

# Quality Participation in Paraspport: A Narrative Perspective

Veronica Allan<sup>1</sup>, Brett Smith<sup>2</sup>, Jean Côté<sup>1</sup>, Kathleen Martin Ginis<sup>3</sup>, & Amy Latimer-Cheung<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Queen's University

<sup>2</sup>University of Birmingham

<sup>3</sup>University of British Columbia Okanagan

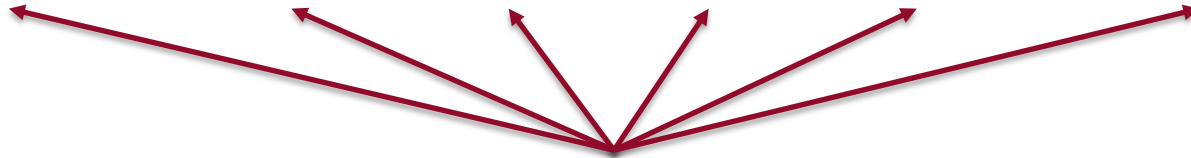
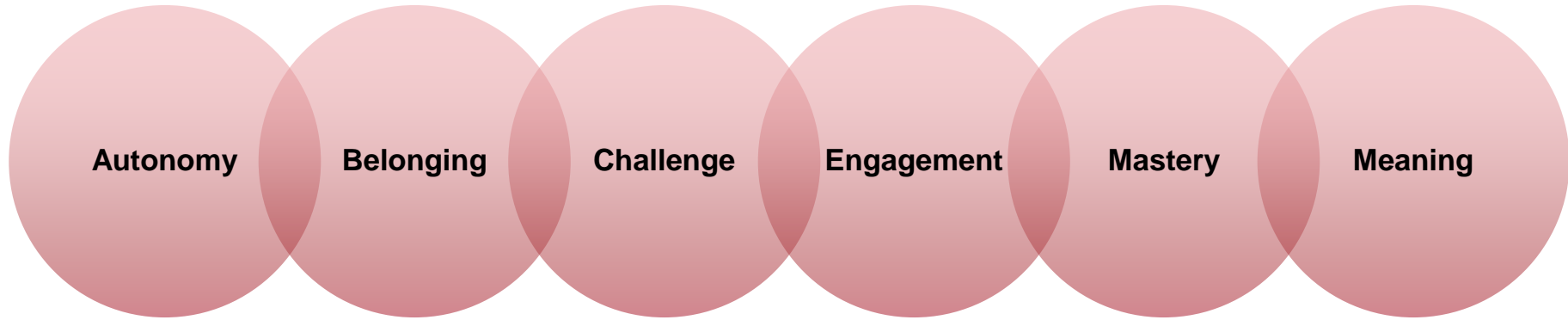


# Conceptualizing Participation



- Dominant conceptualizations of participation focus on *presence* and *performance* in activities or roles (WHO, 2001)
- The **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (United Nations, 2006) protects the right to:
  - “**Full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others**”
- Quality participation = *subjective* aspects of participation

# Quality Participation



**Elements of a Quality Experience**

(Martin Ginis, Evans, Mortenson, & Noreau, 2016)

# Quality Participation in Parasport



- Limited research on 'quality experiences' for athletes with physical disabilities. Examples include:
  1. **Military veterans:** Group cohesion, challenge, independence and choice, and having a role (Shirazipour et al., 2017)
  2. **Youth athletes:** Redefined capabilities, affirmed sense of self, strengthened social connections, and enhanced acceptance (Turnnidge, Vierimaa, & Côté, 2012)

# Objectives

- **Narrative Inquiry**
  - Uses narratives (or stories) to understand life experiences and meanings (Smith, 2015)
- Grounded in a **narrative approach**, we sought to:
  1. Explore and typify narrative types that athletes draw on from culture to represent their participation in parasport
  2. Examine the meanings and conditions that shape parasport participation over time within each narrative type



- **Maximum variation sampling** → Diverse range of perspectives
- **The final sample ( $N = 21$ ):**
  - Men and women
  - Congenital and acquired physical disabilities
  - Ages 19 to 73
  - Individual and team sports
  - Recreational to elite levels



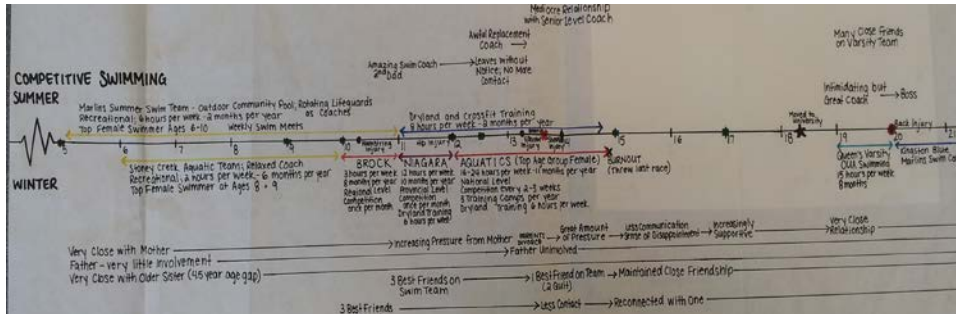
# Procedure

Session #1:  
Timeline  
Construction

Timeline  
Review

Session #2:  
Semi-structured  
Interview

Narrative  
Analysis



**Life Histories:** “The unfolding of an individual’s experiences over time”

- **Session #1:** Co-creation of (para)sport involvement timeline
- **Session #2:** Reflection on (para)sport involvement timeline...
  - Activities: e.g., “How did you feel when you participated in [parasport activity]?”
  - Relationships: e.g., “Who was the most influential person in shaping your parasport involvement?”
  - Environment: e.g., “Tell me about what you consider to be an ideal parasport environment.”
  - Outcomes: e.g., “What were the most valued elements or effects of your participation in parasport?”



# Narrative Analysis



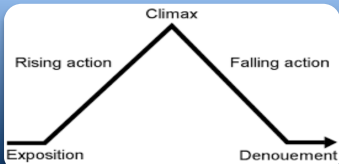
## 1. Familiarization

- Reviewed audio files and transcripts
- Took preliminary notes



## 2. Content

- WHAT was told in the story?
- Identified themes and thematic relationships








## 3. Structure

- HOW and WHY was the story told?
- Constructed the plotline

# Overview of Narrative Types



Narrative Type	Demographics	Plotline	Meaning(s)
<b>A Cinderella Story</b> ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Female, congenital/ early acquired		Feeling of acceptance and control
<b>From Ordinary to Extraordinary</b> ( <i>n</i> = 4)	Male, congenital/ early acquired		Sense of purpose and achievement
<b>Holding On</b> ( <i>n</i> = 3)	Mixed, acquired		Recovering past identity or self
<b>Letting Go</b> ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Male, acquired		Platform for success; opportunity to 'let loose'
<b>Embracing Change</b> ( <i>n</i> = 7)	Mixed, acquired		Self-discovery; carving a new path in life

# A Cinderella Story

- Six women with congenital or early acquired physical disabilities

- Decline to progress



Autonomy

Belonging

- Participants desired social acceptance and are dependent on others  
→ found **acceptance** and learned to be **independent** through sport

*“It all depends on the people...I’ve noticed a big change from when I started on the team until now in personal life and you know sport life... I feel like I’m a more upbeat person because of my like, **I used to be like down in the dumps and stuff, like not really do anything, but now I’m like up, you know, I’m always up to go and out to do things**” -Anna*

# From Ordinary to Extraordinary

- Four men with congenital and early acquired physical disabilities

- Stability to progress



Belonging

Engagement

Mastery

- Sport initiation motivated by **belongingness** and **enjoyment** →  
Experiences of **mastery** contribute to high performance goals

*“So when I started, I was just a kid... **I wanted to be like everybody else...** [as a teenager] I was performing at a high level, **I was doing something that not everybody else could do...** When I would play [parasport], everything else would disappear... **all my worries, all my fears, all my thoughts just disappeared and became about [parasport].**” - Zack*

# Holding On

- Two men and one woman with acquired physical disabilities

- Interrupted progress



Autonomy

Challenge

Mastery

- Formerly dedicated able-bodied athletes, participants resumed their lives as high performance parasport athletes post-injury

*"I didn't leave [sport] on my own terms obviously, it was kind of taken away from me...so I wanted to do whatever I could do to try and get back into it... At this stage of the game my sights are definitely set on the Paralympics in Rio...but [the Olympic team] is definitely in the back of my mind...the big question is whether or not my body can handle the training loads that the able bodied team is doing but that comes back to me, right now, making sure that I'm doing the best job that I can."*

-Morley

# Letting Go

- One man with a physical disability acquired late in life (i.e., 60s)

- Stability



Challenge


Mastery

Engagement

- Claimed **confidence** developed through sport was the key to success in life, and emphasized the importance of **fun** and **enjoyment**

*"I don't want to get into performance because I've been there...and I've done what I want to do. **I want to enjoy [parasport], that's the difficulty...** That's the element that's really missing when there are so few people and you are being coached by a group of coaches that want to perform...**it's that feeling of competition all the time. Competing for all the wrong reasons.**" - Tom*

# Embracing Change

- Five men and two women with acquired physical disabilities
- Stability to progress with brief decline 
- Participants needed to 'find the right fit' post-injury (i.e., feeling challenged and socially connected), which facilitated self-discovery in their 'new' lives

Autonomy

Challenge

Belonging

*"There are so many benefits that came from my sports...obviously the health and physical stuff, but the people I met and the travelling I got to do...I was doing it in a lot of ways to beat my disability, just to kind of show myself and show other people that just because I was sitting in a chair, didn't mean I couldn't go out and go hard at it and accomplish things and be a world class athlete." -Frank*

# What Have We Learned?



1. The narratives support the **six experiential elements of quality participation** (i.e., *autonomy, belongingness, challenge, engagement, mastery, meaning*)
2. The importance of each experiential element **depends on the person and the context**
3. The experiential elements are **dynamic and fluid** → they are **subject to change over time**
4. Quality participation in parasport is **individually specific**: The “right fit” will be different for each individual athlete



- **Supporting the quality participation elements:**
  - Train practitioners to be aware of and implement each element
  - Understand athletes' unique needs → Tailor programs accordingly
  - Design and market programs that explicitly target one or more element
- **Using narratives to enhance participation:**
  - Create messages or campaigns that appeal to a diverse range of (potential) athletes (e.g., use characters that are relatable)
  - Avoid messages that may exclude or marginalize others (e.g., “supercrip”)

# Conclusion



- The narratives offer a unique understanding of diverse developmental pathways and what it means to participate in parasport
- The narratives are useful for informing strategies that optimize participation and enhance participation rates

# Thank You!

E-mail: [7vra@queensu.ca](mailto:7vra@queensu.ca)



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



cdpp

Canadian Disability Participation Project