partnership?
  - In what ways does your athlete rely on you?
  - In what ways do you rely on your athlete?
  - Consider training, racing, and outside of sport
  - Have the roles and responsibilities changed over time?
  - Do you and your partner explicitly discuss the roles and responsibilities within your relationship?
7. (R1, R3) Can you talk to me about the goals of your partnership?
  - Do you ever have different goals than your partner? Can you talk to me about that?
8. (R2) Are there benefits to working as a guide? If so, please explain.
  - Are you compensated in any way for your work as a guide?
    - If yes, who is responsible for your compensation?
  - Consider training, racing, and outside of sport.
  - Do you feel valued within the partnership?

9. (R2) Are there any negative aspects of working as a guide? If so, please explain.
- Consider training, racing, and outside of sport.
  - Have you ever worked with an athlete that didn't work out? Can you tell me more about that?
10. (R2) How do you feel this partnership is understood by others?
- Team
  - Coaches
  - High performance staff
  - Media
  - Consider valued and devalued roles and identities
11. (R2) How has being a guide informed your perceptions of disability?
12. (R2) How has being a guide informed your perceptions of sport?
13. Is there anything else you would like to include that we have not discussed?

## Appendix F: Thematic Map

