

Plotting a Paralympic field: An elite disability sport competition viewed through Bourdieu's sociological lens

International Review for the

Sociology of Sport

2015, Vol. 50(1) 83–97

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DOI: 10.1177/1012690212470123

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Abstract

In this paper components of Bourdieu's sociological theory will be utilized to systematically outline key constituents, and the interrelated power struggles, which shape Paralympic sport. The premier Paralympic sport competition is arguably the summer Paralympic Games, a quadrennial multi-sport competition for elite athletes with specific impairments, governed by the International Paralympic Committee. This paper argues that Paralympic sport is significantly influenced, shaped and developed according to the differential resources and contestation for power between individuals and organizations that possess an interest in deriving benefit from the Paralympic Games. Firstly, this article outlines the historical development of Paralympic sport. Relevant aspects of Bourdieu's sociological theory are then identified and utilized to generate a fresh sociologically infused interpretation of the current key constituents who together form a Paralympic field. The intention is to provide a more systematic overview of Paralympic relations, while also highlighting potential avenues for future social research.

Keywords

Bourdieu, disability, media, Olympic, Paralympic, sociology, sport

Introduction

Components of Bourdieu's sociological theory will be utilized in this paper to systematically outline key constituents, and the interrelated power struggles, which shape Paralympic sport. In doing so, it is argued that Paralympic sport is significantly influenced, shaped and developed according to differential resources and contestation for power between individuals and organizations that possess an interest in deriving benefit from the Paralympic Games.

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This article begins with a brief outline of the historical development of Paralympic sport. Subsequently, relevant aspects of Bourdieu's sociological theory are identified and utilized to generate a fresh sociologically infused interpretation of the current key constituents who together form a Paralympic field. The intention of this paper is to provide a more systematic overview of Paralympic relations, while also highlighting potential avenues for future social research.

Paralympic sport – a historical outline

Paralympic sport originated from rehabilitative treatment, provided at Stoke Mandeville hospital in Aylesbury, England, during the mid-1940s (Guttmann, 1976). At Stoke Mandeville sport was part of the rehabilitative programme administered to servicemen returning from the Second World War with spinal cord injuries (Scruton, 1998). Today, the Paralympic Games are a biannual global multi-sports competition for athletes with specific impairments, governed by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC).

Since its creation in 1989, the IPC has played a central role within the development of disability sport. The IPC contains international organizations of sport for the disabled (IOSDs), of which the Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association (CP-ISRA), International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation (IWAS), International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) and International Sports Federation for Persons with an Intellectual Disability (Inas) are key organizations. More recently, the move towards a sport-specific, rather than disability-specific, organization of elite disability sport by the IPC has led to National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) entering into the battle for control of the structure of Paralympic sport governance and its associated sports competitions, such as the Paralympic Games. Bailey (2008) has shed some light on conflicts between IOSDs and NPCs as groups compete for control and decisions that are favourable for them and their members.

Throughout the development of Paralympic sport, there has been an expressed desire for a closer working relationship with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2010; Guttmann, 1976; Howe and Jones, 2006; Scruton, 1998). Since the beginning of the 21st century, the Olympic and Paralympic Games have, to some extent, become increasingly interlinked and influenced by IOC–IPC contractual agreements (Howe and Jones, 2006; IPC, 2010b). A key development in the IPC–IOC relationship prior to these occurred at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games at which Paralympic demonstration events were held¹ (Bailey, 2008; Legg et al., 2009). This allowed some Paralympic athletes the opportunity to compete in the same venue as Olympians, but still they were somewhat marginalized because they never received Olympic medals and are absent from the Olympic records.² Several decades later, the inter-relationship between Olympic and Paralympic sport has been brought into the public domain through Paralympic athletes' attempts to compete at the Olympic Games. Most notably, the performances of Oscar Pistorius, a bi-lateral below-the-knee amputee, at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games raised debate surrounding the eligibility of individuals with a disability competing within both Games (Lippi, 2012). This issue of eligibility helps highlight the contested co-existence and inter-relationships that are generated and influence social meanings and manifestations of Paralympic sport.

Before critically discussing a Paralympic field, we will now highlight key aspects of Bourdieu's sociological theory that act as a pivotal foundation for unpacking power relations affecting Paralympic sport.

Bourdieu's sociological theory

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984), capital (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and field (Bourdieu, 1993, 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) interact together to generate what Bourdieu calls practice (Maton, 2008). The relationship between these constructs has been represented in the following equation: $[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$ (Bourdieu, 1984: 101). As Laberge and Kay (2002: 253) suggest: 'with this equation in context, its formulation can be seen as Bourdieu's intention to stress the critical role of social fields, and their close connection to habitus in social practice'. For this paper, however, it is field that is of central importance. As such, in this paper the key equation is $\text{field} = \text{practice} - [(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})]$. The utilization of this equation does not seek to reify or restrict our understanding of Bourdieusian theory or society; we use it to help demonstrate the inter-relation and complexity of habitus, capital and field in the generation of practice.

An individual's physical, sensory and intellectual abilities and competences are enacted and given expression through mobilization of the multifarious resources available to them. In doing so, social actors' occupy a particular position within social hierarchies. The position in which they operate is either maintained or altered through the continual self-management and self-awareness of the consequences of their actions within the context of individual and group dynamics.

Bourdieu's use of habitus seeks to conceptualize the manner in which individuals internalize the social norms and meanings they encounter and assimilate. This internalized social knowledge subsequently guides and shapes an individual's disposition and the manner in which they interact with people and social places (Bourdieu, 1984). Habitus often functions in an unconscious manner (Bourdieu, 1977) and is the point of covalence where individual decisions are made against the backdrop of historical experience and within the context of contemporary, culturally specific social rules and norms. This helps explain the capacity for individuality of behaviour within the confines of culturally acceptable group-orientated structures.

Bourdieu (1997) uses the term 'capital' to explore issues of inter-relation, interdependence and power struggles within social configurations. Reasons for two or more individuals or groups to relate with each other are revealed through considering the flows of capital that are facilitated and/or prohibited by certain social relations.

Economic capital is the term used to identify financial resources that can be possessed by an individual and/or an organization or exchanged for goods, services and other forms of capital. Social capital is another form of capital, articulated by Bourdieu (1997: 51) as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'. Initiation and maintenance of social relations, that is, ownership of social capital, may entail the use of financial resources (economic capital). This may be

considered profitable if economic expenditure translates into usable social capital for the individual and/or the group.

An alternative form of capital, used by Bourdieu, to understand social relations, is cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to the valued tastes, consumption patterns and behaviours stemming from belonging to a certain group (Bourdieu, 1997). Significantly, cultural capital can exist in three forms, namely the embodied state, objectified state and institutionalized state (Bourdieu, 1993, 1997).

Social and cultural capital can independently be perceived to be transformed into what Bourdieu refers to as symbolic capital. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 119 italics in original) define symbolic capital as 'the form that one or another of these species [economic, social, cultural capital] takes when it is grasped through categories of perception that *recognize* its specific logic or, if you prefer, misrecognize the arbitrariness of its possession and accumulation'. Prestige, status and authority are referred to as examples of symbolic capital (Mahar et al., 1990).

Together, habitus and multiple capital act as analytical tools with which to explore social perceptions of Paralympic athletes. However, it is important to note that the potential 'profits' from possession of certain forms of capital are inextricably influenced by the social setting in which the capital exists. Bourdieu and Wacquant state: 'a capital does not exist and function except *in relation to a field*' (1992: 101 italics our emphasis). To facilitate capital exchange inter-relation mechanisms for co-existence and/or interdependence are required. The allocation of individuals and resources across space, and influenced by time, is articulated through Bourdieu's notion of field.

'Field' as a sociological tool

The schematic topographies of social spaces can be articulated using Bourdieu's concept of *field*. In defining field, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 97 italics in original) state:

A field may be defined as a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital).

In light of this power, fields are sites of vibrant, complex re-makings of social constructs. Field is a tool that begins to de-limit the incomprehensible totality of human existence and facilitates systematic sociological analysis of complex social constructs.

The concept of field possesses several key attributes. Fields are specific. The social hierarchy or configuration of social organizations that structures a field is based on some form of shared interest or common desire that encourages or forces groups within a field to interact and interrelate (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Linked to the specificity of fields, the structure and changes occurring within a field are shaped through consensual and conflicting relations. Bourdieu (1993: 72–73) argues:

In every field we shall find a struggle, the specific forms of which have to be looked for each time, between the newcomer who tries to break through the entry barrier and the dominant

agent who will try to defend the monopoly and keep out competition... which means, ultimately, the conservation or subversion of the structure of the distribution of the specific capital.

Fields, therefore, operate as a focal point for individuals and groups to seek, attain, produce and compete for various forms of capital highlighted above.

The role of capital within a field is pivotal. Laberge and Kay (2002: 254) comment that a field is ‘simultaneously a space of competition for resources (economic capital) and rewards (symbolic capital) and of struggle for dominant positions’. Within the field there will be individuals and groups that are producing a commodity and/or product deemed profitable. An individual or group, guided by their habitus, may attempt to gain contact with and/or control over this item or service and/or be associated with it, thereby accessing economic, cultural and or social capital, potentially even symbolic capital. A field is the social battleground where consensual and conflicting alliances form to produce, negotiate and compete for multiple streams of capital, in accordance with individuals’ habitus.

Overview of a Paralympic field

Through synthesizing extant knowledge regarding the development of Paralympic sport and Bourdieu’s sociological concept of field, a Paralympic field (see Figure 1) can be mapped.

The cartographic representation in Figure 1 shows that a Paralympic field can be generated from the interconnection between the IPC sub-field, and seven additional sub-fields that surround it. We would argue these are the IOC, media, sponsorship,

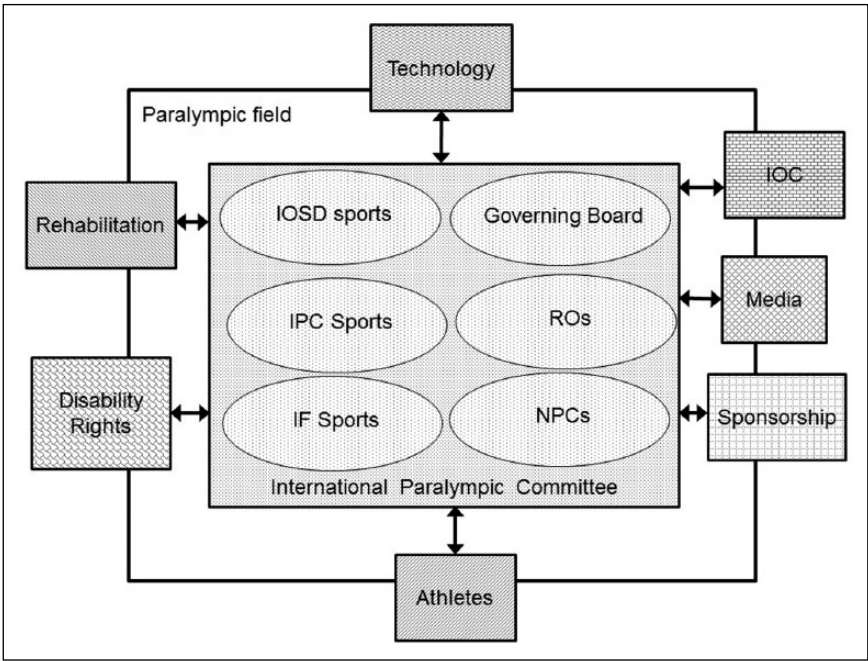


Figure 1. A Paralympic field.
Source: Purdue (2011).

rehabilitation, technology, disability rights and athletes sub-fields. These seven additional sub-fields exist both within and outside of the Paralympic field. The boundaries of each of the Paralympic sub-fields are permeable, hence no sub-field is entirely mutually exclusive nor operates within a vacuum, unaffected by the other sub-fields surrounding it. The temporal sensitivity of fields means that the Paralympic field, as depicted in Figure 1, represents a 'snap shot', a moment in time, of the *current* Paralympic field. This is not a reified, definitive model of how the Paralympic field was historically, nor prediction of how it will be arranged in the future.

The identification of the eight key sub-fields within this Paralympic field is a product of past contestation and future aspirations on the part of former, current and future key groups on issues influencing, sometimes unintentionally, the development of Paralympic sport. The following discussion seeks to better identify the key sub-fields that together form this Paralympic field.

Paralympic field constituents

While each sub-field can be viewed as a single field in its own right, inevitably fields change and possess individuals and/organizations that can be seen to straddle more than one field and thus may demarcate or blur where one field/sub-field ends and another begins. For ease of understanding, each sub-field will now be considered individually; however, it is important to view each sub-field as *not* existing in isolation.

The IPC³ sub-field, outlined above, was deemed central to the decision-making processes for the Paralympic field. Several groups combine to generate the IPC sub-field, including the Governing Board (which includes, amongst others, the President of the IPC, Philip Craven). Within the IPC are Regional Organizations (ROs) that represent geographic regions, for example Africa, Europe, Oceania, etc. There are also NPCs that are the national organizations recognized by the IPC as the sole representative of athletes with a disability in a country or territory (IPC, 2010c). International Federations (IFs) are independent sport federations recognized by the IPC as the sole world-wide representative of a sport for athletes with a disability that has been granted the status of a Paralympic Sport by the IPC (IPC, 2010c). The IPC to date currently recognizes nine IFs including, amongst others, the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF). Within the IPC there are also IPC Sports, which are multi-disability sports for athletes with a disability, governed by the IPC under the management of an IPC Sports Committee, for example Paralympic swimming (IPC, 2010c). The IOSD, highlighted above, govern sports that are for athletes with a specific disability on the Paralympic Programme. Currently, the IPC recognizes seven such IOSD sports, including Boccia, Goalball and Wheelchair Rugby (IPC, 2010c). As the governing body of Paralympic sport, the IPC's power to decide which athletes and events should be included in the Paralympic Games schedules can be seen to be immensely significant. However, the IPC sub-field alone does not shape the Paralympic field, as will now be highlighted.

The IOC and its premier sports competition, the Olympic Games, generate the IOC sub-field. This sub-field has been highly significant during the development of Paralympic sport (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2010). Courtship of IOC recognition by previous, and

current, organizers of the Paralympic Games has influenced, and continues to impact upon, the manifestation of Paralympic sport. Recent agreements signed between the IPC and IOC (IPC, 2010b) are tangible examples of how the IOC has sought to manage its relationship with the Paralympic sub-field.

Local, national and international media organizations generate the media sub-field, which facilitates and restricts media coverage of Paralympic sport. More recently, messages produced by media organizations have been transmitted, and become fused with individuals' habitus, in the form of so-called 'social' media outputs (for example, Facebook pages and Twitter responses). These outputs highlight how evolving forms of media are re-articulating meanings surrounding Paralympic sport and related phenomena.

The media sub-field provides varying quantities and styles of coverage of Paralympic sports (Howe, 2008; Schantz and Gilbert, 2001; Schell and Duncan, 1999). Newspapers, television programmes and online media artefacts (for example online articles, blogs, etc.) provide an interpretation of Paralympic sport that individuals consume and interpret. For the majority, the media is the dominant medium through which Paralympic sport is experienced with televised coverage of the summer Paralympic Games every four years supplemented by newspaper and/or online articles, which often explore the lives and sporting achievements of Paralympians and to some extent some wider issues facing Paralympic sport (Howe, 2008; Schell and Rodriguez, 2001; Thomas and Smith, 2003). The apparent pride and sense of success expressed by the IPC in attracting increased media coverage to the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games, compared to previous Paralympic Games, in part begins to highlight the significance of the media sub-field's place within the Paralympic field (IPC, 2010a).

The sponsorship sub-field influences the Paralympic field as a whole by being a site through which support is provided, often in the form of economic capital, but also at times as goods and services, by individuals and/or organizations to others. Sponsorship and the many benefits, and some restraints, which it entails, can be seen to be a potentially lucrative opportunity for members of the Paralympic field to accrue economic, as well as cultural and possibly symbolic, capital. Cultural and symbolic capital may be accrued by being connected with certain organizations and their products. For example, Sainsbury's, a British supermarket chain, was a London 2012 Paralympic Games sponsor and stated: 'Sainsbury's will utilize its network of over 875 stores to help promote the Paralympic Games in the run up to 2012 and will make Paralympic Games and ParalympicsGB merchandise available across the UK' (Sainsbury, 2012). By being part of the sponsorship sub-field, within the Paralympic field, Sainsbury's sponsorship provides a wealth of benefits, including economic capital, as well as promoting Paralympic sport across its network of stores. Inevitably, however, the public perception of Paralympic sport will also be influenced by the marketing techniques employed by Sainsbury's when acting as a sponsor of the Paralympic Games. As such the sponsorship sub-field can be seen to play a significant role in the development of this Paralympic field.

Technology as a sub-field has a significant influence within this Paralympic field, as its continued development is instrumental in some impairment groups' ability to compete in sporting contexts. Similar to most forms of technology, technologies employed in

Paralympic sport have been transformed dramatically overtime (DePauw and Gavron, 2005). The development of lighter, stronger materials has assisted the evolution of wheelchairs and prostheses used by Paralympians and thus facilitated improved performances. The importance of technology in the development of sport-specific wheelchairs (basketball, racing and rugby wheelchairs, etc.) and bicycles as used within Paracycling makes the technology sub-field a significant factor in this Paralympic field.

The role of technology can, in some instances, be perceived as so significant in that the athlete themselves becomes subsumed by the technology that they use. The well-documented experiences of, and reactions to, a bi-lateral below-the-knee amputee, named Oscar Pistorius, but often referred to as 'the Blade runner' is evidence of this (BBC, 2008; Swartz and Watermeyer, 2008).

The input of the technology sub-field can occasionally be seen to contribute to debates surrounding the sporting abilities of Paralympic athletes and an apparent cyborg anxiety (Swartz and Watermeyer, 2008). It can be argued that technology, in the form of prostheses and sports wheelchairs, merely provides impaired individuals with the opportunity to compete in sport. What an athlete achieves in a sport is down to their talent and effort. Alternatively, as prostheses and sports wheelchairs become lighter, and as racing wheelchairs being used within Paralympic sport become more aerodynamically streamlined, so the subsequent improvements in performance blur the distinction between sporting ability and technologically induced enhancement.

Rehabilitation centres and organizations developing and distributing rehabilitative and assistive devices for everyday life form the rehabilitation sub-field. In part, the rehabilitation sub-field provides an arena in which individuals who are impaired can, to some degree, be rehabilitated and potentially given their first insight into different disability sports. As such, in one sense, the rehabilitation sub-field provides the raw materials that allow certain individuals to engage with Paralympic sport and some to make the transition into the athletes sub-field before competing at the Paralympic Games.

The rehabilitation sub-field can be seen to possess a somewhat differentiated ideology compared to, for example, the athletes sub-field. Arguably, an individual within the rehabilitation sub-field uses physical therapy and exercise to adjust to their impairment. This can be seen in contrast to the use of exercise to develop sporting ability, as is the case for those within the athletes sub-field. At the same time, the athletes sub-field and Paralympic field as a whole can be seen to impact upon the rehabilitation sub-field by providing role models who demonstrate the potential for individuals who have an impairment to still have an active role within society, including specifically elite sport.

The athletes sub-field is comprised of individuals who compete within disability sport. Those that compete in disability sport events sanctioned by the IPC can be seen to be part of the Paralympic field as well. Those athletes with a disability who do not partake in Paralympic sport can still exert some influence upon the Paralympic field through their desires to be part of, for example, the Paralympic Games. This has been made apparent through a proportion of Paralympic media attention being given to some athletes with a disability not eligible to compete at Paralympic Games (BBC, 2004). The re-inclusion of intellectually disabled athletes into Paralympic Games in 2012 (IPC, 2009) is a significant recent change affecting, among others, the athletes sub-field. The issue of disability discrimination was prevalent amongst calls for the inclusion of certain

athletes (East Anglian Daily Times (EADT), 2007) and begins to illuminate the rationale for inclusion of the disability rights sub-field within this Paralympic field.

The disability rights sub-field contains academics and social researchers of disability, from the realm of disability studies, as well as disability rights advocates and activists. Disability rights as a sub-field within a Paralympic field may be questioned given the paucity⁴ of research within disability studies into Paralympic sport. Nevertheless, the position of the disability rights sub-field within this Paralympic field is significant given the IPC's assertion that 'Paralympic Sport acts as an agent for change to break down social barriers of discrimination for persons with a disability' (IPC, 2010d). Furthermore, new forms of communication, such as online blogs and Twitter feeds, have the potential to disseminate a more radical interpretation of Paralympic sport than was the case over a decade ago. The specific flows and contestation of capital between these aforementioned sub-fields help illustrate the interdependence that maintains a Paralympic field. The volume, type and exchange of species of capital between particular members of the Paralympic field will now be explored.

Exchange of capital within a Paralympic field

The contestation for, and flow of, capital within and between sub-fields⁵ are key mechanisms that maintain and (re-)orientate the Paralympic field and its members. Different types of capital are clearly evident within the Paralympic field. For instance, economic capital can be seen to be created, and exchanged in a variety of ways, in varying quantities and with differing perceptions of importance. One obvious stream of economic capital is the financial revenue received by the IPC from the IOC (IOC, 2010).

Social capital is also sought and accessed in various ways within this Paralympic field. The importance of the links the IPC possesses with the IOC can be adjudged to be an influential nexus from which social capital can be amassed. The veracity and perceived strength of the social link with the IOC will influence perceptions of social capital. For example, although Paralympic athletes use the same venues as Olympic competitors, they do so following the completion of the Olympic Games and are not permitted to compete alongside Olympic athletes, unless fulfilling certain performance-related criteria.⁶ As such the interlinking between, and perceived similarities of, Paralympic and Olympic athletes is debateable and has a bearing on the credibility and thus volume of social capital that can be perceived to be accrued through the IPC and IOC connection.

Cultural capital is exchanged throughout the Paralympic field. Some embodied cultural capital is possessed by individuals who have been classified as 'Paralympic' bodies and are able to compete in Paralympic competitions. In relation to this, objectified cultural capital can also be considered a by-product of being a Paralympian and attending a Paralympic Games. This objectified cultural capital increases when an athlete wins a Paralympic medal at a Paralympic games. Institutionalized cultural capital is on show when organizers create Paralympic sporting competitions for the Paralympic field. By sanctioning a Paralympic Games or Paralympic World Cup, the IPC invests these specific competitions with the institutionalized cultural capital that stems from competing in an official Paralympic sporting event. The status of the IPC accreditation

means these sporting events (the Paralympic Games and Paralympic World Cup) possess greater cultural capital compared to other disability sport competitions not affiliated with the IPC.

As stated previously, capital generated within a field is specific and does not possess a universal, generalizable value (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 101). This is apparent within this Paralympic field. For instance, a member of the athletes sub-field may possess some cultural capital from belonging in this sub-field, yet changing this into the economic and symbolic capital emanating from being a Paralympian is fundamentally determined by the IPC sub-field, which dictates which events and thereby athletes are included in the Paralympic Games. Furthermore, the type and quantity of sponsorship and media attention, stemming from the sponsorship and media sub-fields, respectively, that is afforded to an athlete will further impact upon their ability to convert the Paralympic cultural capital of being a Paralympian into economic and symbolic capital afforded to marketable elite athletes with a disability. Arguably, those Paralympic athletes that can identify, and be perceived by others, as legitimate elite, high-performance sportsmen/women will receive the corresponding status and prestige (symbolic capital) that they are believed to warrant. Attempts to identify as legitimate elite, high-performance sports may cause some sports and/or athletes to emphasize their similarities with other seemingly legitimate models of elite sport, such as Olympians and their sports.

The relatively recent reintroduction of intellectually disabled athletes at the 2012 Paralympic Games (IPC, 2009) has generated another potential source of conflict within a Paralympic field, as this reduces the available space for the inclusion of athletes with other impairments in Paralympic sports/ events. Thus, individuals in the athletes sub-field may stop operating within the Paralympic field, with their space taken by a member of the athletes sub-field who was previously not operating in the Paralympic Games, and vice versa. This issue will continue to be contested intensely within the IPC sub-field between IFs and IOSDs as they attempt to protect the interests of their members, that is, individuals with particular impairments engaging in specific sports events, while also safeguarding the position of the IF and/or IOSD within the IPC sub-field. As Laberge and Kay (2002: 254–255) warn, ‘individuals’ positions continually move in a field both as the outcome of the struggle for ascendancy and/or eventually as a consequence of the entry of new agents who modify the structure of the field’. This inevitably places pressure on existing IFs and IOSD sports as these organizations compete to be part of a Paralympic field and could lead to the forging of alliances, as well as efforts being made to distance their organization and athletes from others, in the pursuit of maintaining and/or improving their position and therefore power within the IPC sub-field, so that their sport and athletes remain part of the Paralympic Games programme.

Throughout field analysis, it is important to remain focused on the fact that the capability to exchange capital within the Paralympic field is influenced by the specific conditions created within the limits of this field. This is evident when considering, for example, the input of the technology sub-field. Economic capital investment in creating lighter, stronger prostheses or racing wheelchairs, within the technology sub-field, is only forthcoming due to the desire of members of the technology sub-field to have this equipment;

firstly used by Paralympians and secondly endorsed and revered by others in light of the Paralympic athletes' achievements. The financial revenue and prestige (economic and symbolic capital) received within the Paralympic field can be used to attract further investment and utilized in the marketing of relevant goods and services to others, such as rehabilitative and assistive devices to practitioners operating within the rehabilitation sub-field. The introduction of new technologies can transform the habitus of athletes that benefit from its application, while the habitus of those who cannot might remain relatively unchanged, in part because of the different flow of capital. This is because while investment in, and provision of, high-tech prostheses for Paralympians may be considered profitable, it is arguably unlikely that the same standard of prostheses will be made available en masse, nor be affordable, to members of the general public, thereby reiterating the certain conditions created, and their impacts, within a Paralympic field.

Disparities between subjective judgements regarding the 'worth' or 'value', in terms of capital(s), of a particular facet of social life are endemic and can be highly significant in shaping the social topography of the Paralympic field. When discussing field relations, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 99) stated: 'two individuals endowed with an equivalent overall capital can differ, in their position as well as in their stances ('position-takings'), in that one holds a lot of economic capital and little cultural capital while the other has little economic capital and large cultural assets'. This is evident when exploring the inter-relationship of members of the athletes, media and IPC sub-fields.

It may be argued that Paralympic athletes, commonly termed Paralympians, possess high levels of Paralympic cultural capital. However, some may interpret their 'worth' very differently. Figure 2 pictographically demonstrates the variance in terms of economic and Paralympic cultural capital volume and the influence this may have upon the position and thus power of actors within the athletes, media and IPC sub-fields. For instance, an international media organization (operating within the media sub-field) is likely to possess high economic capital but low Paralympic cultural capital, in large part due to the operation of this multinational across various fields beyond the Paralympic field. In comparison, both the IPC and Paralympians (existing in the IPC and athletes sub-fields, respectively) can be adjudged to possess high levels of Paralympic cultural capital. The IPC sub-field arguably possesses moderate levels of economic capital, with Paralympians generally possessing relatively low levels of economic capital compared to the IPC and an international media organization.

These differences in capital can be seen to affect interactions within the Paralympic field. For instance, for the international media organization to market the Paralympic Games, an economic value will be placed upon the event, including the athletic population. This value is likely to be differentiated across Paralympians. Variance is illustrated in Figure 2 and suggests that some Paralympians may in fact be perceived to possess little/no economic value to the media organization if their performances cannot be transmitted and presented to yield profit. Economic value is likely to be influenced by perceptions of the athletes' symbolic capital (influenced by the ability of the athlete to represent the 'image' of an elite sportsman/woman) and wider Paralympic cultural capital (Howe and Parker, 2012).

The economic capital possessed by an international media company likely dwarfs that possessed by athletes and even the IPC, leading to the media company being seen to

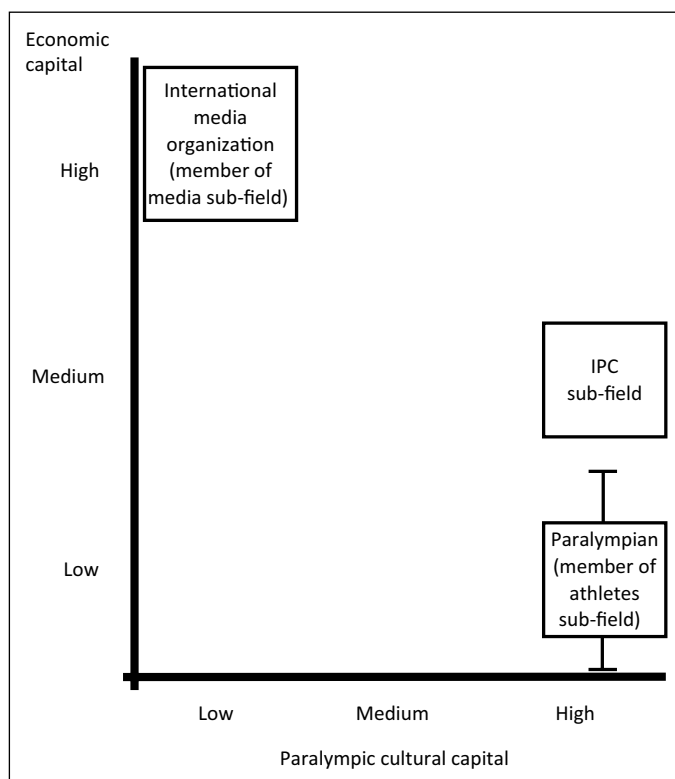


Figure 2. Comparison of volume and structure of economic and cultural capital between members of the media, athlete and IPC sub-fields.

occupy a dominant position of influence within this Paralympic field. Moreover, a consequence of this may be the marginalization of certain bodies (Purdue and Howe, 2012b) that fail to be viewed as tradable, profitable products within and beyond the media sub-field. However, Paralympic cultural capital is still significant, since without it an alleged Paralympic sports competition lacks credibility and thus loses its economic value. The significance of Paralympic cultural capital provides those individuals and institutions imbued with it, most notably the IPC and Paralympians, with some means to compete for position and influence within the Paralympic field, in spite of their inferiority in terms of economic capital.

Overall, the existence of a Paralympic field is predicated on members of this field forging consensual relations and negotiating areas of conflict. Their ability to do this is influenced by their type and volume of capital resources and the specific conditions at play within and outside of the field. Throughout these negotiations an organization's and/or individual's position in the field remains contestable, making the study of fields both insightful and challenging.

Summary

This paper emphasizes the relational processes that underpin and constantly re-make Paralympic sport. As a result, this situates the Paralympic Games within its social environment as well as identifying its critical areas of engagement with various areas of society. The interested individuals and groups, both consensual and antagonistic, are alluded to and thus allow social connections that are forged and contested prior to, during and beyond Paralympic Games to be made apparent.

From a theoretical perspective, Bourdieu's sociological concept of field (Bourdieu, 1993, 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) has demonstrated the dynamic nature of the social world surrounding and penetrating Paralympic sport. Utilizing the concepts of habitus and capital we are able to robustly analyse and articulate the Paralympic field at a particular moment in time. The re-articulation of Bourdieu's summative equation to read, $\text{field} = \text{practice} - [(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})]$, seeks to refresh and invigorate innovative application of Bourdieusian sociological theory to sport and society. With regard to furthering empirical Paralympic social research, it is hoped that the 'Paralympic field' presented in this paper can provide a framework with which future researchers can dismantle and further investigate specific areas of, and relationships within, the complex social construct that is Paralympic sport.

In light of this paper's analysis, it is important to emphasize that while economic capital can be viewed as highly influential, the risk of the Paralympic field being dominated solely by those individuals, groups and sub-fields with considerable economic capital resources is tempered, to some extent, by the multifarious nature of capital. The importance of distinctive signifiers and producers of Paralympic cultural capital, most notably through members of the athletes sub-field and the IPC sub-field, provide these individuals and organizations with a degree of power within the Paralympic field. Fundamentally, the *raison d'être* of the Paralympic field resonates from these cultural producers, while clearly the volume and structure of capital, and its exchange, within the Paralympic field remains subject to influence by those who operate both within and outside of the Paralympic field. This inevitably includes members of the media sub-field who transmit, re-present and ascribe value to Paralympic sport vis-à-vis Paralympic cultural capital.

The complexity of Paralympic field relations, while challenging, clearly warrants further dissection and investigation. The influence of messages and discourse stimulated by media outlets in the media sub-field is clearly an important area for future research highlighted by this paper. Research into the inter-relationship between groups within the IPC sub-field would also help shed much-needed light on the decision-making processes that occur at the centre of the Paralympic field. The interaction of the IPC and IOC is another important interconnection within this Paralympic field that demands critical engagement from scholars, including those already operating within the realm of Olympic studies. However, there remains a clear need to explore all of the Paralympic field's sub-fields, both collectively and in isolation.

This broad call not only reflects the paucity of existing sociological endeavour into Paralympic sport, but also reflects the fact that to ignore other sub-fields would result in certain sub-fields attaining a highly privileged and arguably dominant position within the Paralympic field. It is through exploring the capital resources, production and exchanges

instrumented by members within all eight sub-fields forming this Paralympic field that the intersection of disability and elite sport within society can be better understood.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. Note that Paralympic demonstration events have subsequently ceased to be included since the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games (Legg et al., 2009).
2. The account of the 1984 Olympic Games on the IOC website fails to mention the existence of the Paralympic demonstration sports, but ironically mentions a wheelchair user (Archer Nerioli Fairhall) competing in an Olympic event (see IOC (2009)).
3. A breakdown of the make-up of the IPC can be viewed at IPC (2010c).
4. This is a lacuna that the authors have begun to address (please see Purdue and Howe (2012a, 2012b)).
5. Given the breadth and complexity of this Paralympic field, a selection of examples is included for the sake of brevity.
6. Obvious contemporary examples of elite athletes with a disability who have fulfilled these criteria are swimmer Natalie du Toit and sprinter Oscar Pistorius.

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