

**IN TIMES OF LIQUID MODERNITY: EXPERIENCES OF
THE PARALYMPIC STUDENT-ATHLETE**

Volume I

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**IN TIMES OF LIQUID MODERNITY: EXPERIENCES OF
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Abstract

This phenomenological study explores the life-worlds of eight Paralympic student-athletes by employing the conceptual framework of Zygmunt Bauman's Liquid Modernity (2000), and utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) as a method of data gathering and analysis.

The study aimed to answer the main research question: *To what extent is Bauman's Liquid Modernity an effective metaphor for describing the life of a Paralympic student-athlete.* Accounts concerning the lived experience of each of the participants' life-worlds were gathered via semi-structured interviews and analysed through a double hermeneutic process of interpretation producing a multitude of intricate, intimate and personal themes for each participant. Analysed and presented as individual case studies, the research demonstrates the uniqueness of experience despite the existence of common and shared life environments. Collectively, the themes from each account were then explored via the lens of Bauman's sociology, identifying connections with Bauman's considerations of Identity, Otherness, Culture and Belonging in times of liquid modernity.

Six key areas were identified for discussion: i) Sport as a container for Liquid life; ii) The problem of Identity; iii) Moving beyond the Social Model of Disability; iv) Belonging to the Paralympic movement; v) The creation of Otherness; vi) The Liquid life of the Paralympic Student-Athlete.

The research concludes that the metaphor of Bauman's Liquid Modernity can be used to provide insight to the phases of liquidity being experienced at an individual / psychological level, providing a demonstration of how the concept might be explored within the realms of the sociology of sport, with a specific focus on the Paralympic student-athlete. However, the study also demonstrates a need for research to explore Bauman's Liquid Modernity at the micro-level to elucidate why some of his global observations withstand for the individual life-words of the participants, and why some observations seemed very much at odds with the accounts provided for this study.

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Dedication

I feel so exceptionally lucky to be able to dedicate this thesis to so many important people in my life, each of whom, in their own extraordinary way, have helped me more than they could possibly know.

To Jaquai and Trisha, Team US Rowing: For being the most amazing female athletes I have ever met. You are my inspiration – I hope I can become even half the woman you both are. Words cannot express how truly lucky, and grateful, I am to have met you along this incredible journey.

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To my parents: I love you both more than you could possibly imagine. Everything I am today is because of you.

Chapter One

Introduction

“Adversity causes some men to break; others to break records.”

William A. Ward (1921 – 1994)

1.1 Introduction

This study explores the lived experiences of eight Paralympic student-athletes. At the time of writing, all participants were studying full time at universities in the United Kingdom, or had graduated within the last 12 months. In addition each participant was on a Great Britain Paralympic sport Performance Pathway. The primary aim of this phenomenological research was to gather narrative accounts of individual and common experiences relative to the participants. Applying a conceptual framework of Zygmunt Bauman’s (2000) Liquid Modernity, this study collected detailed accounts of the athletic, academic and social experiences of each participant. Furthermore, the study examines the intersection of psychology and sociology in regards to the construction of meaning making and the combined lived experience of the relationships between sport, disability and higher education for the participants. Acknowledging the role of hermeneutics within the study, the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was employed to analyse the narratives in order in answer the main research question: To what extent is Bauman’s Liquid Modernity an effective metaphor for describing the life of the Paralympic student-athlete?

This chapter begins by contextualising the problem Bauman's Liquid Modernity provides and explores the rationale for the conceptual framework of liquid modernity as well as the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Finally, the chapter addresses the research questions and also provides an overview of the thesis structure by offering a brief summary of the content found in each chapter.

1.2 Contextualising the problem

Using the conceptual framework of Bauman's Liquid Modernity and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) as the main underlying approach for analysis, this phenomenological study was based on the societal and personal experiences of individuals who are athletes, are students and who have a disability. The study provides a collection of case studies concerning the participant's identities, relationships, daily environments (in sporting and educational institutions), aspirations and concerns.

Theoretical influences for the research are drawn from recent thinking in a range of disciplines in social theory with the main one being that of Bauman's Liquid Modernity. Liquid modernity was employed as the conceptual framework due to its current relatively sparse use within research pertaining to the sociology of sport. When initially exploring the number of possible conceptual frameworks that could be employed for a study such as this, it was necessary to find a lens with which to view the narratives which addressed the juxtaposition of the realist and the relativist aspects of the study, but which also accommodated the complexities of the many different academic domains to be

discussed: Sociology; Philosophy; Economics; Psychology; Education; Disability; and Sport. These and other aspects are discussed in greater depth in the Literature Review in Chapter 2.

1.2.1 Consideration of other potential theoretical paradigms

A study such as this could sit well within a number of paradigms within the domains of psychology and/or sociology. Indeed, knowing that the study would pervade already established critical discourse present within the area of disability and of high performance sport structures, the pool with which to potentially adopt a paradigm well used within each would be anticipated; a bow to tradition almost. However, one of the primary objectives of this study was to trouble the established and existing framework within which the majority of research concerning elite disability sport is situated. Initial literature searches highlighted that very few academics within the sociology of sport (or disability for that matter) had been bold enough to move beyond the shared assumptions that Postmodernism was considered the most suitable conceptual framework for their work; that Postmodernism had been documented over many years as the most favourable offering of explanation in the agency/structure argument regarding disability.

Whilst conducting the literature search, I concluded that the common rhetoric found concerned with the Postmodern condition of disability did not sit comfortably with me and I found myself becoming increasingly resistant towards employing the Postmodern account of disability for this study. It was evident that within Disability studies and disability sport, there remained a strong alliance between the academics, the Postmodern and the social model of

disability; an allegiance to guard the terrain on what appeared to be an ideology of convenience. It should be made clear that no means was I dismissing the (ground-breaking at the time) work of the Postmodern discourse to bring the debate of asperity to the fore; indeed, without the transgressive strides of postmodernists such as Michel Foucault, Jaques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard, it is possible disability would still be slave to the oppressive systems of genealogical control, cure and experimentation. More that the abundance of literature employing the Postmodern conceptions were so ubiquitous, I found myself questioning to what extent this study would add value to the landscape of research concerning the Paralympic. From my years as a practitioner within elite disability sport, I found myself unable to marry up the academic discourse with what I had witnessed within my years in the high performance sports industry. What was of note, however, was that a small collection of work began to surface amidst the regular instalments championing Foucault and his peers. Sporadically articles appeared which seemed to challenge and resist the pull towards the common rhetoric; authors boldly waving their work above the parapet, suggesting that something has changed, but they were not sure what. A number of scholars called for both a paradigm shift in disability research (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001; Watson, 2002; Barnes, 2003; Marin & Prinz, 2003; Tate & Pledger 2003; Gabel & Peters, 2004) and a rethinking of the potential of a “post-postmodern” turn (Lee, 2005, 2006; Owen, 2007; Sibeon, 2007; Ritzer & Ryan, 2007).

Reading these articles I was intrigued – the idea of multiple realities and the emergence of multivocality in a number of sociological papers encouraged me to look beyond the appeared convenience of the Postmodern. I agreed with

Blackshaw's (2006, p.294) critiques of Postmodernism's "national language" and the intolerability of radicals such as Bauman who trouble and disturb the translatability of this patriotic discourse. Postmodernism seems unwelcoming of content which does not fit its prescribed 'off-the-peg' objectivity – an ironic concept considering the relativism of the postmodern epistemology is self-refuting in regards to the rejection of grand theoretical concepts. Instead of moulding the research to fit the paradigm (the apparent commonality within the sociology of sport), I hoped the research would guide me to an alternative, far less orchestrated paradigm which welcomed changes, challenges, fluidity and the complexity of relations between actors discourses and social contexts. Furthermore, I found Sibeon's (2007, p.31) criticism of Postmodern *essentialism* to be fitting of the current literature concerning both disability and the Paralympic athlete.

"Essentialism presupposes on a priori grounds a necessary unitaryness or homogeneity of social phenomena, whether the phenomena in question be 'culture', social institutions such as law or education, or say taxonomic collectivises such as 'women' or 'men' or social classes; against essentialism it can be argued that it is better to leave open for empirical investigation the question of how far any particular phenomenon is homogenous."

This issue of 'presupposing' was perhaps, at its core, was the primary rub of my disengagement with the Postmodern theorists, as well as their predecessors such as Erving Goffman. I purposefully did not want to assume a collective stigma or discourse as is often imprinted on work concerning the Paralympic athlete. I hoped to determine the degree to which (potential) stigma and exclusion were evidenced or obsolete as the actor navigated and negotiated their life-worlds, revisiting these experiences for me in their own words, when (and only when) they chose to bring attention to such differences.

I feel that had I entered into a study which succumbed to the Postmodern I would have produced, as Ritzer & Ryan (2004, p.41) would define it, a “symbolic exchange with near lifeless social theory”. I did not want to produce a study chained to a rhetoric “too dependent on its own ready-made cognitive frames”, fearing the results would be “uninspired and uninspiring” (Blackshaw, 2006, p.297). And so I searched for a paradigm which would allow for (indeed embrace) dualities rather than dichotomies, and that would fit the analysis of such complex social phenomena addressed in the study.

1.2.2 Deciding on Liquid Modernity

Whilst reading a number of sociology of sport papers grounded in the Postmodern approach, a reference for Blackshaw’s 2002 paper: *The Sociology of Sport Reassessed in Light of the Phenomenon of Zygmunt Bauman* caught the researcher’s interest. Blackshaw (2002) argued for a new approach to the trajectory of social theory – one that moved beyond the postmodern rhetoric and provided a fresh reflection on contemporary sport. At the time I had found myself overwhelmed by the number of sociology of sport studies employing Postmodernism as their backdrop, but underwhelmed by their relevance and their contemporary application. Evidence of the use of Postmodern theories to conceptually frame research within the sociology of sport since the early 1970’s, is abundant. Interestingly, I found the Postmodern account of present day issues within the sociology of sport to be somewhat outdated and overly focused on the agency/structure (read able/disabled) binary. I felt the Postmodern theories failed to recognise and explain progressions within sport as a whole, often producing stale studies with (as I consider) little pragmatic

application. I spent subsequent months engaging in all that was Bauman – from his life history to his early works in Marxism, his writings on the Postmodern turn and into his development of Liquid Modernity. In Bauman's work I found a conceptual framework which not only encompassed the multiple areas of sociology required for a study such as this (such as athlete identity, globalisation, disability for example), but also a framework which allowed for my own understandings of the world. More importantly this provided the researcher with an opportunity to produce a study which is in itself innovative, novel, contemporary, original and of relevance to the profession because it is the first of its kind.

In actuality, when exploring the landscape of studies employing liquid modernity as a conceptual framework I was surprised to find that (in comparison to others such as Postmodernism or Feminism for example) Bauman's work had not yet become mainstream within the academic domain of sociology, let alone within the sociology of sport. His work was emerging but very few empirical studies had taken the leap to use it to inform research. Indeed, none within the area of sociology of sport had explored the use of Bauman's Liquid Modernity. In his paper *Re-inventing Modernities*, Lee (2006) comments that what is missing in planting Bauman's work firmly within the sociology research arsenal is the lack of empirical evidence demonstrating the applicability and validity of his work. Additionally, for the studies which have employed Bauman's Liquid Modernity as the lens with which to view the research, many employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the method of analysis (Stone, 2009; Hazaz-Berger & Yair, 2011; Nakagawa & Payne, 2011).

1.2.3 Deciding on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was considered to be an appropriate methodology as it provided a framework which acknowledged the limitations of a double hermeneutic process, i.e. the researcher providing an interpretation of the participant's interpretation. Due to the complexity of the lives of the participants in regards to the different social spaces they occupy I wanted to represent their experiences as honestly as a methodology would allow. IPA acknowledges that this double hermeneutic process means that the analysis involves a high degree of subjectivity and is shaped by the researcher's interpretative frameworks. In this study interpretations are illustrated by extracts from the transcripts in order that the reader can assess the persuasiveness of the analysis themselves. Again, this study is the first of its kind to employ the method of IPA with the framework of Bauman's Liquid Modernity within the field of the sociology of sport, further cementing the research as progressive and new.

As previously mentioned the study explores how 8 Paralympic student-athletes interpret and perceive their life-worlds as a student at university in the UK and additionally as a high performance Great Britain Paralympic athlete. It also explores their life-world being a young adult living with a disability. In order to fully unpack the complexities within a study such as this, it is necessary to first explore where within the field of research this thesis sits. Exploring notions of the self are largely harboured within the domain of psychology, whilst research exploring the social and society (and its associations such as culture, lifestyle, education etc.) sits firmly within the realm of sociology. Therefore, it would be correct to state that this is very much a psycho-social study (please see

Appendix G for the authors primary considerations for conducting a psycho-social study).

1.3 Significance of the study

As will be further discussed in Chapter 2, Bauman's Liquid Modernity is not a theory. It is not a proclamation of truth; not an assertion nor is it a testimony. Although I am aware that Bauman's Liquid Modernity is just one version of how modern society is viewed, and that there are many other vantages which could have been considered for this thesis, I concluded that applying the lens of liquid modernity to this research would best represent and reflect the accounts produced by the participants, and ultimately contribute best to the production of original knowledge within the area. Adopting Bauman's concept of Liquid Modernity, coupled with the use of IPA, ensures that the study is an original body of work containing rich data which has allowed me to explore deeply the lives of a collective of individuals of whom I have admired and developed a passion for working with. This study is therefore unique in setting out to integrate these several different perspectives of psychology, sociology and IPA in researching this particular group of young people with the relatively unexplored concept of liquid modern times. By applying interpretive methods, the aim is not external generalization but rather theory informing. What follows are the research questions utilised to provide a framework within which this study is bound.

1.3.1 The Research Questions

Using Bauman's Liquid Modernity as a framework to inform the narratives produced by the participants, the research asks: To what is extent is Bauman's

Liquid Modernity an effective metaphor for describing the life of the Paralympic student-athlete?

From this primary research question five subordinate research questions can be addressed, some of which have overlapping content. However, different epistemological considerations will be utilised to unpick the thematic data. These primary research questions find their foundations in the contextualisation of the research and the reflexive narratives, and their interpretations. What follows are the 4 subordinate research questions.

1.3.1.1 Subordinate Research Question 1

How do concepts of the self and social identity evolve when conventional and non-conventional experiences of normalisation (as least within Western society) collide?

The exploration of the creation of individual and social identity is central to Bauman's presentation of Liquid Modern living which provides questions such as; Are Bauman's postulations on the process of Othering via engrained and embedded traditional practices of social ordering? As such, this study investigated the participant's experiences regarding identity formation in their academic, athletic and social life-worlds and aimed to uncover their personal thoughts and reflections on the notion of 'normality' in liquid modern times.

1.3.1.2 Subordinate Research Question 2

What is the relationship between the different life-worlds presented by the participants and to what extent are these life-worlds conducive with Bauman's Liquid Modernity?

The research provides insight into the understandings and lived experiences of the Paralympic student-athlete in multiple environments and their connection to each of these environments. This question lays the foundations for the study to uncover the realities of the stratification and complexity of the life-worlds presented by each participant and to what extent these supposedly shared life-worlds are experienced either similarly or differently by each participant.

1.3.1.3 Subordinate Research Question 3

Is it possible to move beyond the postmodern binary opposition of able/disabled when researching disability within the conceptual framework of Bauman's Liquid Modernity?

This question considers the possible deviation away from the postmodern rhetoric of the able/disabled divide and explores to what extent the relationship exists in the liquid modern world. Furthermore, addressing this question allows for the exploration of the use of liquid modernity as a whole in regards to its practicality and pragmatism within contemporary research of the sociology of sport.

1.3.1.4 Subordinate Research Question 4

Is the Social Model of Disability considered valid within Bauman's Liquid Modern society?

This question raises the debate on the possible need for a paradigm shift concerning the dichotomy of the Medical Model versus the Social Model of Disability within Disability studies. It appears as though the difficulty of placing the Social Model of Disability within Bauman's Liquid Modernity is linked specifically to the participants' experience of the agency/structure relationship with a focus on how this relationship alters between each life-world discussed. It is hoped that the researcher will find the answer to this valuable point in the data.

1.3.1.5 Subordinate Research Question 5

How do the participants choose to reflect upon and express their experiences of being disabled, being an athlete and of being a disabled-athlete?

In regards to the literature reviewed on the issue of disability, as well as the literature available concerning the sociology and psychology of elite athletes, the study examines how the participants chose to navigate the complexity of each experience. The question hopes to elucidate the tension (if any) of if the accounts align with the reported marginalisation and disempowerment caused by disability against the assumed strength and respect commanded of being an athlete. How do the participants choose to articulate this clash in social perception of being a 'disabled athlete'?

Finally, each subordinate research question utilises the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology and the embedded philosophy of interpretation to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the participants'

experiences whilst, simultaneously, addressing the primary research question. What follows is the structure of the thesis.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This PhD thesis is presented to the reader in two volumes. Volume 1 presents the study whilst Volume 2 presents the appendices referred to throughout the study. This section provides a clearer understanding of the nature of the work and directions undertaken by the researcher and provides the reader with a summarised overview of the remaining chapter of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review. Chapter 2 provides the reader with a detailed, in depth review of the literature relevant to the foundations of the study. The chapter begins by examining sociology in relation to Bauman's work and addresses the issue of problemising history. The path of Modernity to the arrival of Bauman's Liquid Modernity is explored at length, as are the central concepts of liquid modernity. It goes on to discuss the current criticisms and critiques of Bauman's sociology and provides some rebuttals. Finally chapter 2 places Bauman's Liquid Modernity within the context of high performance sport, and of university education and disability.

Chapter 3: Methodology. The Methodology chapter begins by discussing the epistemological considerations of conducting phenomenological research. Following this, the chapter goes on to detail the methodology of the study. This section provides the reader with the rationale for the study before discussing at length Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The chapter then goes on to explore and understand the links between IPA and liquid modernity, followed by

a thorough explanation of the procedures undertaken throughout the study. Finally, a discussion of the interview process is then offered, as well as a comprehensive explanation of the gathering of participants, data collection and process of analysis.

Chapter 4: Analysis. The reader is presented with a guide of how this chapter should be read in order for the contextualisation of the data gathering process as well as transparency of analysis. The accounts of all 8 participants are presented as individual case studies. The analysis of each account stays as close to the original text as possible, with emergent themes being explored in depth in relation to both the individual and the sociological context.

Chapter 5: Discussion. The chapter re-introduces the main and sub questions and thoughts for discussion in regards to applying the filter of Bauman's Liquid Modernity to the accounts of the participants. The 6 presented are: 1) Sport as a container for the Liquid Life; 2) The problem of identity; 3) The social model of disability; 4) The Paralympic Movement; 5) The creation of Otherness; and 6) Liquid Life. The Discussion chapter examines to what extent liquid modernity is an effective metaphor for describing the life of a Paralympic student-athlete and offers arguments for the level of applicability. The chapter concludes by summarising the main findings of the study in relation to the question posed.

Chapter 6: Conclusions. The significance of the study and its original contribution to knowledge is explained in this chapter. Following this, reflective methodological considerations during the process of the data gathering and analysis are discussed. Suggestions for future research are presented as are

acknowledgements of the possible limitations of the study. The chapter ends with some concluding reflexive thoughts and an overall conclusion of the study.

1.5 Summary

This chapter has provided the reader with an introduction to the thesis and has given a brief understanding of the rationale for the author choosing Bauman's Liquid Modernity as the conceptual framework and IPA as the method of data analysis. It succeeds in placing the notions of psychology and sociology as an important set of fundamental theoretical concepts which are adhered to throughout the study. It also points to liquid modernity as the conceptual framework of the research, and furthermore, the chapter poses a significant main question and 4 subordinate questions which provide a direction for the remainder of the research. Finally it has provided an overview of the thesis structure and the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The following literature review provides an overarching comment on the trajectory of social theory within the discipline of sociology and how it is specific to the thesis. The purpose of the review is to provide the reader with a chronology of sociology from a history of ideas to a history of Bauman's work. It is divided into three distinct sections. These are:

1. Sociology and Bauman's work
2. Liquid Modernity
3. Critiques and Criticisms of liquid modernity

The chapter introduces Bauman's metaphor of Liquid Modernity (2000) as the conceptual framework for the study. Furthermore the literature review guides the reader from the generic to the specific in regards to understanding the development of Bauman's sociological arguments via the development of social thinking and the emergence of sociology. Key contributions to Western sociology are discussed and examined with regards to the shaping of Bauman's ideas and how they relate to this study. Additionally of note to the reader is the reminder that this study examines the life-worlds of eight Paralympic student-athletes. Whilst the principle discussion of this study is one of a sociological standing, this chapter also reviews literature concerning determinants which contribute to the other aspects which impinge on the study; these being disability, education, high performance sport, identity and experience. Each of these is discussed in turn,

with significant emphasis being placed on linking previous considered theories within each area to Bauman's observations of liquid modernity. What follows first is the relationship of sociology to Bauman's work.

2.2 Sociology and Bauman's work

A key consideration of this study is that many academics acknowledge that Bauman's work does not easily fall into the compass of conventional sociology (Smith, 1999; Beilhaz, 2000; Tester, 2004; Blackshaw 2005, 2006; Jacobsen & Poder, 2006). Indeed, in his introductory text, Blackshaw (2005, p.52) argues that Bauman "does not fit into the carefully organized classificatory academic divisions that are the mainstay of the modern university system". To understand why this is the case, it is necessary to assess the definitions around the curriculum of sociology and its contributions to our understandings of society ontologically. Koenig (2011, p.5) has commented that ultimately, the aim of sociology is "to improve man's adjustment to life by developing objective knowledge concerning social phenomena which can be used to deal effectively with social problems". However, the exact intention of sociology is one that is still contested by many academics today. Opinions are divided and conflict exists regarding the question should sociology be, ultimately, an instrument for social reform, or is its role purely one of objective analysis? Regardless, the reason perhaps that Bauman's work does not align itself with traditional sociology is that it does neither of these two things – it does not offer any suggestions or solutions for social reform, nor does it objectively analyse the society it observes. As Vecchi (2004) explains, Bauman is not like other sociologists or social scientists:

"His reflections are a work-in-progress, and he is never content with defining or conceptualising an event, but rather aims to

establish connections with social phenomena (...) The methodology he brings to bear on a subject aims above all to 'reveal' the myriad of connections between the object under investigation and other manifestations of life in human society." (p.1)

Bauman's work provides "Liquid Modern" (Bauman, 2000) interpretations of some common themes which have attempted to be the mainstay of sociology discourse. The study investigates if these interpretations are then applicable to the Paralympic student-athlete. The literature review aims to highlight fundamental shifts in societal norms which have led to the society which Bauman provides commentary on today. The primary significances to Bauman's claims are the move from the certain to the uncertain, from the homogenous to the heterogeneous, from the parochial to the broad – ultimately from the un-different to the different. The following section looks at how these changes can be highlighted by considering the path of modernity.

2.3 The Path of Modernity

The concern of the 'Modern' and of 'Modernity' has been interesting sociologists for generations; indeed, Cohen & Kennedy (2000) trace the emergence of modernity back to the 17th Century with the dawn of the revolutionary age of Enlightenment. As is discussed later, the Enlightenment period influenced European societies by dramatically transforming primary and secondary social institutions (Macdonis & Plummer, 2008). This is of exceptional note when considering the topic of disability and the treatment of disabled individuals.

Giddens (2002) states that the expression 'modernity' encapsulates the progress of societies, from primitive civilisations which evolved steadily through distinct stages, arriving at a modern age characterised by industrialisation and capitalism,

culminating in the current state of emerging globalisation which shapes contemporary society with ever increasing momentum. The following section provides forethought on Bauman's understanding of modernity.

2.3.1 Early Modernity and the need to Order

Bauman (2000) considers the birth of the modern era to have been defined by a natural disaster in the 18th century. In 1755 Lisbon, Spain, one of the most prestigious cities of its time in terms of culture, riches and industrial trade in Europe, suffered a devastating earthquake. The disaster saw the city destroyed in a matter of days, not only from the earthquake itself but from the after effects of fires and flooding. The earthquake's impact was profound and lasting (Bauman, 2009). Depictions of the disaster could be found in art and literature across several European countries for centuries after the event, with casualties reported throughout Europe and Western Africa. Many mosques, synagogues and churches were ruined. For Bauman, this natural disaster signified the beginning of the modern era - primarily as it engendered the rise of reason.

The earthquake destroyed not only the buildings, but also the theological fabric of society. Bauman (1998b) comments that in the pre-modern era identity, belonging and culture (as is defined as a concept central to anthropology) were only considered as subjects worthy of debate in referencing how best to fulfil one's religious duties. Baumeister (1986, p.29) highlights that towards the end of the pre-modern era, the "self" served only to demonstrate the "general struggle between good and evil". Even salvation was not a personal attainment but a collective gain (Baumeister, 1986). For Bauman (2000) a primary consequence of the earthquake was a deeply rooted change in social theory. The Modern era

saw political, sociological and scientific revolution bring about an explosion of cultural and industrial diversities. The comparable mass society dichotomised and for some, religious texts were no longer revered as the source of knowledge. Groupings of people within Western society began a newly revived search for truth via rationalism and logic. Intellectuals of the time - Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau for example - questioned the meaning that could be attributed to this disaster. Via philosophical and societal thought, they, plus many others, attempted to make sense of this new world within which they were living. What was the purpose of the earthquake? What lessons could be drawn from it? For many the answer was that the world under Divine or natural management does not consider the individual. Catastrophe came without warning, striking at random without consideration for the individual - be it the righteous or the sinners. Regardless of faith or duty, the same fate was appointed to all. Kramnick (1995, p.11) comments that "men were prepared to go back and search for the clearest general principles, and to admit nothing except on the testimony of his own experience and reason".

The early modern philosophers drew similar conclusions to questions asked – nature was morally blind to all human beings. It was these revolutionary beliefs that gave way to the emergence of the individual as a single entity. The ideology of "the individual" began to emerge. According to de Benoist (2004) the 18th century saw the notion of freedom merge with the idea of allowing the individual to independently create themselves and their place in society. A person was not only a legal or civic entity, but also a moral being with an individual soul, able to stand independently from his community, and even be disconnected from it.

Thus, the question of identity became a modern phenomenon, as de Benoist (2004) argues:

“It developed in the 18th century, supported by a burgeoning individualism which originated in the Christian valorization of the soul, in Descartes’ rationalism, in the privileging of ordinary life and the private sphere, and finally, in Locke’s theory, which favours individual free-will over social obligations.” (p.5)

As Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1996) comment, the old pillars of the pre-modern order such as God, the social system and nature endeavoured to be redefined by ‘the individual’, supposedly endowed with reason and freedom to choose. In contrast with the pre-modern era, modernity can be seen as the “story of humans lifting themselves by their own wits, acumen, determination, and industry” (Bauman 2008, p.79). The Lisbon earthquake forced the question of *how* morality was now to be determined and defined by humans. Nature had demonstrated that it did not discriminate against recipients of punishment and devastation, leaving the process of the establishment of moral justice to the individual. And so here, perhaps, began the paradox of human nature’s need to order. In the attempt to develop a utopian, morally indifferent world, western intellectuals constituted societies which, according to Bauman (1995) could not withstand the foundations of human nature. Bauman (1995) considers that it is not in the nature of human beings to endure a world which is morally indifferent, or to allow the development of a world which does not take account of human purposes, human ideals or human values. He argues that to attempt to exist in a world without the propensity to order goes against the psychology of humankind. At what point then does the moral consciousness to achieve indifference become over ridden by the individual’s innate need to consider Otherness (as Bauman considers it) as dangerous, threatening or inhuman? This literature review addresses the question

later when discussing the ordering of Otherness specifically in regards to disability, with the study exploring this in times of liquid modernity.

After the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, the dominant ideology of a modern society became one which demanded that the behaviour of the world should, wherever possible, mirror the supposed behaviour of the enlightened Western citizens. Hall & Gieben (1992) comment that a defining period in European intellectual history was when the great philosophes, for example Immanuel Kant and scientists such as Isaac Newton, inspired the population en masse to embrace ground-breaking and revolutionary ideas that would have profound repercussions for civilisation. These were the prophets and designers of the new - fair, just, reasonable - human order. The perennial and abiding social structures based on pious lore were being questioned and challenged. The intellectuals argued that society should be guided and organised by moral principles allowing for order, predictability and reason. This was the Age of Enlightenment.

Craib (1997) writes that the period of Enlightenment throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries saw unprecedented changes in the way people reflected upon their society, and indeed how they viewed the world. As science began to promote logic, some individuals began to require and request pattern, structure and regularity in human affairs. Society became pre-occupied with 'social order'. Bauman (1968) comments that this active ordering of human agency entails a process where oppression and exclusion are necessary, and that human activity comes to be defined by its natural propensity to order. Poole (1991, p.ix) notes that "the importance modernity bestows upon rationality and science problematises the relationship between morality and modernity". It was morality's

subjective nature which was at odds with the dominant values and goals of this modern era. Bauman's view is that human beings are not inherently good or evil, but that we are moral - meaning "having eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and knowing that things and acts may be good or evil" (Bauman & Tester, 2001, p.4). Bauman notes that in the pre-modern era, where religion was given high importance, free will could only mean choosing the wrong over the right (1994, p.4) whereas in the modern era people could, for the first time choose the good or the evil. Being in the right therefore did not involve a choice. Under modern conditions men and women were presented with the idea (and reality) that they could choose between right and wrong. This leads us to consider the origins of Bauman's work and how his concerns with the ethical demand, morality and the exclusion of others contributed to the development of his argument for liquid modernity.

2.3.2 Ethical demand and the development of uncertainty

Bauman (1993) comments that his understanding of ethical philosophy stems from his time at Aarhus University, Denmark in the early 1940's, where he engaged in discussion with the Danish philosopher and theologian Knud Ejler Løgstrup. Løgstrup's work on Ethical Demand constitutes the basis of Bauman's understanding of the plight of moral being, acknowledging that we are all, by decree, of the Almighty, or by nature, moral beings by necessity (Bauman, 1995). He comments that as humans we confront Others in our daily existence, suggesting that we have an inherent need to develop our own attitude towards them in order to understand and confirm our own place in society as well as theirs. Bauman (2004c) maintains that an obsession with ordering is the common denominator within all facets of modernity. This involves the imposition of

restrictive rules and regulations upon individual lifestyles, identifications and behaviours. On this account, 'the purpose of ordering is the elimination of situational ambiguity and behavioural ambivalence' (Bauman & Tester, 2001c, p.79). Bauman considers that we are aroused by the Other, and when confronted with human difference we, as individuals, are forced to consider to what extent we experience some form of unspoken demand to attend to the person in question. Morality is no longer substantial; "it becomes a perfunctory obligation" (de Benoist, 2004, p.11). The issue of morality is not a central issue for this study, however its inextricable link to Bauman's Other means that it cannot be ignored. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this literature review to discuss Bauman's work on morality, it does provide an initial starting point for understanding the development of Bauman's Liquid Modernity, especially within the key areas of this study such as identity, Otherness and belonging.

Løgstrup's influence on Bauman's concept of Liquid Modernity is quite evident. Løgstrup (1997) argued that when human beings are together they have a responsibility to, and are dependent upon, each other. Additionally, Løgstrup (1997) reasoned that when making a choice, the individual is the master of the situation. This concept was later developed in Bauman's notion of the 'social' and the inclination of how the 'social' operates on the individual human agent (Bauman, 1995). In regards to the question of choice, Løgstrup (1997) postulates that whilst there are different choices available, one possible choice is to actually avoid choosing anything at all. For Bauman, this is the root of his writings on ambivalence – the individual choice to choose to do nothing. Furthermore, Løgstrup (1997) wrote that making a decision involves more than making a choice - it involves risk. With a decision comes risk and when it cannot be realised, the

risk becomes reality, a new decision must be made thus more risk is created. Bauman translates this problem of ethical philosophy as being tied to the conundrum of the current human condition of being incomplete; that individuals are, now more than ever, uncertain and under-defined in their personal pursuits. According to Bauman (1998a), the drive to capture morality in a set of laws should not be viewed as an effort to improve on morality, but rather as an effort to free humankind from any form of uncertainty. Despite this heightened level of risk, for Bauman, we are moral *because* of our current state of modern living. We are like this not in spite of uncertainty but rather thanks to this existential uncertainty. This, as Bauman (2000) claims, gives us the right perspective on the plight of the human condition. Bauman's Liquid Modernity is the very epitome of the state of permanent uncertainty; satisfaction without ever being satisfied.

2.3.3 The difference of Modernity

It seemed to Bauman (1995) (and still does) that the distinctive feature of contemporary modern times, of what is different from the classical, first, initial Modernity, is precisely the degree of liquidity within which individuals experience their life. Bauman uses the term 'degree of liquidity' as he argues that all modernity was liquid. He reasons that all modernity (classical and contemporary) specialises in "melting the solids" (Bauman, 2000, p.2). For Bauman, Modernity is a process – a process of melting the received structures and melting the received way of life, with individuals attempting to re-cast these liquids into different moulds. What follows is a very brief examination of the difference between the modern conditions.

What is important to note is the difference in the way Bauman's concept of early modernity was 'liquidising', (in the process of thawing), when compared to Bauman's Liquid Modernity. Early modernity liquidised not because it was against the solids that existed, rather on the contrary what moved the early modern pioneers, was a dissatisfaction with the 'solidity' of the existing solids. Influential scholars of the time such as Descartes, Machiavelli, Luther and Kant, believed that the structures in place were, in fact, not solid enough. The perceived lack of solidity in societal structures left questions regarding individual responsibility, justice and equality. The correct 'order', the right 'order' was to build a society that was absolute in its solidity. According to Bauman (2000) this need for solidity was driven by the quest for the perfect society. As Renaissance philosopher Leon Battista Alberti (1404 – 1472) stated:

“The state of perfection is the state in which any further change can only be a change for the worse” (in Bron & Schemmann, 2003, p.29)

The problem, however, is that perfection is paradoxical in its nature. Alberti's early modern conception of perfection agreed with Aristotle's argument that perfection must equal completeness. Any addition or subtraction would create an imperfection. Alberti's notion of perfection implies that once the perfect state has been achieved there is nothing left for the individual, or for society to contribute. For this perfection, all efforts of progression should cease. All of the uncertainties of the past are, by default, finished, forgotten as life perfectly reproduces and repeats itself. However, Bauman comments that this philosophy of perfection does not contend with the current human condition. He argues that we now live in a society which treats the received, the inherited solid structure as a temporary irritant. Our attitude towards liquidising the solids in liquid modernity agrees more

with Empedocles's (490BC – 430BC) argument that perfection depends on progress – if society were perfect, it could not improve and would, therefore, be lacking "true perfection". For Empedocles, perfection depends on incompleteness. Bauman argues that, in liquid modern times, the persistent melting of the solids is driven by the need to demonstrate that both the society and the individual are incomplete, that both possess the potential for continuous development and improvement. Incompleteness requires change, and with change comes uncertainty. For Bauman, it is this notion of 'incompleteness' as both the cure and the cause for the current human condition that led him to contemplate a liquid modernity. This study explores the avenues of incompleteness felt by the participants and examines the place of improvement in their different life-worlds. What follows is a succinct review of the development of Bauman's Liquid Modernity.

2.3.4 Developing Liquid Modernity

Bauman (2000) has commented that whilst writing Liquid Modernity he was overwhelmed by doubt; constantly questioning his observations and attempting to determine exactly what demonstrated this new way of life he was so convinced by. Bauman postulated if the changes he had witnessed around him were the beginnings of a new era, that it was likely that the world would remain in this state, or was it that he was simply witnessing a period of transition? He considers that we have lost one kind of 'ideal' order – one which he called Hard Modernity:

"The kind of modernity which was the target, but also the cognitive frame, of classical critical theory strikes the analyst in retrospect as quite different from the one which frames the lives of present-day generations. It appears 'heavy' (as against the contemporary 'light' modernity); better still, 'solid' (as distinct from 'fluid', 'liquid', or 'liquefied'); condensed (as against diffuse or

'capillary'); finally, systemic (as distinct from network-like)".
(Bauman, 2000, p.25)

For Bauman, the problem is that we have transitioned into a new order, but a new order which has not yet been given. Whereas previous social structures were ordered according to solidity, the contemporary condition is that social structuring is ordered around liquidity. However, this liquidity fails to provide any fixed or substantial scaffold with which to encourage the firming of any form or set order. Thus, Bauman puts forward his present view; his temporary settlement intended to be a temporary statement - for it was the 'temporary' of this situation which perplexed him so. His conclusion was that we are living in a period of interregnum. We live in a period of discontinuity and of gaps; a period of time without source for direction or order. And so, without the ability for these liquid times to 'set' as it were, Bauman purports he cannot foresee the forces, the people or the event which would change the social structuring and ordering in as great a way as the Lisbon earthquake did in 1755. Consequentially, he considers our current interregnum to be endless. Collectively, Bauman's writings on Liquid Modernity explore the human consequences of living in times devoid of 'ideal' order. (Whilst it is beyond the scope of this literature review to explore and explain the events leading to this period of interregnum, please see Appendix E for a detailed overview of the path of modernity leading to Bauman's conception of Liquid Modernity). Bauman credits his observations of interregnum to the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci

In the early 1930s, Gramsci recorded in one of the many notebooks he filled during his long incarceration in the Turi prison:

“The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear”. (Bauman, 2010, p.119)

Bauman (2010) comments that Gramsci infused the concept of ‘interregnum’ with a new meaning; one which embraced the wider spectrum of the socio-political-legal order whilst simultaneously reaching deeper into the socio-cultural condition. For Gramsci it was not the question of one king replacing the other, nor one political party gaining governance- it was much more abstruse. Bauman considers that the core substance, the spiritual state of interregnum is that the ways of doing things which have been deployed so far are no longer effective. The aporia is that the new ways, which will be free from this mis-developed method of previously doing things, have not yet been invented. The subsequent phase of direction is not yet in operation. And so, the old ways work no longer, yet the new ways have not yet been uncovered. It is this state of uncertainty in which we are placed today. This is what Bauman is suggesting within his Liquid Modernity. He argues that in our current state of interregnum, Western society knows well (and if pressed could even respond in a reasonable way), what it is it has left behind and what it is that no longer works in contemporary society. However, what is of most concern is that we have limited comprehension as to where it is we will move to from our current state of human condition which Bauman terms Liquid Modernity. This study uncovers to what extent the participants are experiencing a personal and social interregnum, exploring the gaps and discontinuities in their life-worlds.

This section has provided the reader with a condensed overview of how Bauman has arrived at his contemplation of living in liquid modern times. Additionally, key indicators as to how the historical understanding of the development of sociology

influence this study have been brought to the reader's attention, demonstrating the linearity of sociological thought. The next section of this literature review will provide a concise overview of the concept of liquid modernity and its application to this study.

2.4 Liquid Modernity

The emergence of Postmodernism in the 1960s challenged modernity as the reigning paradigm of world development. According to the postmodern view, both the physical and metaphysical world merely constituted a play of differences, simplifying and reducing society to a text. Yet, the primary issue was that Postmodernism failed to go beyond its criticisms of modernity, rendering itself vulnerable to accusations of relativism and nihilism. Bauman found the abstract, arbitrary and esoteric nature of the postmodern movement becoming functionless. Lee (2006) argues that new approaches to modernity constitute theoretical positions that dispute the emergence of a new era marking the end of modernity. At the same time it addresses the continuity of modernity as requiring new concepts that can meet the challenges of modernity. One could argue that we have never moved from the modern to the postmodern or beyond, more that the modern remains a constant suffix of the differing phases for the explanation of social action. Consequently, Postmodernism was exorcising actors and agents from society by reducing the social to a mere system of differences and the subject to an illusion of individuality or self-presence – in effect, Postmodernism could not adequately explain the meaning of social action and change. The failure of Postmodernism to go beyond the critique of foundationalism has led to its decline. Observations by Alexander (1995) of the dramatic changes within the global economies and the transformations of newly industrialized countries led

him to conclude that these new social conditions prompted a return to many modernist themes, and that these temporal changes to society could not plausibly be related to postmodernity.

Throughout its conception, theorists have discussed at length the purpose of sociology, which, according to Bauman is to “give people tools with which to think” (1993, p.6). The sociology of the postmodern intellects was failing to do this. Bauman’s preference for the term Liquid Modernity can be viewed as a general response to the recent abatement with Postmodernism, with his works being located within these revived themes of modernity. Certainly in regards to this study, the use of the Postmodern to conceptually frame research pertaining to areas discussed in this thesis (Otherness, education, identity, culture) is common and abundant. Additionally the Postmodern account of contemporary issues within the sociology of sport is somewhat outdated and becoming increasingly irrelevant. As discussed in Chapter 1, in order to progress the domain of the sociology of sport, employing Bauman’s Liquid Modernity as the theoretical lens ensures an original contribution to knowledge and a bold move away from the familiar discourse often presented.

2.4.1 Bauman’s break with Postmodernism

Bauman (in Dawes, 2011) comments that during his academic career he grew weary of being another rather ordinary Marxist sycophant sociologist, constantly diluting and disguising Marx’s work to explain and interpret his surroundings. Instead, Bauman wanted to present his own critique of the world. He recognised that the starting point of his own critical elaboration of the world would be wrapped up in the consciousness of who he himself was as a product of the

historical process to date. Borrowing from Gramsci, Bauman saw in himself and his surroundings “an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory” (Blackshaw, 2008, p.9), and so began to compile his inventory via the interpretation of society.

Initially, Postmodernity for Bauman was about embracing ambivalence, contingency and uncertainty and, thus, transcending boundaries. Despite writing about postmodernity in the early 1990s, Bauman never truly detached himself from the underpinnings of modernity, commenting on the spread of democracy, the revival of the market and the role of agency. For Bauman (1992) what was distinctly postmodern about contemporary society could be found in the meaning of choice for individual agents under conditions of plurality – his argument concluded that it is inconceivable to disregard agency when examining any instance of social change. Postmodernity, as Bauman (1992) observed:

“does not seek to substitute one truth for another. Instead, it splits truth, it denies in advance the right of all and any revelation to slip into the place vacated by the deconstructed/discredited rules” (p.ix)

Bauman’s approach towards liquid modernity began whilst he was struggling with reservations he had towards the idea of postmodernity, opposing the notion on two grounds. His first concern with Postmodernism was its suggestion that society operated on the other side of modernity; that modernity was over and that we are living in its aftermath. Bauman considers this to be evidently untrue. Western society is, more than any other generation in history, modern - compulsively, addictively, obsessively modernising everything around us which, according to Bauman (in Blackshaw, 2005) is the distinctive feature of being modern. In an interview with Blackshaw (2005) Bauman comments:

“everything needs to be ‘made’ first and once made can be changed endlessly (...) indeed, obsessive and compulsive change (variously called ‘modernizing’, ‘progress’, ‘improvement’, ‘development’, ‘updating’) is the hard core of the modern mode of being”. (p.39)

For Bauman the current state of modernity is linked to the impression that time flow is accelerating. We live in a condition where everything begins to age the moment it is born and that this aging process happens within a very brief stretch of time. Bauman’s argument is that Postmodernity was, in a sense, a misleading term. Contemporary Western society is not postmodern. It is absolutely modern.

Bauman’s second reservation towards Postmodernism was its negativity. Postmodernism is negative in its statement in that it only suggests (wrongly and falsely according to Bauman) what we *are not* any longer. Whilst Postmodernism argues that we are no longer modern, that we are something different, Bauman comments that it fails to suggest *how* we are different, what these differences are or why we are experiencing these differences. There is no positive statement made. Postmodernism does not attempt to suggest what is new about the human condition.

Since the mid-1990s, dissatisfaction with postmodernism has prompted a return to modernist themes (Alexander, 1995) and several new approaches to the changing nature of modernity have been proposed. Lee (2006, p.355) suggests these new approaches include ‘reflexive modernisation’, ‘liquid modernity’ and ‘multiple modernities’, arguing that these new approaches do not necessarily suggest a convergence of views in regard to the redefinition of modernity, more

that each “connotes a particular response to postmodernism and represents a different vision of what modernity entails”.

Tester (2004) argues Bauman saw his work on postmodernity as becoming too associated to the “science of society” (Bauman & Beilharz, 1999, p.337), increasingly too divorced from the society he felt sociology should direct itself to. Tester (2004) suggested that Bauman felt the term ‘postmodernity’ had limited him and often found himself disagreeing greatly with his peers, not only in their understandings of the postmodern, but on their purpose for engaging in sociology at all. Postmodernists had formalised their own distinctive discourse to such an extent that it moved beyond the reach of everyday experiences.

In the mid 1990’s Bauman began his subtle shift away from the repressiveness of the postmodern and into the metaphysical realms of fluidity and alteration. Lee (2006) comments that Bauman’s approach to modernity accomplishes two goals: 1) overcoming the limitations of Postmodernism and 2) putting back on track the modern problem of institutional stability, whilst Dawson (2007, p.35) comments that the term ‘postmodernity’ has gained “a new meaning, which ironically has removed it from any idea of progress”. However, the link with postmodernity is not completely severed – there is a dialectical bond much in the way Francoise Lyotard observed that one cannot be modern without being post-modern first. The stress of flexibility, uncertainty and mutability of all relationships implicit in the postmodern is continuous with the notion of liquidity. According to Bauman (in Anderson, 2004), the changes in contemporary society and culture required new modes of thought, morality, and politics to appropriately respond to the new social conditions. This required a reconfiguration of critical social theory which

presented new tasks and dilemmas for a postmodern sociology. In 2000, Bauman's observations of the increasingly individualized unstable conditions of the ordinary population's day to day existence in advanced capitalism were offered in his publication 'Liquid Modernity'. Subsequent books, lectures, essays and critiques all followed from Bauman, providing contributory thoughts for the thesis in regards to the life of a Paralympic student-athlete. A detailed overview of Bauman's work in relation to the postmodern works of Foucault, Derrida and Baudrillard is presented in Appendix E. What follows is a summarised explanation of Bauman's Liquid Modernity. For more detailed readings on liquid modernity see Bauman (2000; 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2005a; 2006; 2007a; 2010; 2011; 2012)

2.4.2 Explaining Liquid Modernity

Although Bauman had begun to hint in his earlier works of the strains in his relationship with postmodernity, his intellectual separation from it was offered formally in Liquid Modernity (2000). Currently, professionals from a multitude of domains providing a social commentary, use and indeed often seek his assessment and explanation for some of the most compounded conditions of society. Academics such as Tester (with Bauman 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010) and Blackshaw (2005, 2008) have been making strides in bringing Bauman to the forefront of sociological thinking in the UK. When discussing Bauman's contribution to sociology, most attention is normally paid to his substantial theoretical analyses of "ethics, ambivalence, the Holocaust, strangers, globalization, the intellectuals, love, community and utopia" which relate to a vast amount of social and historical phenomena (Jacobsen & Marshman, 2008, p.799). However, underlying Bauman's apparent inconsistency and eclecticism

are broader, recurrent themes that only emerge when the whole of Bauman's project is considered (Marotta, 2002). Throughout his publications he poses fundamental challenges to contemporary social theory and provides an original and provocative postmodern version of the sociological imagination, developing sketches of social and cultural changes of 21st century living. Smith (2011) observes that Bauman has remained consistent in his sociology in that his deepest moral, political and intellectual concerns relate to the social and institutional conditions under which human beings may enjoy individual responsibility, equality and justice.

Bauman's metaphor of 'Liquid Modernity' essentially addresses the juxtaposition of increased personal freedom and mobility with a life of accelerated anxiety in an era of reduced social security and deregulated consumption (Lee, 2011). Primarily, liquid modernity is critically concerned with the ephemeral condition of contemporary society (Lee, 2006) and is an observation of social change that attempts to uncover the consequences of advanced social differentiation and alienation. Bauman has identified that the new forms of this alienation appear to be consistent with the effects of globalisation and rampant consumerism. Jacobsen and Marshman (2008) explain that we have moved from the stability, permanence, and heaviness of the 'solid' modern era to the unstable, fleeting era of 'liquid' modernity, where maximum impact, instant obsolescence and constant mobility are all important. Chaos and ambivalence, for Bauman, represent the true nature of the modern social world. Bauman adopted the word 'liquid' to best represent his work as, in its essence, liquid modernity is directed towards a critique of the aqueous foundation of modernity (Lee, 2005). Its application to Bauman's new found focus on life was such that, as Bauman explains, the word

'liquid' was chosen for its pragmatic implications as well as its symbolic representation:

"Why this metaphor of liquidity? Look into any encyclopaedia: You will find that a liquid is a substance that cannot keep its shape for long. In terms of society, that is a revolutionary change." (Bauman, 2004c)

Bauman comments that post-Enlightenment modernity had seen things previously durable falling apart, leading to a "whirlwind of transient ephemera" filling the vacancy (Dawes, 2011, p.134). However, less than two centuries later the relation of superiority/inferiority between the values of durability and transience has been reversed and it is the rapidity at which things *can* be disposed of and abandoned that is now valued most. Bauman's metaphor of fluidity resonates well with the rapid speed of contemporary life. He continuously touches upon the facilitation of 'lightness', achieved through the refusing of commitments and obligations for individuals, both for careers and in private lives. In the liquid modern society, the constant and enduring is unwanted, undesired and even feared. Here Bauman develops a theme, one could argue originally explored by Jean Paul Sartre, contrasting the liberating 'fluidity' of the modern day with the 'viscosity' of life in the past (Jacobsen & Marshman, 2008). The era of liquid modernity is centred on "avoiding fixation and keeping the options open" (Bauman, 1996, p.18). The idea of a life-long project is no longer desirable (Atkinson, 2008); instead, a "flexible identity, a constant readiness to change and the ability to change at short notice and an absence of commitments" have become not only attractive options in the liquid modern society, but are apparent prerequisites for survival (Bauman, 2004, p.35).

In nearly all of Bauman's texts, and the works of those commenting on his work, one will find an introduction to his reasoning's for the societal shifts from solid to liquid modernity, because, as Lee (2005) comments, social change is not just an intrinsic part of any society; it also produces a tendency towards the acceptance of new values underlying our conception of existence. The solid modernity of the past was once characterized by the attempt to make the world orderly and organised through the imposition of categories and definitions that were seen as equally solid and unchanging (Jacobsen & Marshman, 2008). However, this new sense of liquefaction and its erratic nature suggests that fixed categories have become ineffective, unable to reflect rapidly changing circumstances and social or cultural upheavals. For Bauman:

"Transience has replaced durability at the top of the value table. What is valued today (by choice as much as by unchosen necessity) is the ability to be on the move, to travel light and at short notice. To be fixed is to be at fault. Power is measured by the speed with which responsibilities can be escaped. Who accelerates, wins; who stays put, loses." (Bauman & Tester, 2001, p.95).

This new liquidity of being has reduced our sense of durability to suggest new levels of freedom, and at the same time dissolves the bonds that reify our sense of security (Lee, 2005). Issues of stratification, polarisation and inequality borne from this conflict between freedom and security are ever present throughout Bauman's work. Bauman explores at great length the dilemma caused to the individual by the satisfaction and, paradoxically, the oppression 'freedom' bestows in times of liquid modernity. Atkinson (2008) comments that:

"whether conceived in terms of freedom to consume and experiment with one's identity versus exclusion as a flawed consumers and bearers of unshakable, stigmatising identities, in

terms of freedom to move around the globe at will ('tourists') versus those who have to move because of the inhospitality of the world ('vagabonds') or those who cannot move for lack of resources, or simply in terms of a polarisation of wealth, income and life chances, there are in Bauman's vision of society, always winners and losers." (p.7)

As with any social figuration, liquid modernity is shaped by and contains, relationships of power, and those with the most power are also those who are most free from entanglement, most free from being defined by others, most liquid (Jacobsen & Marshman, 2008). However, whilst being liquid may make the agent free, this notion of being free does not always equate to freedom. For Bauman, freedom signifies a social relation, an asymmetry of social conditions: essentially it implies social difference - it presumes and implies the presence of social division – essentially, a false freedom (Bauman, 1999, p.63). Haugaard (2008) remarks that in a liquid society, freedom is no longer the opposite of domination, rather that it constitutes domination in its most subtle form. Certainly in terms of liquid modernity, some can be free only in so far as there is a form of dependence they can aspire to escape. As part of the 'culture of fear' of liquid modernity, there is the need for the human waste (the poor, the disposed, the deficient) as a pole to repel society from indolence and incompetence to the pole of animation and aptitude. Lee (2011) argues that liquid modernity creates paradoxical conditions that simultaneously support the illusion of freedom and a frantic psychology. Regardless, the continuous commutation of freedom versus security remains a pyrrhic victory and is an ever present thread throughout Bauman's work. It is a central resource for the analysis of the accounts given by the participants.

As Smith (2011) observes, Bauman's intellectual trajectory shifts from security versus freedom, the elusiveness of happiness, the inescapability of uncertainty

and anxiety, the preoccupation with identity and then finally onto conditions of globalisation and consumerism. As aforementioned, at the core of all Bauman's works is his concern with the dissimulation of inequality and injustice begat by the development of the liquid modern society. The melting of the previous 'solids' essential to modernity – state, nation and territory – has seen unparalleled levels in the rise of consumerism, globalisation and capitalism. Releasing individuals from the shackles of the solid, liquid modernity has ushered in an era of manifold options and possibilities, rendering the future for individuals open for those who are able to economically grasp it (Marques, 2010). The end result is the pandemic production of an omnipresent inequality, encroaching, perhaps already rooted, in the moral aspects of modern living. From the physical, tangible reminders of disparity to the more subtle, incorporeal differences, the crux of the matter, as noted by Mary Douglas (in Bauman, 2007a, p.28) is that "unless we know why people need luxuries (that is, goods in excess of survival needs) and how they use them, we are nowhere near tackling the problems of inequality seriously".

Lee (2005) comments that Bauman's dissatisfaction with the inability of the postmodern to confront the emerging conditions of inequality in the West, and around the world, was his primary reason for up-rooting from his previous academic standings. By expressing that his sociology is applicable to individuals who live in that society (i.e. the West), Bauman rejects the recent grand-narratives presented in historical observations of the human condition. Bauman is not, however, as sweeping in his remarks as his Postmodern predecessors, and acknowledges the limits of his work. Indeed, in an interview with Dawes (2011, p.135) Bauman comments that the advent of liquid modernity is anything

but globally synchronized, observing that the passage to the 'liquid stage' of living, "like any other passages in history, happens in different parts of the planet on different dates and proceeds at a different pace". In Bauman, we are dealing not with 'solid vs. liquid', but with the propositions of the 'betweenness' – in his texts the frequent uses of 'between' is repeatedly presented (Dimitrov, 2012).

Whilst Bauman is aware that his sociology does not, as of yet, transcend the collective, global human condition, his intellectual disengagement from Postmodernity came when he observed its non-committal attempts to offer reasons for the features the world had acquired, especially concerning the increasingly apparent differences within the populace. According to Atkinson (2008) Bauman's sociology is consistently seen as being critical of the entrenched inequality, poverty, degradation and power differentials present in western 21st century living. However, for Bauman, sociology, either his or that of others, cannot stop short of being an on-going, collaborative interpretation of the human world in order to understand how it may eventually be improved – primarily by exploring the very depths of this manufactured inequality.

Since introducing his ideas and observations, Bauman has continued to publish his musings on liquid modernity, separating his work into what one would consider the main themes of societal existence. Bauman has provided offerings on the more general life affairs such as those of *Liquid Love* (2003), *Liquid Life* (2005a), *Liquid Fear* (2006) and *Liquid Times* (2007) as well as producing more concentrated works which reflect his thoughts towards specific problems within contemporary society, most often concerning the development of capitalism and

globalisation and its repercussions. According to Jay (2010) each of these develops variations on, fundamentally, the same argument;

“that we now live in a world of precarious uncertainty, short term planning, instant gratification, the weakening of institutions, ephemeral relationships, struggles to manage risk, volatile consumerist identities and the collapse of viable communities” (p.97)

Bauman’s rhetoric is compelling. His bold yet effortless statements expose the (as it can be read) ill-fated and hopelessness of a society heavy with ruin. One could argue that the lightness with which he speaks conflicts with the seriousness of the topic of his work. Jay (2010) comments on the light/heavy binary metaphor superimposed on Bauman’s work and its ability to organize, heuristically, a mass of information from economic, social, political and cultural sources. It is worth noting, however, that Bauman does not purport to have a theory, nor does he comment that his observations on liquid modernity is the objective reality, more that this is how it is becoming. He is merely pointing to incipient trends, rather than providing an historical account of irreversible epochal changes (Jay, 2010). Yet here lies Bauman’s talent, as Therborn (2008) has commented:

“Bauman’s recent writings travel light, burdened neither by research nor by theoretical analysis, but borne up by an unusual life wisdom, a trained observer’s eye and a fluent pen.” (p.168)

Bauman’s reflections are a work-in-progress. Never content with defining or conceptualising an event, his aim is rather to “establish connections with social phenomena or manifestations of the public ethos that seem far removed from the initial object of the investigation” (Vecchi, in Bauman 2004b, p2). Bauman’s work can be placed alongside the thoughts of Erving Goffman (1959) who regarded his

own work as the temporary 'scaffolding' constructing a frame for analysis, enhancing sociological understanding but always with the intention of being dismantled once the task had been performed. Jacobson & Marshman (2008) highlight that Bauman's concepts, and the metaphors he employs are also heuristic devices, and not end results or actual descriptions of social reality. For Bauman, sociology "makes sense only in as far as it helps humanity in life (Bauman & Beilharz, 1999b, p.335). On this remark, this study employed Bauman's sociology to help better understand the complex, conflicting, complicated and compounded life of the Paralympic student-athlete living in times of liquid modernity. This section has explored the overall concept of Bauman's Liquid Modernity. Explaining its origins and its developments, this chapter provides the reader with a foundational understanding of the consideration of liquid modernity in reference to this study. However, it is important to not consider liquid modernity as an absolute. Many disagree with some of Bauman's major themes of his observation of contemporary society. What follows is a critique of Bauman's Liquid Modernity.

2.5 Critiques and criticisms of Bauman's Liquid Modernity

The personal experiences of living in contemporary society under the impact of globalization may support, to a certain extent, Bauman's wide-ranging observations of modern fluidity. However, as Lee (2011) has commented, his abstract and inductive style has made him susceptible to the criticism that his body of argument is closer to 'sociology as art' than it is to 'sociology as science' (Davis, 2008, p.1238). Despite the expanding interest in Bauman's work, Jacobsen & Poder (2008, p.1) explain that most reviews of his work are "expository rather than exploratory, biographical and chronological rather than

thematic and contextualising". In order to fully understand and correctly apply Bauman's sociology to this study, it is imperative that the counter arguments, challenges and critiques of his work are assessed.

Many academics have attempted to categorize Bauman under numerous labels such as 'storyteller', 'socialist', 'structuralist', 'humanistic Marxist', 'existentialist', 'hermeneutic sociologist', or as a hybrid 'poet-intellectual' between sociology and poetry (Jacobsen & Poder, 2008). Whilst being written on and about, it is common to find that introductions to his work will emphasize the difficulty in recapitulating his work. Bauman often draws eclectically on a variety of theoretical sources rather than maintaining any specific theoretical orientation, and often sits astride barriers erected by academics to separate traditions, perspectives and schools of thought. Perhaps the most overarching criticism of Bauman is that he is truly a generalist, rather than a sociologist, as is evident in the broadness of the topics covered in his publications. Using the metaphor of liquid modernity he has produced an arsenal of work attempting to explain exceptionally intricate conditions such as the Holocaust, ethics, globalisation, freedom, consumerism, utopia, ambivalence, the working class, the intellectuals, community, death, love, sexuality and strangers. With so many being sector and academic experts in these mentioned areas, conducting countless hours of empirical research over a number of decades, it is not difficult to see why it is that many find his work to be cursory, shallow and fleeting.

Indeed, Atkinson (2008, p.14) argues that Bauman's depiction of liquid modernity cannot be readily accepted claiming that it is "in a nutshell, an intellectual edifice constructed out of acutely unsound materials". Kilminster & Varcoe (1992, p.211)

comment that the “aim of Bauman is to reflect life’s inconsistencies in his texts – and this cannot but make heavy demand on the composition of his writing”. For some, the inconsistency of Bauman’s work is a positive trait whereas for others this inconsistency exposes the confusing and problematic nature of some of Bauman’s ideas (Kellner, 1998). The perceived inconsistency – whether interpreted as a positive or a negative – might exist as a result of Bauman drawing on a variety of theoretical frameworks and writes on a broad range of subjects which sometimes are not explicitly related (Marotta, 2002). I would argue however that since his initial offering of *Liquid Modernity* in 2000, Bauman has written with specificity on a number of areas and has contributed widely to current affair publications. As the idea of liquid modernity begins to be accepted in English academic sociology, it is being employed as a conceptual framework for empirical work by those who wish to go beyond the abundance and commonality of the Postmodern. It is precisely the lack of empirical evidence in Bauman’s work which provided the interest for employing liquid modernity for this study.

Since openly bringing his metaphor of liquid modernity to the fore, Bauman’s work has been criticised in a general sense, as well as some academics unpicking specific subjects within his work, with a common criticism being that his commentaries are only seen as being applicable to specific parts of the globe. Bauman has been justifiably censured for smoothing out the unevenness of development, which in many parts of the world still involves the active construction of solid socio-economic institutions (Lee, 2005). In particular, Lee (2011) argues that unless the themes undertaken by Bauman are taken to be equally relevant to the transformation of the many societies around the world, his

observations are very much limited to some western countries. He continues to argue that this limitation would mean that Bauman's idea of modernity becoming liquid might not have wide-ranging application because the sense of solidity in many modernizing societies has not yet been shown to be on the decline, and that Bauman fails to take this question into account in his writings. As is aforementioned however, despite Bauman not writing about it at length, Bauman is very much aware that his metaphor of liquid modernity is not globally synchronised. However, arguably Bauman's vision of a global liquid society can easily be recognised. Pocketed communities throughout the globe are constantly exposed to the ideals of the liquid life – of mobility, of goods, of independence but with belonging. Indeed, for example, Bauman's 'vagabond' - the homeless man on the street or the asylum seeking war victim on the television - is often seen in soiled, torn but branded clothes.

Poder (2007) discusses Bauman's contributions towards the notion of freedom and how his metaphorical and poetic theorizing has moved the understanding of freedom further than the understanding of freedom qua liberation or emancipation, from old traditional structures common to conventional theory. Furthermore, he states that Bauman has outlined a sociological theory of freedom which argues that contemporary society is integrated through individual consumer freedom. However, whilst arguing that Bauman's observations provide a significant contribution to a genuine sociological understanding of freedom, he analyses the certain limitations of Bauman's reflections in that liquid modernity purports to reduce individual freedom to being merely a matter of consumer freedom.

Whilst Poder (2007) discusses the works of Foucault in reference to power as relational and also stress that power is based on rights and options, Bauman places much of his work concerning freedom on the (social) possession of resource. According to Bauman it is unfruitful to distinguish between an approach to freedom/power that emphasises possession of resources as something non-relational, and another approach that merely conceives freedom/power as something that is only practised in actual social relations. For Poder (2007), the criticism is that Bauman should not ignore the that role relational power has when all resources are at equilibrium.

To suggest individual freedom is constrained by the ability to consume is too simplistic. As is stated in much of Bauman's work, there remains a constant duel between the notion of freedom and security. Security however, may not always be objectified and, as Poder (2007) explains, whilst security can be seen as a resource, it is also more basic, in a social sense, than the possession of different kinds of power resources. He stresses that security is a precondition for acting on such resources of freedom, without respect to whether one has few or many conventional power resources to hand. He concludes by arguing that security is an emotional component of action - confidence, trust and loyalty for example. The concept of freedom is important and should be further developed to "avoid reducing contemporary individual freedom (and its associated securities/insecurities) as subjected to nothing else but their immediate cravings" (Poder, 2007, p.67).

One could argue that Bauman does not see it as his responsibility to comment on the complexities of an individual's definitions, meaning and attributes of freedom

and security outside the sphere of consumerism. The metaphysical aspects of freedom and security relate to the notion of belonging and identity (which Bauman comments on extensively), however the physical manifestations of these freedoms / barriers and securities/insecurities are evident in the consumerist behaviour witnessed by Bauman. To go beyond this, into the psychological roots and anchoring of personal differentiations and diversities of what constitutes freedom and security is a deeply different domain from Bauman's sociology. Whilst one could agree with Poder (2007) that the human condition should not be wholly reduced to the notion of production and consumption, it could be said that Bauman expertly argues what is happening but, rightly, offers no detailed analysis or explanations as to why it is happening. Perhaps this is in part due to Bauman's time as a Marxist and as a Postmodern intellectual – he has learnt through living these eras that the direction of a society cannot be planned nor predicted, merely observed.

Bauman's thoughts on the 'flawed consumer' are wide ranging and arguably applicable to many aspects within society (local and global) concerning inequality, often rooted in the modern invention of the 'class' system. Over the course of a number of publications, Bauman (1982, 1987, 1988) has proposed that class is no longer a salient feature of society. He comments that the demands of the working class have been successfully integrated into the capitalist system and argues that the steady decline of industrial workers through automation has induced rounds of economic restructuring in the West as production moved East. The result, he continues, is the creation of a new system of division between permanent, full-time workers on the one hand and the new poor of casual workers and the unemployed on the other (Bauman, 1987, p.178).

For Bauman, the term 'class' is no longer relevant in its Marxist form as there is no shared identity to 'bind' class together. Atkinson (2008, p.1) has argued at length that this aspect of Bauman's work has, for whatever reason, escaped the criticism of "faithful class analysts" and aims to make less credible Bauman's claims that class is no longer a significant sociological tool. Atkinson's primary complaint with Bauman's work is his lack of clarity and consistency as to who the 'winners and losers' are in liquid modernity, and additionally, which are the majority and which are the minority. He claims there is no necessary nexus between Bauman's winners and losers like there is between Marx's bourgeoisie and proletariat. Atkinson (2008, p.10) argues that the distinct lack of transparency between the stratification of social groups makes it "difficult to take any one of his [Bauman's] positions seriously" as to how contemporary society is now divided. Bauman's dismissing of a class system is not credible, Atkinson argues, as he makes no attempt to quantifiably go beyond the dichotomies of his social and economic actors – 'winners/losers', 'tourist/vagabonds' etc.

Atkinson (2008) echoes the criticism of Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst (2005) noting Bauman's tendency to draw a single dividing line between populations, rendering his work very simplistic. Savage et al (2005, p.205) comment that his work detaches "from the intricacies of daily life, bunching together in each camp a myriad of heterogeneous actors and failing to recognise any internal modes of division and differentiation". Atkinson (2008, p.10) concludes that Bauman's mistake lies in his jettison of Marxist categories, leaving his undifferentiated binary view of society without justification. He draws attention to Marx being "faithful to the complexities of a social world in a way that Bauman clearly is not", claiming

Bauman's work does not recognise the existence of multiple class 'fractions' (Poulantzas, 1978). According to Atkinson, Bauman's winners and losers do not have an exploiter/exploited relationship, neither does each group depend on the other for existence whilst at the same time utterly opposing the justifications for the others presence in society.

One could agree with Atkinson and his contemporaries that at times Bauman's work can be read as a sweeping generalisation, lacking in specifics and failing to address or acknowledge anomalies or evidence of pockets of behaviour that go against his observations. Also, it could be agreed that, although continuously changing, class systems are still very much embedded within Western society. However, what Atkinson fails to acknowledge in his criticism is Bauman's explicit reasoning that in times of liquid modernity, the ability to depart from a particular class situation is greater than it ever has been. Bauman notes that human beings are socially constrained by their embeddedness but are capable of choice and change. The ability to move, to be more fluid and transient between the classes is now more accessible.

Bauman recognises that for some there are more barriers to prevent this travel than there are for others, but the crux of his argument is that the dis-embedding of the traditional class system allows for this liquidity and not (as Atkinson interprets) that the liquidity of the times erases the system completely. Bauman (2000) comments:

"One thing which even the most seasoned and discerning masters of the art of choice do not and cannot choose, is the society to be born into - and so we are all in travel, whether we like it or not." (p.18)

Here Bauman clearly states that systems of inequality exist and that no human has the choice of the system they are born into, but, in times of liquid modernity the increased availability of freedom of choice to individuals can help facilitate the movement, both to progress and to regress, along the ladder of opportunity. Bauman's work is about being able to distinguish between the haves and the have-not's in each and every sub-division of societal category; that this separation will always be present and oppressive, both between cultures and classes and within cultures and classes.

In response to Bauman's thoughts on ethics and morality, Crone (2008) argues that Bauman does not provide a complete understanding of the disparity of ethics and morals between micro and the macro levels of society, stating he does not go far enough to distinguish between the sociological perspectives of law-based ethics and the postmodern morality of responsibility and proximity. Following on from criticism first introduced by Best (1998) regarding Bauman's concern for moral responsibility, she is critical of his opaque linking of 'justice' as a given substitute for 'morality' and notes much of his work lends itself to the term 'justice' without considering the many philosophies of morality.

Additionally Crone (2008) comments that Bauman fails to tackle the moral distinction between what 'is' and what is 'ought' in the modern world and does not provide detail on how these differing ethics are manifested in the social realm. Crone (2008) concludes that the main problem with Bauman's theory of morality is sociological, in that it is not supported by any empirical evidence therefore

leaving it very limited in its ability to explain what Bauman sees as the decline of morality in the face of rising ambivalence.

Bauman suggests that postmodern individuals are morally ambivalent, commenting that morality does not serve a purpose - people are not supposed to act morally in order to gain profit (financially or spiritually) (Bauman, 2009). He makes it clear that the moral responsibility of the individual is infinite and cannot be reduced to the fulfilment of a limited set of rules. Another major theme is in the argument that morality cannot be ultimately 'proven' or grounded in rational argument, but that morality can only be grounded in that which ultimately precedes any attempt at reasoning, which Bauman terms the "moral impulse" (Bauman, 1993, p.35).

Whilst I can agree with Crone to an extent regarding Bauman's lack of detail and depth into the morality of the human agent, it could be argued that not enough has been explored (by either Bauman or his critics) as to why there is, in the researcher's opinion, still such a sense of moral responsibility present in times of liquid modernity. If anything, one could argue that morality has become polarised during these times and that whilst some members of the populace are becoming increasingly ambivalent, for others the need for ethical and moral consideration is continuously heightened within this consumerist society. This can be demonstrated by Bauman's (1989) argument that modernity pursued the goal of shifting moral responsibilities away from the self towards socially constructed supra-individual agencies. When this was not possible, modernity made it socially acceptable to exempt a considerable part of human conduct from moral judgment altogether. Thus individual morality became a residue and ethics its substitute.

However, individual moral responsibility is very much practiced. Certainly in relation to this study, the topics of disability, sport and education are contradictions to Bauman's observations that moral considerations fade at the level of the micro-society. Individual behaviours such as volunteering and mentoring which demonstrate compassion and rejects ambivalence towards others leave much room for discussion, and these are areas of human action that Bauman fails to consider in the majority of his work. Despite the rationalising and criticising of his thoughts by peers, Bauman (1993, p.13) has observed that "moral responsibility is a mystery contrary to reason". Reflecting on this, perhaps even the most thorough of empirical research would still not adequately explain why it is that the moral and ethical responsibility of (at least some) individuals continues to prevail in contemporary society.

In some respects the link between postmodernity and liquid modernity, when read critically, is that both explanations of social theory express the view that nothing is verifiable beyond one's own experience, that there is no privileged standpoint and both dismiss the possibility of objective knowledge. Whereas postmodernity could be classed as mere babel, liquid modernity could in turn be viewed as having a tendency towards solipsism. Both liquid modernity and postmodernity are concepts concerned with the problem of depthless social change, for example the loosening of social bonds that disguise alienation as a celebration of diversity and flexibility. It is without question that Bauman's writings can appear (to some at first and to others shall always remain) depressive, with a miserable and austere message delivered in a derisory and highly normative tone. Davis (2008) observes that Bauman finds precious little in present society of which to be

optimistic about whilst Abrahamson (2004, p.177) claims “the road liquid modernity is going down currently leads to unbearable suffering and injustice”.

Criticisms such as this leave liquid modernity open to interpretation ranging from, at best, abject triviality to, at worst, borderline nihilism. Perhaps a post-Postmodern sociology is simply not possible. As is common with most readings of social theory, those who identify with the work will champion its credibility and subscribe to its declaration whilst those who do not will attempt to quash its academic advocacy. Perhaps Bauman’s saving grace (which is often overlooked by his critics) is that in none of his publications does he explicitly claim his work as truth – Bauman offers thoughtful explanations, not solid proclamations. He presupposes nothing, leaving the reader to draw their own judgements and conclusions, determining for themselves the praxis of liquid modernity.

This section has addressed the primary criticisms of Bauman’s work which are central to this study. Whilst many other arguments to the concept of liquid modernity and Bauman’s writings will no doubt continue to be expressed, the overall consensus from leading academics in sociology is that i) Bauman is right to suggest that we should leave behind the lens of Postmodernism to view reality, and that an alternative should be offered; and ii) that in order to demonstrate Bauman’s claims, empirical research employing liquid modernity must be conducted. This study addresses both these concerns.

Having discussed the reasons for employing Bauman’s Liquid Modernity for this study by challenging the arguments to his work, the following section of the literature review will question the notion of the liquid modern condition in regards

to the three main life-worlds discussed with the participants; Disability; Education; and Elite Sport.

2.6 Disability in times of Liquid Modernity

Disability studies as a field of inquiry is porous and encompasses a wide range of disciplinary concerns, theoretical frameworks and political projects (Mawyer, 2005). The issue of 'disability' certainly from its ontological and metaphysical meanings have concerned thinkers and cultural workers as far back as ancient Greece. Traditionally, the study of disability had been privileged to the medical and social sciences, however over the last quarter of a century there has been a significant interrogation in the humanities of cultural constructions of disability (Mawyer, 2005). Academics have considered the topic from nearly every niche of political, philosophical, psychological and sociological thinking. From Cartesian dualism onwards, disability research has been paradoxical in its construction, the subject continuously fighting with itself – the constant search for emancipation via understanding without the oppressive nature of understanding via investigation. Whether discussing the social construction of the self or the discursive narrative of the disabled body, the psychological transition of disablement or the political marginalisation of communities throughout history, disability studies are extensive, contentious and complex. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this literature review to critically consider all literature available in the field of disability studies, an understanding of historical representations of disability, especially when considered through the lens of a social theory of the human condition, must be addressed in order to fully consider disability in Bauman's Liquid Modernity.

2.6.1 A brief understanding of the history of disability

Plato's Republic - one of the most intellectually and historically influential works of philosophy and political theory (Baird, 2008) – proves to be seminal in disability studies in that it is one of the first texts (although somewhat rudimentarily) to refer to the notion of the 'disabled' and 'disability'. The dialogue considers reason and value of the individual and of the community, primarily the 'use' which one can bring to the other in order to create the 'good' human. Among the Greeks, the sick were considered inferior (Barker, 1953), and in his Republic, Plato recommends that the deformed offspring of both the superior and inferior be put away in some "mysterious unknown places" (Goldberg & Lippman 1974, p.330). The Socratic text, after much reasoning, concludes that an individual born in such conditions cannot serve to adequately contribute, improve and progress the community to which s/he was born into – virtues considered necessary for the creation of a "good" citizen. If a human cannot be "good" then there is no purpose or value to their being. As an example, in 355 BC Aristotle, a student of Plato, proclaimed that those "born deaf become senseless and incapable of reason" (Merriam, 2010, p.141), advocating that the ability to 'reason' determines the ability to which an individual (disabled or otherwise) can positively participate in their surroundings. With no scientific erudition to either disprove or affirm the statement, the attitudes of the Greek philosophers towards those with disabilities were carried forward for centuries.

As Western society progressed, with the rise of religion came a gradual influence on how persons with disabilities were treated. By the fourth century A.D., the following of Christianity led to more humane practices toward persons with disabilities and helping the afflicted became a sign of religious strength (Selway &

Ashman, 1998). Early Christian doctrine introduced the view that disability and disease were neither a disgrace nor a punishment for sin but, on the contrary, a means of purification and a way of grace, as was interpreted by the early readings of the Bible (Barker, 1953). During the 1300's, the cultural and intellectual movement of the Renaissance signified a revival of the concept of the dignity of man (Kramnick, 1995). While religion remained a powerful influence, people became less consumed with spiritual matters and more interested in the arts and sciences, leading to advancements in health care and to a better understanding of disability. With disability no longer being seen (by the scientific community at least) as the result of Divine intervention, corrective intervention ensured disability became more a cause for medical concern. Advancements towards understanding the biological and scientific explanations of the disabled individual became topical in contemporary medicine. However, the gradual understanding of science led to new and often painful treatments towards individuals with disabilities (Miles, 2002). Without yet understanding the extent to which a disabled individual could rationalise, internalise and interpret their surroundings, scientists subjected many with disabilities to tortuous experiments without consent on the belief they were 'fixing' the individual through scientific logic and rationale (Borsay, 2005). From here, persons with disabilities assumed the on-going role of patients, needing to be cured. During the rise of the political and economic powers of the Church in the 16th century, many Christian leaders indicated that those with diminished mental capacities and other persons with disabilities were possessed by evil spirits, often subjecting such individuals to mental and/or physical torture as a means of exorcising the spirits and daemons within (Selway et al, 1998).

French Pastor John Calvin (1509 – 1546) preached the notion of predestination, stating that God has already chosen who will and who will not be saved. German monk Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) denounced children and adults with diminished mental capacity as being "filled with Satan." However, in 1500 Italian physician Girolamo Cardano recognized the ability of the deaf to reason, highlighting the previously assumed incapable cognitive capacity of the disabled community, questioning the methods practiced throughout the medical community and the subsequent role of medical intervention. Indeed, in the late 1700's French psychiatrist Philip Pinel was amongst the first to introduce alternative treatments to those with cognitive impairments, rather than subjecting the individuals to physical abuse and dehumanising conditions in asylums. Towards the beginning of the 18th century, certainly within Western society, the notion of disability as a manifestation of religious lore was weakening greatly. The function and place of an individual in society, essentially their worth and value (in terms of both economic and social capital), became paramount. Oliver (1990) draws attention to the emergence of 'social' disability as a result of the process of industrialisation in the nineteenth century. With the Industrial Revolution came urbanisation and the breakdown of rural based state and church welfare. The spread of poverty in cities led to a growth in the number of institutions, asylums and workhouses for those viewed to be economically unproductive. Economic prerogatives transformed impairment into idleness and the culture of fear of contamination informed the strategy of social distance (Hughes, 2002). Treated as a social problem and a public burden, a disabled individual's fate was to become an economic outcast from society, exploited either as institutionalised cheap labour or confined to 'hospitals' as objects to experimentation.

Continuing through to the present day, the treatment of the disabled community has varied considerably – from the establishment of specialist education schools to the abhorrent abuse suffered during the 1930's and 1940's in Nazi Germany, from charitable campaigns for disability rights through to social Darwinism. It is not unfounded to state that the history of disability is stratified, contextual, social, cultural, complex and multifarious. The changes in societal conditions in education, economics, politics, sciences and technologies have given way to multiple perspectives and perceptions of disability. From the development of Disability Studies as an area of research has come two broad but encompassing models. Whilst both models are subject to change as research within the area of disability progresses, each model aims to provide a panoptic vantage of the issue of 'disability'.

2.6.2 The Medical Model and the Social Model of Disability

The medical model of disability emerged in the 18th century, defining disability as any one of a series of biological deficiencies located in the body (Swain, French and Cameron, 2003). As a socio-political model of disability, it aims to demonstrate how illness or disability, being the result of a physical condition intrinsic to the individual, may reduce the individual's quality of life, and cause clear disadvantage. The model seeks to explain disability as a result of a mutated neurology, physiology and/or pathology located within, and restricted to, the physical body. Indeed, as well as seeking to explain, the medical model also encompasses the practice of coping, managing, improving and/or overcoming a disability with medical intervention. Up to present day, medical intervention in disability provides drugs, technologies, treatment, equipment and professional services without which many individuals would suffer a much reduced quality of

life, or at worst, would not survive at all. However, by extension, the medical model also encompasses that a compassionate (or just) society invests resources in health care and related services in an attempt to cure disabilities medically, to expand functionality and/or improve functioning, and to allow disabled persons the best quality of life possible given their condition. In essence, the medical model of disability provides a framework within which disability can be understood, assessed, experienced, planned for and justified from a scientific standpoint.

A major criticism of the model is that it is a functional analysis of the body as machine to be fixed in order to conform to normative values. Swain et al (2003) comment that the medical model places the disabled individual in a surrounding environment and culture which is regarded as unproblematic, reflecting and reinforcing that the framework is a way of thinking of disability imposed on disabled individuals by non-disabled professionals. Swain et al (2003) continue to argue that the model perpetuates dominant ideas about individuals and their roles within society as it values conformity and asserts the significance of fixing and self-reliance. Regardless, the medical model of disability is objective and pragmatic in its application to help better facilitate (medically at least) the functionality of an individual with a medically diagnosed disability (Stucki, Cieza, & Melvin, 2007).

The social model of disability was a reaction to the considered dominant medical model of disability. Developed by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in 1976, the alternative model sought to present a person's limitations not as something which one has, but instead as something which one

has done to them. The social model of disability identifies systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by society (purposely or inadvertently) suggesting that society is the main contributory factor in disabling people. While physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychological variations may cause individual functional limitation or impairments, the model purports that these do not necessarily have to lead to disability unless society fails to take account of and include people regardless of their individual differences. The central point of the social model of disability is that it provides a critique from which people with disabilities can argue that the social exclusion they experience is due to able-bodied enforced socio-structural barriers preventing participation in a society based on cultural assumptions of normalcy and capability. Disability, therefore, is not an outcome of bodily pathology, but of social organisations: it is socially produced by systematic patterns of exclusion that are built into the social fabric. It argues that if disability is a social construction there is no such group as people with disabilities (Kliewer & Drake, 1998). Shakespeare (2006) criticises the social model of disability for its lack of focus on impairment, and whilst it has proved an invaluable tool, some disabled writers comment on the model's overemphasis on discrimination. Thomas (1999, p.24) argues the model "down plays or ignores cultural and experiential dimensions of disablism" whilst Hughes & Paterson (1997, p.326) comment that the model proposes "an untenable separation between body and culture, impairment and disability".

The medical model and the social model of disability have provided platforms for a plethora of research concerning 'disability' and 'the disabled' across an increasingly wide range of academic domains – from the scientific to the philosophical. Although the social model of disability is recognised as being

foundational to Disability studies, Shakespeare & Watson (2001) argue that it has become an outdated ideology. Furthermore, recognising the merits and criticism of both models, Gabel & Peters (2004) called for a paradigm shift away from the rigidity of 'models' as such and promote research which operates in all directions of the social sphere and across all paradigmatic boundaries, thus allowing for theoretical evolutions which welcome subjectivity, objectivity and the space between. By using Bauman's Liquid Modernity as a framework, disability will be explored in this way.

When conducting research which concerns 'disability' and the 'disabled individual', the role that each of these models play in contemporary society is important to consider. Both models are able to provide a framework to which disability can be acknowledged from a number of perspectives— biological, historical, ethical and social to name a but few – however disability discourse must move beyond the social and medical disability and begin to acknowledge recent economical and political changes. To determine a paradigm, theory or model about disability is not the purpose of this study, and disability is not treated as a singular, exclusive thread of investigation. Knowing the two most widely accepted models of disability, and considering fully the historical, sociological and cultural reflections of disability, the study allows disability to be discussed from a new social observation, that of liquid modernity. The study does not separate or highlight disability as the primary focus of each participant, which is often the attraction for much research within Disability Studies. Instead the study recognises that disability contributes an individualised proportion of the life of each participant, and that seeking to provide an overarching meta-analysis

covering all dimensions of every disabled person's experience is not a useful or attainable concept.

2.6.3 Disability, Bauman and Liquid Modernity

Shakespeare & Watson (2001, p.19) rightly observe that disability sits at the intersection of biology and society, of agency and structure". This study operates within the parameters of psycho-social research and recognises the complex, intricate and oscillating relationship between the external and the internal, the individual and the society. This theorising of disability is controversial and problematic. Questions are continuously raised regarding macro-subjective stances of validity, socio-cultural processes, the authority of the privileged voice and the increasing number of frameworks, models and methodologies being employed to investigate the phenomenology of 'disability'. Taking this into consideration, Bauman's Liquid Modernity is an exceptionally fitting conceptual lens through which to view disability, mainly because he makes almost no comment on the subject in any of his work. His work does not consist of labels, rather metaphors to describe a representative cluster of individuals to help demonstrate his notions of a liquid society. When discussing disability under the guise of Bauman's Liquid Modernity there are two themes of his work to consider – 'Identity' and 'Otherness'. Bauman's considerations for the construction of identity are vast, a nexus bridging the very many different matters discussed in his work (the subject of identity formation in relation to Bauman's work is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5). Bauman's work has no explicit connection to Disability Studies, but his sensitivity to modern patterns of exclusion and Othering provide a useful lens through which to view the relationship between modernity and disability. As Hughes (2002) acknowledges, Bauman is not

interested in Otherness (or 'Strangerhood' as Bauman sometimes refers to it) as an existential outcome of life in modern times, more that he is concerned with how social and cultural practices produce and invalidate strangers.

The origins of Bauman's work regarding Othering stems from his interest in the ordering process, seen in his writings from the 1950's. At the macro level, Bauman argues that pre-modern and modern societies can be understood in terms of their need to establish an order or structure, and thus alleviate the strange and the different that could potentially threaten the stability and coherence of the social order. Otherness is articulated in multiple ways in Bauman's thoughts and different conceptions of identity underlie these multiple constructions. This explores what the participants regard as Other and to what extent they consider themselves to be Other or perceived as Other to those in their immediate and peripheral surroundings. The discourse of the stranger in Bauman's work demonstrates how the stranger is used both to reinforce and question the boundaries between the Self and Other. However, what is considered Other within a society is heavily dependent upon the cultures existing within the population; cultures which have their own rules of ordering and boundaries set within them – a tiered system of self-regulation. According to Bauman (1997, p.17) strangers threaten the boundaries that the ordering process requires in order to impose stability and predictability on the social world. So to consider the different 'cultures' present within the life-worlds of the participants is of great importance in establishing their understanding of the Other. Bauman considers 'culture' itself to be oppressive, viewing it as a meta-structure which imposes itself on the individual. In subscribing to a particular culture, the porousness of the boundaries of that culture determine the extent to which an

individual will consider the aberrant. Culture, concludes Bauman, is an activity, a process linked to human praxis. For Bauman, liquid modernity is providing 'culture' the critical process in which individuals can transcend boundaries, leaving one foot in certainty whilst outstretching a hand to explore the uncertain. Culture therefore, according to Bauman (1973), allows for multiple realities – the reality for the participants of, not only living with impairment, but also the reality of being a higher education student in the UK and the reality of being an elite level athlete. As Deleuze (1993, p.10) stresses “the world can be (un)folded in countless ways, with innumerable folds over folds”. The social condition in liquid modern times is such that the existence and therefore cross-over of multiple realities creates the permeability of acceptance, devising a continuum of difference from novelty to absolute fear and abhorrence for each and every individual. Considering this, the issue of disability in times of liquid modernity is not necessarily one of monstrosity or disfigurement, of disease or revulsion, but more about how much an individual perceives, recognises and accepts the cross-over of their reality with the reality of another.

According to Bauman (1991, p.15) modernity “is about the production of order” and this search for order is associated with the suppression and exclusion of Others. This propensity to structure and impose order ultimately leads to exclusionary practices. Disability, however, displays the dichotomy between acceptance and rejection. The word 'disabled' is laden with historical, political, societal and individual tension. Its place in contemporary society is heavily influenced by its rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion. But in times of liquid modernity, to be categorised (either medially or socially, by oneself or by others) may not necessarily lead one to be considered to be Other. Chapter 4 considers

the participants position on the Other, examining the different ways in which each participant perceives and experiences the process of Othering in their own life-world. Bauman (1991) argues that social and cultural boundaries are now more fluid, threatening the notion of certainty and predictability. However, this fluidity can sometimes problematize the position of who is to be considered Other, giving rise to the ambivalent position of someone who is 'in-between', an insider yet on the periphery of 'normalcy'. Bauman (1991, p.58) calls these strangers the "true hybrids" who cannot be classified and are the unclassifiable – the sociological stranger. In Bauman's sociological hermeneutics the key to a broader understanding of social interaction, identity and macro-sociological patterns is the idea of the sociological stranger (Marotta, 2002). To what extent does disability produce these 'in-betweeners', these sociological strangers, and to what extent does liquid modernity consume them? This question is considered when analysing the accounts of the participants.

As Marotta (2002) argues, Otherness implicitly connects the experience of 'strangeness' to the problem of hermeneutics, that difference is based on the existential experience and the interpretation of that experience. Yet the human condition is not a vacuum. Heidegger suggests the concept of "thrownness" to describe the interactions of the subject with its surroundings in everyday life, and the experience gained from these interactions. He suggests that this "thrownness" is a universal a priori corporeality which ultimately must lead to prejudice and preconception.

However, disability is becoming increasingly visible in the modern world, and the experience of 'disability' as more than an exploitation of the abnormal is becoming

familiar in the lives of non-disabled individuals. But with this familiarity comes a characterisation of disability through regulatory practice, which Kumashiro (2003) calls 'repetition'. Kumashiro (2003) argues that every repetition of a stereotype carries with it past utterances and past actions based upon the stereotype's message, creating vertical and horizontal hierarchies by privileging ways of thinking (and being). Research regarding the representation of disability via repetition (in the media or in fiction for example) is vast. Yet with the notion of difference becoming ever more part of the social fabric, something to be celebrated even, positive repetition is beginning to occur. With disability being such a complex and stratified reality it is understandable that there is such interest in it as a singular topic of research. However, as is detailed above, in times of liquid modernity, it is the 'strangeness' of something to another which creates exclusion and causes fear of the unknown. For Bauman, liquid modernity dictates that this Othering is centred largely around an individual's ability to contribute to the 'normalizing' of society, to be able to 'consume' society and participate fully in the liquid modern world. According to Bauman, it is not the physical disability that causes Othering, it is the extent to which these differences prevent the individual from engaging in the ideals of the liquid society. This is Bauman's 'flawed consumer' (Bauman, 1998a, p.93).

Bauman uses the metaphor of the flawed consumer to signify prevailing social discourse about poor consumers, or those who, by virtue of their limited means, cannot participate fully in the consumer culture of the contemporary West. Whereas historically the disabled community have been discursively portrayed as immobile, inefficient, poor and incompetent, this is no longer the case in a liquid society. If an individual possess the socially approved resources that consumer

activity requires, disabled or not, they are at far less greater risk of being ostracised from their community than are those who do not. Those that possess are 'useful' members of society. Being 'useful' is paramount and to be termed 'disabled' (socially at least if not medically) in the liquid society very much depends upon the severity of the disability and the dependency one has on others. Liquid modernity reflects the wider cultural assumptions around individuality, personal autonomy and self-determination within a society in which great value is placed upon independence, dignity and self-preservation (Keith, 1994). Here remains the contradiction between liberation and dependence – can a disabled individual ever be truly independent, or does dependency on others inevitably prevent the required liberation to participate? Bauman (2003, p.19) addresses the transition to liquid modernity as a “forcibly built order to a world which rejects any future burdened with obligations that constrain freedom of movement”.

And here is the core of where disability is placed in times of liquid modernity – the extent to which disability proves to be a factor for exclusion is determined by how much the disability limits an individual's participation in the cultural norms of a consumerist society. Hughes (2002, p.580) argues that in these liquid times “unless disabled people have the resources and wherewithal to participate in cultures of consumerism then they will continue to be marginalised”. Further, it could be argued that even if prejudice in respect to physical and / or cognitive difference declines, those who lack economic capital may still become 'flawed consumers'.

In Bauman's liquid society, it matters little whether or not one is disabled, for in the crowd of the flawed consumer" we are all starved of intimacy; we are all atomised and estranged from one another" (Hughes, 2002, p.573). Bauman comments (2007b) that those who are judged to be 'flawed consumers' and find themselves removed beyond the boundaries of where economic balance and social equilibrium are sought, can at times, even if momentarily redundant, be earmarked for what he describes as 'recycling' or 'rehabilitation' (2007b, p.31). Those who find their exclusion is a state of abnormality which commands a cure or a therapy are to be reintroduced as soon as possible in order to resume participation in the consumerist society.

Certainly this metaphor can be recognised for a disabled individual – those who can improvise, adapt and overcome are recycled back into the community (either with the introduction of accessible entrances to shopping malls or recycled as Paralympic athletes for example). For those whose disability proves to be more problematic within the liquid modern world, those with absolute social redundancy, Bauman concludes their fate to be that of "human waste" (2004a). Those found to be excluded as 'human waste' are not earmarked for recycling – they are unneeded, left redundant and rejected by a society that insists it is better without them. Perhaps, on the continuum of disability, this is where Bauman would place the profoundly disabled – the individuals who can never and will never, knowingly or not, contribute personally to the liquid society. For this group, any prospect of being 'recycled' into a legitimate and acknowledged member of human society is dim and infinitely remote. One could argue the only extenuating allowance of the 'human waste' is that of the required paid for services, allowing (salary earning, tax paying, commodity buying) others to live in liquid times –

those who care, treat, document and legislate this 'human waste'. Although not a direct concern for this study), it poses the suggestion of further research of profound disability in times of liquid modernity.

Each participant in this study was medically classified as 'disabled', however their condition did not prevent them from attending university, nor from participating in high performance sport. Knowing this, and considering Bauman's observations on the criteria for exclusion in a liquid society, the study explores not the nature of their disability per se, but to what extent the participant perceived their disability to prevent them from participating in their social 'norms'. Scheler (1912) as quoted in Haugaard (2008, p.127) comments that the average person appreciates a value only "in the course of, and through, comparison with possessions, condition, plight or quality of (an)other person(s)". The participants have made, and will make, conscious and unconscious daily comparisons between themselves and their peers in two differing surroundings – one where all their peers have disabilities (sport), neutralising their disability as a potential single factor for exclusion, and one where the majority of their peers are able bodied (university). This self-evaluation is affected by the importance that self-concept and self-worth holds for an individual (Appleton et al, 1994). This, then, becomes a question of identity – a topic which is the heartland for the majority of Bauman's thoughts; for indeed identity is at least as much a social as a personal phenomenon.

As aforementioned, Bauman's work is not linked explicitly with disability in so far as he has not dedicated a specific book, chapter or article to the subject, however his comprehension of identity in liquid modern times does not sit easily with disability. Put simply, Bauman (2000, p.32) suggests that "human beings are not

born into their identities” and that “identity is a task rather than a given”. Whilst this may be agreed upon for individuals with acquired disabilities, it is not the case for congenital disability. In liquid modern times there is the “problem of identity” (Bauman, 2001a, p.147), but the problem is not how to obtain an identity of one’s choice or how to have it legitimately recognised by one’s peers, nor is it societal placement within previously considered solid frames such as class. According to Bauman, the problem of identity is “which identity to choose and how to keep alert and vigilant so that another choice can be made in case the previous chosen identity is withdrawn from the market or stripped of its seductive powers” (2001, p.147).

The medical model of disability demonstrates that certain life conditions associated with having a disability eradicate the individual privilege of having choice. What is a choice, however, is the extent to which each of the participants accepted the task of distancing themselves from their ascribed, physical identity of disability. This task resonates across all of the life-worlds of each participant : When surrounded by other individuals with disabilities, what identity (identities) does each participant create when disability is excluded as a factor for recognition? When at university, how does each participant internalise their given identity and do they try to create an identity away from their disability? I consider that, at times, Bauman’s concern for identity creation in liquid modernity is naïve – without question one is ‘born’ into an identity, especially if that identity manifests a physical characteristic with a discursive history. The physical and symbolic chains of prejudice and discrimination do still exist. However, Bauman is progressive in acknowledging that in liquid modern times individuals can (if they bear the required social resources and capital) formalise their own identity and

their own reference groups, and can choose the cultural and societal boundaries they wish to belong to. Whilst the physical condition of being 'disabled' is (most often) fixed, the metaphysical identity of being disabled, to a point, does not have to be. It can be argued therefore that the subject of disability in times of liquid modernity does not resemble or follow on from previous academic discourse placed in embodiment, narrative or the postmodern for example, isolating 'disability' as a research interest. For Bauman, the human body has come to represent a site of identity contests, with the liquid modern fluidity of identity bringing with it a new sense of freedom as well as challenges to preconceived notions of institutional stability (Lee, 2006). Liquid modern times recognise the restrictions and limitations placed on all individuals, and observes the interplay of the multiple identities a liquid modern assumes in the multiple realities they inhabit.

The study explores how the participants view themselves in being able to exist, participate and contribute to the liquid world, and examines Bauman's metaphors of a liquid existence in response to the accounts provided by disabled individuals. Individuals classified with mild to moderate disability are perhaps quintessential strangers to the able-bodied community, ambivalent outsiders who, although with access to a different perspective on the world, do not pose a threat or conjure immense fear or repulsion. Instead, it is how the disability is encountered which produces the response of Otherness. The problem, however, is the irreducibility of Otherness – the confrontation of strangeness requires communication which may not always be possible, or even welcomed. Bauman provides an original analysis of the social construction of Otherness and maintains that 'strangers', however defined, will remain a fundamental part of human existence and the

outcome of any attempt to construct social order. Levinas (1972) comments that one should recognise the Other (other people, other cultures etc.) as strange, different and beyond our comprehension, not trying to destroy or dominate, and recognise the challenge the Other presents to oneself. According to Bauman, liquid modernity brings with it ambivalence to the Other, with the freedom to either respond, reject or ignore. This study examines the extent to which in a liquid modern society the Other (in regards to disability) can be equal, but not the same.

In addition to exploring the life-worlds of the participant as a disabled individual, the study explores their life-world as a higher education student. The following section will assess how the role of the intellectual features in liquid modern times, and how the culture and expectation of a university degree is affected by liquid modernity.

2.7 Higher Education in times of Liquid Modernity

Bauman comments at length on the role of the intellectual, elaborating on the source, production and function of knowledge within times of liquid modernity. His work centres around the generation and purpose of education both in times of solid and liquid modernity, attempting to adequately explain the meaning behind the changes he has observed. Bauman often employs the metaphors 'Gamekeeper' and 'Gardener' when discussing the evolution of the culture of intelligence. The pre-modern posture towards the role of the intellectual was akin to that of a Gamekeeper, with their main task being to defend the environment from interference, in order to preserve its 'natural' balance or equilibrium. The vocation of the Gamekeeper rests on the belief that things are at their best when not interfered with; that the world is a divine chain of being in which every

creature has its rightful and useful place, even if human cognitive abilities are “too limited to comprehend the wisdom, harmony, and orderliness of God’s design” (Bauman, 2005a, p.305). However, with the formation of state controlled societies, the role of the Gamekeeper began to disintegrate. Bauman contends that in the modern world it is the attitude of the Gardener that best serves as a metaphor for the educational practice seen during the Enlightenment period. The Gardener assumes to know better what should be encouraged to prosper and what should not. A preconceived vision of society is planted by the twin efforts of encouraging the growth of the deemed correct species of whatever is desired, and of uprooting and destroying all the others whose uninvited and unwanted presence disagrees with the overall harmony of the design (Bauman, 2005b).

In times of solid modernity, Bauman (1997) comments that the goal of education was to teach how to obey. To educate was to order (both literally and figuratively) society. He argues:

“the instinct and the will to comply, to follow order, to do what is required by the public interest, as defined by one’s superiors, were the most needed attitudes for the citizens of a planned, programmed, exhaustively and completely rationalized society”. (Bauman, 1997, p.108)

Certainly during the modern era, the most important condition was not the knowledge transmitted to the students, but the atmosphere of training, routine and predictability in which the transmission of knowledge took place. To learn was, in effect, to learn to be disciplined in the interests of society. Education was considered a system of improvement either in the prevention of impairment or in the arresting and reversing of intellectual deterioration. The role of the intellectual (the Gardener) was to create and generate support for a societal model planned

by the political powers and to justify state activity as true and moral – what Bauman calls a ‘legislator’ (Bauman, 1987). In solid modernity, intellectuals were needed by the establishment to provide the societal explanation to legitimate its power (Blackshaw, 2002). Those in a society experiencing solid modernity viewed that the purpose of education was to become trained in a particular profession which was thought to benefit the state and society. This profession was to become a lifelong identity. The role of the intellectual was to objectively explain and systematically improve the surroundings.

Best (1998), argues that in the postmodern condition by contrast, the role of the intellectual was to provide individuals with an understanding of other views of the world, rendering more intelligible the meaning of unfamiliar cultures into our own terms with as little deviation as possible to the original meaning, in Bauman’s words (1987) to be an “interpreter”. The ‘Cultural Turn’ increasingly saw the intellectual giving attention to cultural factors (such as language, symbols, and meaning) in sociological explanations. This changed the preconceived ideas not only of what it meant to be educated, but also the validity of the production of knowledge based on one’s own understanding of one’s personal surroundings. This saw the re-introduction of Bauman’s Gamekeeper as some intellectuals ventured to understand societies and individuals without interfering, disturbing, claiming or colonising.

In liquid modern times, Bauman (2005b) comments that both the Gamekeeper and the Gardener are now rarities, increasingly giving ground to that of the Hunter. According to Bauman (2005b):

“hunters could not care less about the overall ‘balance of things,’ whether ‘natural’ or contrived. The sole task they pursue is another ‘kill,’ large enough to fill their game-bags to capacity.” (p.306)

Hunters move swiftly, never lingering, constantly on the prowl for prospective opportunities to cultivate their own desires. The liquid-modern intellectual (the Hunter) is a camouflaged chameleon who is always ready and ready for anything. The preconceived model of the intellectual has somewhat faded, giving way to experts whose expertise exist only to fill cracks in yet unformed identities. However, despite these expertise, their knowledge is fleeting, in constant need of upgrading and up-skilling. Bauman (2005b) suggests this to be true for every human who claims to be an authority on a particular ground of intellect – from the students at universities, to the academics who teach them; from the high performance sport coaches to the state powers who issue funding. In liquid modern times, knowledge is increasing temporal.

From Bauman’s works, it can be deduced that education was once a traditional form of security. He argues, however that this form of security has become greatly devalued. It is only with the transition into liquid modern times that what had been regarded as ancient wisdom lost its pragmatic value – those concerned with learning, and the production of learning had to change their understanding of ‘education’. Universities are no longer regarded as temples of conversion and ideological mobilization for an educated society. Instead, Bauman (2005b) calls attention (quoting the then Ministry of Education Charles Clarke) that:

“the whole idea of schools and universities is that they have become somewhere to increase economic growth rate and to help us compete with our European partners” (p.27)

For Bauman, the question lies in the overall purpose of the university and the knowledge it produces. Universities are now characterised as a locus of quiet conservatism rather than a force for radical social and political change (Barnes, 2007). Indeed Giroux (2004) comments (restated by Bauman, 2005b) that the challenges for academics and students is to join together and oppose the transformation of higher education into a commercial sphere. It is not presumptuous to argue that only a few years ago a university degree offered a safe conduct for practicing the profession until retirement. Bauman (2005b) states that this is no longer the case, explaining that in liquid modern times, knowledge needs to be constantly refreshed, replenished and renewed. Aged knowledge must be rejuvenated, made to appear youthful and appealing.

“Professions must be changed lest the impetuous growth of new knowledge and the rapid aging of the old combine to produce human ignorance on a massive scale.” (Bauman 2005b, p.119)

For now, the liquid modern society is saturated with ‘experts’ – commercially driven gurus with pseudo-qualifications sanctioned by commercial industries. These experts are consistently available to remind us of how we can self-improve. The ‘current cult’ of life-long education (Bauman, 2010, p.98) is a business opportunity for ‘spiritual masters’ to reach as yet unexploited or even undiscovered flaws in the exhausted liquid modern consumer. According to Bauman (2010) the matter lies in not only in improving ourselves as commodities, but to constantly ensure that we are involved in the liquid society. The only thing that can produce more anxiety than the liquid society itself is the feeling that we are no longer involved in it. We fear being ‘useless’. Bauman (2005b) attributes this to one of the fears facing young people today, that it is almost impossible to

calculate let alone create a catalogue of risk based on future opportunities because the real causes of fear are dispersed and difficult to define.

Bauman (2005b) cites the divorce between power and politics as the principle reasoning behind the downfall of the integrity of a university education. Power now circulates within the politically uncontrolled global space. The reconfiguration of state reasoning has seen the collapse of its marriage with the intellectuals conceived of as Bauman's 'legislators'. It would appear that in the Western world, every child has the right to an education up to a certain age, but after said age, education becomes a commodity, to be produced and consumed by those deemed meritorious.

The production of 'new' universities in 1992 and the introduction of tuition fees in 1998 highlighted the juxtaposition of the role of the university within the UK – the perceived need for a larger university educated workforce to satiate market demand showed the absence of political control over global market powers. Universities were now running courses which followed market trends, providing degrees which appeared to provide solutions to developing global and economic problems. Bauman (2005b) comments that in a Democratic society, the state in liquid modern times has a responsibility to provide quality education to its citizens. He discusses the most resented promise from the state - that each citizen will be provided enough academic support that to achieve at higher education is within their reach, almost within their rights. However, he goes on to criticise this political incentive, explaining that the state issues loans to those who do achieve but cannot afford the education, charge high interest on such loans abdicate its responsibilities when the now educated individual is unable to apply their

knowledge in the global market due to reduced job opportunities. The policy assumption today is that one-half of young people should be in higher education, and that the responsibilities – and risks – of negotiating pathways through the university system rest with young people themselves, and with their families (Christie, 2009).

According to Bauman (2005b), the liquid society is knowledge dependent. The complication is that the liquid modern world does not know when knowledge becomes useless, nor when it becomes outdated or misleading. Knowledge is easily sold and easily discarded, noting that education has become dispensable and is everywhere, not just in formal learning environments. In the 21st century, the generation of knowledge is becoming much more diffused throughout society. Consequently, the university is no longer the only or even the most important producer of what counts as useful or meaningful knowledge (Castells, 1996). Bauman's concern is that it is becoming clear that left to its own logic, the 'teaching market' will magnify rather than mitigate inequality and multiply potentially catastrophic social consequences and side effects (Bauman, 2005b). A society which functions on the production and consumption of knowledge – a knowledge society – would threaten to bring about greater inequalities and social exclusion. However, it can be suggested that whilst it is agencies who control which members of society can actually gain access to a university education, in some ways this is needed.

If universities were to operate in a manner which saw every post 18 year old in the UK attend, what would become of the labour market that does not require the individual to be educated to degree level: a surplus of 'account executives' and

‘senior social media researchers’? Who will restock the shelves at the supermarket when the ‘creative designer’ does their food shopping? Who will drive the bus to ensure the ‘financial broadcaster’ arrives at work on time? Who will repair the washing machine at the ‘interior photographer’s’ house? Bauman (2005b) comments that we are left with a market-orientated definition of social viability. Society, and consequently the market, will (for example) dictate if a degree in computer science is equal in educational value as a degree in fine art.

Bauman (2004b, p.14) compares higher education to “effective therapy” – a therapy afforded by the few. For many, higher education is seen as an escape from the afflictions of liquid modernity, offering direction, security and options. However, this vantage has recently shifted, with many finding that university will not offer the safe, secure future that their school teachers had been promising. With dreary graduate prospects, a contracting labour market, fees of up to £9000 and universities being touted as more inclusive than ever (read by some as ‘we accept anyone’), the once excitable pull towards higher education has lost its magnetism. In the modern and post-modern periods, to be educated was to be empowered – for people to acquire the ability to control or significantly influence the personal, political, economic and social forces impacting upon their life trajectory. In liquid modern times, the idea of influence, choice and skill acquisition is being ‘sold’ to those contemplating university, but whether these equate to having the power to influence is contentious. The educated and the elite are no longer comfortable bed fellows. Gomes, Quintao de Almeida & Bracht (2010) comment that with the commodification of education, those in a liquid society have learnt to seriously doubt the wisdom of state legislators in their ability to identify moral issues and to make informed judgements to better the

individual and society. They go on to comment that the mark of equality that used to be placed between knowledge, civilization, the moral quality of human interaction, and the social and individual well-being has faded with the modernizing process.

By all accounts it appears a university functioning in liquid modern times cannot offer what it traditionally sought to. Higher education is now a form of institutionalised social capital, produced and consumed in volume both economically and culturally. The child of liquid modernity is quickly realising that knowledge generates a greater (monetary) value if it can be applied to the consumerist market.

For those that successfully clear the intellectual bar to attend university, the options are overwhelmingly broad in terms of choice of location, of course, and of social diversity, yet for many, it is the lack of options afterwards that presents the challenge. Graduates must digest the diametrically opposing ideas that in a liquid society, life options appear to be limitless whilst life opportunities are few and far between. As Bauman (2005b) comments, in typical Hunter behaviour, with a degree lasting 3 years at a minimum, the concerns about the future however, are not an immediate worry as it has no bearing on their current hunting association. The contemporary university student need not burden themselves with something that will happen in 3 years' time (unless that is of their personal nature) for the world from which they entered university will have changed greatly upon their release. 'Education', in the liquid society at least, appears to offer a world of multiple meanings, filled with uncoordinated needs, self-procreating possibilities and self-multiplying elections (Gomes et al, 2010). For Bauman, things count if

they are valued in proportion to the cost of their acquisition. The results produced by this study provide qualitative data which will explore to what extent the participants valued and consumed their experiences of higher education in liquid modern times, and to what extent this fits with Bauman's observations of the contemporary role of the intellectual.

This section of the literature review has brought together Bauman's understandings of the role of the intellectual in liquid modern times with the current disposition of higher education. This broad exploration of the higher education experience in liquid modernity and how this will add to the analysis of the accounts given is detailed throughout. In addition to the academic experiences gained, the final life-world to consider for the subject is that of elite performance sport.

2.8 Paralympic Sport in times of Liquid Modernity

People with a disability negotiate a complex identity that involves both physical difference and social stigma. Identity based areas of inquiry has led academic research to consider a multitude of topics focusing on the label of 'disabled', with much work centred around the social construction of disability, empowerment and emancipation from marginalisation, and personal narratives of the body and the Self.

In regards to disability sport, research appears to be clustered into areas which focus heavily on 'disability' and not on 'sport'. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this literature review to map the complete Paralympic landscape, the majority of works undertaken are similar in their themes and theoretical approaches, with the four

main categories of research being: 1) negative media representations of the Paralympics and Paralympic athletes; 2) a history of the Paralympic movement; 3) the Postmodern rhetoric of Paralympic sport; 4) (in)equality of the Olympics and the Paralympics. The tendency for most research on Paralympic sport is to create a complete overarching identity for the phenomena of disability sport and forcefully imprint it onto the Paralympic athlete. Certainly within the area of sociology, a systematic review of Paralympic literature for this study has demonstrated that the field lacks greatly in empirical research that incorporates first hand, primary data concerning the Paralympic athletes themselves. Instead, the works produced are more fitting to that of a meta-analysis of disability studies, superimposed onto the discernment of the Paralympics.

Research concerning the Paralympic athlete as an individual is scarce, with much of the research focusing on the identity of the Paralympic athletes as one of a 'super cripple' (Barnes, 1992a, p.12). Berger (2008, p.648) describes the 'supercrip' as "those individuals whose inspirational stories of courage, dedication, and hard work prove that it can be done, that one can defy the odds and accomplish the impossible". This idea of a 'supercrip' is used repeatedly in work attempting to demonstrate the paradoxical nature of the Paralympic Games in that stories of superhuman achievement divert attention away from the social causes of disability, and that sport is a vehicle for which disabled people can appear 'normal' if they try hard enough (Barnes, 1992a). But elite level sport is not 'normal'. As argued, normality is constructed through value comparison, and the nature of comparison is a sore topic for a Paralympic athlete. Whereas able bodied Olympians are placed in comparison to the able bodied population who consume them (by watching them or reading about them), there is no clear

indication of if the sporting ability of a Paralympic athlete is to be compared to another disabled individual, to an able bodied individual or to that of an Olympian. For some, elite sport for people with disabilities, and in some cases sport at all, is an anathema. There are no hard and fast rules to elite disability sport as it operates within altering shades of ambiguity. Societal perceptions of disability can directly conflict with socially constructed perceptions of what sport is, especially in relation to ability and body image (Brittain, 2004). This unfortunately leaves research concerning an Paralympic athlete to be (dis)placed in the realm of Disability Studies rather than Sport Studies – chained to the disability research assumptions of negative rhetoric, social model limitations and theories of resistance.

The Paralympic Games can be litigious, controversial or contentious, but subjectivity remains the locus of control for any research within the area, which at times, is overlooked by academics who simply follow the trend in disability sport. Indeed, Blackshaw (2002, p.210) draws attention to Foucault's observations that "integrated intellectuals pretend to be guided by their senses, but they are actually motivated by their ideologies or their martyrs". The conflicts and consensuses of the modern day Paralympic Games will provide debate for as long as the games continue. The task sociologists of sport have is to provide the research area with some much needed empirical data concerning the Paralympic Athlete, which welcomes their individual lived experiences and personal accounts within their perceived social context and construction of the multiple realities they find themselves living. Disability Sport research is plagued with the postmodern voice of a university intellectual, quoting other postmodern university intellectuals. This study rejects the postmodern framework which has come to make Disability

Studies so stale, choosing instead to adopt a contemporary conceptual framework with an analysis which allows for the athlete to give voice to disability sport research. The data gathered for this study, which will hopefully inform future research, is gathered directly from athletes who experience daily the power and the pity of the Paralympic world.

Swain & French (2000) have called for alternative accounts of disability that demonstrate how life following impairment need not be empty and meaningless, but can actually reflect a positive, if different, social identity. A number of recent academics (Purdue, 2012; Wolbring, 2012; Legg & Steadward, 2011; Roy, 2011; Le Clair, 2011) have indicated the need to reposition 'disability sport' into an area of sociology which recognises the change in the meaning of 'disability' as synchronised with the contemporary global condition of sport, increasing capitalism and social context. By interviewing current and potential Paralympic athletes, and exploring their accounts via the conceptual lens of Bauman's Liquid Modernity, this study provides research which aforementioned academics have stated is missing from the area of the sociology of sport.

2.8.1 High performance sport, Bauman and Liquid Modernity

Bauman (in Dawes, 2011) comments that sociologists are called to de-familiarise the familiar and familiarise the unfamiliar. Sociologists must be heretical and dissident in attempting to examine that which is pre-supposed taken for granted as embedded truth within historical rhetoric. In regards to disability sport, the familiar is often quoted as Paralympic athletes being tragic super humans, the Paralympic Games being an awkward Olympic side-show heavy with moral burden. This study challenges these familiar assumptions and is written in full

recognition of Bauman's advice to the sociologist. It aims to familiarize the Paralympic student-athlete, exposing shared and individual identities and experiences in times of liquid modernity.

As is similar to the subject of disability, Bauman does not write specifically on sport, let alone Paralympic sport. Indeed, the use of Bauman's Liquid Modernity as a framework or background for empirical research within the field of the sociology of sport (and disability for that matter) is almost non-existent. Blackshaw (2002, p.199) argues that some of the "chief protagonists in the sociology of sport have become resistant to new bold points of view" leaving little opportunity for literary comparison as it "visibly shows less confidence in stepping into uncharted waters". Research concerning the sociology of sport (including disability sport) is very much grounded in the postmodern, of which studies are common and abundant. Essentially, Bauman's central proposition towards explaining the condition of liquid modernity is that it is characterised by a process of dis-embedding without re-embedding (Bauman, 2000, 2001b), that traditions and societal security are being replaced with uncertainty coupled with increased individual freedoms.

However, liquid modernity is a transition – it is not applicable to every culture in every society in every population, nor is it applicable to every domain of societal interest. And perhaps here is why there is very little work written on sport today that is suggestive of Bauman's sociology. Sport, in a liquid modern sense, is problematic. Mastro, Hall & Canabal (1988, p.81) remark that "is no culturally recognised need for competition and sports beyond therapeutic programs", implying that sport, certainly elite level, is a manufactured pastime of human

consumption, born from ideological traditions and a need for bodily perfection. Sport is therefore nothing *but* tradition. So how would Bauman explain the omnipresence of sport in both liquid and solid societies? Perhaps the answer is that sport, as a logical and physical practice will always be solid, and with boundaries of human excellence always being pushed, ambivalence towards the requirements or consequences of these boundaries is not possible – a 9.5 second sprint will always be faster than 10 seconds, 5 goals will always be more than scoring 3, lifting 120KG will always be heavier than lifting 100kg. There is a mathematical rationale to the process of winning, regardless of the traditional connotations of the ‘act’ of winning. Sport exists in a world where uncertainty and contingency constitute the very essence of the modern, but it denies the fragmentary and fluid nature of the modern condition (Marotta, 2002).

Solid modernity refers to the belief that a condition is “predictable and manageable” (Bauman, 2000, p.3) – two characteristics of culture favoured highly by the elite sporting world. Bauman (2004, p.32) comments that liquid modernity is “existence without parameters”, that borders and boundaries, in a liquid modern world, are superfluous. But elite level sport does have parameters and dividing lines for inclusion – it has set standards to distinguish what is acceptable, what is expected, what is certain to happen if a specific target is reached. However, sport is a collective of self-regulating individuals operating within a culture governed by both legislative and custom rules - it is this culture of sport, and the individuals that subscribe, belong and attempt to belong to that culture, that are susceptible to the trappings and freedoms of liquid modernity. The liquid modern state is one of excess without ultimate satisfaction. Paralympic sport, however, does not provide a state of excess – it is limited in its availability, in its attraction and in its

capacity to produce and to be consumed. It exhibits traits more accustomed to solid modernity. Consequentially, this study explores to what extent the rigidity of sport allows the participant to experience satisfaction (or the ever present liquid modern condition of dissatisfaction) in a culture and society that is tending toward the liquid modern condition.

In regards to this study the concept of an 'athlete identity' was inherent in its research design. As mentioned previously, not only must the participants contend with the complex issue of a 'disabled' identity, labelled upon them by the medical profession and also, one would argue, by the sporting national governing bodies. They must also choose the extent of affinity they have towards the identity of being an elite level athlete – something that is not as easy to define. Bauman (2004, p.18) comments that identity, whilst a problem, is "first and foremost is a task". The task therefore for the participants is to distinguish if they wish to take up this task. Is athlete identity something more than the physical, outer showing of team branded kit? Does their body instantly expose them as being an 'athlete' as much as it does being 'disabled' in the same way an able bodied athlete might experience this?

Lee (2006, p.361) observes that a liquid identity is "to be fluid, is to be nimble, being able to blend in with the others and reduce signs of difference", however this is not the case for an aspiring Paralympic athlete. Certainly within their sporting life-worlds, the participants do not want to reduce difference – they want to, need to, stand out and make the difference between themselves and their sporting competitors as obvious as possible. They need to use difference to their sporting advantage. However, for a Paralympic athlete this difference is largely

focused around ability – part of the athletic identity of a disabled athlete is to exhibit the ‘ableness’ of their body to achieve more than their disabled peers. One could argue that certainly within the elite disabled sporting world, the purpose of this display of ability is not to reduce signs of difference between the disabled athlete and the able bodied athlete in an act to normalize the individual, more that elite level sport requires difference. The Paralympic athlete engages in a constant struggle between the need to be recognised as the same (i.e. part of the liquid modern society) but also the need to be recognised as different (i.e. better than their domestic and international competitors). There is an existence caught between a liquid life and a solid structure. Enduring the paradox that is elite sport requires obedience and rules; viewed by the athlete as a provider of salvation and satisfaction, but not of security nor of freedom. The difference between ‘sport’ and ‘athlete’ is the uneven dialect between the two – fluidity exists on the surface level of the subjective experience of the athlete, while on the deeper, more objective level of enduring sporting institutions there are much anchored regularities that resist liquidisation.

The Paralympic Games exist as a paradox with the constant ability to divide and unite. The Paralympic Games have been burdened it seems, with the impossible task of promoting equality without sameness, difference without different, disability without disabled. The Paralympic Games as a mega-event, as a sociological and cultural point of interest is growing, which is enthusiastic to see. What is currently missing though within the repertoire of disability sport research is research driven by the words and experiences of the athletes. However, a meta-analysis of the research presented by the academic community demonstrates studies are becoming predictable and often far removed from those

who actually participate in the Games. Often, for academics in the field of disability studies, the Paralympic Games are forever upheld as a symbol of oppression, of inequality and a representation of the negative societal perception of disability. For example, Kama argues (2004):

“the wish to see the disabled who ‘have done’ is particularly intense while the pitiful disabled trigger antipathy because they reproduce and reinforce disabled people’s inferior positionality and exclusion.” (p.447)

However, it can be argued that this statement is true of every group considered to be the ‘inferior’ in the binary (i.e. women in positions of power in a male dominated work place; wealthy workers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds etc). To treat the Paralympics as an event which society endures as a manifestation of negative or pitiful attitude towards disability is a disparagement to every competing athlete.

The Paralympic Games should be about elite level performance sport, however it is continuously denied this opportunity. The majority of Paralympic research is about the games as a whole; that it is bigger than the sum of all its parts. However, this study suggests that it is the ‘parts’, the athletes are the only ones who can progress Paralympic research. For all the efforts made, many researchers in the Paralympic area are contradictory in their work, highlighting ‘disability’ and marginalising ‘sport’, relying heavily on discourse provided within the domain of Disability Studies whilst imploring that disability sport culture requires its own discourse. Works on the corporeal body, social in/exclusion and negative representation (whilst important in their own domain) are failing to provide any original contribution of knowledge to the sociology of sport. In order

for high performance disability sport to move beyond being stigmatized with the same rhetoric of Disability Studies there needs to be a marked increase in research which gathers data from the individuals who find themselves participating daily in and working within the life-world of Paralympic sport. Subsequent analysis and critique of this work will inevitably ensure, but of most importance will be, that the foundations of the data will have been collected from those who have experienced it at their core. Kell, Kell & Price (2008) question the need for a parallel event to the Olympics, suggesting that the current dual format only perpetuates outdated stereotypes about ability and disability, and reinforces a paternalism and devaluation of the achievement of Paralympians. However, the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games saw more cross over than ever of athletes with disabilities competing in the Olympic Games. The issues of competition should not be for the debate of scholars far removed from the stadium – the suggestions they put forward of what should be fair and just and acceptable is of little consideration. Disability sport research needs to reach beyond the university walls – at present it is the Paralympians themselves who are needed most to contribute to the dialogue that should feed the discourse on the debate. Hughes (2002) argues:

“Disabled people are still viewed as symbols of tragedy, as reminders of the frailty of existence and non-disabled ‘culture’ continues to resist and despise the most obvious lessons of the human condition. The refusal to recognise – and, indeed, celebrate – frailty and imperfection makes each of us a stranger to ourselves.” (p.581)

What then are the Paralympic Games? Are they a celebration of ability; of disability; an economic burden; or an elite sporting event? The answer to this question will very much depend on who the question is directed at. As De Certeau (1999, p.118) notes “amid the murmurings of the system, people produce

their own meanings". Bauman considers that the focus of sociology should move more towards agency and how agency operates within its habitat (or life-world), the environment defining the levels of restraint placed on the freedom and the dependency of the agents. However, despite this habitat existing, he argues the responsibility is mostly with the individual to formalise their own identity and their own reference group in order to make sense of their own world. This study therefore asks Paralympic student-athletes to provide their own meanings of the academic and sporting systems they find themselves occupying in times of liquid modernity. It does not focus specifically on disability, or education, nor elite level sport. Rather it asks the participants what it is like to be them: a Paralympic student-athlete in times of liquid modernity.

2.9 Summary

Lee (2006) argues that Postmodernists insist that the era of modernity has passed but that many fail to realise that the plural condition suggested in their work was also the source of new forms of modernity. It is this condition that has given rise to competing ideas about the current phase of modernity. The paradigm of modernity has not only survived the criticisms of postmodern discourse but it has also "blossomed into multiple paradigms to reflect the plural condition in the world" (Lee, 2006, p.367). Lee (2006) goes on to comment that these pluralities of modernity can be empirically analysed for a better understanding of how these ideas have come about. One such plurality is Bauman's Liquid Modernity. Bauman poses fundamental challenges to contemporary social theory and provides an original and provocative version of the sociological imagination.

Bauman (2010) hints that we have found ourselves in the period of interregnum; I argue that this is prevalent when considering conceptual frameworks for sociological research. Additionally, Bauman (1997) argues that the postmodern account of society is lacking, disagreeable and unaccommodating, leading him to revisit modernity but with an alternate lens through which to view it. Bauman's critical reflections on modern theory and society require serious critical responses to his challenges to conventional wisdom and practice.

When considering the many subjects covered by Bauman in his catalogue of work, it would be a disservice to his work, and to his critics, if one study attempted to address all his possible lines of investigation. This study brings into focus Bauman's notions of structures, the intellectual and Otherness, whilst at the same time acknowledging the much broader themes of his work such as uncertainty, consumerism and identity. Bauman's work on Liquid Modernity is complex yet at the same time simplistic; examining the human condition not only from a global economic point of view, but also to its effects on daily life. His work is subjective, poetic, literate and descriptive, whilst dusted with alarming present day statistics and examples from recent global happenings. The researcher considered it paramount that a methodology be employed which represented and reflected not only the diversity and intricacy of his books, essays, articles and contributions but also his ethos and attitude towards sociological research. As Atkinson (2008) comments the question of whether identities, lifestyle choices and personal orientations have been set afloat by liquid modernity can only be definitively answered by means of dialogue with the social world itself in the form of detailed empirical data. Indeed, the commonality of the critical remarks regarding Bauman's work concern the lack of primary research carried out and field data

gathered to support his contention that we are moving into a liquid modern world. The study therefore required a methodological process that allowed for flexibility, subjectivity and exploration – a methodology not handcuffed to rigidity and rules, but which addresses explicitly the exact contentions of Bauman's liquid modernity.

For Bauman sociology is first and foremost a moral enterprise:

“To think sociologically can render us more sensitive and tolerant of diversity (...) thus to think sociologically means to understand a little more fully the people around us in terms of their hopes and desires and their worries and concerns.” (Bauman & May 2001,p.11)

This knowledge and understanding of others can provide us with a general set of aims: “Sociology is therefore central to the endeavour of coming to understand ourselves in better ways” (Bauman & May 2001, p.180). Knowing this, every attempt has been made during the methodological preparation, the physical conduction of the research and during the writing of the study to reflect not only the spirit of Bauman's written work but also his belief for the primary reasons of conducting research within the domain of sociology – that by thinking sociologically researchers can begin to understand a little more fully the people around them.

To conclude, this chapter has provided extensive information pertinent to this study, with the origins of Bauman's intellectual considerations being discussed. It has addressed the criticisms associated with Bauman's work and has provided a justification for rejecting a conceptual framework rooted in Postmodernity. The key thematic concepts of Bauman's Liquid Modernity have been explained and

explored, as has its application to the critical variables of the study – Disability; Education; and High Performance Sport.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss, the multiple elements of research design contributing to the facilitation and production of the study. In this study the word 'narrative' is to be taken as the 'event' or the 'account' of the interview in which the study analyses the narratives produced by the interviewer/interviewee dialogue. The chapter provides a detailed account of the use of qualitative, phenomenological research and evidences rationales for the many considerations of this psycho-social study. Additionally, the chapter comments on the sociological, philosophical and objective standpoints of conducting qualitative research, arguing for the complementary use and application of the method of analysis to the conceptual framework. The primary purpose of any research is to produce original contribution knowledge. Knowing this, and the conceptual groundings of this thesis, it is important to first consider what the researcher understand as 'knowledge' in relation to this study.

3.2 Epistemological Considerations

In regards to phenomenological research, there are two main theories to which most academics subscribe – the approaches of Husserl and Heidegger. Husserl's philosophy of Phenomenological Reduction brackets experience and describes it while attempting to suspend all presuppositions and judgement normally made about the experience. His descriptive phenomenological philosophy emphasized descriptions of the meaning of human experience, with bracketing being an iterative process that involves preparing, evaluating, and

providing systematic, on-going feedback about the effectiveness of the bracketing (Polit & Beck, 2004). Porter (1993) believes that bracketing can result in more productive use of the researchers' time if they attempt to understand the effects of their experiences rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate them, as well as it demonstrating the validity of the data collection and analytic processes. Ahern (1999) aims to provide tips for qualitative researchers to help with bracketing through notes in a reflexive journal or a similar tool. For Heidegger, the question of phenomenology was one of stressing the need to interpret and understand, not just describe human experience. His was one of interpretative phenomenology where the focus of the phenomenological inquiry was the meaning of human experience in regard to a phenomenon and how those experiences were in turn interpreted (Heidegger, 1962). For Heidegger, it was not possible to bracket one's being-in-the-world. He insisted that hermeneutics presupposes prior understanding on the researcher's part (Lowes & Prowse, 2001). Having considered both the descriptive and interpretative approach, as well as considering the need for reflexivity within the research process, Heidegger's interpretative approach to phenomenological inquiry was adopted and best reflects my understandings (both academic and personal) of phenomenological research.

When conducting research within the area of interpretative sociology, the study subscribed to the concept that 'society' is a product of human activity (or action), rather than as a large collective of behaviours. Sociologists, therefore, must attempt to uncover meaning based on interpretation and intuition in order to understand this action. As well as interpreting the research, it is important that attempts are made to consider the meaningfulness of the behaviours

described in the participants' narratives. It is important that the research procedure reflects the distinctiveness of humans and their actions and places emphasis on understanding behaviour rather than attempting to explain it. From an epistemological consideration, as the researcher I acknowledged that my participants' behaviour (and therefore responses) would be uniquely meaningful – each participant defined situations and gave meaning to their actions, and the actions of others, based on their own awareness and interpretation of their life-world. Therefore, when understanding the approach of placing emphasis on individual's interpretation of a situation, and on importance of subjective meaning, it must be considered what constitutes acceptable knowledge. This knowledge includes my prior knowledge within the area used to scaffold the study, as well as the original contribution to knowledge the study aims to produce.

As this study is of a qualitative nature, a constructivist research paradigm was adopted, recognising that knowledge is contextually and culturally defined (Golinski, 2005). This study is idiographic in its approach and considers that the knower and the known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality. As Elias (1987) highlights, the fusion between the knower and the known is never complete – as in every epistemological relation, there will always be some element of detachment between the researcher and the participant. In more positivist work, the need to maintain a distance between the knower and what can be known, or between one's personal orientations and the study, is greater, in that “scholars writing from the empiricist tradition have demonstrated little patience with narrative approaches” (Alvermann, 2009, p.53). Generally, they have tended to regard interactions

between researchers and their research participants as potential sources of distortion and bias (Jansen & Peshkin, 1992). Due to the nature of this research, it is important to recognise that what the participants choose to reveal as their 'truth' of a situation or experience was only the version of the 'truth' they wished to tell. This 'truth' could change depending on the listener. Researchers cannot expect to discover 'the truth'; only aspire to convey the various truths held by others. Knowing this does not make the versions of the 'truth' expressed in their narratives any less genuine, but it should be noted when considering the question of production of acceptable academic knowledge.

Using Heidegger's philosophy of phenomenological research, the considerations between the two different models of disability – the social and the medical - have been discussed. In regards to this study, one could argue the ontological consideration is that of disability, especially when aligned with the medical model. From a positivist, biological vantage we could state that the only objective, detached knowledge present was that the participants were 'disabled' as defined by the World Health Organisation International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. The ontological knowledge is that (for example) if a participant was born without a left hand then the participant physically does not have a left hand. However, the underlying point of the interpretative analysis for this study is to determine to *what extent* the participant's ontological knowledge of not having a left hand influences their epistemological understandings of their life experiences in times of liquid modernity, and to what extent this is reflected in the accounts produced. The methodology and methods employed therefore reflect this. What follows is a

detailed account of the methodology and subsequent methods employed for this study.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Rationale for the Method

Phenomenological researchers agree that the central concern of an investigation is to return to “embodied, experiential meanings aiming for a fresh, complex, rich description of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (Finlay, 2009, p.6). This heuristic paradigm stresses the importance of studying the whole, subjective experience of individuals by examining the way people perceive, create and interpret their world. This shift from more rigid methods has led to a greater emphasis on experiential knowledge and recommended differential idiographic approaches to investigation (Côté, Salmela, Baria & Russell, 1993). However, contemporary phenomenologists are challenged to recognise that any knowledge produced is contingent and emergent and subject to alternative interpretations (Finlay, 2009) and, as stated by Garza (2007, p.338), “ the flexibility of phenomenological research and the adaptability of its methods to ever widening arcs of inquiry is one of its greatest strengths”.

Marotta (2002, p.39) argues that when a project concerning the ‘social’ adopts a positivist paradigm it becomes “deterministic rather than hopeful and critical”. It forcibly imposes boundaries which restrict exploratory work and therefore deny the potential of ‘hope’ within emancipatory research. Breaking away from positivism, scholars across a number of disciplines are (re)discovering the narrative nature of human beings (Sandelowski, 1991). This study analyses the narratives of a particular sample of individuals and takes their personal

accounts of particular experiences as a representation of a life at a given moment rather than the life itself. The qualitative nature of interpretation encourages the researcher to attempt to develop a deeper understanding of the *'how's'* and *'why's'* of the phenomenology being investigated; the attempt to interpret and better understand the lived experience, thus allowing us to think sociologically. In regards to placing this form of research into the context of Disability Studies, and studies in sport and education, interpretive investigation reveals, and potentially suggests solutions for analytical problems that have typically been disguised in conventional debates concerning objectivity and validity. In particular, these problems involve the ambiguous nature of truth and the metaphoric nature of language in communicating an objective reality. Indeed, McFee (2011) writes extensively on the subject of the epistemology of sport, discussing ethics, knowledge and truth within the logical conception of research.

Constructivist approaches to the study of lives reveal the extent to which these problems have been "conditioned by empirical rather than narrative or biographical standards of truth" and by a preoccupation with obtaining information at the expense of understanding expression within a particular context (Sandelowski, 1991, p.162). As such, "interpretive research tackles the inherently contradictory project of making something scientific out of everything biographical" (Geertz, 1988, p.161). It recognises and accounts for the temporality and liminality of human beings and their environments, and allows for the historical and socio-cultural constraints which undoubtedly affect and influence narratives and their interpretation.

According to Somers (1994), while the older interpretation of narrative was limited to that of a representational form, more recent approaches define narrative as possessing concepts of social epistemology and social ontology. These concepts posit that it is through narrative that we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world, and it is through these narratives (those which we tell and those which we listen to) that we constitute our social identities. Knowing this, it can be argued that it matters not whether those engaged in phenomenological investigation are social scientists or subjects of historical research, but that all humans come to be how they are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating themselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of their own making. As identified by Marx (1818 - 1883):

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.” (cited in Murray, 2000, p.334)

When applying this particular perspective to this study, it must be considered that the narratives told are constructed and presented under differing social conditions of which the participants have varying levels of choice and control. For example in this study whilst the categorical identities of being a student and of being an athlete have been self-imposed by choice (in the absolute sense one could argue), the identity of being disabled is not, and neither are the historical conditions and societal underpinnings of each.

Liquid Modernity was used a lens through which to view the lives of these Paralympic student-athletes. However, it is important to state that the concept

was not imposed upon the methodological process of the research, and was not intended to oppress, limit or restrict the narratives produced. The participants were not asked to relate or associate their answers with any form of deliberate and forethought approach. They were not expected to understand liquid modernity as a concept of social theory and (as is detailed later in the chapter) were not provided with background information regarding Bauman and his work. Additionally, the interview questions were not scripted in a way that explicitly linked them to Bauman's observations (for example a participant would be asked: "Tell me, how do you feel about being a student with a disability at your university", as opposed to "Tell me, does your disability make you feel alienated at university"). Knowing this, it was not expected that the participants would produce narratives which they themselves purposefully framed in the theoretical concept of liquid modernity, more that the narratives were simply a dialogue between the participant and the researcher which were (in every attempt) free from pre-determined underpinnings of social theory.

Considering the above, the methodological considerations for this study are complex. The narratives produced by the participants present a discourse of their own making built upon their own ontological and epistemological understanding of their lived experiences under the conditions of Bauman's Liquid Modernity – therefore the phenomenological research methods employed must be responsive to both the phenomenon and the subjective interconnection between researcher and researched. As Langdridge (2008, p.1131) notes however, in practice there are no hard and fast boundaries between the varieties of qualitative research methods as "such boundaries would be antithetical to the spirit of the phenomenological tradition that prizes individuality

and creativity”. Knowing that the study is one of phenomenology, the method of Interpretative Analysis was employed for data analysis.

3.3.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a methodology that has developed from three approaches to qualitative research; the phenomenological, the hermeneutic and Symbolic Interactionism. The primary aim of IPA is to consider the phenomenon of a person’s experience as constructed, in this case, between the participant and the interviewer and to interpret these experiences using social, theoretical and cultural concepts (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). Additionally, the method incorporates and allows for the idiographic. The central objective of IPA is to understand what personal and social experiences mean to the people who experience them (Shaw, 2010).

The foundations of IPA lie in Psychology. Smith (1996) argued for an approach to psychological research which was able to capture the experiential and qualitative, and which could still dialogue with mainstream psychology. Smith felt psychology needed a centralised approach to qualitative work which was not borrowed from other disciplines, an approach which incorporated the objective without suppressing the experiential. The approach was to focus on the human predicament; to recognise the human as an agent and to focus on humans engaging with the world around them (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The aim of IPA is to explore how participants make sense of their experiences, therefore IPA engages with the meaning that experiences, events and actions hold for participants. At the same time, IPA recognises that the researcher’s

own conceptions are required in order to make sense of the personal world being studied through a process of interpretative activity (Chapman & Smith, 2002).

IPA is phenomenological in that it wishes to explore an individual's personal perception or account of an event or state as opposed to attempting to produce an objective record of the event or state itself. At the same time, while trying to get close to the participant's personal world, IPA considers that the researcher cannot do this directly or completely. It acknowledges that interpretations are bounded by participants' abilities to articulate their thoughts and experiences adequately, and it would follow, by the researcher's ability to reflect and analyse (Baillie, Smith, Hewison & Mason, 2000). The phenomenological element of IPA constructs the individual as "an entity that is essentially embedded, intertwined and which is otherwise immersed in the world that it inhabits" (Larkin et al, 2006, p.105). This is conceptualised by both Husserl's focus on individual psychological experience and his attempts to construct a philosophical science of consciousness, and also by Heidegger's phenomenological approach concerned with the ontological question of existence itself.

IPA is an approach which does not hold with the aspect phenomenological heritage of trying to capture the 'pure' human experience, but recognises that the narrative (or spoken account) will be an interpretation of the interaction between the researcher and the participant (Eatough & Smith, 2007). IPA allows for the participant's humanness and reality to be connected with what is essential when attempting to understand the experience of the participants as individuals, as an understanding of their individuality cannot be encompassed

by the 'Paralympic student-athlete' position. This sample of participants were asked to recount a number of events they have all experienced personally, for example 'Freshers Week' at university and Paralympic Sport Classification procedures. Similarly they share the same societal labels (student / athlete / disabled) and are engaged, broadly, in the same societal environments (academic / high performance sport / Western). Despite the shared events and cultures, each participant, due to the study's understanding of social action, will have consumed, produced and attached meanings to these which are utterly unique to that individual. Both convergence and divergence of signification can be explored. IPA has the fluidity to provide overarching themes of meaning and experience to the sample as a whole, but it maintains the paramount principle that the apprehension, insight and translation of an individual's life-world cannot be understood or expressed in, by or through group positions.

As IPA is interpretative, the area of hermeneutics must be considered. Hermeneutics is primarily concerned with understanding and interpreting meaning, with this meaning more often than not being derived from text (Porter & Robinson, 2011). Certainly within the qualitative practice, research is a dynamic process and researchers must assume an active role in becoming aware of how their own views, biases, culture and personal history will have a significant impact on how they view the world. Hermeneutics suggests that 'prejudice', pre-judgement or prior knowledge plays an important part in our understanding and, as argued by Gadamer (1975), that understanding always involves interpretation - using one's own preconceptions so that the meaning of the object can become clear to us. IPA considers that there is process of double hermeneutics when employing this method of analysis and applying it to

research. As is detailed by Smith and Osborn (2003, p.51) “the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world”. This acknowledgement of the double hermeneutics is essential when conducting research and using IPA as access to the participants experiences depends on, and is complicated by, the researcher’s own conceptions of the experience. Through the process of interpretative activity, this dual interpretation is necessary in order for the researcher to understand how the participants understand their life-worlds. As commented previously, therefore, the analysis consists of *my* attempted understandings of what it is like to be a Paralympic student-athlete (through a liquid modern lens) via narrative accounts of *their* understandings of what it is like to be a Paralympic student-athlete.

IPA acknowledges a debt to symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 1995) with its concern for how meanings are constructed by individuals within both a social and a personal world (Smith et al, 2003). Thus, the meanings which individuals ascribe to events are of central concern, but those meanings are only obtained through a process of social engagement and a process of interpretation. According to Chenitz & Swanson (1986), the theory of symbolic interactionism concerns itself with inner or experiential aspects of human behaviour; that is, the study of human conduct and human group life. Essentially, it focuses on how humans define events or reality and how they act in relation to their beliefs in natural or everyday settings.

In regards to this study, a focus on situational meaning is critical towards understanding the life-worlds of the participants. In order to understand the associated meanings, the researcher must embrace yet grapple the

participant's particular meaning within a specific context or situation (Charmaz, 2006). According to Blumer (1969) people are able to co-operate and assume mutually recognized roles because at some level there is agreement about the meaning of these symbols (whether between individuals, groups, communities, cultures or society). In order to be understood, there needs to be shared language and shared meanings between myself and the participants. However, the research addresses to what extent the level of agreement of these meanings becomes differentiated (from fragmented to completely unrecognizable) when there are fundamental differences between the researcher and the participant – of which I consider disability to be the biggest difference – but also differences between meanings of shared experiences, such as being a student for example. Whilst meanings are constructed by combining dynamic personal construct systems with shared social realities, I acknowledge that I am representing the Other, despite sharing a great deal in common with my participants. Claiming otherwise may render invisible important distinctions in experiences rooted in differences such as class, culture, sexuality, etc. (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). However, it is important to realize that not all experience can be shared. There are intrinsic limits on the scope of sharing, and as Dewey (1927) comments, an experience can only be shared in as far as the meaning and representation given by each participant to the signs and symbols associated with the experience itself are the same.

The idiographic aspect of IPA which allows what is distinct to be accessed as well as what is shared (Smith et al, 2003), is also an important aim of this research. The conceptualisation of each participant as an individual allows for difference between the participants rather than considering those interviewed as

a homogenous group. Whilst the participants are similar in that they are all Paralympic student-athletes, there are number of critical variables which will contribute to their narratives. Differences such as the severity of their disability, the sport they play, the university they attend and the onset of their disability will enrich the narratives and highlight the diversity of their lives. Additionally, the idiographic approach encourages attention to detail and depth of analysis to be considered within these experiences, positioning the participant as the expert of their experiences (Reid, Flowers & Larkins, 2005), forming part of the rationale for this research. The inductive nature of IPA also allows for unexpected themes to be generated, giving freedom for unanticipated descriptions to be included in the accounts produced.

IPA was therefore used to explore the participant's accounts of their experiences of being Paralympic student-athletes. The content of these narratives were analysed to consider the experiences of being a student, being an athlete and being disabled within the context they were presented by the participant, and included that which was described by the participant as relating to this context. The organised setting of the interview and subsequent interpretation by the researcher was acknowledged throughout the analysis. This aided in providing an overall descriptive analysis of the Paralympic student-athletes' experiences as indicated within the boundaries of these accounts and the methods employed.

By employing IPA, the method aims to bring to this research a contextual perspective of Paralympic student-athletes' experiences, which allows for attention to detail in this phenomenon that can be either individual or shared.

IPA also recognises its own construction between the researcher and the participant through the focus of interpretation. As Smith et al (2009) comment, human beings are sense making creatures and therefore the accounts they provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of what is happening to them. However the researcher must consider that access to experience always depends on what the participants tell us about that experience. The inductive nature of this method grants the participants to voice their experiences in their own words. This potentially allows for new material and a personal approach that connects with the phenomenon of individual human experience.

3.3.3 Liquid Modernity and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The use of Bauman's Liquid Modernity as a conceptual framework to inform empirical, phenomenological studies is still very much in its infancy. As a commentary on the changes in societal traditions, the concept of liquid modernity seems to almost straddle the dividing line of realism and relativism (mirroring the theoretical vantage of IPA). As mentioned previously, Bauman is practical, pragmatic and current in his observations of the shifts in Western culture, proposing the cause and effect of these shifts in a logical, rational and methodological manner. In contrast however, he remains largely subjective throughout his work and reminds the reader that his words are merely his interpretation of the world he finds around him. He chooses his language thoughtfully; his writings filled with light hearted symbolic metaphors which serve to juxtapose the severity of his topics, combining diametrically opposed ways of comprehending and describing reality. As a result, Bauman consciously and consistently blurs the dividing line between theory and method by way of literary means and poetically inspired techniques – his sociology is one of an

alternative methodological stance lingering somewhere between science and literature, which at times can seem problematic in the world of academic research.

Jacobsen and Marshman (2008) argue that Bauman's work is not made less scientific by the fact that his way of practicing sociology is at odds with more prosaic and orthodox methodologies. Blackshaw (2002) argues that sociology must come to terms with the ways in which the world has changed around it and that Bauman offers:

“an extraordinary way to reinterpret and assimilate the most useful of some ‘older’ sociological postulations with ‘new’ theoretical insights to make sense of these new times.” (p.205)

However, many advocates of Bauman's work argue that it is the lack of empirical studies adopting liquid modernity which prevent it from being valued as an alternative to more traditional means of conducting sociological research (Blackshaw, 2002; Lee, 2006; Tester, 2001). In order for sociology to reach beyond the agenda of any particular paradigm, Bauman (2000, p.213) argues that “sociology must put individual self-awareness, understanding and responsibility at its focus” – that research must begin with self-reflexivity from the researcher. It is this integration of the position of the researcher, the flexibility and adaptability of the use of Bauman's sociology which makes it on the one hand so appealing and malleable to qualitative studies, yet on the other can appear to lack academic rigour. The marriage of liquid modernity with IPA provides a mutually beneficial ground for cultivating empirical research within the interpretative frame. Bauman understands that there are many ways in which the ‘story’ of sociology, and the stories of its actors and agents, can be

told. Bauman argues for dissolving the clear cut divisions between the different realms of human knowledge and to expose a more lenient attitude towards how to conduct and report sociological knowledge. Knowing this, IPA was considered the most appropriate method of analysis to complement Bauman's complex, unconventional and "pseudo-scientific" sociology.

Knowledge originates both from rationality, logic, statistics and reason and also, equally important, from literary sensitivity, feeling and emotion. This demonstrates the significance of how an experience is consumed by the participant is concerned with the convening of the psychology of the individual with the sociology of their life environment. Jacobsen et al (2008) link Bauman's sociology to that of Redfield (1948) in his description of social science as an 'art':

"Like the novelist, the scientific student of society must project the sympathetic understanding which he has of people with motives, desires, and moral judgements into the subject he is treating. Neither the one nor the other can get along without this gift, this means of understanding." (p.184)

Jacobsen et al (2008) comment that it is this special 'gift', this 'sympathetic understanding' is the trademark of Bauman's sociology. Thus, it would stand to reason that the most appropriate method of analysis to fit this sociology would be one which allows for such subjectivity, which welcomes a layered understanding and which seeks to explore more than the production of generalised, 'en masse' statistics. IPA does just this.

Rorty (1979) comments that in most research of social inquiry, the researcher produces a study which takes on the normal discourse of legislative reason; one

that is heavy in both historical and political direction and dictation. He argues that the main aim of interpretative intellectual work should be to deconstruct the privileged position and for the researcher to allow their work to absorb and reflect any 'abnormal discourse', without fearing the obligation to follow or conform to traditional or accepted sociological procedures and findings. As is with IPA, the interpretative way of thinking about research makes the tacit assumption that there is no single understanding of reality and that there is no observation that is not discursively positioned. Bauman is clear in his writing about his own limitations in proving a 'true' account of contemporary society, and that for him hermeneutic work, including his own, functions as a corrective to the detached deployment of what he describes as modern, authoritative legislative reason. Much of Bauman's work is critical of hermeneutics and seeks to incorporate, explain and include the role it plays in the development of society as he views it. According to Bauman (Bauman & May, 2001, p.172) "understanding that human actions are meaningful is the foundation of hermeneutics". Indeed, Tester (2004) comments that interpretative sociology is one that Bauman has always practised. For Bauman (1992), interpretative intellectual work:

"demonstrates in practice (even if not in theory) the non-exclusiveness of any of the competing interpretations, the absence of any single authoritative standpoint from which unambiguous and universally binding pronouncements can be made." (p.90)

In Bauman's hands, the hermeneutic method is artistic and represents a clear challenge to the dominant vision of the natural science of the social and as Bauman himself makes plain, there could be no other way with sociology 'made to the measure' of liquid modernity: As Bauman (2000, p216) argues "there is no

choice between “engaged” or “neutral” ways of doing sociology - non-committal sociology is an impossibility”. Bauman has no appetite for highly systemised research; he resists at length the structured, linear arguments of so-called ‘academic sociology’ and rebuffs almost all abstract reasoning. His books, chapters, articles and interviews appear to point to a rooted distrust of methodological preoccupation. He questions the traditional standing of rigid research methodology and confronts the misconception that obdurate, inflexible methodology satisfactorily produces ‘truth’. Nijhoff (1998) observes that Bauman switches back and forth between literary and logical exposition, changing his vantage from hermeneutical to systematical, analytical and back within a few pages. Yet, the structure, direction and coherence of Bauman’s work flows from his primary ambition to participate in an on-going dialogue with human existence (Jacobsen et al, 2008).

Perhaps Blackshaw (2002) writes it best when concluding on the use of Bauman’s sociology to inform academic research within the domain of sociology, especially within the field of sociology of sport:

“Bauman’s understanding of sociology is a vision to which the sociology of sport should try to aspire to as it quite properly places shared understanding, rigorous debate and creativity at the heart of the sociological imagination in order to facilitate conversation between different interpretative traditions instead of looking at intellectual work in sociology as a legislating tactic for dominating the entire field of study.” (p.213)

Therefore, the connection between the use of IPA to analyse a study conceptually framed by liquid modernity is convincing, with both being grounded in the principles of adaptability, interpretation, understanding and agreeing on a theoretical position that allows, to a degree, for the inclusion of relativism and

positivism in their approaches. The variety and complexity that all kinds of life present should, at the very least, allow the meeting of several ideas together when researching within the realms of experience and life-worlds. The refusal of some scholars to accept multiple approaches to their research can deny academic culture from thinking 'sociologically', preventing the discipline from furthering the apprehension of the lives of others. This knowledge and understanding of others can provide sociologists with a general set of professional and personal aims, coming full circle to Bauman's initial consideration for interpretative, self-reflexive research: "Sociology is therefore central to the endeavour of coming to understand ourselves in better ways" (Bauman & May 2001, p.180). A full detailed exploration of the reflexivity undertaken during this study is available in Appendix G. Having explored the methodological understandings and the rationale for the method employed, the study procedure will now be discussed.

3.4 Procedure

3.4.1 Ethics

A primary concern regarding the ethical considerations of this study was the ability to demonstrate to the University Research Ethics Committee the acknowledgement and consideration of any accompanying cognitive disability to any physical impairment. The necessary documentation was completed and submitted detailing the process of identifying a participant's capacity to consent. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the University Research Ethics Committee on 20th December 2011.

Payment for research participation has raised ethical concerns, especially with respect to its potential for coercion. In medical and psychological studies monetary payments to participants are commonplace, and there has been discussion in these fields about the role and impact of making such payments (see Russell, Moralejo, & Burgess, 2000; Singer & Kulka, 2002). In qualitative social research the practice of paying for participation is becoming increasingly common (Head, 2009). Sandel (2003, p.77) discusses the two major principles concerning the payment of participants in qualitative research – i) coercion and ii) corruption. His main argument is that there are some things that money should not be able to buy, including that of personal experience and that payment for participation “will degrade the idea of a common good that research contributes to, and instead transform it into another marketised exchange”. However, as Head (2009) comments, this line of argument may be of limited use to researchers in the field dealing with the difficulties of recruiting participants to research studies. This particular point is pertinent to this study.

For this study, each participant was given a £30 Amazon voucher to thank them for their time, with the voucher being presented to the participant at the start of the interview. Each participant had signed an informed consent form (see Appendix B) which detailed their right to terminate the interview at any point without needing to give reason and that their entitlement to the voucher would not be affected. This does not demonstrate corruption in any form. It could however be argued that this was coercive for participants to part take in the interviews if they were subject to any financial difficulties rather than them simply wishing to participate in the study. However, I believe the compensation to be justified for several reasons. In total, 37 potential participants were

identified and each contacted to gauge their initial interest in the study (see 3.4.3 Recruitment). At the time of initial contact with each participant, the compensation of a £30 voucher was not disclosed until the participant responded with an initial interest in the study. Out of the 37 participants contacted, 8 came forward to express an interest in being interviewed. Each participant could potentially be interviewed twice with no maximum interview time length specified. In addition to the interview participants were also requested to remain involved in the study for up to 6 months to ensure transcriptions of interviews were checked. For this reason the offer of £30 of a book voucher is not considered to influence the quality of the data. It is considered a reasonable amount of payment to the participants for their time and involvement in the study.

All of the information gathered was personal to the participant. The narrative data was exceptionally personal to each individual however more general personal information such as name, age, disability, National Governing Body etc. were also gathered. All audio/visual data collected was stored within password protected files on an external hard drive which was locked away when not in use and all paper data capture forms and transcripts were kept in a locked file. All participants remain anonymous throughout, with pseudonyms provided for the purposes of identification within the written element of the study. Although sports are named (as they are integral to the interpretation of the accounts) no sporting National Governing Bodies are named directly and neither are the universities attended by the participants.

3.4.2 Recruitment

Directors of Sport and Sport Scholarship Managers (titles differ between institutions) at a number of Higher Education institutes were contacted asking to forward on a pre-written email outlining the study to all disabled athletes at their college / university. Accompanying the email were documents detailing the study proposal, a participant information sheet and a participant information form. Athletes who were interested in participating in the study, or who wished to know more information were then asked to contact myself directly. The participants for this study were therefore self-selected.

3.4.3 Selection Criteria for participants

IPA challenges the traditional linear relationship between the number of participants and value of research. It retains an idiographic focus, with 10 participants at the higher end of most recommendations for sample sizes (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). Smith et al (1999) comment that IPA researchers usually try to find a fairly homogenous sample as the process of analysis of the phenomenon does not lend itself to random or representative sampling, especially if the population is small to begin with. Through purposive sampling, IPA aims to employ a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant. They note that how the specificity of a sample is defined will depend on the study and that in some cases the topic under investigation may itself be rare and define the boundaries of the relevant sample. IPA defends the use of small samples, enabling a competent theoretical perspective to be developed as long as adequate contextualisation is preserved (Chapman & Smith, 2002) via a “detailed, formulaic procedure” (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p.97).

The homogeneity of the group was that all participants had at least 3 commonalities in their lives; 1) A physical impairment great enough for them to be classified within a Paralympic sport; 2) Competing at a High Performance level in that sport; 3) Over 18 years old and studying full time at a Higher Education Institute in the United Kingdom (or had graduated within 12 months). These 3 commonalities also served as the selection criteria for participant recruitment with High Performance being defined as the participant being on a GB Paralympic Performance pathway. An additional criteria for selection was that the participant would not be eligible for the study if their condition incurred any form of diminished mental capacity.

Absolute homogeneity of the group would not be possible due to other variables such as the place of study, the sport, the nature of the participant's disability, the chosen university course, the socio-economic background of the participant etc. As Smith et al (1999, p.56) advocate "it should be remembered that one always has to be pragmatic when doing research; one's sample will in part be defined by who is prepared to be included in it". From correspondence with the universities a total of 8 student-athletes came forward to participate in the study. As stated by Smith and Eatough (2006), six to eight participants are recommended as an appropriate number of participants for a typical IPA study, however according to Smith (1999) there is no right answer to the question of sample size. When conducting IPA studies, breadth of information is often sacrificed for depth, as the main distinctive feature of IPA is its commitment to a rich, detailed interpretative account.

3.4.4 The participants

In total, 8 participants took part in the study (female = 5; male = 3) with an age range of 18yrs to 26yrs of age, with all participants being of White British ethnicity (which was not purposive, simply that was a commonality amongst the participants who responded to wanting to take part in the study). The participants came from the following sports: Athletics (n = 1); Blind Football (n = 1); Para-Equestrian (n = 1); Para-Sailing (n = 1); Swimming (n = 2); Wheelchair Fencing (n = 1) and Wheelchair Table Tennis (n = 1). The participants presented a range of disabilities: Amelia (n = 2); Retinoblastoma (n = 1); Fixed Dystonia with Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome (n = 1); Juvenile Arthritis (n = 1); Osteogenesis Imperfecta (n = 1); Post Brain Surgery Motor-Neuron dysfunction (n = 1); Turner Syndrome (n = 1) (Please Appendix D for Participant overview). Out of the 8 participants, 5 were still studying full time and 3 had graduated within the last 12 months. It was identified that participants were either studying at a High Performance Centre (HPC) university (n = 6) or a non-High Performance Centre university (N-HPC) (n = 2). A High Performance Sport university was defined as a university which hosts a hub sporting organisation (such as the English Institute of Sport or UK Sport) and / or the hub for a sport's National Governing Body, where as a non HPC university will have neither). The differences between an HPC university and a non-HPC university were identified by the on-campus facilities, services and opportunities available to the student (including training facilities, sport scholarships and sport performance services).

3.5 Interviews

Eight participants were interviewed over a 4 month period. Interviews were used to gather data on the experiences of being a Paralympic student-athlete

as told by each individual. As is argued by Atkinson & Silverman (1997) the face to face interview is thought to enable a special insight into subjectivity of a lived experience allowing for more open, textured and authentic accounts. Each participant engaged in one face-to-face interview with one participant being followed up and asked to answer 4 questions via e-mail due to sound quality issues on the media file of the original interview. Interviews ranged between 1 hour 45 minutes, to 2 hours 45 minutes and were guided by the responses given by the participants. The length of each interview was determined by the participant's length of answers and interest in the issues being discussed.

3.5.1 Interview questions

When conducting interviews, I encouraged the interviewee to speak about the topic in question in great detail but with as little prompting as possible. In IPA, the role of the interviewer is not to be too explicit in their questions, or their questioning, rather to ask gentle, unloaded questions to begin the interview, preparing prompts to help encourage interviewees to discuss the research topic without directly asking them to discuss the research topic. The questions were written to encourage the participants to talk about their athletic, academic and social experience as a person with a disability, and were not framed to reflect Bauman's ideas. Open, expansive questions were used to facilitate a detailed account of the experience being investigated. Each interview section contained approximately 5 questions, on average 3 were asked as the interview developed and prompted other areas of that particular topic relative to the participant to be explored. All questions were open ended and allowed for the

direction of the topic to be led by the participant, allowing the interview to be iterative rather than linear.

3.5.2 Structure of Interviews

The interview planning and process was informed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) guidelines to IPA. An interview schedule (Appendix C) was pre-prepared containing a list of main topics to be covered, namely sport, education and lifestyle. The interview structure was purposefully inclusive of IPA and allowed for the development of less structured and more free flowing accounts. Rapley (2004) states that interviewers:

“should not worry excessively about whether their questions and gestures are ‘too leading’ or ‘not empathetic’ enough; they should just get on with interacting with that specific person”. (p.16)

This approach to interviewing works well with IPA as one of the main principles of IPA is that each interview be recognised, treated and analysed as an event in itself. Following a less strict method allows for the unravelling of complexity or ambiguity in the respondent’s narrative and also the interviewer to probe and react to the interviewee’s interests and concerns.

The structure of the questioning followed a purposeful (but not fixed) outline. The interview began with a question which encouraged the participant to recount a descriptive episode, with more analytical questions being asked later. Participants were first asked about their present, then about their future and finally about their past, beginning the interview with less intrusive questions (concerning their sport and their education) and moving on to ask questions which dealt with more sensitive and personal subjects (such as their childhood).

It was anticipated that this order of questioning would help to better establish a researcher/interviewee rapport. If participants spoke of an event or incident or another aspect of their life which was felt to be of importance to elaborate or explore further, but perhaps was too early in the interview to do so, notes were made on the margins of the question sheet and the topic was revisited later into the interview at an appropriate time.

3.5.3 Interview procedure

Face-to-face interviews were conducted at an agreed place (interviewee's home, university library or their sports training centre). Rapley (2004) comments that the interviewer should always be aware of their immediate environment and how it can, and does, affect the talk of both the interviewer and the participant. Considering this, it was of utmost importance that the participant felt comfortable and able to express their narrative without worry or fear of possible interruptions by others. Interviewees were given a copy of the Participant Information Document (which they had read previously prior to the interview) and were briefed about the interview procedure and the forthcoming aspects of the study. Once all questions had been asked and answered to the satisfaction of the participant, each was asked to sign an informed consent form. All interviews were video recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. As was detailed in the Research Ethics Application form, the necessary referral systems were in place for each participant should the interview need to be terminated due to the participant becoming uncomfortable or distressed.

3.5.4 Pilot Interview

Despite previous training in Motivational Interviewing, this study was my first experience at conducting IPA interviews. Prior to conducting the first interview, a mock IPA interview with a member of my supervisory team was carried out. As each interview progressed the structure of the interviews became more relaxed. I considered that prior experience as a peer-mentor, teacher and athlete lifestyle support advisor had equipped me with skills to enable the interview to be conducted more in the style of a conversation rather than a formal research process.

Holloway (1997, p.121) comments that piloting of qualitative approaches can be carried out if the “researcher lacks confidence or is a novice, particularly when using the interview technique”. It was decided that the first interview to be arranged would be considered a pilot interview – this was Katy. Upon analysis of the interviews, Katy’s interview yielded 4 themes whereas the other interviews yielded between 5 and 7. I consider this to be a reflection of the increase of confidence in myself as a qualitative interviewer and additionally a reflection on the progression of my interviewing skills. Frankland and Bloor (1999, p.154) argue that piloting provides the researcher with a “clear definition of the focus of the study”. They continue to comment that contamination is less of a concern in qualitative research it is often that part or all of the pilot data is used in the main study. As Katy was a pilot interview, her complete analysis has not been included in Chapter 4, however it can be found in Appendix K. As it is regarded that qualitative data collection and analysis is often progressive, this study has chosen to include the results of the pilot interview in the discussion chapter.

3.6 Method of Analysis

3.6.1 Overview

The progressive analysis was undertaken in that IPA was carried out moving through the first interview to the last in order of data collected. What follows is a detailed review of the procedure.

3.6.2 Transcription

In regards to debating transcription in qualitative research, Ochs (1979, p.44) maintains “the transcript should reflect the particular interests of the researcher”. Cook (cited in Smith, Harré & Van Langenhove, 1995, p.105) argues the opposite in that there is a real danger “that each system records not the discourse but a particular approach to it”. Drawing on this, the interviews were carefully transcribed verbatim using the basic principles of transcription set out by O’Connell & Kowal (1995), who advocate that there is no single field-wide standard for analysts of the spoken word, instead providing a flexible guide to translation for researchers to follow. The data was anonymised within this process as pseudonyms were given and university locations and NGB’s removed to protect participants’ confidentiality.

3.6.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Procedure

Traditionally IPA has been a methodological tool which remains divorced from social theory or sociological frameworks as it is primarily concerned with an individual, personal and intimate psychological focus of experience. IPA is idiographic, committed to the detailed examination of the particular case, aiming to reveal the lived experience of each individual person. However, Smith et al (2009) comment that it is possible to move to more general claims with IPA but

that this should only be after the potential of the case has been realised. This study does, to an extent, move beyond the IPA process in producing a general claim of the liquid modern condition. After detailed examination of each individual case, the research question(s) was considered after the themes generated by the IPA analysis to examine to what extent the accounts of each participant demonstrates that the sociological observation of liquid modernity was applicable to their lived experiences and over lapping life-worlds. The following will provide a clear and detailed account of the procedure of the data analysis to demonstrate how the study tightly followed the guidelines (below) set out by Smith et al (2009), but additionally how the filter of liquid modernity was applied in the final stage of analysis to examine the combination of the personal experience in a newly observed societal condition.

Each interview was analysed as an occasion in its own right, meaning therefore that the context within which the narrative was spoken was taken into account throughout the analysis (Speer, 2007). The following steps were applied to each transcript.

Step 1: Reading and Re-reading

The transcribed data was read and re-read at the start of the process to help the researcher become more familiar with the material. Repeated reading is encouraged as it allows a model of the overall interview structure to develop and permits the researcher to gain an understanding of how narratives can bind certain sections of the interview together. Additionally, the re-reading also facilitates an appreciation of how rapport and trust may build across an

interview and thus highlight the location of richer and more detailed sections, or indeed contradictions and paradoxes (Smith et al, 2009).

Step 2: Initial noting

This initial level of analysis was the most detailed, examining semantic content and language on a very exploratory level. Initial noting of the first transcript employed protocols to delineate between identified descriptive comments, linguistic comments and conceptual comments, taking in account the interactions of the three different life-worlds discussed. This step is close to being free textual analysis with the aim of producing comprehensive and detailed notes and comments on the data, which have a clear phenomenological focus and stay close to the participant's explicit meaning. See Appendix H for an example of this stage of analysis.

Step 3: Developing emergent themes

The purpose of step three was to reduce the volume of initial notes written in step 2 whilst maintaining complexity in terms of mapping interrelationships, connections and patterns between the exploratory notes. Here, attempts were made to turn notes into themes by producing concise statements (or linking words) indicating significance and importance to the various comments attached to a transcript. Themes were expressed as phrases which encapsulated the root of a piece of text, being particular enough to be grounded whilst abstract enough to be conceptual.

Step 4: Searching for connections

This step involved the development of mapping how the emergent themes fitted together. This level of analysis was not prescriptive, rather it has the flexibility to explore and be innovative in terms of organising the analysis. At this stage some emergent themes were discarded due to the nature of the research question and the scope of the study. The remaining emergent themes were developed in to super-ordinate themes via the use of abstraction, subsumption, polarisation and contextualisation.

1. Abstraction: Here, the development of super-ordinate themes concerned the process of grouping 'like with like' statements. An example of this was grouping emerging themes concerning a participant's experience of daily life in a wheelchair.

2. Subsumption: Whilst similar to abstraction, subsumption operates where an emergent theme itself acquires a super-ordinate status by bringing together a series of related themes. An example of this would be a theme of 'struggling to overcome' which included themes such as social barriers, self-perception and poor sporting performance for example.

3. Polarisation: This approach involved examining the transcripts for oppositional relationships between emergent themes by focusing upon difference rather than similarity. An example of this was grouping statements concerning the experience of disability amongst team mates against the experience of disability amongst university friends.

4. Contextualisation: Contextualisation involved highlighting clusters of emergent themes which relate to particular narrative moments or key life events. An example of this was the experience of an elite athletic performance or the acquisition of a permanent disability. The completion of step 4 resulted in a moderate number of super-ordinate themes for each participant, examining

specifically the areas of high performance sport, university life and living with impairment.

Step 5: Applying the lens of liquid modernity

The research question for this study is 'To what extent is liquid modernity an effective metaphor for describing the life of a Paralympic student-athlete'. After super-ordinate themes had been defined, a filter was applied to determine to what extent these themes could be attributed to the categories of Identity, Otherness or Belonging. The themes presented by the individual analysis gave way to the discussions in Chapter 5, leading the study to focus on 3 particular topics of liquid modernity: Identity; Otherness; Belonging. Super-ordinate themes relating to the three aforementioned topics are reported whilst other super-ordinate themes that did not are not. The purpose for this was to ensure the research question was considered during the final stages of analysis. Applying this lens of liquid modernity allowed for the imbrication of complex analysis when bringing together the rich and detailed accounts of the life-worlds of each participant (and how these life-worlds interact with one another) within 3 particular psycho-social areas.

Step 6: Higher order themes

Higher order themes were created within the frames of Identity, Otherness and Belonging, often with one or two higher order themes being attributed to each. The higher order themes were developed as an overarching bracket to super-ordinate themes within each liquid modern frame. An example of this is:

“Otherness”: Theme 1: I am relatively normal student

Theme 2: My disability is not your problem

For an example of the process of examining emerging themes and creating super-ordinate and high order themes please see Appendix H.

Step 7: Writing

Each participant was written as an individual case (as seen in Chapter 4) to maintain the authenticity and individualistic properties of each account. Despite similar issues being discussed with each participant (athlete / student / disability) the variation of answers across the sample was so diverse that it was thought inappropriate to conduct cross case analysis concerning individual experience. Each case was written following the IPA guidelines of being comprehensive, systematic and persuasive (Smith et al, 2009), providing detailed analytic interpretations of the texts. For each participant an introductory section was written which contextualised the interview setting and gave brief information regarding the participant. Chapter 5 explores the drawing together of the overlapping experiences present in each account and summarises these experiences through the lens of Bauman's Liquid Modernity.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has provided in detail the methodological process and the methods used to collect and analyse the data for this study. In addition, it has demonstrated the reflexivity required when undertaking a project such as this. What is important to note, as has been expressed by Barnes (2006), there that is no one universal position on how the relationship between researcher experience and the researched phenomenon should be constructed – the relationship between experience and scholarship is constructed differently

between universities and the individuals and groups concerned. It is anticipated that this chapter has provided the reader with transparent and necessary information in order to be explicit about the relationship between subjective experience and the objective action in the scholarly activity and the wider world.

Chapter Four

Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from conducting an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of each of the 8 accounts given. It is anticipated that the sections below will aid the reading of this chapter, as well as reminding the reader of the overlap of a psychological-sociological study such as this. According to Stake (1995):

“There is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as final complications.”(p.7)

The above best demonstrates my approach to the analysis of each account given. What follows is a gentle, suggested guide for how this chapter should be read to best understand the presentation and the outcomes of the analysis.

4.2 How to read this chapter

This study sits at the junction of where the psychological meets the sociological. The accounts given are analysed in the context of the individual's personal world, but at times reflects on the importance of how the social surroundings of the individual could influence or help explain the account given. Each account is taken as an event in itself and is treated as such. The questions and answers given by each participant did not serve to influence the interviews with

subsequent participants. When reading the accounts, the reader is told when I, the author, am suggesting an interpretation of a specific extract in relation to the participant, or in reference to their environment. As each account unfolds and themes are presented, the analysis stays as close to the original text as possible during the process of interpretation. What the reader will notice is that once an analysis of the personal has been made, an interpretation of the account in relation to Bauman's Liquid Modernity is often offered to demonstrate the relevance of the extract in a sociological context. The importance of knowing the life-world of the participants, as well as the wider social contexts within which they are located is stressed by Channer (1995) and Agyeman (2008) and is felt to be of significance for this particular study.

This chapter presents the participants as individuals, with thoroughly different life-worlds, and details each of these life-worlds with themes specific to the person. The following chapter, Chapter 5, provides the reader with a much more detailed analysis of how the collection of these accounts answers the research question. A summary table of each individual and their themes can be found in Appendix J.

4.3 How to read each participant case

Each case is presented with the same format. The following details the structure of each of the cases presented and offers the reader a thoughtful insight into the process of writing the analysis of each participant account.

4.3.1 About the participant

At the beginning of each case study, the reader is provided with a short introduction to the participant, focusing on the key details of each including their age, their sport, their year of study and their disability.

The reader is strongly encouraged to refer to Appendix I: *About the participants: Contextualising the interview environments*. This appendix provides a reflexive note on 'About' the individual. In this appendix the reader is provided with contextual information to better place the interview in regards to how the analysis was produced. So that the interview can be completely consumed by the reader as a lived experience, attempts have been made to be as transparent as possible as to how the accounts have been interpreted. This includes information about the setting of the interview (the room for example), detail on how the participant greeted me, and my immediate judgements of the participant. I feel it is of utmost importance for the reader to understand not only the participant's account of their life, but also my interpretation of the time that I was with them for interview. I suggest that without complete contextualisation of the interview and without offering my personal contribution to how I may have interpreted the accounts, the data produced may be open to rebuttal and considered inadequate or invalid. I contend that the initial and immediate reflection presented at the start of each case leaves the analysis to be understood openly and in its entirety.

4.3.2 IPA and the themes presented

The approach to analysis that I have adopted is based on allowing the construction of themes to develop from the descriptions and recounted experiences of the participants. They are not imposed themes, rather they

reflect the emphasis given by participants to areas of their lives. As would be anticipated from asking questions regarding being an athlete, being a student and being disabled, themes concerning identity, Otherness and culture were loosely identified, however, the idiographic, individualistic nature of the account meant that themes do not focus specifically on these categories and stay close to the words given by the participants. As a result, the themes presented are wide ranging and each account differs in the number of themes presented. Whilst a great number of topics were discussed in each interview, the themes presented and represent a major significance in the account given of their lived experiences as a Paralympic student-athlete.

4.3.3 Who is the participant?

At the end of each case is a section which aims to answer who the participant is. It is an interpretation of my final interaction with the participant. When each interview was drawing to a close I would find a way to bring the conversation to finish with the participant reflecting on who they thought they were. I wanted to know their interpretation of themselves in order to help me put forward my interpretation of their accounts. The variation in answers given was fascinating, truly emphasizing that despite all 8 participants sharing commonalities across their life-worlds, I was absolutely interviewing a collection of individuals; individuals who all interpreted their academic, athletic and social experiences extremely differently.

4.4 The ordering of the cases

The cases have been ordered in such a way that allows the reader to develop a sense of scale between the participants and are done so according to my

interpretation of the physical severity their disability has had, or currently has, on their life, beginning with the least severely disabled participant. It is hoped that by ordering the cases in such a way the reader will sense the continuum of disability presented. Additionally it is hoped that my placing cases side by side where participants would be classed as having medically similar disabilities, the difference between the life experiences and associated themes for each would become polarised, emphasizing that a similar disability does in no way result in a similar life experience.

Amy

About Amy

Amy was a 23 year old swimmer and had graduated from a high performance sport university 12 months prior to the interview. Born with the condition Amelia (commonly referred to as congenital amputation), she had already attended the 2004 and 2008 Paralympic Games and was hoping to be selected for the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

Theme 1: Struggling to identify with the image of 'disabled'

Being a Paralympic athlete for the past 8 years, the topic of disability was one that Amy had little trouble discussing. As we spoke, she covered many areas for discussion, from the small, intimate areas of disability associated with her experience of self, to social perceptions of disability sport, even to over-arching comments about Amy's position within the 'disabled community' as a whole. The subject was explored from the parochial to the broad and allowed for a detailed account of Amy's understanding of disability.

I felt that Amy struggled to separate her own truthful, genuine responses to her disability from the responses she thought that she *should* have in order to appear unaffected by the reactions of others to her arm. It became clear that Amy's disability and its contribution to her identity away from the pool was a controversial and contentious subject for her. Whilst she was embracing and accepting of her disability and her difference in relation to her sporting endeavours, at times her conversation appeared contradictory towards it in her other life-worlds.

"I was never very good at going into my uni department and being like 'look I'm a Paralympic athlete' you know, I would just blend into the background" (Pg 18, Ln 548)

I felt that Amy wanting to *'blend in'* demonstrated she experienced difference due to her disability as an athlete and so did her best to divorce this feeling from her academic environment, manipulating her identity based on when being seen as 'different' could be considered advantageous for her (i.e. sport) and when she chose to remain anonymous. This continued to be demonstrated by the discord in Amy's account as she clearly fought with her identity of being classified as 'disabled'.

"I don't really know if I'd class myself as disabled, but then again if there was an information sheet that said do you have a disability I would tick 'yes'" (Pg 23, Ln 716)

Bauman's notion of identity being a task or being a problem is certainly applicable to Amy. Amy did not recognise herself as someone that she would identify with her own perception of a disabled individual. I felt that her involvement in disability sport over such a long period of time had led to her valuing by comparison what it meant for her, personally, to be disabled and why she struggled to identify to this identity as such.

"(...) there's somebody worse off than you (...) you can look around the pool and be like 'I have nothing to complain about'" (Pg 6, Ln 165)

However, she went on to demonstrate that she struggles to reconcile her conflicting identities. She understood that the social structures within which she exists (especially within sport) compel her to admit that is disabled.

“I guess because I am a Paralympic swimmer I do have to class myself as disabled” (Pg 24, Ln 723)

The meeting of these two identities was a difficult situation for Amy to negotiate. Below, Amy appeared to sum up quite well her attitude towards the dispute she has with her disabled and non-disabled self.

“(…) I don’t know <pause> labels, labels” (Pg 24, Ln 718)

I felt Amy became uncomfortable talking about the issue, having to define herself as someone (or something) that for medical purposes (and therefore sport) she is, but in regards to her self-image in society is not. She more often than not brushed the issue aside, choosing instead to relate her understanding of her identity as a disabled individual to her sporting classification. This is demonstrated in the extract below concerning how she measured her understanding of her disability against the disabilities of those around her.

“I’m very easy, my classification system I just go in, they measure one arm, measure the other and I’m done” (Pg 24, Ln 735)

I consider that Amy finding the process as ‘easy’ displays that she understands that for some other Paralympic athletes the process can be drawn out, painful, dehumanising and humiliating. The classification process forces athletes to recognise what they are *not* capable of; going against the disability discourse of focusing on what an individual *is* capable of. Classification is when Amy is forced to admit to her disability, yet at the same time exposes the lack of ‘disabledness’ she has experienced when compared to others. Acknowledging this, Amy went on to explain further:

“I guess for a lot of people their disability can change which can always leave you a bit anxious in the Paralympics (...) I know I’m in the right class, it’s like there’s no way a tape measure can lie” (Pg 24, Ln 753)

I do not necessarily consider that Amy felt fraudulent about her claim to disability, more that her years in high performance disability sport have led her to compartmentalise her disability.

Amy experienced the greatest division in her disabled identity when her identity spilt out of the ‘Paralympian’ compartment. In the pool Amy is a medal winning athlete born with Amelia. Away from the pool her identity is conventional.

Me: “Can you tell me if or how you consider yourself to be different from the ‘average’ 23 year old?”

Amy: “Um I don’t really see myself as different”. (Pg 25, Ln 755)

Amy found it hard to distinguish and define herself away from the pool. She has had the identity of a Paralympic swimmer for so long now I believe she struggled to concede an identity outside of this. I interpret her difficulty to identify herself as disabled away from her sporting environment as being tied to her own perceptions and prejudices of disability outside of the sporting world. This is discussed further in Theme 3 where Amy expressed a disassociation from the label ‘disabled’ if it is not tied to ‘athlete’.

Theme 2: An Elite athlete (arm or no arm)

There was no question that Amy is to be considered an elite level athlete. During her interview she gave countless examples of the clash between the

solidity of sport and her attempted liquid life whilst trying to become the world's best Paralympic swimmer in her category. When I asked Amy if she would call herself an elite level athlete her answer, unlike other participants', was said without hesitation or contemplation.

"Yes" (Pg 4, Ln 98)

We discussed at length her experiences of being an elite level athlete for so many years, however, during the interview it became apparent that Amy talked about the more negative aspects of her life-world as an elite level athlete.

Throughout the interview, Amy discussed the number of times she had experienced people in her sporting life-world to consider her as different to them. Amy talked openly about the difficulty she experienced with her current coach, causing her to question what it was about how he consumed her identity which provoked such behaviour from him.

"(...) when I first moved to[her city] , he didn't really accept me, I don't know if it was because of my disability or what" (Pg 6, Ln 173)

Amy established the difficulty she encountered within sport concerning her identity of being classed as elite but also be categorised as disabled. She seemed to hope that her identity as being disabled was not the reason for the difficulties she had with her coach but she was aware that it could be. Despite her remark appearing to be one of indifference, it was clear that Amy considered that her disability could potentially be a factor influencing their relationship.

She continued to express situations which perpetuated her experience as an elite athlete with the identity of being disabled in an able bodied sporting environment.

“He’d never come to any disability competitions to support, he’s really only ever there at the able bodied competitions” (Pg 5, Ln 177)

It was clear that Amy did not experience her athletic identity to be equal to the able body athletes in the eyes of her coach. I felt these experiences of inequality produced an undertone of unhappiness and resentment in Amy. I felt that for Amy, her coach’s focus on her disability detracted from and reduced her athletic identity. This tension was augmented when she commented that she felt that within her club her disability was not an issue for the other swimmers.

“Well I mean I swim in an able bodied squad here and nope I don’t see myself as any different and no one treats me any differently.” (Pg 5, Ln 184)

Amy did not identify herself as being any different from her sporting peers. She was an elite athlete, just as they were. However, despite competing for the same country, with the shared goal of winning medals, Amy indicated her label of disability evoked a clear separation from the elite able body squad. This is highlighted below, with her repetition of ‘*able bodied world*’ demonstrating the divide Amy feels between the groups of swimmers.

“(...) people in the able body world, like, <pause> so, it’s never going to be quite as competitive as it is in the able bodied world” (Pg 6, Ln 192)

This was difficult for Amy, as the following extract reveals. Being an athlete was so engrained in her way of living that she was prepared to sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of her sporting ambitions. She was aware that her identity as a disabled athlete was a contributing factor to her dissatisfaction.

“It’s really hard (...) I could have quite easily moved away and gone somewhere else and be happy, but at the same time I was performing [well] so why would I move away?” (Pg 7, Ln 211)

In the liquid modern world, Bauman comments that ties are broken when the relationship is no long advantageous. With the above extract, Amy explains she is not willing to sever this bond – her athlete identity is so strong that she will persevere the misery in order to obtain the glory. Despite these feelings of inadequacy and frustration, Amy chooses to stay in the elite sporting world for as long as is possible, demonstrating a lifelong commitment to her sport.

“Swimming is so important because it’s been in my life for so long (...) until I’ve achieved my goal I won’t let anything get in the way of that.” (Pg 7, Ln 215)

In choosing to stay in elite sport, Amy provided insight into how the lifestyle of obtaining this goal impacts on her ability to live in the liquid modern world. Her tie to her athlete identity almost certainly prevented her from participating fully in the liquid modern mantra of opportunity, freedom, movement and consumption.

“Well I mean you can’t not sacrifice, pretty much your whole life is a sacrifice” (Pg 8, Ln 225)

As Bauman comments, the key to happiness in liquid modern living is flexibility. Amy explains how she is unable to live a full liquid life within the solid structure of sport.

“(...) I'm just so unflexible (...) I just don't have the time” (Pg 3, Ln 79)

However, Amy considered her life at the time of the interview as saturated, demonstrating that she is attempting to live it as liquid modern society dictates: fully, quickly and independently.

“I guess I do have a lot of freedom but I try to fill it up as much as possible (...) I'm very much looking to keep myself busy” (Pg 16, Ln 475)

I felt that throughout the interview Amy gave examples of her accelerated living, juxtaposed against the solid sporting framework inevitably accompanying her athletic identity. It seemed to be this clashing of the liquid life she wanted to lead and the solid structure she was trapped by which provided the greatest difficulties for Amy. However, despite all the difficulties Amy experienced as an athlete she made a comment which perhaps concludes why it is that she continues to choose to remain in a life-world where she experiences unhappiness and discrimination due to her identity as an Paralympic athlete:

“I still really love swimming and why would you give up something you love if you're still performing?” (Pg 4, Ln 117)

For Amy, to truly ‘love’ something is reason enough to stay put, to not relinquish your position and seek new opportunities as is expected in the liquid modern world. Despite the confliction of her identities, she chooses to remain in a

repetitive life-world she dislikes in order to do the one thing she loves until she achieves her finite goal. It is what happens after that goal that seems more align with Bauman's considerations of a liquid modernity.

Theme 3: Not that 'kind' of person

When it came to being labelled as disabled Amy was divided. As a disabled Paralympic athlete, she very much considered herself as belonging to such a group.

*"(...) like I say we don't, we don't really see ourselves as disabled
(...) we're sort of all in it to achieve the same thing" (Pg 12, 365)*

However, outside of the sporting world, Amy very much displayed a disassociation with the disabled community, especially if she felt people would categorise her with the same characteristics.

*"(...) if I meet some with a disability I'm like why do you feel sorry
for yourself? It brings us a bad name" (Pg 21, Ln 623)*

The dichotomy of Bauman's Identity/Label argument sits centrally at a psycho-social study such as this. Here, Amy is clearly expressing the tension created by the intersection of an 'identity' as being something she gives herself but a 'label' as something society requires of her as a Paralympic athlete. It seems paradoxical that she felt such affinity with 'disabled athletes' yet such rejection at belonging with 'disabled people'.

Amy admitted that the majority of people she has met with disabilities were athletes. I consider the issue that the clustering of athletes in the world of

Paralympic sport provides little opportunity for the separation of what being disabled could mean to someone who isn't an athlete.

"I think also being surrounded by other disability athletes I know speaking to some of the other guys you kind of just feel like you can be completely yourself" (Pg 6, Ln 161)

This above extract demonstrates an environment of emotional security which Amy very much felt like she belonged to, and additionally *wants* to belong to. Her perception of disabled individuals was very much shaped by her involvement in disability sport.

"(...) people just find it [the Paralympic Games] more humbling because you're watching people that, that are perceived to have struggled in life, (...) there are people that have overcome many barriers" (Pg 10, Ln 285)

The words Amy chose seemed media rehearsed – ‘*humbling*’, ‘*struggle*’ ‘*overcome*’ and ‘*barriers*’ are words rarely used by Paralympic athletes to describe their own personal sporting endeavours as it puts the focus heavily on their disability, rather than their athleticism. I consider Amy's perception of disabled athletes to mirror the rhetoric of able bodied individual's perception of disabled athletes. I believe this extract indicates that Amy identified herself more with the image of an able bodied athlete than as a disabled athlete. I felt that she spoke of the athletes she had experienced at Paralympic level with inspiration and respect, almost acknowledging that these athletes belong to the disability sport movement more than she does. Upon recognising this Amy was quick to re-position herself as belonging to disability sport.

“(...) and I'm not just saying that because I've not struggled because that's not the case” (Pg 10, Ln 285)

I interpret Amy finding it difficult to reconcile her ideas of what it means to ‘struggle’ in life both in and away from high performance sport. I think Amy knew that she did not struggle in the same way she thinks others may do. The difficulty for Amy was that her disability contributed enormously to the individual she was when we met – a Paralympic athlete. I felt she found it almost impossible to separate her personal feelings of the perception of disability outside of sport with her feelings of responsibility and achievement as a Paralympic swimmer. Amy expressed her considered distinction between disabled athletes and disabled individuals:

“(...) in Paralympic sport there are so many people who have you know lost an arm or been in a crash (...) They are not sitting back on their laurels and being like ‘oh well I've lost my arm I can't do anything’” (Pg 12, Ln 348)

This feeling of disassociation from disabled individuals who may have such an attitude carried on throughout the interview. Indeed she was quite open and honest. She disliked the perception she had of the disabled community and actively identified herself as someone who did not fit her own perceptions of those ‘kind’ of people.

“I've never perceived myself as disabled, and never been that kind of person” (Pg 20, Ln 605)

“I find it embarrassing you know, it's like ‘why are you like that?’ you know? (Pg 21, Ln 624)

I feel the above extract demonstrates the complexity of disability. Clearly Amy experiences, rationalises and internalises her disability differently to others she

has experienced. To find the behaviour of those experiencing their disability differently to hers as '*embarrassing*' could be argued as quite conflicting for a Paralympic athlete.

Her experience of being disabled had brought her both joy and frustration, which was difficult for her to contend with. Regardless, Amy appeared to subscribe to the liquid modern condition of choosing her identity (able or disabled) to suit her audience. Amy's account of her position in the overall concept of disability was perplexing. However, I believe that because Amy was so successful at swimming she could not deduce why she *would not* belong in the high performance sport environment. Conversely, she considered herself to be so far removed from her perceptions of disability away from sport she could not deduce why she *would* want to belong to such a community of individuals. It was her perception of what made each community different to her that dictated the extent of her belonging.

However, Amy had hinted that the London 2012 Paralympic Games might be her last as she was contemplating retirement. Knowing this, I wanted to explore how she felt she would experience her life-worlds once she had hung up her cap and goggles for good.

Theme 4: Life in the 'real world'

Amy recognised that her participation in elite sport had prevented her from progressing forward. She considered that her life is not 'normal'.

"No it was purely from me [the decision to retire]; I'd decided that I do need to live a normal existence" (Pg 5, Ln 123)

She went on to discuss how being an elite athlete can distort *'real world'* experience, acknowledging that her sporting life-world was very different to her life-world outside of the high performance sport environment.

"(...) as an elite athlete you live a very sheltered life, you don't quite know what goes on in the real world" (Pg 4, Ln 124)

The idea of uncertainty bringing about insecurity is a principal argument throughout Bauman's work. I interpret Amy to demonstrate this liquid modern condition quite well when considering her future outside of sport, acknowledging her insecurity about the issue.

"I'm still not sure if it's something that I am ready to do, like I still don't feel as if I'm ready to go into that part of the world" (Pg 5, Ln 127)

Her choice to use *'that part of the world'* alludes to her experiencing herself as different for so long due to her sport that she experiences complete separation from another aspect of life which she knows she will have to transition to soon. She hinted to an uncertainty as to if she could, in fact, belong in *'that part of the world'*, triggering an emotional insecurity. Amy explained that her insecurities about living in this other life-world were due to an absolute shift of how her life would be ordered once swimming stops.

"It is quite scary because always throughout my life I've always had goals, I've always had something to aim to, you know I always know what my next step is" (Pg 5, Ln 134)

There is obvious tension here between the solidity of sport and the liquid modern world. To have fixed goals, to have *the* finite goal is a consistent trait of the solid world of sport. In contrast, the liquid modern world simply asks that you have a goal, preferably one that can easily be changed, moved, altered or relinquished should a better goal present itself. However, within the same answer Amy expressed an attitude towards her future which perfectly suits the liquid modern metaphor.

"I don't know where my life is leading me and I suppose that is a bit worrying but then I'm hoping some opportunities will come about and you know my life will take an amazing route (laughs)!"
(Pg5, Ln 137)

And, as Bauman would agree, the liquid modern condition is very much to have 'hope', to need 'opportunities', to expect the 'amazing', knowing that to be as flexible as possible is as the very core of liquid living.

Previously, the uncertainty of swimming had not necessarily created insecurities for Amy as she had the emotional security of knowing she had a team behind her planning her next stages, ensuring all could be done to fulfil her sporting potential. However, I interpret that the reality of losing the support structure that elite sport has provided for so many years would be both a frightening yet almost welcoming prospect for Amy.

"I've always had set things in stone for where my life was going to lead me, for swimming at least, so maybe it's good to have the opposite for a change and try to be as flexible as possible" (Pg 19, Ln 575)

Amy was the only participant who was nearing the end of her elite sporting career, and was beginning to consider her life without swimming – I suggest this could be the main contributor towards her emotional insecurity.

At the start of the interview Amy mentioned why she considered herself to be such a successful swimmer, revealing it was due to a distinct feeling of Otherness in her childhood.

Theme 5: Proving them wrong

I felt that the common thread throughout Amy's account was her personal experience of being perceived as Other. Amy explained that her first initial experience of feeling different was at her first swimming gala as a child after a remark about her ability to swim on account of her arm. Amy described her reaction to the negativity and how she internalised this feeling to use to her advantage.

"I remember just being really angry and being like 'well you know what I'm gonna prove you wrong (...) I'm gonna beat you, and I did.'" (Pg 1, Ln 14)

The early confrontation of needing to prove someone wrong resonated throughout Amy's interview. Her need to achieve seemed to be driven from this childhood experience of being made to feel inadequate or lacking by her peers. Additionally Amy explained that it was this particular experience of assumptions about her capability that most likely contributed to the athlete she is today.

"(...) that was kind of the moment that I kind of realised that I wanted to be a Paralympic swimmer (...) that satisfying feeling of just being, just kind of proving her wrong." (Pg 1, Ln 18)

The positive self-esteem gained from the experience of beating an able bodied individual gave her a sense of pride and assurance, which I felt seemed important to Amy. This initial negative experience had defined her attitude towards her disability and was carried throughout her interview.

“(...) like I know myself I've always wanted to prove <pause> you know <pause> people wrong” (Pg 14, Ln 526)

For some of the other participants it was clear that they were ‘*proving*’ themselves to themselves and for themselves. With Amy it seemed to be the opposite. Her reason and need for achieving did not appear to be internally driven, rather that it appeared to be prompted externally. I felt Amy did not need to prove anything to herself, rather she felt she needed to prove her capability to others. I felt this need to prove others wrong was a contributing sub ordinate theme to Amy experiencing herself as Other and is explored later in themes 6 and 7 in relation to her experiences of being an athlete.

When I questioned Amy about her sporting goal she gave a seemingly simple answer.

“A gold medal, a gold medal for GB” (Pg 8, Ln 221)

This answer encapsulates the issues demonstrated in this theme regarding a need to prove herself to others. I consider that Amy not choosing to answer with “*when I....*” or “*for me ...*” for example, indicates her athletic pursuits are rooted in her need to declare her capabilities to others. From this I interpret that achieving a gold medal is the end of her sporting goals, not the start. I felt that

winning a gold medal would satiate Amy's need enough to eclipse those feelings of Otherness she felt in the swimming pool as a child. During the interview we spoke more of how past experiences of Otherness have contributed to Amy being the person she is today.

Theme 6: Other both in and out of the pool

When discussing the issue of disability, Amy offered examples of how others have made her feel different by their reactions to her disability. Towards the end of the interview Amy spoke openly about the difficulties she experienced during her teenage years.

"I used to hate going into school because my teacher would say like 'get your arm out of your sleeve!' and you know I'd have to be like 'well I don't have an arm' and it would embarrass me" (Pg 17, Ln 650)

Amy expressed conflicting thoughts about to what extent she was changing for the approval of herself, or for the approval of others.

"(...) during my teenage years I was very self-conscious (...) but when I went into my 2 years at sixth form in the college I was like right I need to change this." (Pg 17, Ln 643)

Additionally Amy expressed the social anxiety she felt during her teenage years at being physically different from her peers. I consider that it was the actions and reactions of others which ignited Amy's desire to consider her disability differently. However, in the extract below, Amy seemed unsure, caught almost, between wanting to change her attitude towards her arm for herself, or wanting to change it for others.

“(...) so, me not loving myself I thought how am I ever going to get friends or guys to like me? So that was the point where I thought right I need to make a change and I just thought if people don’t like me for who I am then screw them”. (Pg 17, Ln 652)

Here, I consider that whilst Amy’s internal, personal self-concept was that she was ‘normal’, that she was not lacking, she struggled to contend this against the social norms of her environment. Amy appeared to be pushing away the social expectations of corporeality with one hand, yet drawing closer with the other her desire to be accepted and loved in spite of her arm. This was echoed later as Amy confessed that she still experiences such social anxieties today.

“(...) say I’m out on a night out somewhere and I’m with all my friends I tend to think ‘well why would they choose me?’ <pause> someone who’s only got one arm over my two other friends who are gorgeous and both have both their arms” (Pg 17, Ln 760)

From the interview, it seemed to emerge that Amy’s self-esteem was balanced on the reactions of others towards her physical appearance. She appeared to be self-conscious and aware that she may not be as aesthetically pleasing to the opposite sex, which troubled her. She did not experience herself as a ‘complete’ person. Again, with this topic Amy seemed to be caught – battling between what she wanted to say and what she thought she should want to say. She went on to justify herself, almost to explain herself to me for considering her arm in such a negative manner.

“I’m not proud to say that and I think it’s really bad to have that opinion of yourself but <pause> (...) [people] are going to think ‘she’s only got one arm, why would I want someone who’s only got something that’s half there?’” (Pg 17, Ln 763)

I sensed that Amy felt guilty in admitting that the reaction of others towards her arm does, at times, change her self-perception. I felt that the construction of

Amy's reality about her arm was located socially. The problem seemed, for Amy, was that her self-perception changed depending on the actions and reactions of others towards her arm.

"(...) people laughed about it (...) and that makes me feel comfortable, but it's when people are like 'oh that makes me feel really sick (...) that makes me think well thanks that makes me feel really great about myself.'" (Pg 22, Ln 661)

Amy's feelings of Otherness, brought about by the behaviour of those around her were not restricted to her social surroundings. She commented that these feelings of inadequacy and rejection had also been experienced in her sporting life-world. Despite winning individual medals at every major championship that she has competed in, Amy recognised a difference in the way she is treated by elite able body athletes and by the National Governing Body, feeling almost as if the disability swimmers are an obligation or a moral burden for elite swimming.

"(...) the GB able bodied squad, I feel as if they kind of slightly do look down on us, especially if we're at competitions that they are all at, it does always seem like we're second class" (Pg 5, Ln 185)

"(...) it kind of feels like we're just getting in the way and we're just plonked on the end of the [competition] schedule." (Pg 6, Ln 200)

Amy's use of the word 'us' and 'we' demonstrates her sense of belonging to the elite disability swimming community and that perhaps this feeling of inequality is recognised by other athletes as well her. I interpret her using the word 'plonked' to indicate Amy's experience of being treated with carelessness, with little thought or attention. Here Amy is experiencing herself as more than 'different' -

considering her treatment ‘*second class*’ can be interpreted as borderline Other with her sporting life-world being unequal, unfair and even demoralising.

Following on from this, in addition to feeling different due to her disability Amy also discussed how being an elite level athlete contributed to her experiencing feelings of Otherness as a student within her university environment.

Theme 7: An Elite Other-athlete

Amy attended a high performance sports university which, she admitted, she chose based on its links to elite level swimming. By the time Amy was in her first year of university, she had already attending one Paralympic Games and was only two years away from being selected for her next. For Amy, her university education had to be as fluid as possible to allow for her sport to take priority.

“(...) it turns out I couldn’t do speech therapy because of swimming, it was far too intense, too many hours” (Pg 13, Ln 382)

When confronted with the dilemma that Speech and Language Therapy would not be an option Amy chose another course which she felt would offer her more options.

“(...) I kind of felt it [linguistics] would lead me on to speech therapy but then obviously not tie me down by doing speech therapy because I wouldn’t be able to swim at the same time” (Pg 13, Ln392)

For Amy, the idea of being ‘*tied down*’ to one profession as a result of her degree subject was not appealing. Amy appeared to consider the notion of

being *'tied down'* as having a negative impact on her life, both by limiting her future career objectives and by disrupting her swimming.

Amy and I discussed her time at university and also the past few months where she has been outside of full time education. Despite attending a top sports university, she recalled how different she felt from her peers being an elite athlete.

"I felt like I missed out a lot on the social aspect of university, obviously going out on nights out, you know I'd be going out for training as they were all coming in from a night out" (Pg 8, Ln 228)

Yet Amy made only one reference to her experiencing her disability as a point for difference at university:

"(...) at freshers week, people didn't realise I had one arm (...) someone was like 'Oh can you just use your other arm or something?' and then she obviously realised and was absolutely mortified" (Pg 14, Ln 414)

After this Amy explained that her not having a forearm did not contribute towards her feelings of Otherness during her time at university, leading me to interpret that her disability was not a contributing factor to her feelings of Otherness whilst she was a student.

"(...) [everyone] realised that I was comfortable with my arm and it just became like a running joke" (Pg 14, Ln 418)

The missed yet expected social experience of university culture came through quite regularly when Amy described her time at university. I felt that Amy

experienced herself as more than different at university because she was at such an elite level in her sport.

Amy seemed to demonstrate a complete lack of participation, or even willingness of participation, in the expected university student life. She spoke candidly about her university experience and did not appear to reflect on her time at university with nostalgia or warmth, rather as a period of necessity in order to achieve her sporting ambitions.

“There were just so many times where I would miss out on those kinds of things (...) but they don’t really mean that much, when you’re standing on that medal podium, with that medal around your neck those moments don’t really mean anything to me.” (Pg 8, Ln 230)

Throughout the interview, Amy hinted that her time at university was perhaps quite isolated and unfulfilling. She peppered the interview with experiences of feeling very different to her peers. However, I felt that whilst the majority of her experiences of ‘different’ due to her disability were caused by others, her experiences of Otherness at university were self-administered due to her choosing to compete at such a high level of sport.

“No my life was definitely different, well like how many other students get up at 4 o’clock in the morning?!” (Pg 16, Ln 491)

It seemed apparent that the level of sport at which Amy participated very much prevented her from participating in the expected behaviour of university culture. There is the inherent expectation that university provides a platform for change and a plethora of opportunity. It seemed that Amy was rather disengaged and detached from this and the university experience. I felt that university was a

rather lonely time for Amy – as if she actively sought to remove herself from the swarm behaviour of her university peers.

“University is actually the stage where I feel I didn’t make many friends (...) at university, you know, constantly people are wanting to go on a night out and it’s like well no I can’t (Pg 16, Ln 486)

Whilst Amy commented greatly on the loss of social experiences at university she did not appear to grieve for these. She seemed quite removed from any possible disappointment incurred by not experiencing the same university life as her peers.

“Most people are so drunk they don’t even remember it so you know you can do that when you’re 30, or you know whenever you finish your swimming career” (Pg, 15, Ln 504)

It was clear throughout the interview that university was secondary to swimming for Amy. She discussed that university was almost something that she had to do, as a societal expectation, in order to increase the options available to her. However, Amy recognised that a university degree was of some value and that there was an expectation that a degree demonstrated abilities required by the liquid modern world - almost that without a degree you are deemed less able to contribute.

“(...) you’re not always going to have sport to fall back on and you almost need the academic to fall back on just in case otherwise what else are you going to have going for you?” (Pg 18, Ln 539)

At the time of the interview Amy had graduated and was training as an athlete full time. I asked her about her future now that she was out of full time

education. Amy expressed her disappointment at the lack of opportunity for personal development offered to her by university. It seemed that outside of her sporting environment university did not contribute towards Amy's current life-world at all. When asked about how university had helped her prepare for her future after swimming, Amy was rather negative and felt that her university failed to provide her with the skills she considered are required for existing in a liquid modern society.

"I suppose if I'm honest I don't think being at university taught me anything" (Pg 13, Ln 400)

When I questioned Amy about what her time at university meant to her, she concluded by saying:

"I don't know really <pause> it was great for my swimming though!" (Pg 16, Ln 564)

Exploring this a little deeper I asked Amy to explain to me if she felt different to her peers now in the same way she did when she was at university. It is here that Amy recognised herself as Other due to the life that she is choosing to lead in elite level sport. I felt that being an elite level athlete placed more restrictions and limitations on her experiences at university than her disability ever did.

"I guess my lifestyle was and still is very different to most people, I mean not many people train 4 hours a day, you know it's not normal <pause> I'm clearly a bit of a freak (laughs)!" (Pg 25, Ln 771)

Whereas traditional interpretation of language might have previously unified the word 'freak' to her disability, it appears Amy's interpretation of being a 'freak' is

to sacrifice assumed societal norms in order to pursue an individual (perhaps even egotistical) sporting eagerness. This absolute determination and need to achieve was consistently present throughout the interview, giving rise to the final section which provided great insight to the life of an athlete who was, at the time of interview, the second best swimmer in her category in the world.

Who is Amy?

At the end of each interview I asked the participant to describe themselves to me. Amy's response was short by comparison to most.

"Um, born missing my lower left arm, gone on to compete for Great Britain at the Paralympics in Athens and Beijing, and then hopefully London and then achieving a degree at university, um, I don't really know what else I'd say <pause> sounds like my life is really exciting doesn't it?! Sorry I'm not very good at talking about myself, I've never had to describe myself before, never had to say who I think I am before <pause> hmmmmm <pause>" (Pg 26, Ln 783)

From this response I interpret that Amy finds it difficult to describe herself outside of her sporting achievements. The account she gives of herself is factual, non-descript and emotionless. The ordering of her identities indicate that Amy is conscious that it is her disability which has led to her achieving such a high level sporting career, but it does not contribute to her identity outside of her sport. The information she provides about her degree displays little concern about her identity as a student in so far as she does not comment on her university or the title of her degree. This description tells us what Amy does, but does not give away anything into who Amy feels she is.

James

About James

James was a 23 year old middle distance athletic runner and had attended a non-high performance sport university. He had graduated 12 months prior to the interview and was training to be selected for the London 2012 Paralympic Games. James was born with Amelia (commonly referred to as congenital amputation) and was relatively new (2 years) to competing as a classified disability athlete.

Theme 1: The discontent with disability

Despite the struggle James encountered at identifying himself as a Paralympic athlete, he gave a single, small example of how his participation had helped him come to terms with accepting his arm.

“(...) since I've started doing athletics <pause> disability athletics and you know feeling proud that I should like what I'm doing and who I am that I've started to become more confident, at least with hiding it or showing it”(Pg 29, Ln 912)

I interpret this extract as James admitting that whilst he recognised his corporeality, he was never in a position where this was forced upon him. It was almost as if his condition was something that neither him, nor his family, peers nor fellow athletes drew attention to. Being on the Paralympic pathway has forced James to consider his disability much more than he had previously. When compared to the other participants, James has been part of his disability sporting life-world for a short length of time and at times his account demonstrated the lack of belonging he felt to his this new environment he found

himself in. The issue of disability has suddenly become a focus of his attention – his disability had now been brought forward to the present as opposed to it remaining in the background previously. James found it difficult to place his disability outside of his sporting ambitions.

“I don’t think I class myself as genuinely disabled, I think it would be like saying to someone, I don’t know, try to play badminton like I can and then call them disabled if they couldn’t do it” (Pg 35, Ln 1082)

Despite not having his right forearm, he was still an accomplished musician, again exposing ever so slightly his intrinsic need to achieve as well as his want to not be seen by others as disabled.

“I don’t know, there’s not a lot I can’t, I mean I can’t skip (laughs) but that’s about it.” (Pg 35, Ln 1085)

James did not consider his disability to prevent him from participating purposefully in his surroundings. Working as an occupational therapist, James was the educated, qualified and certified guide on the liquid modern mantra of autonomy. He contemplated the fundamental doctrine of living in times of liquid modernity - the shamefulness of dependence and reliance.

“(…) they [people he works with] all show some sign of interest in living independently or looking after themselves and not being a burden on anyone really, I don’t know, well I guess, may that could apply to all people” (Pg 16, Ln 705)

James’ account conveyed such differing, contradicting and changeable experiences of disability that I felt it could not be anything but an unconscious reflection on where he placed himself. Dis content with disability was present in

both his reflections on the disabled community as well as the Paralympic community. Hearing James' discontent with disability provided extraordinary insight into the difficulties he faced in accepting his disability as a contributing aspect of his athlete identity. James displayed such a spectrum of emotion towards his condition that it seemed it had become an utter encumbrance on his life.

Theme 2: See me as a proper, decent athlete

Joining the local running club aged 10 and then joining the Paralympic Programme in 2010, James had spent the first 11 years of his running career as an able bodied runner. Classified at the age of 21 and competing in his first disability event, at 23 years old James was exceptionally new to his status as a disabled athlete. A central argument that arose from James' account of his sporting career was the internal struggle he seemed to face in recognising himself as a Paralympic athlete. This dichotomy of identity was ever present as he struggled throughout the interview to understand where it was that he placed himself as an athlete. He commented on an able bodied race he had competed in the day before the interview.

“(...) like in the field yesterday I was at the back, but <pause> I don't know, I guess, if it was seen differently it would seem like I was right at the front of the field if it were a disability event” (Pg 2, Ln 55)

This extract encapsulates the immense tension James endured daily whilst training as a Paralympic athlete but whilst also competing in able bodied events. Relatively early on James made his position clear about how he considered the

Paralympic Games and how he wished to be consumed by those who watch him race.

“(...) it’s the obvious difference between sort of a proper athlete, in my eyes, and someone who just sort of doing it for different reasons” (Pg 3, Ln 71)

I believe that here James is indirectly admitting that for him the Paralympic Games should not be used as a platform to promote disability and inclusivity. His use of ‘*proper athletes*’ expressed his concern that there are individuals competing in the Paralympic Games who may not be considered ‘athletes’, who fail to emphasise the real athleticism which James strives for.

“(...) at the moment I want to be seen as achieving – (...) I want people to think, sort of, you know, we all train really hard” (Pg 3, Ln 74)

The idea of being seen to be ‘*achieving*’ is a common rhetoric throughout James’ account of his athletic experiences. James’ athletic identity appeared to be tied to the difficulty of his being consumed as a good athlete full stop, rather than as a good disabled athlete. In the extract below he details the distress he feels when consumed as a disability athlete.

“(...) you could sort of come at the back end of an able bodied race and you could almost get automatic approval by the general public to say ‘he’s done really well because he looks like he’s disabled, or he’s missing a limb’ (...) I’d have to be like ‘well no I didn’t do very well, it was a bad race and I’m nowhere near the top standard I want to be” (Pg 3, Ln 88)

James openly expressed his dislike for ‘*automatic approval*’ in sport simply on account of disability. The extract demonstrates that James tied his athletic

identity to his experiences as an able bodied athlete with a need to achieve via sporting success as opposed to needing to avoid failure by using sport to overcoming a disability. James provided examples of how competing as a Paralympic athlete did not provide him the sense of self-affirmation he sought, regularly disclosing that being an Paralympic athlete did not satiate his need for validation. It was only in able bodied races that James gained a sense of worth and fulfilment.

“I get sort of approval from myself when I’m racing by competing against a competitive field and by being challenged by the other people (...) [you] don’t get that as much at the Paralympics” (Pg 4, Ln 97)

This extract highlights James’ insecurities at being considered a good athlete simply because he has now been identified as a disabled athlete. James regarded his position on competing in the Paralympic Games.

“I would probably prefer to be running in the Olympics because that’s where the best are – um I don’t think even if you took into account my disability that I would be on par with the athletes that are running in the Olympics and that’s just being brutally honest” (Pg 4, Ln 113)

For James, the Paralympic Games are not where the ‘best’ athletes compete. The Paralympics by their very nature is a disability sports event, meaning it cannot lay claim to featuring the world’s best runners. To be victorious against other Paralympic athletes is not enough for James, this does not prove his worth – to himself or to others. James was the only participant to comment on wanting to compete at the Olympics as well as, if not more so, than the Paralympics. I consider this to be conformation of his distinct and purposeful lack of attachment to an identity as a disabled athlete. Despite the 30 hour

weeks, the years of dedication to his sport and the sacrifices he has made, he explained to me that none of it would be worth it if he was not racing against opponents he considered *‘proper athletes’*.

“(...) that idea frightens me more than anything, that I wouldn’t be racing against people that would be the best, because I want to race against the people that are the best” (Pg 9, Ln 263)

The idea that he could win a race easily, on a world sporting stage *‘frightens’* him; it undermines his athletic ability. James’ understanding of this dilemma is that he would be consumed falsely – that he is thought of something lesser than he wants for himself. I felt that James’ desire to be the *‘best’* was completely internally motivated; he didn’t give any indication that he felt a need to prove himself to anybody but himself.

“(...) it’s just not sort of an arrogance of needing to be the best it’s just wanting to get the best out of yourself I think” (Pg 7, Ln 217)

I felt James’ needed to validate himself through achievement came from the formation of his identity as a child. James had a twin brother, born with both his arms, and he attributed much to his brother and to sport as to why he felt he did not acquire a disabled identity.

“(...) being quite good at sport probably put me in quite a good position to not be bullied” (Pg 29, Ln 902)

In the above extract James indicated that sport was a possible factor as to why his disability did not become his whole identity at school. I consider that such positive experiences as a child with sport sat uncomfortably with James when he considered himself as a disabled athlete as an adult. By all accounts James

was an athlete, not a disabled athlete. It was clear that the transition from a good able bodied athlete to a potential Paralympian had been difficult for him. Knowing that James had now, willingly or not, acquired the label of being a disabled athlete, I asked him how he felt about the Paralympic frenzy in the run up to the London 2012 Games. The extract below exposes perfectly James' lack of affinity with Paralympic sport.

"It's very disability heavy, and you don't want to be belittled in that way (...) [Paralympians] want to just be seen one day, like I do as just a decent athlete" (Pg 34, Ln 1064)

This is James' preferred identity - a '*decent athlete*'. However, as Bauman would suggest, the question of identity for James is exceptionally problematic. He desperately wants to fulfil his self-image of a competitive able bodied athlete, but understands that his current running times prevent this. Until he becomes a better runner, he is tied to the Paralympic label and its implications (for him) of a lesser athlete.

As the interview progressed, James spoke more about his place in disability sport and how his own understandings of disability, based on his profession, meant that he was conscious of being consumed in the same way – as potentially lacking independence or worth simply due to the word 'disabled' being chained to his athletics career. His need to define himself as a 'proper' athlete in sport resurfaced.

"If you call someone disabled then people are going to immediately react like "oh poor them" (...) I think that's why it needs to be more specific about being disabled in sport" (Pg 35, Ln 1094)

The dissatisfaction James endured whilst complying with the status of a disabled athlete was evident. He reflected on a race which left him contemplating his purpose in disability races.

“I was the first person to cross the line but my time probably would have put me about 20th in the world (...) I got given this medal, a gold medal, and it’s just gathering dust somewhere” (Pg 35, Ln 1100)

James appeared to be utterly trapped by being identified as a disabled athlete. His struggle is personal, intrinsic, undoubtedly tied to his internal desire, more importantly need, to achieve and succeed.

“(...) when I’m competing as a disabled athlete, or in disability athletics, then the impairment needs to be taken into account <pause> but it’s hard because I know [trails off]”

This extract is taken from a lengthy response James gave about whether he considered himself disabled. At the time of the interview James was Britain’s fastest disability runner – however he is Britain’s only athlete in his classification and his chosen distances. He is number 1, but out of 1 - something which he struggles with.

“I mean I’m technically the British number 1 but I’m 1 out of 1 [laughs] (...) it doesn’t really sort of strike the general public as a really competitive field” (Pg 4, Ln 95)

This title of Britain’s number 1 Txx athlete did not provide him with the sense of accomplishment and self-worth he craves. Unfortunately, as is demonstrated above, James runs times which place him 20th in the world, and therefore would struggle to even qualify for the London 2012 Paralympic Games. In

domestic events he wins – easily. In international events he loses – significantly. James concedes that his condition does not actually cause exceptional hindrance to his running times. He simply isn't as fast a runner as his international Txx competitors. And so here is the very troubled predicament James finds himself in. For 11 years James competed as a very good, reasonably accomplished domestic able bodied runner. However, in the last 2 years James has transitioned to an athlete defined by a disability and who is unable to perform at an international level.

At no point during the interview did James attempt to create any identity other than that of an athlete. Throughout James' entire account there was obvious friction created by him chasing his ideal identity of a possible Olympian against the apparent discontented identity of a probable Paralympian. As our conversation progressed, it became clear that James did not consider his disability to contribute anything to his life, outside of its negative contribution to his sporting aspirations. He would often deride disability sport, sensing a lack of athleticism and elitism, which often mirrored his thoughts on disability in general.

"I think it's great that the athletes at the moment are <pause> you know <pause> flying the flag for disability sport" (Pg 14, Ln 424)
"(...) I'd rather see a show about different sports men or women and about how they're doing and about their sport and not just making it into sort of a bit of a Sesame Street show." (Pg 34, Ln 1059)

James is aware that if he accepts his position as a disabled athlete he will be exposing himself to the imposed and presumed negative judgements James feels accompanies disability sport – something he desperately rejects. As an

able body athlete James enjoys the presumed more positive imposed judgements such as dedication, motivation and hard working – being a ‘proper’ or ‘decent’ athlete. James’ inherent need to achieve for his own personal merit was evident. I consider that James’ introduction to Paralympic sport brought with it a seemingly feasible opportunity for James to fulfil a need to compete against the best; to demonstrate his athletic ability, moving towards his desired self-affirmation of being the best. The unfortunate realisation for James was that competing as an elite disability athlete immediately magnified and polarised his successes and failures.

Yet despite the obvious disappointment in his athletic performances, his renunciation of being labelled as disabled and his lack of rapport with the Paralympic movement, James did not appear to make any distinct attempt to separate himself from competing as a Txx athlete. His dedication to his sport was relentless, yet it was this dedication to something that for 11 years did not contribute to his identity as an athlete that had introduced James to such self-doubt. Disability sport was the only area of his life where he was forced to consider his disability. Yet at the time of the interview this pursuit of being the best was all consuming; almost overpowering James’ seeming dislike for his current dilemma. This notion of having to attach himself to ‘disability’ athletics seemed convoluted.

“I just think I’m a talented able bodied athlete and a potential elite disabled athlete or maybe just elite athlete really, just put it all in one” (Pg 37, Ln 1147)

James seemed lost and unsure of himself, as if he knew that despite his unhappiness, he felt it necessary to carry on pursuing a Paralympic ambition

only a couple of years old. I consider his transition into disability sport was an issue of wanting to find fulfilment – a sense of worth and belonging almost. Athletics had not featured heavily during James' time at university. Often, the way in which James talked about his present situation was a stark contrast to how he reflected about his past. I interpret the emergent themes in James' account of his place in disability sport to be fuelled by the lack of self-fulfilment he experienced at university.

Theme 3: A far less than hoped for university experience

James openly admitted that his process for choosing his course and place of study was done with little forethought:

“(...) some people go to prospective university open days and have had these sort of aspirations of doing whatever their degree is for years and I chose mine whilst I was in the Himalayas on a little computer in a shed” (Pg 22, Ln 668)

James was thorough in his words as he led me on a journey through his time at university. Similar to his present day sporting life-world, James spoke of his academic life-world with an underlying sense of loss and disappointment. This deficit of satisfaction was present throughout.

James spoke of the contemporary condition of higher education in a manner similar to other participants. For James, becoming a university student was an assumed role rather than a desired one.

“(...) all my friends were going off and it sort of, it was kind of a peer pressure thing but I knew that I didn't want to spend another year sort of at home” (Pg 15, Ln 462)

This extract supports the notion that in liquid modern times to not attend university goes against his generation's cultural norm; that it is shameful almost to not want to want to consume the habitual university experience; to stay at home does not contend with assumed liquid modern aspirations. Continuing his reflections on university, James had admitted that the course he had studied was not his initial career choice. However, in order to support his athletics, James was now working 30 hours a week in the degree he had gained at university. However, he seemed somewhat underwhelmed by this achievement.

Me: "That's sounds like a really interesting job to do actually, very worthwhile?"

James: "Um well <pause> Yeah I guess so, I suppose so, <pause> well it's what I studied to do so [trails off]" (Pg 17, Ln 151)

The current cultural opinion that university is about more than simply gaining a degree is reflected well in this extract. James had alluded to the idea of university providing 'life experience' as becoming an inherent understanding of what is to be an expected outcome of university. It is this 'life experience' that makes university fulfilling, not necessarily the attainment of a degree. As my conversation with James continued, it surfaced that his university experience was not the gratifying, life affirming event he had perhaps expected it would be. Instead, James seemed to demonstrate a complete apathy towards his time and university, hinting at the very little value he considered it to contribute to his life.

“(...) right from the start I didn’t have a huge passion for it [the course] I never really fully applied myself to it really, I just didn’t care enough really” (Pg 22, Ln 617)

James gave a reflective indication of his expectations of what university life would have been like. He had hoped to join an athletics club with the anticipation of enjoying the expected social camaraderie he had heard about from friends.

“(...) when I went to university, I think, I think you go along with the sort of freshers experience (...)part of a sports team [and] combine this sort of heavy drinking with a competitive schedule <pause> and I didn’t really” (Pg 23, Ln 707)

James had hoped to develop his athletics whilst at university. However, I contend that at the time, becoming an elite athlete did not feature as an important contribution to attending university.

“[the university] didn’t have an Athletics club [laughs] so that was sort of a real good start for me [shakes head and laughs] (...) so the athletics was sort of put on hold completely” (Pg 23, Ln 710)

This sense of loss as himself as an athlete was prevalent throughout James’ account of his time at university. His expectations of university sport and the associated culture it creates went unfulfilled, which was something he was aware of looking back.

“(...) in retrospect university could have been a lot more beneficial towards my sport had I gone to university and done a course that I really wanted to do and that had an interest in sport” (Pg 23, Ln 796)

What was severely lacking from James' account was any sense of excitement or joy in James' experience of university. I found that James tended to revert back to a discourse concerning what he felt he missed out on at university rather than what he enjoyed. The below extract highlights the considered essentials of any student-athlete experience at university – the need for a supportive social and athletic network; both integral aspects seemingly absent to James.

*“(...) maybe in different circumstances I could have had more support on the friendship side of things and sort of for the competitive side of things, or maybe they would have gone hand in hand <pause> you never know.”
(Pg 27, Ln 831)*

James' account of his experience of university seemed to be one of loneliness and disappointment. I found James detailing accounts of how he attempted to make up for the lack of re-invention of himself that he had hoped would come from athletics. James alluded to the loss of athletics as being a catalyst for him to take on another identity at university.

“I think you can kind of start a fresh at university (...) I thought I should probably make an effort at university” (Pg 30, Ln 297)

I felt that James arrived at university with a moderate athlete identity which he'd hoped to peruse. However, when denied the opportunity to create such an identity I consider that he found himself lost, and rather unsure of himself or his place at university. The 'effort' James appeared to making was one that seemed to distance him from his university peers.

“(...) I probably didn't do as much studying as everyone else because I was probably known as someone that, like, pursued

every other part of their life apart from the academic” (Pg 30, Ln 939)

James’ lack of interest in his course, coupled with the loss of university sport culture he had hoped to gain suggested that James was deprived of a particular university experience he had anticipated. By all accounts James appeared to spend a lot of time on his own.

“(…) if no one is sort of taking the lead in what you think your interests are you sort of have to do it yourself which was what I had to do at uni, probably because I didn’t have people there who were similar to me” (Pg 30, Ln 949)

The issue of difference and similarity resonated throughout James’ account of university. The subject of loss of experience in his narrative was linked to his experience of Otherness. My conversation with James revealed how he considered the issue of himself as Other and how he experienced Others to be a major contribution to his feeling of loneliness and loss whilst at university.

Theme 4: There was no ‘connection’

I asked James to talk to me about his peers during his time at university. A common occurrence was that James very much considered an obvious difference between himself and the majority of his course mates.

“(…) they were mostly Christians, and I know that’s a different sort of topic but <pause> (...) about 90% of my friends were Christians [laughs] like by the book practicing Christians ” (Pg 24, Ln 738)

As I spoke more with James about his friendships at university, he explained how at times the issue of Christianity prevented him from participating in the university culture he had expected.

“I had to sort of adapt slightly to mixing with them which is probably why I didn’t go out as heavy as I did if maybe I had made a different friendship group” (Pg 24, Ln 738)

Again, the sense of the loss of potential social experiences surfaces as James considers the possible different outcome of his university experience had he not been on this particular course at this particular university. James argued that due to the culture he found himself in he was denied the opportunity to push or further himself socially. Due to his chosen course James automatically found himself as part of a community which he did not feel like he belonged to, nor did he want to belong to. He was an Other amongst ‘others’. It is from here that his sense loneliness would inevitably ensue.

“I didn’t really you know, didn’t really connect with most of them on the course (...) I think the course I would have taken would have dictated more the kind of people I would get on with because we’d have similar interests” (Pg 24, Ln 743)

I consider that within this extract James expertly identifies the key for differentiating between ‘difference’ and Otherness. Despite the presence of ‘differences’, if a ‘*connection*’ is identified then consequently similarity can be recognised. However, if there are differences without connection, the move towards Otherness is much more probable. James very much considered his course mates as Other.

James continued to purposefully distinguish and label those who he did develop friendships with. I consider this to be an indication of him still considering these individuals as Other as he specifically felt the need to categorise 'Christian' and even 'Women', as opposed to simply saying he lived with 4 girls for example.

"(...) by the 3rd year I was living with [laughs] 4 Christian women (...) I probably just did, well just made do the best I could with the situation" (Pg 26, Ln 820)

However, in one instance James did talk fondly about one particular course mate.

"(...) there was a guy on the course who wasn't a Christian and he was a really good friend of mine (...) he was probably for me the saving grace of the course (...) he was the only person I really got on with" (Pg 26, Ln 824)

The idea that his one friend was James' 'saving grace' evokes a picture of rescue, of a paradoxical salvation from the Christians James appears to consider Other. James appeared to recognise a sense of similarity in this one friend. Again, this provides a sense of loss of what could have been had he chosen a different course or different university.

As well as experiencing his course mates as other, James seemed to be aware that he too could be perceived as Other to them, understanding that he was not similar to them in the same way that they were not similar to him.

"I think that sort of developed my character (...) knowing that I was with people that weren't quite the same as me" (Pg 30, Ln 947)

I find James' confession that his character '*developed*' due to feeling detached from his peers interesting as it shows he was aware that he believed he had changed both during his time at university. James detailed that whilst at school he very much had a sense of belonging and sameness.

"I had quite a large group of friends at secondary school and I guess we were the popular kids" (Pg 29, Ln 903)

This sense of '*popular*' and in a '*large group of friends*' was far from how he experienced his time at university.

"I guess I was a completely different person before I started university" (Pg 29, Ln 914)

James expressed that he transitioned from feeling a strong sense of friendship and popularity at school to one of loneliness whilst at university. However, this transition also allowed James to grow as an individual, altering his self-concept. I believe that finding himself so displaced at university led James to attempting to create an athlete identity, as something more than the Otherness of being a non-Christian male he had found himself as.

"(...) really my last 4 months of university was when I knew that I was good enough complete in the Paralympics" (Pg 25, Ln 763)

James started university with many hopeful expectations and assumptions of how the experience would enrich his athletic, academic and social life-worlds. Regrettably this was not the case for James. James began university with a self-image he enjoyed and identified with. As his time at university progressed this image was challenged and quickly faded. A lack of positive social and

university sport experiences signalled a gradual alteration from the 'James' James was before he started university to the James he found himself as in his final year of university – disconnected, independent and now classified as a 'disabled' athlete. I consider that James left university dissatisfied, unfulfilled and saddened. As a result, James was now attempting to create a self-image he seemed utterly unconvinced by – that of a Paralympic athlete. These shifts in James' identity from school to university to at the time of the interview helped to uncover the final theme from James' interview.

Theme 5: I don't really see myself as anything at the moment

After finishing university James chose to relocate to another city pursue his athletic ambitions and dedication to becoming the best. Unfortunately the loneliness that James endured at university had followed him on his Paralympic journey.

"Um I am here by myself. I don't train with a group of people."

(Pg 10, Ln 300)

Knowing that James had only been involved in the Paralympic programme for 2 years, I asked him to talk about his present situation. The picture James presented seemed quite barren and joyless. The issue of being alone arose regularly.

"(...) now I'd settle for like a hour [of socialising] or whatever [laughs] (...) there's not really anyone here that sort of knows me fully" (Pg 23, Ln 712)

"(...) if I had a choice it would probably be quite nice to have a friendship group up here" (Pg 27, Ln 846)

However despite James volunteering to disclose his lack of friendship and social experiences, he provided a rather common rhetoric familiar with that of many athletes aiming to become elite:

“I know I’ve had to sacrifice a lot (...) wasted thousands of pounds worth of money and thrown away pursuing a job as a therapist or you know [laughs] making friends somewhere else but, just, you know, to me that’s easily worth the risk! (Pg 13, Ln 318)

The extract demonstrates that James was fully aware that his choice to chase becoming a Paralympian restricted him from a career, from earning money and acquiring social capital and mobility – essentially preventing him from participating in liquid modernity. Yet despite this James seems to be relentlessly pursuing a sporting standard which, by his own admission, is currently inadequate.

“I’m really off the radar at the moment (...) I think until I start running faster I won’t really be of interest to them” (Pg 10, Ln 289)

I found the tension between James’ hopes and James’s actualities to be difficult to comprehend at times. He was acutely aware that he was not performing at the level he should be. Rather than sounding modest, this came across quite sorrowful and painful admittance.

“I’m still very much coming through the ranks, my performances are slowly improving but I don’t think I’ve really done anything to sort of shout about yet” (Pg 6, Ln 161)

At times I felt James found himself having to convince himself of his potential.

"I know is I've got some fast times in me, you know, it's just, I <pause> I'm just burying myself at the moment until I start running those times." (Pg 19, Ln 589)

This idea of 'burying' himself away did not strike me as a something that a passionate, determined, driven young athlete would say. The relationship James seemed to have with his running was very much one of subjugation. As James spoke about his current situation and his future ambitions I felt a sense of unease, a resistance almost. I found it difficult to decide if this path James was on was actually a path he wanted to follow. I found this distinction difficult because James himself was unsure if this is what he should be following, and he alluded to this at the start of the interview.

"I'm thinking of Para-triathlon though for 2016, it's sort of at the back of my mind and I need to start checking it out really" (Pg 2, Ln 57)

I found it confusing that an athlete would provide an indication that they were pursuing a sport that was not essential to them; that they did not live and breathe for their sport, that their destination was not to be on a London 2012 Paralympic podium. Nowhere in the interview was this evident from James. I suggest that James found it very troublesome, almost oppressive to fully subscribe to committing to being a Paralympic runner.

"(...) all the belief and motivation is just sort of having to come from myself really (...) it's just constantly plugging away until I get what I need really [laughs] (Pg 37, Ln 1146)

I asked James to explain to me if he was able to recognise what it was that he needed. His answer was lengthy, goal orientated and impersonal. He did not

define for me what it was that he ‘needed’, rather a list of what needed to happen. Instead I interpret his answer as more that he was trying to convince himself that what he was hoping for was attainable, achievable and worthwhile. However, I was not as convinced of this.

“(...) if I actually had two or three years I could do it comfortably but just sort of having it all pushed into one (...) it can become quite stressful but you’ve just got to remind yourself of why you’re doing it I think” (Pg 37, Ln1166)

As I was not satisfied with James’ answer, I probed more. I asked James why he was doing it. I felt the response was loaded with his predicament – utter uncertainty.

Who is James?

Me: And why are you doing it?

James: <pause> I <pause><pause> I <pause><pause> have no idea <pause> I can’t answer that [trails off] (Pg 37, Ln 1171)

I consider that this answer perfectly encapsulates James, merging all of the above themes. I have no doubt that James is passionate about his running, that it is such a large part of him and his identity.

“(...) I know that at the moment I don’t feel sort of, um, complete, (...) if I wasn’t competing and training and feeling like I was, you know, competing at a top level, I think that’s just something that’s ingrained in me. (Pg 6, Ln 190)

The issue for James is not that he is uncertain that he was meant to run, more that he is uncertain why he thinks he is meant to run as a Paralympian. James’

account was disjointed. He separates himself from disability yet is chasing the qualifying times for the Paralympics. He offered that his university experience was filled with feelings of Otherness but proved to be the catalyst for his Paralympic running career. He confided that he is lonely, yet this lifestyle was his choice. I felt James' overall pursuit was one of an elite athlete – but I am not convinced about that of an elite Paralympian. It seemed that James was running to create distance between himself and his personal discontents with disability and even disability sport. However, what James was running towards I do not know – and neither, I think, does he.

Emily

About Emily

Emily was 19 years old swimmer and was in her second year studying at a high performance sports university. She was born with Osteogenesis Imperfecta (commonly referred to as Brittle Bones Syndrome).

Theme 1: Not just an athlete

Emily completely subscribed to the liquid modern condition of shaping her identity depending on her circumstances and situations she found herself in. Perhaps the only time her identity could be recognised as being most fixed was when she was in the swimming pool. Her identity was at its most solid in her most aqueous environment. However, away from the pool Emily was anything and everything she wanted to be – the work-hard / party-hard student; the committed athlete; the content girlfriend; the sociable employee. It seemed that Emily had very much embraced her student identity and all that came with it, choosing to become as involved in her university life as she possibly could, consciously disallowing swimming to galvanize her university experience.

A difficult contention of identity Emily faced was being an elite athlete at a university which specifically attracted elite athletes. She found herself surrounded by people with similar levels of sporting and academic achievement. Emily appeared to recognise that being an athlete at her university could reduce her student experience should she choose to allow it to. To fix her identity to one particular group or culture would be limiting, potentially damaging, and was a liquid modern condition that Emily was astutely aware of.

“I would hate to know just swimmers, because it only gives you one option (...) I’ve got friends in different areas” (Pg 30, Ln 917)

The above extract demonstrates that Emily does not enjoy having just ‘one option’, and regardless of the depth of her friendships, she considers that to have friends ‘in different areas’ does indeed provide her with more options. These options therefore create more opportunities for Emily to create identities which are adopted and adapted depending on her company and her environment. I felt that Emily’s student identity and athlete identity tended to feed off one another, both providing different dimensions to her overall understanding of herself. Emily was able to prioritise when each identity was required to be more dominant. Her reaction to being asked if she considered herself an elite athlete was an indication that she has a strong athlete identity.

“Well <pause> at the risk of sounding really big headed yes” (Pg 11, Ln 309)

Emily did identify herself as a swimmer, demonstrating the strength of her athletic identity and that her sport was an important part of this identity.

“(...) if someone said to me, you know like ‘oh what do you do?’ I would say ‘oh I’m a swimmer’” (Pg 11, Ln 323)

However Emily seemed to have a balanced attitude to her current situation. Her descriptions of her life-worlds were not dominated by examples of sporting achievements or the Paralympics. Indeed, had I not known about her sporting decorations it would perhaps be difficult to tell from her interview that she was indeed as elite as she was. Her academic aspirations were just as important to

her as her swimming ambitions. She seemed to be able to anchor her experiences as a student-athlete by demonstrating that she was reflexive to her own needs as well as to the needs of others. She appeared to understand the need to evaluate the costs of the choices she made when creating both her student and her athlete identities.

“(...) obviously yes I could spend more time doing some work and I could spend more time seeing my friends (...) it’s just those sort of things that you sacrifice” (Pg 16, Ln 477)

“(...) obviously it’s all really important like my degree and my swimming it’s all kind of quite high pressure but if you can’t kind of relax about it then you’re never going to be able to relax” (Pg 19, Ln 593)

I interpret her repetition of the word ‘*relax*’ gave an indication to the type of person Emily was – easy going and carefree. Emily’s sense of self-fulfilment and self-affirmation did not seem to be explicitly linked to her athlete identity. Her sense of self-acceptance paradoxically seemed at odds yet also complimentary to her sporting achievements. I felt that she accepted herself (in her present situation at least) regardless of athletic performance. She based a positive sense of self on her individual value distinct from and not dependent on her swimming. I consider this to be the case for Emily two fold. Firstly (as is discussed later in more depth in Theme 2), Emily experienced her difference as a disabled athlete as a positive contribution to her university experience. Secondly, Emily had consciously sought an identity separate from her athlete identity and had actively participated in a university experience similar to that of her non student-athlete peers.

“(...) I’ve made the effort to get to know people on my course and away from swimming you know and I’ve started working in the union and stuff like that” (Pg 24, Ln 724)

Swimming was of exceptional importance to Emily but it did not wholly define who she was. As aforementioned I consider Emily’s most important attribute to the experience of her identity was her understanding of and willingness to accommodate her differing life-world situations. I asked Emily to order the importance of her identities of Athlete, Student and Disabled. Her response was very representative of her attitude to living in an ever changing liquid modern condition.

“Right now it would be athlete, student, disability - athlete first obviously because it’s 2012. Ask me next year and I’d probably put student first because it’ll be like my final year” (Pg 31, Ln 1121)

In the above extract Emily considers her disability to be the least important identity to her current situation. However Emily chooses when to adopt her role as an athlete and when to fulfil her role as a student. However, in the case of disability, ‘choosing’ when to adopt the role of a disabled individual is exceptionally complex, especially if the identity of being disabled is tied to the identity of being an athlete. Emily explained how her identity of being disabled facilitated some positive experiences of being considered different in a homogenous environment such as a high performance sports university.

Theme 2: Sometimes it’s good to be different

Emily seemed to fully understand who she needed to be and when, in order to achieve a sense of self-affirmation in each of her life-worlds, and because of her continuous flux of identity, Emily’s self-image seemed to be related to how

Emily perceived herself to be known and distinguishable to those around her, which as it happens, related heavily to her physical condition of Osteogenesis Imperfecta.

Emily did not identify herself with her own considerations of what it means to be thought of as disabled.

Me “So do you see yourself as disabled then?”

Emily: “No not really, no.” (Pg 32, Ln 983)

For a disabled individual not to conform to their own preconceived notions and prejudices of the term ‘disabled’ is not uncommon. However, it is precisely this label of disability that allows her to become an international athlete. Throughout the account Emily made reference to enjoying herself as being ‘different’ to the other swimmers (and other student-athletes), with this difference being largely centred on her disability. Emily’s account demonstrated her understanding of the advantages of manipulating one’s identity to suit the situation. In her sporting life-world, Emily revealed the common paradox of wanting to be considered ‘disabled’ enough to be classified within a range of disability that would place her as at the better athlete in her category.

“(...) I was like OK well this changes things quite a lot because like when I was in Sx¹ I was racing girls that were a lot more able than me” (Pg 2, Ln 47)

The relief to be pronounced as more disabled than originally thought for her sport demonstrates the conflicting nature of the word ‘ability’. For Emily her

¹ Sx refers to Emily’s Paralympic classification. For purposes of anonymity the exact classification has been removed and is denoted with Sx.

(dis)ability within a sport setting is very different to (dis)ability in an everyday setting. At university, Emily is forced to recognise within her sporting life-world that it is her disability that makes her different, and that she could potentially begin university as Other.

“I’m like the first disability swimmer they’ve had in years and years and years and I didn’t know if it was going to work (...) was I going to fit in?” (Pg 6, Ln 166)

However, despite not identifying herself as disabled, Emily seemed to embrace and enjoy the associations made with her due to her disability. Throughout our conversation she provided numerous examples of how she believed her identity was consumed by others, and additionally how she hoped it was consumed. Being the only disabled swimmer at her positively affected her.

“(...) no one even thinks ‘oh Emily’s really slow’ (...) I just don’t get compared in the same way, which I really like because there’s no pressure” (Pg 8, Ln 223)

The idea of not having ‘pressure’ allowed Emily to experience herself uniquely in an environment constrained by competition and performance. For Emily, in this particular surrounding, to be the only disabled athlete relieves her from the anxiety and distress faced by her able bodied swimming peers. It was obvious throughout that Emily drew on the advantageous aspects of her disability to shape her identity as disabled, even if she considered that she did not identify with the label of disability. Throughout the interview Emily provided examples of how she identified herself as different (due to her disability or not) and enjoys that she experiences herself in this way.

“I didn’t want to go with the rest of everyone else [other Paralympic swimmers] at the high performance centre, I wanted to be a bit different” (Pg 12, Ln 358)

Being at an elite sports university, whilst being exceptional for sporting development, can at times be difficult for the athlete’s personal development. Athletes will encounter other athletes who are just as talented as they are, with the same academic endeavours and sporting ambitions. All too often their previous identity as ‘the athlete’ has become redundant, becoming lost amongst the other ‘athlete’ identities. In such a homogenous environment the task of creating an identity becomes even more problematic. Even objects which usually define an athlete identity (such as team associated kit and sports bags) become ubiquitous. I consider that Emily was aware that her disability allowed her a particular freedom of identity – she believed that she found herself acquiring a unique identity within a sea of swimmers.

“But like everyone knows like ‘I’m the swimmer’ and like I kind of quite like that in a way” (Pg 24, Ln 734)

However I consider Emily’s above extract to be somewhat naive. I do not doubt that Emily was known as a ‘swimmer’ but I wondered why she believed she did not have any other adjectives attached to her identity. With her university being a hub for elite swimming talent, for Emily to consider herself as being known as that ‘swimmer’ seems to be somewhat naive. Emily hints in other areas of her account that she allows her disability to contribute to her identity away from the pool, enjoying the perceived recognition she gains.

“I quite like standing out a bit, not blending in (...) because there’s like a lot of good looking guys and good looking girls here and it’s all quite the same really” (Pg 23, Ln 714)

Emily seems to have captured Bauman's aporia of identity expertly; she has not allowed one identity to dominate. Instead she recognises when she should change her identity in order to best benefit the situation she finds herself in at that moment, including as to when she chooses to embrace her condition. Regardless of her situation, I felt that it was important to Emily to experience herself as someone who was well known, well liked and well recognised – that she is set apart from the rest for the right reasons, which sometimes includes her disability and sometimes does not. Emily seemed to have created an identity based on popularity, athleticism and positive difference in an environment which can sometimes be oppressive and limiting. In liquid modern times, many strive to create an identity such as Emily had – one which makes them 'different', recognisable without being considered Other.

Emily 'enjoying' the recognition her disability therefore questions the determining of what constitutes Otherness. Why is it that Emily benefitted emotionally from her difference whilst others do not? Emily answered this question herself.

"I'm kind of quite lucky coz I'm quite recognisable" (Pg 23, Ln 700)

"(...) when I was growing up I always was really small, (...) this'll sound a bit sad, but I kind of quite enjoyed being the little one" (Pg 31, Ln 958)

Emily referred to herself a number of times as '*the little one*'. I felt that Emily's self-image regarding her disability was one of an aesthetic interest. By all accounts, Emily's disability does not make her displeasing to look at; the

physical manifestations of her condition are not “offensive” enough for her to be considered within the realm of Otherness. She looks childlike almost. Her condition does not immediately present a realisation of one’s own morality and the potential suffering of the human body. I consider that Emily’s disability evokes a response from those around her not dissimilar to protection or maternal instinct. Emily had not encountered much negativity towards her disability because, visually at least, she does not conform to the criteria of Other within her life-worlds.

Although Emily appeared to be less focused on her disability, she did touch on occasions where she had encountered negative experiences. When Emily spoke of these associations of her condition, she tended to steer the conversation towards more external, pragmatic problems rather than any internal struggles and difficulties.

*“(...) things like on the aeroplane to like pick up my massive bag”
(Pg 34, Ln 1056)*

*“I really don’t like crowds coz I’m sort of at boob or armpit level”
(Pg 35, Ln 1085)*

However, Emily regularly found a way to enjoy the drawbacks of her condition, again using her appearance to gain advantage from the situation.

“I ended up getting out of the crowd [at a concert] and I went to stand on a windowsill – and it was the best view! (Pg 36, Ln 1089)

Perhaps the only concern of her condition that Emily expressed was one which mirrors the concerns of many females, but more specifically females with a disability.

“(...) it’s annoying like when you’re trying to buy clothes and like things don’t fit right (...) sometimes you can use it to your advantage like buying cheap kids clothes [laughs]” (Pg 35, Ln 1067)

This extract demonstrates that Emily recognises that she looks different to her peers, conceding that perhaps she does not look as good in clothes as her able bodied peers, unable to conform to particular standards of femininity or beauty in a liquid modern popular culture. The act of buying clothes which present a particular identity is a large part of liquid modern living and due to her condition Emily cannot participate in this practice to the extent her peers can, causing perhaps a mild sense of social anxiety. Emily’s words do not masquerade her feelings – she finds the situation ‘*annoying*’ but does not appear to get frustrated or angry or depressed about the situation, as she does not attach a high level of self-esteem to this seemingly small fashion inconvenience. What appeared to be Emily’s main concern was the issue of the physical image – the topic of appearance resurfaces regularly in her account.

Theme 3: The visual representation of Otherness

The topic of Otherness remained somewhat veiled beneath stories of university life and elite sport.

If Bauman considers Otherness to be created initially on the visual representation of identity, Emily did not embody the criteria of gross physical

abnormality. I suggest that societal attitudes tend to reinforce a positive sense of identity and esteem in individuals who recognise that society regards them with a positive disposition. Clearly, Emily experienced herself positively through the actions and reactions of her peers. This idea of the visual, of the physicality of Otherness is present throughout Emily's interview, as she spoke about how she experienced herself as Other, and experienced those around her as Other.

I consider that Emily did not identify with her supposition of the label 'disabled' mainly because she considered herself to be 'normal'. In regards to how she experiences her disability, Emily tended to normalise the events which may give cause to highlight her disability.

"(...) he [Emily's boyfriend] didn't even realise that I had a disability, he just thought I was small (laughs)" (Pg 11, Ln 339)

"I am pretty much in proportion, I'm just smaller than everyone else, so like, I'm quite happy to walk around in a bikini all day" (Pg 35, Ln 1065)

Emily believed others consumed her physical image as one of 'normality', that there were no obvious outward signs of her disability. Regardless of the fact Emily had a condition which brings with it muscular and skeletal disorders, she was able to purport an image which is deemed to be understood as "socially acceptable". Additionally, Emily commented that she looks '*in proportion*' again highlighting that the way that she looks is an indication of how her disability is identified and consumed by others. I consider the fact that she felt comfortable in a bikini to indicate that when Emily's body was most on show (in an environment outside of her requiring a swimming costume) she did not consider the image of her body to be too far removed from the conventional concept of

what constitutes the aesthetics of a 'normal' body. It is these considerations of normality that brought me to assess to what extent Bauman's Otherness is initially pre-determined by our immediate visual consumption of an individual. My conversation with Emily indirectly brought about examples of how ordering and Otherness is initially created purely on how we interpret the objectiveness of one's physical appearance.

Emily gave reference to how important image is at her university in regards to understanding how 'difference' becomes Other.

"(...) we turn up to lectures here in tracksuit bottoms (...) wet hair, like no one really cares, you don't really wear makeup or anything (...) everyone just gets it you know, you're an athlete" (Pg 22, Ln 674)

Using 'we' and 'you're an athlete' shows Emily very much considered herself as conforming to the image of a particular identity at a high performance sports university. However, she continued to describe what (to her at least) is a representation of Otherness, based purely on superficial visual cues which do not seem to fit with her personal idea of what constitutes sameness at her university.

"(...) like wannabe's (...) like proper poser grammar posh school people they walk around in like Jack Wills and their gillets (...) whereas like the serious athletes walk around in kit" (Pg 23 Ln 703)

Emily makes the distinction here between the 'serious athletes' (i.e. herself) and those who she considers Other based on the image they present within that environment – 'wannabe's' and 'posers'. She clusters these Other girls with

wanting to buy the identity of an athlete but the lack of authenticity in their physical appearance makes their identity fraudulent to the serious athletes such as Emily. However, this Otherness is based purely on cosmetic and peripheral displays of identity. Emily alludes in the conversation that she has friends who are not athletes and so she may well have initially considered them Other if they conformed to the description she gives above.

Quite often Emily indirectly referenced how one's appearance can create Otherness, displaying that as a member of a liquid modern society the majority of us are conscious of how we are consumed by others, and how in turn this can create a feeling of insecurity about our own image and identity. This is something that Emily is aware of as a disabled athlete and the disabled half of an inter-racial couple.

"(...) the gym in there is full of like 7ft 20 stone rugby players and it's so intimidating (...) it's just like unheard of that a tiny little girl goes into this gym and starts throwing weights around!" (Pg 14, Ln 419)

"I mean he's big and black and plays American football, so we look quite funny together (laughs)" (Pg 11, Ln 332)

Evidently, Emily has at times found herself in situations where there is not always the option for her physical appearance to be disregarded and that she is not in control of how her identity is consumed by others. In the first extract Emily expresses how a particular gym environment makes her feel uncomfortable due to the expected assumptions of which type of athlete should use that particular gym, causing her to experience a feeling of difference if she were to begin participating in actions not normally witnessed in that social space (which can be extended to most people). Additionally, although brief, Emily

takes the experience of Otherness much wider, to a deeper sociological development of what constitutes Otherness in regards to historical, culturally embedded doctrines of race relations. For Emily to even comment that her and her boyfriend '*look funny together*' perhaps indicates that she is aware that the image of a large black male dating a small white female has the potential to create a plethora of reactions. Emily knows, for one reason or another, that the image of her and her boyfriend did not look 'normal'. And whilst she did not indicate any distress or harm caused by her relationship based on their differing ethnicities and physical appearances, this provides an interesting example of a form of Otherness that Bauman does not touch upon in any detail – the extent which a 'normal' individual becomes Other in the eyes of a liquid modern society based on the company they keep rather than the possessions they own or the identity they create.

Theme 4: Otherness as a cultural creation

In addition to Emily providing thought for the process of 'Othering' from the perception of an individual, she also drew upon personal examples of how Otherness is experienced, cultivated or even encouraged within particular areas – be they cultural or geographical. Emily inter-fused her life-world stories with examples of how our surroundings can dictate the extent of our own Otherness, finding ourselves welcome in one place yet rejected in another.

Emily demonstrated how she felt a sense of Otherness when returning back to her home town, purely because of how *she* felt, rather than how others treated her.

“God it was just full of girls that were just like bright orange (...) but like that’s just like the kind of place where like I feel out of place.” (Pg 33, Ln 1000)

Emily’s account shows that an individual can experience heightened sensations of Otherness depending on their surroundings. Emily found herself feeling ‘*out of place*’ in an area which was once her home. At university, Emily experiences herself as ‘different’, however she actively demonstrates that she enjoys this difference her identity brings with it. It is when this threshold of difference is reached and tips over into the unwelcoming label of Other that anxiety, insecurity, uncertainty and suffering have the potential to intrude and disrupt.

Emily seemed to understand the importance of experience outside of her swimming culture, allowing herself to widen her boundaries and experience the difference, and potential Otherness, of her peers.

“(...) you’ll find a lot of the swimmers don’t know anyone else apart from swimmers (...) but I’ve made the effort and I’ve met a lot of people now and made a lot of friends which I’m really grateful for” (Pg 29, Ln 903)

For Emily, you are considered part of a group by its members (i.e. her university swimming team) it is the responsibility of the individual to ‘*make the effort*’, to break free and discover personal boundaries of acceptance. I consider Emily expressing that she was ‘*grateful*’ meant that she has had to face her own prejudices about difference and Otherness, allowing her to better understand herself whilst attempting to better understand her peers. As a result, Emily now experienced a sense of belonging at her university which transcended beyond the swimming pool.

Theme 5: 'Disability' is a slippery slope

Emily made it clear throughout the interview that she did not consider herself to be 'disabled'. Whenever Emily and I spoke about disability sport or disability in general I sensed that her responses would be more in line with the responses of an able bodied individual rather than that of an impaired individual. Emily's attitude to the issue of being disabled did not seem to be laced with any sense of loss or sadness or suffering. Although I found her thoughts on disability to be somewhat cursory, I did not consider them to be disingenuous. Emily's opportunistic attitude towards life seemed to shine through in our conversation.

"(...) it's [disability] sort of just a fact of life" (Pg 16, Ln 498)

She continued to express her attitude towards disability, separating out what she considers to be the true tragedy of disability.

"(...) if you like, have a child and they are so severely disabled that they're not going to live til like they're 5 now that, that's devastating, but whereas if you're going to be born with one leg then you're born with one leg – that doesn't mean like that you can't not (sic) run a marathon or anything!" (Pg 16, Ln 502)

Emily's reality of disability is the tragic potential loss of life – both as a literal loss of life but also the loss of participation in life. Emily did not appear to experience her disability as a reason to not engage in liquid modern living. She argues that it is up to the individual with the disability to decide to what extent they will allow their disability to prevent them from life. I reflected on what extent Emily's condition prevented her from participating in liquid modern life and that perhaps her view was so insouciant and casual because she had not personally experienced much difficulty with her disability.

Emily considered the situation of the disability itself to be a determining factor of the extent of one's suffering, indicating that any form of suffering in life is *'tragic'*.

"I think also a lot of people in Paralympic sport have had some sort of illness or a car crash or something which is tragic obviously you don't wish that upon anyone" (Pg 17, Ln 509)

She goes further to demonstrate that a loss of a life well lived is indicative of requiring help, of needing to rely on others; that a loss of independence is associated with a reduction of life.

"(...) it's sad when you see fully grown men and women having to be taken to the toilet and having to be changed by their like elderly parents" (Pg 17, Ln 524)

However, her afterthought of this consideration of how life is for others seemed quite carefree, perhaps even unconcerned.

"(...) but like they probably don't know any different if they were born that way" (Pg 17, Ln 527)

Instead, Emily considered that disability can indeed provide people with positive, life-affirming opportunities which promote self-esteem.

"(...) she was a national swimmer um she got diagnosed with MS and she now swims in the Paralympics (...) in a way it's opening doors for people that maybe were good but weren't good enough" (Pg 17, Ln 512)

Emily was the only participant to consider the Paralympic Games from this vantage – that the Games are an opportunity for those less athletic than able

bodied athletes to participate in some form of elite sport. This extract could be interpreted as Emily allowing the Paralympics to be seen as secondary to the Olympics – as something for those who are not good ‘*enough*’. Emily did not speak of the Paralympic Games with much personal association. She did not seem to speak of the Games with much conviction – neither as a platform for disability or for elite sport, nor for elite disability sport. She seemed rather detached from the complexities and difficulties others seemed to face when discussing the topic.

I suggest that perhaps Emily did not associate herself with the overall label of ‘disability’ or ‘disability athlete’ was because she spent most of her time away from the disability sport environment. I consider that with disabled athletes not being a regular feature in her life-worlds, she displayed an attitude towards disability sport which could be argued as not dissimilar from those of able bodied athletes. Emily indicated on many occasions that she had chosen to remove herself from situations in which she would normally be in contact with other disabled swimmers.

“I had a bit of a falling out with [the National Governing Body] over it because I was the only disability swimmer here [her university] (...) I was just like well actually this is my decision” (Pg 6, Ln 117)

She explained how despite knowing her best chances of Paralympic swimming were elsewhere from her current university, she chose not to study in these cities.

“Well, our high performance centre, like the disability ones are in X-university and in Y-university and they wanted me to go there but I didn’t want to” (Pg 7, Ln 190)

I asked Emily to explain her decision. I consider her answer to be the argument as to why Emily discussed disability sport with such a lack of belonging or association.

“I’ve never ever wanted to swim and I never have swum in a disability club, in a lane full of disabled athletes, I’ve never wanted to do that, I’ve never had to do that (...) they always say the minute you go into a disability club you’re not going to leave because you will adapt to it and then you won’t be able to swim in another environment” (Pg 7, Ln 195)

Emily purposefully wanted to distance herself from the solid identity of a disabled swimmer which she would attract if she attended a disability specific swimming centre. Emily would feel trapped by this label, hinting that perhaps she experienced it as a rather rigid, institutionalised structure which is difficult to break free from. Emily’s difficulty was that she did not consider herself disabled enough to belong to the label of a disabled swimmer but knows that she enjoys the difference that come with being a disabled swimmer in an able bodied swimming environment.

I asked Emily to explain to me what the term disability meant to her and she was quite fixed in her description, indicating that it was not the word that should be considered, rather the person that chooses to adopt that word to describe themselves.

“(...) it’s almost how people view themselves (...) I think it’s a very slippery slope to say ‘I’m disabled’” (Pg 36, Ln 1109)

From Emily's account of her sporting life-world there was an obvious tension between her label as a 'disabled athlete' and her considering herself an able bodied individual. The issue of considering her prerogative in disability sport was a difficult issue for her to articulate. I asked Emily if she ever felt out of place in disability sport:

Emily: "No (...) I guess I feel like I belong there <pause> but I also belong here, like [tails off]"

Me: "Where's here?"

Emily: [Gives university name] <pause> within like an able bodied club, it doesn't <pause> I've never felt like I don't belong somewhere" (Pg 32, Ln 990)

I consider this last extract to perfectly reflect Emily's self-image. Her self-esteem is as such that she feels confident and comfortable within Paralympic swimming as well as in her able bodied swimming world at university. I consider then that Emily has not experienced situations within each of these worlds where she has encountered prolonged and negative feelings of Otherness - she has never felt displaced within either life-world.

Emily discussed that her university life-world seemed to be the one place where she felt she did actually belong; that being at her university has allowed her to become the person she experiences herself as today. Confident, popular, athletic and proud.

Theme 6: This is where I should be, this is me

When choosing a university, Emily needed somewhere where she could study hard, and train harder (and preferably with able bodied swimmers).

“(...) I didn’t like really have much choice, no, not that I didn’t really have much choice, of course I had choice” (Pg 6, Ln 154)

Emily reflected on the fact that having limited choice could in fact be perceived as not really having a choice at all when it came to prioritising her swimming over her education. However, she explained the feelings she experienced when she came to the university open day.

“(...) I was like ‘yep, yeah I’ve got to come here, this is where I should be, this is me!’ basically” (Pg 6, Ln 155)

Her instant affinity with this university took over the potential rigidity imposed by her sport. Bauman often suggests that our sense of belonging is cultivated by groups welcoming the identities we create for ourselves. I consider this extract to be Emily admitting that she had a particular self-image, or perhaps an image of how she saw herself in the future and felt that this university was the perfect environment to compliment and contribute to this image – that this university ‘welcomed’ her.

As the conversation progressed, Emily gave examples of how her self-esteem had grown due to her experiences at university. These experiences were often evidence of her enjoying her identity of difference. The position she had found herself in at university was of such belonging that perhaps she would not have experienced it so strongly had she attended a university that put less of focus on sport, or conversely was disability sport specific. Emily’s sense of belonging in her university sport culture came from feelings of achievement, success and support.

“When we were at BUCS in November and I broke 2 world records (...) everyone went crazy [laughs] and I was like ‘the’ person to be that weekend” (Pg 8, Ln 229)

As well as discussing her sporting life-world at university, Emily also spoke of how she perceived her time at university away from swimming, with her understanding of these experiences very much fitting with Bauman’s observations about the changing role of the intellectual and the place of a university education.

“(...) I think that well a degree is a degree (...) a lot of people are going to university because it is the “done” [makes quotation marks gesture] thing, but I think you’ve also got to have something else like on your record as well” (Pg 21, Ln 634)

Emily recognised that university was an expected life event for most; that there was an assumption amongst her peers that university is the ‘*done thing*’. However Emily is suggesting that a university degree has become devalued, something which perhaps previously was seen as a substantial contribution to an individual’s identity. For Emily a ‘*degree is a degree*’. To ‘*need something else*’ demonstrates the liquid modern assertions of self-improvement and that being different can be welcomed to positively differentiate. I consider that this extract demonstrates the liquid modern condition that it is difficult for the individual to understand what is actually required of them; to know what is enough in liquid modern times is often vague with undefined borders or parameters. I believe that these blurred borders of acceptance, achievement and expectation in university life can contribute to feelings of anxiety and insecurity.

I asked Emily about what her time at university had meant to her. She was overwhelmed almost about how much her time at university had contributed to the student and the athlete she is today.

*“[blows out and shakes head] it’s just, I just love it, it’s amazing
<pause> I’m a bit <pause> I don’t know how to describe it really”
(Pg 27, Ln 811)*

From her account, Emily seemed to be thriving at university. Her course was challenging her, her swimming was exceptional, her social life was at its peak and she appeared engrossed in her student-athlete experience. Her 18 months at university so far seemed to have contributed daily to her desired self-efficacy. It that Emily was very much doing exactly what it was she was meant to do, becoming exactly who it was she wanted to become. Overall I found her account to be uplifting, light, carefree and (on the surface) untroubled. This was very much reflected when I concluded our conversation by asking Emily who she was.

Who is Emily?

*“Um [laughs] I’d say, I’m Emily, I’m 19, I’m a swimmer and I’m at
X [university]. That’s me!” (Pg 37, Ln 1145)*

Emily provided me with one line about who she was - line which perhaps provided a great insight regardless of few words. Emily tells us *what* she is, but not *who* she is. Her answer was non-descriptive, and unconsidered almost. She chose to provide two key facts which she considered the most important to know about her. Primarily, Emily chooses to reveal herself first and foremost as an athlete; a swimmer. This line confirms the discussion in theme 2 and 5

regarding Emily's position on her disability – she does include it as a means to define herself. Despite becoming a Paralympic athlete being such a major focus in her life at the time of interview, she nonchalantly omitted the accompanying adjective of 'disabled' or 'Paralympic' or even her classification for example in her self-identification. Having a medically recognised musculo-skeletal condition did not even feature in how Emily chose to answer this last question. Her disability was not part of her self-image. In regards to the reference to her university, she chose to simply state the name of the university, not even reveal the degree which she was studying. For Emily, to give the name of the university was enough – this was confirmation that the reputation of the university spoke for itself. In regards to her athletic and academic life-worlds, Emily assumed there is an inherent understanding of what it means to be at this high performance sport university. Emily is a swimmer and she is at that university – anything else is just peripheral.

Helen

About Helen

Helen was an 18 year old wheelchair Table Tennis athlete. She was in her first year of university studying at a non-high performance sport university. Helen was diagnosed with Juvenile Arthritis at 8 years old and was coma for a number of weeks, losing the ability to walk.

Theme 1: A life not wasted

Although Helen did not allude to this until more than halfway into the interview I consider one particular line to be of the most value to this analysis, a line which acts as the key stone to all the other details of her life Helen provided, indicating the very core of her experience of self.

“(...) if I came that close to dying and the doctors managed to save me I don’t want their efforts to be for nothing, I want them to see that I was someone worth saving” (Pg 16, Ln 480)

This theme of being worthy – of being ‘worth’ something - resonated through Helen’s interview. This idea of needing to prove one’s worth, to demonstrate one’s efforts and attitudes seemed to be of significant importance to Helen - she came to back to this theme regularly. The relationship between ‘worth’ and identity lingered in many of her answers as she drew on experiences of when she considered herself, and others, worthy or not. One such time was during Helen’s self-perception of herself as an elite level athlete. Despite representing her country, the definition of an elite level athlete was not something she identified with.

"I just don't think I am <pause> to me you're an elite athlete if you're a gold medallist" (Pg 8, Ln 217)

Helen did not yet consider herself 'worthy' of the title of an elite athlete; it was something that she believed she has not yet attained, not yet earned. For Helen, a gold medal is the proof that you have demonstrated that you are worthy of that title. I felt very much that, especially within her sporting life-world, Helen's need to demonstrate 'worth' was fuelled by her own, very liquid modern, attitude that a lack of improvement demonstrates a lack of self-worth.

"(...) to be honest even if I do get there I still don't think I'll call myself an elite level athlete (...) I want to go as far as I can, push myself to the absolute limit to make sure I'm doing the best I can" (Pg 8, Ln 219)

I interpret this to mean that Helen measured her self-efficacy by her own standards, not standards set by others - only she knows what is acceptable for her in terms of demonstrating worth. When discussing her experiences as an athlete, Helen repeatedly spoke of needing to battle against others to evidence her value.

"I'm not bothered about who you are away from the table, on the table its enemies, me against you" (Pg 9, Ln 258)

Helen struck me as a very confident, self-assured individual. Even though not identifying herself as an elite athlete, Helen's athlete identity was evident. In her sporting life-world, the table tennis table was where she battled to prove her worth.

In terms of proving her value in the future, Helen measured her worth against very liquid modern trappings, indicating that she considered that she alone was responsible for proving and securing her worth.

“I want to be able to have a job, I want to be able to be secure and know that I've earned the money” (Pg 25, Ln 769)

I interpret here that Helen wants to have the same assumed life expectations of many other individuals, almost that to her to be able to show you have a job and that you are settled is an achievement. Helen demonstrates her desire to participate in liquid modernity as what Bauman would consider a tourist; being able to participate freely in the liquid modern world in how she chooses, yet to still feel ‘secure’ in that she is providing for herself.

Despite providing such personal, intimate responses throughout the interview, Helen gave a rather familiar answer concerning her attitude towards being labelled disabled which seemed discordant amongst her other words.

“I'm a person with a disability, not a disabled person (...) I'm an athlete not a disabled athlete you know I'm a student not a disabled student” (Pg 16, Ln 498)

I felt this rhetoric to be somewhat unconvincing – almost regurgitating someone else’s disability mantra. However, after speaking with her at length I felt she was actually relatively ambivalent towards her disability outside of her sporting life-world. I felt that this answer was tied to an underlying issue of her identity of being a wheelchair user. I consider that Helen’s constant need to demonstrate her worth came from an obligation to become more than what was expected of her or what other people had resigned her to being.

“(...) she [mum] says to me she can remember me being in hospital hooked up to all these machines not knowing if I was going to live or not” (Pg 16, Ln 470)

Helen knew that had she not become ill her life could have been exceptionally different. Although I do not feel like she grieved for the life she could have had, I felt that she had a desire to compensate for the person she could have been. I suggest that she reconciles this battle between ‘lost’ Helen and ‘this’ Helen by achieving all, wherever possible.

“I remember thinking ‘my life is over’ you know I couldn’t do anything (...) and then it was a sort of think that it was like ‘well I managed to live, I may as well make the most of life’ and see what I can get out of it” (Pg 16, Ln 477)

I felt Helen battled between understanding who she could have been and who she was now. She drew upon a past experience to illustrate how she coped with illness and how it shaped her life today.

“I should be proud of the fact that I’ve managed to overcome my disability and carry on you know going through life and achieving well” (Pg 15, Ln 468)

This was where I consider a different aspect of Helen’s theme of battling – her battle to overcome her disability. Helen often spoke about ‘overcoming’ her disability and becoming the person she was today – a university student who also happened to be an international level athlete.

Theme 2: If you're not born with it your entire life changes

Helen discussed times both in and away from her sporting life-world where she had to overcome something to become the person she was today. I felt this theme of overcoming came from Helen's contemplation of being born an able bodied child and then falling ill, resulting in permanent disability. She was able to identify a point in her life when she felt that she needed to address how she saw herself and find peace with who she was and to accept the new challenges before her.

"Since I was ill I always wanted to blend in, be normal with everybody else and a few years ago I thought why am I trying to be like everybody else? I'm a different person now" (Pg 15, Ln 467)

Helen wanted to '*blend in*' and be normal but found that she no longer could. What she had always known as '*normal*' had been taken from her, leaving her with an alternative self that she did not recognise. Helen recognised herself not only as different from others around her but also different to how she was before the illness. Her emphasis on '*now*' indicated that perhaps Helen had come to terms with letting go of her past self-identity; learning to separate her past self and her present self. I interpret the statement above as showing the importance of wanting to conform to one's own understanding of what it means to be considered normal. Yet Helen also showed that in liquid modern times, it is possible to experience belonging to a particular culture or community without necessarily being the same as the other individuals. Here, and throughout the interview Helen demonstrated the constant battle that she (and every other liquid modern) must fight: how does one create an identity which is different enough to be considered individualistic but conforms enough to be considered

as similar? This question is magnified when considering the aporia of acquired disability in identity formation.

Helen considered the battle between identities in congenital verses acquired disability and explained her position at length.

"I sort of had a debate with one of my friends (...) he's got spina-bifida (...) he said he would have preferred to be in my shoes and have been normal for a while and then disabled and I said I would rather be in his shoes (...) it's you know it's the whole is it better to have known it and lost it or to never have it at all?" (Pg 15, Ln 443)

I consider the word 'normal' to be Helen's wording as she makes reference to being 'normal' quite regularly. Regardless of acquired or congenital, disability is an un-doable abnormality. Helen demonstrates that despite her battles, she is admitting that there are times where her disability prevents her from feeling 'normal'. She goes on to explain her reasoning for this:

"I think it's maybe a bit harder to all of a sudden be disabled and have to overcome it and have to change your entire life than it is to have been brought up with it (...) if you're not born with it you've got to change your entire life" (Pg 15, Ln 449)

The above extracts are from a lengthy response Helen gave to the question of how she considered her disability knowing that she was born able bodied. Within her answer she gave an indication of the problem she faced in constructing her identity.

"I was in a coma for 7 weeks I've got no idea at all what it was like before I got ill so I'm sort of like in between never having it and having had it and lost it" (Pg 15, Ln 451)

Helen experienced herself as ambiguous; as having a lost body. However, unlike some individuals with an acquired disability, Helen has very few memories of her life before she fell ill and has a limited reference of experiencing herself as an able bodied individual. Helen provided a number of aligning examples from her life-world which displayed her attitude towards her having a body - a body she was not born with - that was no longer as able as it once was. Perhaps what was of most importance was that Helen's disability was Helen's - it was not the subject or object of anyone else. She chose when her disability was part of her identity and when it was not. She appeared irked when others considered her disability because, for Helen at least, it is not theirs to consider.

"(...) one of the most biggest complements for me is when I'm out with one of my friends or anyone and we're going around and they walk over to some stairs (...) to me they're showing that they don't look at the wheelchair or the disability (...) you're just with your mate you know" (Pg 17, Ln 507)

Helen appeared to demonstrate that her disability was something that those around her did not need to overcome – overcoming it was her responsibility. In the extract below I feel Helen believes that it is important that she controls the contribution of her disability to her identity and that it should not be an important consideration for others.

"(...) they booked a room in the library and I had to double check that it was accessible and stuff (...) other people think that they should have thought about it instantly and to me it doesn't bother me" (Pg 18, Ln 561)

I consider the battle between Helen resisting the identity of being disabled to be demonstrated by her disability being a strong contribution to her identity as an athlete.

I consider the undercurrent of Helen's battle to overcome her disability to be that of the lack of choice Helen had over the change in her identity. The issue for Helen was that although she was born able bodied, she was trying to come to terms with the loss of a life, and a body, that she had no recollection of. She had difficulty in accepting a new identity imposed upon her by circumstance and the label imprinted on her by society. She knew that a former version of herself existed prior to her illness. I believe that this was Helen's hardship to overcome, not the disability itself. Liquid modernity suggests that identity is a problematic task, but ultimately a choice. The difficulty here is that identity becomes even more problematic if an individual is denied the choice of an identity based on a physical impossibility.

I felt Helen was accepting of the fact that she was now a wheelchair user, yet I believe the above extracts demonstrate the tension Helen experiences at the embodiment of her identity. She seemed to compartmentalise her disability between her different life-worlds. Considering this, I interpret that Helen did not accept her disability as an excuse to be deficient as an individual, but rather exercised it as a reason to enhance her self-identity.

Theme 3: A disability is not an excuse

A common thread throughout the interview was Helen's very strong rejection of being associated with people who do not share her attitude towards living an

independent life – those who do not appear to demonstrate their worth and appreciation of their life.

“I don’t like people feeling sorry for me” (Pg 16, Ln 474)

She had experienced people with disabilities outside of her sporting life-world and very much disagreed with what she had seen. She firmly expressed that she did not belong, nor did she want to belong, to this particular community of disabled individuals.

“(…) if you feel sorry for yourself then you’re allowing other people to feel sorry for you (…) it’s not nice but you’ve got to get on with it, you know, there’s no point sitting in bed all day” (Pg 19, Ln 569)

It was clear that Helen did not want to be seen as a weak or lesser individual based on her disability simply because (according to Helen) that was the life choice of others with disabilities.

“(…) people exclude themselves from it [life] coz they use it, they use their disability as an excuse not to do things and I think that’s really wrong, you can still do the same stuff as everybody else” (Pg 22, Ln 680)

Here, Helen hints that individuals have a responsibility to include themselves in society if they wish to prevent becoming Other. She continued to discuss the issues which concerned her about being associated with particular stereotypes within the disabled community, and how she actively ensures she does not become such an individual.

"I don't want to be one of those people who doesn't work (...) I'm not going to use my disability as an excuse to do nothing you know" (Pg 25, Ln 767)

Additionally, Helen expressed her intent dislike for students who use their disability as an excuse to not participate in the university experience. I felt the conviction in her argument and the frustration she encountered by being associated with students she considered to be very different from herself due to their attitude towards their disability.

"(...) they use things not being accessible as an excuse not to do things (...) I do all that sort of stuff you know you can still, you can still do it all" (Pg 22, Ln 677)

I felt that Helen had created an identity for herself at university which she purposefully used to distance herself from other students with disabilities, becoming frustrated when grouped with other students with disabilities.

"Yeah I mean people just expect me to know everyone just because I'm in a wheelchair or if they're in a wheelchair I'll know them, it's like, just expect you to be like a group in the corner" (Pg 27, Ln 824)

For Helen, it was illogical to assume a friendship with an individual due to a shared label. Helen appeared to be relatively indifferent to others with disabilities outside of her sporting life-world. She came across as being confident enough in herself to feel no need to create a false connection with someone simply because they both had a disability.

"(...) its daft it's like, it's like saying just coz someone supports the same football team or has the same hair colour you're gonna be the best of friends, it doesn't work like that" (pg 27, Ln 839)

Instead Helen chose to describe her preferred company in the following way:

*“I’m friends with people who are like decent people you know”
(Pg 27, Ln 839)*

I consider Helen’s use of the word ‘*decent*’ to refer to people she considers similar to herself – people who participate in their surrounding world; who do not use excuses, who do not allow themselves to become Other. The difficulty Helen faced was evident in her account. Whilst she associated herself with disability to an extent (as is discussed later in relation to her experience of being an athlete) she battled strongly to be chained to it. Helen did not consider her disability to be a disadvantage and became angered by those who did.

“(…) it doesn’t help that there are stereotypes and stuff, people that are disabled that do do that and you know feel sorry for themselves” (Pg 19, Ln 567)

For Helen, her disability was advantageous when it can be used to create a feeling of self-worth, but she did not subscribe to the attitude of those who perpetuate embedded negative assumptions of being disabled. When it came to identifying Helen’s sense of belonging in her life-worlds,

Theme 4: A relatively normal student

Throughout the account, Helen made numerous references to experiencing her university life-world as a ‘normal’ student. I consider Helen’s attitude of ‘normality’ to be based on identifying the actions and behaviours of her peers and measuring herself by comparison. The idea of being a ‘normal’ student was intricately linked to Helen’s disregard for people who she considers choose to exclude themselves from contemporary practices.

It was evident that Helen was enjoying her university experience. She demonstrated that she has earned her spot at university and was proud of her academic achievements, enjoying identifying herself as a university student.

“I mean it’s nice to know you’re a university student” (Pg 26, Ln 805)

Helen alluded to feeling pleased that she was now living without the previous support structures she perhaps relied upon at home. Helen did not appear to be overwhelmed by this, nor even that she was necessarily experiencing any difficulties being at university.

“(...) it’s nice to know that you can be on your own and still survive, still cope and that really” (Pg 26, Ln 808)

I felt that Helen’s positive experience of university was attributed to by her attitude towards her disability. Whilst she knew that her disability was a factor in her university experience, she still considered her experience as ‘normal’ and was able to participate in all that her peers did. Certainly her disability did not cause her to experience feelings of Otherness whilst at university.

“(...) if you’re willing to go out and do things then you’re fine you know (...) if you want to go [out] you can still go not a problem you just have to give it a go you know” (Pg 26, Ln 816)

Helen continued to demonstrate that she experienced the majority of her time at university as the same as those around her. The examples she provided were typical of any student, regardless of physical capability.

"I'm managing alright <pause> I'm eating, keeping the place fairly tidy (...)I'm managing to go out and get a degree and do what other people do and that" (Pg 25, Ln 785)

Helen often normalised her experiences at university and commented throughout that she was able to do everything that her university peers did. She did not feel like her disability restricted or prevented her from participating in any way.

"(...) you know you can go bowling, you can go to the cinema, you can go to the pub you can do, you know you can do anything really, like anything a (makes quotation marks) normal person would do" (Pg 21, Ln 652)

The only area of her university life-world where Helen indicated that she felt different (but not other) was in relation to her sport. She recognised that her dedication to her sport sometimes prevented her from participating in the expected and assumed culture of university. Yet she understood that this difference was a result of the choices she makes, and more importantly, that she has control over to what extent she moderates these behaviours and actions that make her different.

"If you've got an early morning training session or an early morning competition then it makes sense that you can't go out all night drinking (...) but it doesn't bother me you know, it's my choice" (Pg 20, Ln 618)

For Helen, university was an environment where she very much considered herself equal (but not necessarily the same) to those around her. Her disability was a contributing factor to the way she had to live her life at university, but it in no way restricted her or made her experience a feeling of Otherness. Her university environment was the life-world where I consider Helen not to be in

battle – she appeared to fully consume and enjoy her university student experience with positivity and pride. Throughout the interview I felt Helen spoke forcefully on having earned the right to be somewhere; that she had to prove her place both on and off the tennis table.

Theme 5: You have to earn it

At the time of interview Helen had been a university student for only 4 months. I felt that because of this Helen did not provide many examples demonstrating where she positioned herself within her university life-world. Instead, Helen spoke at length about the experiences she has had in her sporting life-world both as belonging to it and not.

At the beginning of the interview Helen spoke about how she became involved in wheelchair table tennis. She spoke of the relief she experienced when she tried the sport.

“I liked sports from a young age and, and I tried all sorts (...) it was like I finally found something that I can do” (Pg 1, Ln 27)

I felt this to be important to Helen's sense of belonging in sport. Sport, it seemed, was something that re-connected her to a self she knew existed before the illness. I interpret her saying to have *‘finally found’* as Helen experiencing almost a return to her original self through wheelchair table tennis; awakening in her something deep within which she had once experienced many years ago. I believe it is this experience of returning that makes sport such an important environment and culture for Helen to belong to.

I asked Helen about the first time she played wheelchair table tennis internationally. Her response led me to believe she saw her Great Britain kit as a stamp of approval almost, demonstrating her right to be at the Commonwealth Games. The kit symbolised a validation of her ability, a realisation of her sporting strength.

“(...) looking in the mirror it was like, you know I’m in England Commonwealth Games kit it was just amazing it was like the first big step of what I managed to achieve” (Pg 3, Ln 89)

Furthermore, Helen consumed her Commonwealth Games experience as something she completely deserved, reinforcing her commitment to table tennis. There was no question to Helen that she should be there.

“(...) over each bed there was picture of the athlete doing something to do with table tennis (...) I was like <pause> wow that’s pretty cool, this is how it should be” (pg 4, Ln 102)

When discussing her sporting life-world, Helen’s accounts of experiencing belonging (and wanting to belong) were a stark contrast to her rejection of the disability stereotype. Throughout the interview, whereas Helen often used the term ‘they’ for disabled individuals outside of the sporting community, she consistently referred to disability athletes as ‘we’, demonstrating this was a community she very much felt part of and wanted to be associated with.

“(...) I think part of it is you know to say ‘yeah we might be disabled or whatever but we’re still pretty good players” (Pg 11, Ln 312)

I feel that this separation of belonging was decided by Helen’s personal perceptions of what it meant to be associated with each group. Helen’s

considered disabled athletes to be demonstrating worth, to be displaying strength, courage and excellence. However, she did not appear to have the same perception of disabled individuals outside of the sporting environment. How she experienced the athletes around her was how she wanted to be consumed by others.

“(...) I think that’s pretty amazing how some of them manage to do that, over-coming a disability (...) let alone find something that you really like to do, take it as far as you can, become the best in the world” (Pg 14, Ln 436)

For Helen, every training session and competition was an opportunity to earn her right, to become increasingly connected to her ideal of a Paralympic athlete.

“(...) like I have to almost show my dominance and be like I'm here for a reason, I'm here now in this sport, you're not, this is why I'm chosen” (Pg 9, Ln 252)

Throughout the interview I felt Helen was open-minded yet pro-active about the direction of her life. Whatever path Helen was on, she showed that it was the right path for her. This included being at university. Although she did not allude to experiencing a strong sense of belonging at university in terms of her course or her friendship groups, Helen did discuss how ‘normal’ she considered her university experience to be.

Who is Helen?

When I asked Helen to describe what it is like being her she gave me a lengthy, detailed, descriptive answer, however she started with the following:

“Phew I don’t really know to be honest <pause> I’m a normal person, I go to university, I play sport, I’m disabled, I do the same things as everyone else does, I do it in a different way but you know I’m happy” (Pg 30, Ln 919)

I found this extract to be very telling of Helen’s self-perception.

She identified herself first and foremost as someone that conforms to her own standards of what it is to be ‘normal’. She identified herself primarily as a university student, then as someone who plays sport. I interpret that she considers her disability to be the label she identifies with the least as she spoke of it last. Again, Helen did not identify herself as an athlete, rather she chose to identify herself as someone that plays sport, not as a wheelchair table tennis player. She did not yet tie her identity to her sport because she felt she had not yet earned the right to do so. She carried on to explain that both her sporting and university life-worlds had led her to experience situations she never considered were obtainable, let alone achievable. The positive effect that sport and university have had on Helen was profound.

“I think the two combined are just amazing experiences, they both lead to amazing things (...) I honestly think that people who have the chance to do either of them and don’t take it really need to re-evaluate themselves” (Pg 30, Ln 924)

I consider Helen’s use of ‘re-evaluate’ as her displaying her personal understanding of what it means for someone to be Other. To her, the Other is someone who does not wish to progress, someone who has no desire to want more for themselves. I felt the battle Helen faced was her need to be considered equal but not the same; however despite these battles she seemed content with her life.

“I’m happy going to university, I’m happy training” (Pg 30, Ln 920)

I believe the battles Helen fights are mainly with herself. Her battle is the liquid modern condition of consistently feeling the need to improve. Helen did not entirely dedicate herself to her studies, nor did she dedicate her life to sport. Instead Helen experienced her life as a way to demonstrate that she is worthy, capable, a fighter. For Helen, it was always better to be getting better. She dedicated her life to proving that hers, indeed, was a life worth saving.

Robert

About Robert

Robert was a 23 year old PhD student at a high performance sport university. Suffering from Retinoblastoma as a baby, Robert now played for the Great Britain Blind football team, getting the call up to the elite squad in 2009.

Theme 1: Intelligence is the difference

There was no doubt that Robert is academically intelligent – studying for a PhD in Pure Mathematics is concrete evidence of this; shown by the number of times Robert drew examples of his life based on his consideration of his intellect were vast. I consider the significance of Robert's intelligence to contribute to his self-identity two fold. Firstly, I believe that Robert used his intelligence to create an identity as the 'clever one' at school, and then later at university as an impetus to avoid the label of the 'blind one' by his peers.

Robert attended a mainstream primary school as a child and then a school for the visually impaired from ages 11 to 18 years old. Despite being the only blind child his school had ever accommodated, his experience of being more capable than other children began in his early years.

"I kind of had, um, kind of like a classroom assistant who was assigned just to me (...) she kind of turned into just a general kind of classroom assistant just helping everyone" (Pg 30, Ln 914)

The secondary school that Robert boarded at was a specialist school for the visually impaired. Bauman often comments on the importance of the body and

visual representation in the creation of an identity; however this cannot be the case when considering a visually impaired individual. At secondary school, Robert found himself in an environment where his peers were not able to consume his identity visually (as they were also visually impaired) meaning the task of creating an identity for himself fell outside of the liquid modern condition of subjective embodiment. Therefore, I consider that Robert's "intelligence" became his identity quite early on. I asked Robert how it was that he thought he came to be so good at mathematics considering it is quite a visual subject.

"If I can say without sounding too arrogant, I was always quite good at most subjects really" (Pg 16, Ln 464)

This idea of being bright was echoed in a number of examples of Robert's time in education. Robert also commented that his academic ability was a contributing factor to him stopping swimming as a teenager.

"(...) yeah the kind of pressure of being fairly academically able and expected to do A-levels (...) I got to be well just a bit off, a bit lazy in terms of sport" (Pg 2, Ln 28)

The above extract was given at the very start of the interview, however on reflection, I do not feel that Robert experienced much pressure and that perhaps this was said as a gentle introduction on my behalf to my understanding of his intelligence. As our conversation continued, Robert remarked on his experience of moving to university after being in a boarding school for so long, referring to his identity of intelligence as him being a '*big fish*'.

“(...) it was just a case of adapting to being back in the big wide world (...) I was very much like a big fish in a small pond” (Pg 21, Ln 616)

Robert demonstrated that the liquid modern identity does not transcend the environment – a person’s identity is not independent of their surroundings. For Robert, I would argue identity was transitive. He was mindful that his identity would be consumed differently at university and felt internal pressure to ensure his identity did not revert back to one of disability simply because he found himself in new surroundings.

Robert made several remarks which indicated that he used his intelligence almost as mechanism to separate himself from a possibly supposed preconception about his capability. In reference to being an undergraduate Robert commented that he found his experience easier than perhaps other undergraduates did.

“I didn’t have to work as hard to get the marks I got because like I was lucky enough to be academically gifted to not have to worry too much about” (Pg 26, Ln 77)

Additionally, Robert felt his university endeavours were of more difficult than those of other able bodied and disabled students because of the subject matter.

“(...) because maths is quite a difficult subject accessibility wise (...) maths is all quite kind of specialised you know like there’s diagrams you have to deal with and stuff like that” (Pg 21, Ln 641)

I sensed that it was important for Robert to be able to demonstrate through his education that he was a capable individual with academic acumen. He

consistently referred to examples where he was able to compare himself to others based on academia as well as in sport.

“(...) the average IQ [for his condition] is something like 130” (Pg 32, Ln 954)

“(...) [football] is the hardest of all the VI sports” (Pg 33, Ln 1001)

The overlap of Robert's identities of being a student, being a footballer and being disabled was quite complex, yet the idea of his identity being tied to intelligence and capability was evident throughout. Robert seemed confident, perhaps even one could argue arrogant about his abilities. As well as making reference to his university peers, Robert appeared to enjoy knowing that his being a university student demonstrated his academic achievements in comparison to his peers in his home town.

“(...) they're all kind of working in construction or whatever” (Pg 24, Ln 718)

“(...) and I think me and my brother are the only 2 people that went to uni from home” (Pg 24, Ln 732)

I consider that Robert experienced his intelligence as a difference to his friends at home – I felt his use of the occupation '*construction or whatever*' was used to highlight the extent to which he considered himself as having achieved more than his peers, almost as if construction is associated with a lack of intelligence or academic progression.

I have no doubt that Robert was aware of the need to create an identity for himself in different environments, disabled or not. However, the issue of being visually impaired does add a level of complexity to Bauman's problem of identity

being linked to visual objectivity. Because Robert did not develop his athlete identity until much later on in his university life-world he chose instead to develop an innate ability into personal characteristic – one which defined who he was to a group of individuals who could not (visually at least) label him. Knowing that at university he would find himself in a different life-world I felt Robert maintained this ingrained identity of intelligence but attempted to manipulate his behaviour to avoid his disability becoming the dominant characteristic of his identity.

In regards to his student identity, Robert spoke of experiences aligning with assumed and expected university behaviour, however, he did not appear to hold his identity as a PhD student in high regard. It was obvious that his athlete identity far outweighed any small affinity he had to being identified as a student.

Theme 2: An Athlete-Student not a Student-Athlete

Robert experienced his first few years of university life as a student, not a student-athlete. As my conversation with Robert progressed, it became apparent that he very much identified himself as an athlete-student rather than a student-athlete. His athletic identity began to dominate his university student identity as he encountered more of the elite athlete experience. It seemed that his PhD was more of a hindrance to his athletic identity, which conflicted with the rhetoric of intelligence being important to his self-esteem. Robert quickly identified himself as a high performance sporting individual.

“I’d call myself and elite level footballer (...) I guess I do like to think of myself as elite level” (Pg 3, Ln 66)

I felt that here Robert was demonstrating the magnitude of the importance of this identity to him. To be a ‘footballer’ is the anchor to Robert’s athletic identity – he enjoyed the label of ‘footballer’ as he felt that is a label to which he conforms and is proud to conform to. I felt that Robert enjoyed confirming his status as an elite player, that this status was an important aspect of how he identified himself to others, almost as a form of self-affirmation of his achievement and success.

“I’ve kind of become better and one of the more established England players” (Pg 4, Ln 89)

“If I’m honest I’m the best in the squad at dribbling” (Pg 7, Ln 108)

Robert mentioned that he used to swim competitively as a child.

“(…) when I was swimming I went to the junior Europeans, and sort of under 15’s and things really and I stopped when I was 15” (Pg 1, Ln19)

I consider that his exposure to top level junior sport was a contributing factor to the speed and capacity at which Robert’s athletic identity has superseded his student identity, which developed at a similar time to when he stopped swimming. On reflection, I concede that these two childhood identities of athleticism and intelligence allowed Robert a distinction of self away from the label of disability. He commented that his return to competitive sport brought with it a sense of re-awakening or re-discovery of himself.

“(…) it was just a bit of a pass time for me (…) but then kind of my competitive instincts took over” (Pg 2, Ln 42)

Robert admitted that he experienced his athletic identity as something all consuming, conflicting with his role as a PhD student.

“When I started my PhD my PhD was very much my number one priority and then came football, but you know now it’s very much the other way round to be honest” (Pg 4, Ln 90)

This conflict of Roberts identities has led him to struggle to manage was own personal self-expectations. To be above average in academic achievement is of significance importance to him, however to exceed in his sporting endeavours is also of great concern. I consider that so much of Robert’s self-esteem is tied to achieving and succeeding at such high levels that his desire to do so in both football and university might not be sustainable. The dominance of his athletic identity resulted in the sacrifice of his student identity. As is discussed later in Theme 4, Robert’s student identity was previously quite strong, very much considering himself an active participant in university culture. However, this was no longer the case and it was clear that Robert was undoubtedly so focused on the London 2012 Paralympic Games that his student identity had deteriorated, despite him holding an exceptionally highly regarded student identity (that of a doctoral student). This was something he battled with daily, yet football remained his absolute focus.

“(…) it (football) has definitely has slowed down my PhD quite a lot so the plan is just to get to London and sort it all out after that!” (Pg 11, Ln 327)

When considering the issue of athletic identity, I do not believe that Robert has succumbed to the liquid modern condition of creating the identity; more that the

identity has re-created Robert. His previous identity at university was not a problem (as Bauman would put it), it was not a task - he was searching for an alternative identity to his supposed one of being intelligent. Robert's transition to an elite level footballer was organic, indigenous and isolated from his surrounding environment. His athletic identity had grown from an innate need to achieve, a need to continuously self-improve. Furthermore, his athletic identity was of such importance to him that he was willing to sacrifice participating in liquid modernity in order to ensure he fulfils his own athletic expectations.

"If I had to go a year of not working or something until the right job came up and that I'd be able to carry on doing football properly and that then I probably would" (Pg 27, Ln 810)

Robert discussed his athlete identity very much in liquid modern terms, making reference to the importance of self-regulation; of time being accelerated; to the constant chase of self-improvement and consequential success. However, what was obvious from Robert's account was that the new identity he subscribes to comes with a solid, tangible, quantifiable benchmark of success, and until the day of the Paralympic closing ceremony Robert finds it difficult to concentrate on being anything other than an elite level footballer.

"(...) you go to bed about thinking how you can get better and get that silverware, get that medal" (Pg 4, Ln 95)

Yet his attitude to his PhD was one of ambivalence and uncertainty.

"I'm just not quite sure where it's going <pause> it'll be alright in the end." (Pg 29, Ln 884)

Throughout the interview Robert made a number of comments indicating that he was aware, consciously or not, that his identity has been shaped by his surroundings. His success at school, his athletic achievements, his social experiences and the friendships he has made were a direct consequence of how he had been brought up to consider his disability, as he comments:

“I’ve never really had any doubts about what I could do” (Pg 32, Ln 969)

I interpret this statement as Robert acknowledging that he is a product of his environment; that his self-image is very much close to his ideal self. I consider this level self-actualisation a key aspect in Robert’s account of and associations with ‘disability’.

Theme 3: ‘Disability’ does my head in

At the start of the interview, Robert was open about admitting he considered himself to be an elite level football player. This admission of conforming to a particular identity led Robert to discuss his sense of belonging to a particular group of disabled individuals – individuals who, whilst being blind, were exceptionally skilful, dedicated, astute athletes. This was a group of individuals Robert felt proud to belong to, indeed at times considering himself very much a key member of the group’s development. These are the people he measured his sporting success and achievement against.

“(…) if I don’t improve someone will certainly have gone past me by the time the time comes around for selection” (Pg 7, Ln 199)

I asked Robert about what playing at the 2012 Paralympic Games would mean to him and he chose to focus on personal, internal gains of the event, rather than the gains the disabled community would benefit from.

“(...) it’s definitely gonna be the strongest competition there has ever been” (Pg 6, Ln 145)

It appeared that Robert did not have much affinity with the Paralympic movement as a whole. The fact that Blind Football falls under the umbrella of Paralympic events was quite irrelevant for Robert in terms of using it as a platform for disability sport - it seemed rather inconsequential to him. When I asked him about the Channel 4 show dedicated to showcasing Paralympic athletes in the run up to the Games his response was evidence of this.

“In all honesty I haven’t watched a lot of it” (Pg 13, Ln 390)

Robert did not express a strong identity as a disabled individual in his account, therefore potentially making his connection to disability sport tenuous. Robert spoke at length, and in detail about his squad mates, his place in the team, their shared goals and expectations of each other. Being a member of this elite team of footballers was where Robert considered his disability to be a contributing factor to his place of belonging in elite level sport. His disability was not an open pass to assuming his allegiance to Paralympic sport. Throughout the conversation, Robert tended to only use the terms ‘we’ and ‘us’ when discussing football or his team mates, and although he discussed his considerations of the Paralympic Games within the disability movement, he remained relatively impartial.

"I wish they'd [Paralympic athletes] just kind of shut up and let the sport do the talking for itself" (Pg 14, Ln 404)

Contrary to Roberts closeness to his team mates was his distinct aversion and disapproval to being clustered with other disabled individuals. His personal separation from the disabled community was quite apparent, as was his frustration of the behaviour of some individuals with disabilities.

"You hear all these things about people where like their disability kind of consumes them where as I, <pause> for me fortunately it's never been like that" (Pg 31, Ln 929)

However, Robert was acutely aware that the concomitance of his disability was linked to his childhood, where he had very few negative experiences of his condition. Due to this, he could not identify with individuals who allow their disability to dictate their participation within society.

"I've seen some horrendous cases over the years of people who just can't function in society you know just because of the way they've been brought up" (Pg 32, Ln 968)

Here Robert is capturing the core directive of liquid modern existence – the ability to function in society is of absolute paramount. He goes on to comment that this inability to function in society, to be the flawed consumer, is not restricted to disability. Robert did not wish to be associated with anyone who was unable to present a capacity to engage in a liquid modern world.

"(...) don't get me wrong I'm not even talking about disabled kids here, just like able kids you know – um like most of the football team are fairly switched on to be honest but there's still a couple of people in there that you think, you know [rolls eyes and shrugs, laughs] (Pg 32, Ln 976)

I think this extract demonstrates Robert's understanding of his own intelligence. He presented this argument almost with a sense of pride that his statement was not a reflection on him; that even with his disability he does not belong to the cluster of individuals he perceives as having little contribution to society, disassociating himself as such.

Robert was exceptional vocal with his thoughts regarding the politics of disability. When discussing disability awareness he commented:

"(...) you know these people that kind of go on disability marches and stuff, all that does my head in to be honest" (Pg 14, Ln 405)

"I tend to get annoyed when you hear this disabled rhetoric about, you know, the world owes me a favour blah blah blah" (Pg 25, Ln 751)

The use of *'these people'* highlights Robert's condemnation of their behaviours and actions. In addition he was clear that he did not want to be associated with certain individuals at his university if the association was based purely on the sharing of the label of disability:

"There was a guy in halls who had cerebral palsy and you know he was one of the most negative people I've ever met what so ever (...) he came up to me and was like 'oh I know what it's like for the likes of us' and I was thinking 'whoa I'm not like you' you know, [laughs]" (Pg25, Ln756)

Robert made the conscious effort to distance himself from this individual because he was aware that his peers may consider him in the same light by association.

“(...) I had to try and separate myself from him a little bit” (Pg 25, Ln 761)

He then justified why he purposefully removed himself from the prospect of being akin with this student.

“It wasn’t the fact the he had cerebral palsy that myself nor no one else really wanted to socialise with him, it was just that he was a miserable bastard [laughs]” (Pg 26, Ln 771)

I consider Roberts intense dislike for situations like this to be due to the fact that he had acquired such a strong sense of belonging at university – a place where he considered at first he might not be accepted. Robert demonstrated throughout the interview that he values his achievements both on and off the football pitch. He spoke of his time as an undergraduate and postgraduate with fondness and humour. It was evident that Robert had understood the challenges he would face transitioning from a visually impaired boarding school to university, and he embraced these challenges completely, carving himself a place within his new environment where he experienced an unexpected sense of acceptance and inclusion – an experience of what he considered to be a ‘normal’ university student experience.

Theme 4: A 'normal' student (until football came along)

Robert was not an aspiring athlete when he was choosing which university to attend. He demonstrated a very liquid modern attitude to his university choice – one of ambivalence and uncertainty. I asked him about his process of choosing a university course and town considering being a Paralympian was not even a consideration, let alone a focus at the time of applying.

*“Haha yeah nothing could have been further from my head! Um life-plan – I think it was more a case of I didn’t really have one!”
(Pg 15, Ln 485)*

Robert was expressing a very common experience of young adults - being overwhelmed by abundant possibilities and options that the task of constructing a ‘life-plan’ is one of complication and confusion, quickly becoming redundant the more liquid the life-world the individual experiences.

For the most part of his time at university, he was a student, not a student-athlete. I felt this above comment drew on past experiences of a life-world without sport, one that he missed at times. Robert commented that as a child he had very few negative experiences regarding his disability. He had never encountered feeling uncomfortable, inferior or unwelcome in his previous educational environments. However, Robert reflected on how he anticipated his move to university.

“ I was just a bit worried really you know about how, how people would kind of react and what not, (...) specialist schools do tend to get a little bit sort of institutionalised” (Pg 21,Ln 613)

His interpretation of his time at his secondary school as *‘institutionalised’* highlights the difficulty of the structure versus agency dialogue. Robert was aware that his educational environment had, to an extent, dictated his experience of being a disabled student. Here, Robert's apprehension was born from him acknowledging that his past experiences of belonging related heavily to his sense of 'normality' or sameness at his past schools. Attending university would expose him to the possibility of experiencing Otherness in a setting where he previously felt confident, competent and capable. For the first time,

Robert was aware that his disability could impede his sense of belonging, giving way to the possibility of feelings of Otherness in an environment where he had previously identified himself as superior. However, Robert conveyed, that as far as he was concerned, this was not the case.

“It was a really kind of positive experience, a lot better than I thought it was going to be before I joined” (Pg 19, Ln 636)

The experiences Robert provided about his time at university very much conformed to the expected and assumed university culture. Indeed, at the very beginning of the interview Robert made a passing reference to 'uni life' to me, assuming that I knew what he was inferring to; that there is an inherent understanding of the university 'life' and the culture that it entails.

“(...) I was, you know, just living the uni life” (Pg 1, Ln 10)

Despite being blind, Robert found that he was able to participate in the assumed and expected university behaviour to a great enough extent that he felt included by his peers, helping to 'normalise' his position as a disabled student. This line of embedded university social expectation was repeated a number of times, demonstrating Robert did indeed experience his time at university positively but also as 'normal' (according to his meanings of normal).

“I’ve still got a bit of a party mentality from the old stereotypical student thing” (Pg 12, Ln 353)

Robin appeared to experience his time at university in a very liquid modern condition – accelerated and full with an abundance of option. I did not feel that Robert was telling me what he thought I expected to hear about his university

lifestyle – there was no sense of bravado during the interview. I believe that Robert participated in university life to his absolute limit, embracing university education and all the social experiences it had to offer.

“ Yeah I’d go out a fair bit, (...) I was able to balance out working fairly hard with going out drinking and stuff” (Pg 20, Ln 595)

Robert would often articulate his experiences in reference to social occasions at university. He recalled how being in halls of residence with the members of the Rugby team contributed to his initial university experience. Their acceptance of him into their sporting culture provided Robert with a positive self-image and emphatically influenced his sense of belonging after an initial period of anxiety and uncertainty.

“I went into a halls that had a lot of the rugby team (...) I might have got on slightly better with my work had I gone into a better hall (...) I screwed myself, just out lots you know!” (Pg 20, Ln 589)

Throughout his undergraduate and postgraduate years Robert made every attempt to participate in and enjoy his university life-world. He did not give any indication that his time at university was markedly dissimilar to his peers, commenting that in only a short period of time he felt a sense of equality, but not necessarily of sameness. He certainly did not identify himself as different, or as being made to feel different.

“(...) after a few days people just get the idea that you know you’re not really any different” (Pg 25, Ln 745)

However, there were times during the interview when Robert indirectly spoke of experiences when his disability had in fact been a limiting factor in the extent to

which he could gain a university experience similar to his peers. I asked Robert if being blind ever restricted his social experiences, and whilst he admitted it did, he was somewhat satirical in his reply – continuing the rhetoric regarding university culture.

“I went out a fair bit but to be honest if I’d been able to see I’d probably have gone out even more!” (Pg 20, Ln 580)

I believe Robert’s response carried with it a slight sense of loss. Robert was aware that his lack of sight denied him the possibility of increased social opportunities – a cornerstone of liquid modern living. Reflecting on this point further, Robert made a knowing comment that his disability proved to be an influential factor when attempting to develop friendships.

“It does kind of, well, I certainly found anyway that it limited who I was friends with to an extent” (Pg 20, Ln 581)

I believe that despite Robert expressing a genuine sense of belonging at university, his account of his academic and social experiences produced an undertone of difference. Consciously or not, Robert gave indication to suggest that his efforts to 'normalise' his experiences at university were often rooted in confessions of a false identity and experiencing Otherness.

Theme 5: Alcohol, mates and not being a burden

Robert was quite candid about his disability. He never attempted to convey that he was the same as everyone else, nor did he pretend his disability was not problematic at university.

Having attended a school for the visually impaired, Robert admitted that his perceptions of a sighted environment were at times a catalyst for his insecurities about starting university. A lack of experience outside of his own school meant he was just as susceptible to judgement of sighted individuals as they could be about him.

“I was just a bit worried really you know about how, how people would kind of react and what not (...) like I say I’d been away at a specialist school where everything’s kind of laid on a plate for you” (Pg 20, Ln 613)

It appeared that participating in a full social life reduced Robert’s feelings of insecurity and possible Otherness. However, I interpret Robert’s examples of social behaviour to be traced with an inadvertent need to avoid dependency. In the liquid modern world independence is the key to social mobility. Having to depend upon others can demonstrate weakness, reducing the freedom of oneself and the freedom of others. This was something that Robert understood, even if he was not quite aware of how it was manifested in his social situations. The below extract demonstrates this well.

“(...) the only time you really rely on someone is like if you go to a nightclub (...) but like I’ve never really been a massive club fan anyway to be honest so I kind of avoided it a little bit, um, which suited everyone else.” (Pg 20, Ln 596)

I was unsure whether Robert avoided nightclubs because he had a genuine dislike for them, or his dislike stemmed from wanting to avoid situations of dependency. Indeed, can these two factors be separated? Certainly a nightclub environment would make Robert exceptionally aware of his difference, presenting conditions where communication is difficult and contact is easily lost

even for sighted individuals. I could accept that Robert would find his surroundings to be disorientating and perhaps therefore causing a need for dependency. However, I felt that Robert did have a genuine sense of loss that he felt unable to participate in the final stages of a night out with his friends given his consistent reference to inclusion, partying and drinking with university friends. To comment that this '*suited everyone else*' indicated that he avoided nightclubs more for their benefit rather than for his own. I understand this to be the case because Robert's mechanism to ensure that he was not in a position to reduce the social freedom of his friends by being dependant on them was to socialise to excess.

"I just tried to make sure I drank more earlier [laughs] (...) you know so by the time everyone went to the club I was too smashed to make it out the front door anyway" (Pg 20, Ln 600)

Robert was aware that being in a sighted environment would initially cause him both practical and social issues. However, he was exceptionally pragmatic, rational and realistic about his new challenge.

"(...) it was just like the whole process of having to adapt to living in a new place and meeting new people" (Pg 21, Ln 621)

I think Robert had prepared himself fully for the new chapter about to start in his life, away from an environment he saw as being institutionalised, highlighting the opportunity that many undergraduates recognise when starting university - the possibility of creating a new identity. Robert understood that his disability would automatically place him at a disadvantage when beginning the task of identity creation.

"It's just a little bit harder; you have to put yourself out there a lot more" (Pg 21, Ln 622)

Unlike many other physical disabilities, blindness is not always instantly recognisable. Perhaps up until certain proximity, Robert is not judged on his disability. He alluded to the need to create a false impression of himself to establish an identity away from his disability. I felt he said this with a heavy heart.

"(...) like I couldn't walk into the student bar and say like 'oh Ben's over there I'll go talk to him' sort of thing, you have to make people want to come and talk to you and stuff and so you just kind of have to be a little more outgoing at first and it might not necessarily be natural so, um, it's kind of a bit tricky" (Pg 21, Ln 623)

Roberts considered it his responsibility to create a likeable, approachable identity as he was aware that his blindness could allow people to actively choose to ignore him without him knowing it. He was conscious that he had to produce an identity that others were willing to consume despite them knowing he was different. It was his responsibility to ensure he did not slip into the role of other.

"(...) you have to be able to go out and do the same as everyone else you know, otherwise you're gonna get made to look like an idiot" (Pg 33, Ln 996)

Robert admitted that if he could not do the 'same as everybody else' then he would look like an 'idiot' which I felt was something Robert would deeply resent given his academic and sporting achievements.

Robert had expressed his anxiety about adapting to a new environment at university. He knew that his inability to see made him different, but he was unsure as to what extent people would experience him as Other. Through Robert's own understanding of what Otherness meant to him, he provided an insight as to how the creation of difference is both an individual and social process.

Theme 6: Understanding the creation of difference

Robert seemed to have a rather academic, personally removed understanding of how and why difference is created. When discussing himself as Other he did not become accusatory or antagonistic, rather he was considerate and reflective. He spoke about why he believed that his peers would potentially consider him as Other and also provided examples of how he understands the Other in his overlapping life-worlds.

"I'm always kind of amazed by the range of people, well no, the range of conceptions that there are about you, about people" (Pg 25, Ln 738)

I consider that for Robert to say this he has had to have experienced a multitude of attitudes towards his disability. However, he indirectly acknowledged that people are a product of their environment and that their surroundings will influence the exposure one has to difference and Otherness.

"(...) through no fault of their own you just don't see that many people with disabilities really, I guess maybe you do if you go to London or whatever" (Pg 25, Ln 736)

Robert justified the apprehension of Otherness if one's direct experience of Otherness is limited – '*no fault of their own*' indicates that Robert is aware that people cannot always be condemned for their reaction and understanding of Otherness. By referring to '*London*' as somewhere where disability might be more visual, I felt Robert was aware that the immediate cultures people find themselves in dictate the extent how people interpret, understand, tolerate and accept Otherness. He commented on the matter further when talking about how he experienced his peers at university.

"I've gotten to mix with a group of people (...) so coming from that environment [small village] you never really get to mix with many different people, like there's no kind of multiculturalism, it's not very cosmopolitan you know" (Pg 24, Ln 717)

Here, Robert admitted to his own possible prejudices and that his own experience of difference was very limited. Until university, his life-worlds had not included many sighted individuals who were not an immediate friend, family or teacher to him. Nor had he experienced what he considered to be other cultures or nationalities. I think to come from a '*small village*' infers rural, white, privileged, insular. Yet this example demonstrates how difference and Otherness transcend, at the very least, the concept of visual identity. Bauman would consider that in liquid modern times the markings of Otherness, of the objects of identity are visual, causing immediate ordering. What is demonstrated above is that despite Robert not having the ability to order visually, he is still openly able to participate in the liquid modern condition of ordering the Otherness of strangers, suggesting that Otherness therefore goes beyond Bauman's concern of the visual trappings of identity creation.

I believe Robert provided excellent examples of the sociological in that Robert was aware of how he perceived Otherness, he could consider why he himself could be perceived as Other.

“(...) some people just, they don’t even think you can put one foot in front of the other, where as other people kind of are really switched on from the word go” (Pg 25, Ln 739)

Robert understood that there was a difference between ignorance and curiosity. When starting university, he considered his peers to be more curious rather than ignorant. Indeed, Robert was sensitive to the issue of his disability potentially affecting those around him, believing that it was his responsibility to ensure he was not perceived as Other.

“(...) it might have just been a case of people thought ‘how’s he gonna get his dinner, what’s he gonna be like on a night out’ and stuff, but like the only way to clear it you know you just have to befriend people” (Pg 25, Ln 742)

Throughout the interview Robert remained thoughtful and circumspect towards the issue of Otherness, and I felt this was largely due to the fact that Robert did not consider himself to be Other – rather his self-image is one of athleticism, confidence, independence and intelligence. For Robert, the Other was the person who does not aspire to these life standards.

“ (...) you can just tell that they haven’t done very much it’s kind of, it’s a bit sad really coz they, they’ve got all the potential there to do stuff , like not even in a sporting sense, just general, and it’s just like wow you know” (Pg 33, Ln 1007)

Robert seemed to appreciate how his different life-worlds both conflicted and complemented each other at that very moment in time. Indeed, he came across

as someone who very much understood himself and his position within these life-worlds.

Who is Robert?

Robert demonstrated that his identity was fluid, changeable depending on his mood and his environment. He ordered his identities as he saw it to best advantage his current situation. In his village he believes he is known as the blind, intelligent son of a local rugby player. At university he believes he is known as the GB Footballer who plays for the blind team. He knows that he will never get away from others considering his disability as part of his identity. However for Robert his identity is not as perplexing as others may consider it.

First and foremost Robert identifies with his idea and image of what it means to be a normal 23 years old male.

“I think I’m a fairly average <pause> well no I don’t know about average but <pause> I think I’m a kind of fairly in adverted commas normal guy who just likes kind of everyday things, the same as a lot of other people” (Pg 36, Ln 1098)

Robert hints that he is equal, but that he is not the same – he is not average. His admission of his athletic identity was tied to football, identifying his own reasons for why he has this potentially temporary identity.

“(…) with a slightly obsessive streak where once I kind of get stuck into stuff I can’t really put it down, which is what football is at the moment” (Pg 36, Ln 1101)

After the mention of football Robert provided his outlook to his disability –which he said with complete conviction.

“(...) someone that’s kind of been fortunate enough, well, perhaps slightly unfortunate to be born with a condition which has resulted in a disability but like I say it’s a relatively minor issue my disability to me” (Pg 36, Ln 1102)

Finally, Robert considers his student identity – the one which was causing him the most anxiety. This was the once preferred but was now most bothersome of his identities.

“I um having more pressing issues such as the PhD and stuff than my actual disability and stuff you know!” (Pg 36, Ln 1105)

To surmise Robert added:

“I’d hope that I’m not seen as too much different from anyone else really” (Pg 36, Ln 1108)

From talking with Robert, I consider that he hoped he actually was seen as a little bit differently though – as an elite level blind footballer who also happens to be a very intelligent individual. Two facts he, quite rightly, was very proud of.

Chris

About Chris

Chris was a 28 year old wheelchair fencer. At 18 years old he had a brain tumour removed which left him with partial paralysis of the left side of his body, occasional difficulties with his balance and Palsy to the face. Despite being a wheelchair fencer, Chris did not require a wheelchair for everyday use – only for his sport. At the time of interview Chris had decided to take time out from studying for a Postgraduate degree at a non-high performance sport university.

Theme 1. The Loss of 'Chris'

Before the discovery and removal of his brain tumour, Chris identified himself as a musician.

"I mean initially I'd always wanted to be a musician, I was a drummer , a jazz drummer" (Pg 23, Ln 705)

In addition, Chris had no previous knowing or experience of disability sport, or even the sport which now contributed to his present day identity.

"I didn't have any idea about wheelchair fencing so I didn't really, I mean I didn't even really know anything about able bodied fencing really." (Pg 2, Ln 41).

Despite Chris' passion and dedication to music he had decided he wanted a career which would offer him more than perhaps the music industry could. I felt that Chris was demonstrating the liquid modern tension of needing to choose and therefore create an identity based on occupation – here was the juxtaposition of the freedom that music provided Chris against the security a

traditional career could offer him, with both opportunities illuminating exceptionally different life paths.

“(...) you go to study and all of sudden you realise there’s not a great deal of money in it [music] (...) it [the RAF] had only come around because I needed something to do (Pg 2, Ln 710).

What was apparent throughout Chris’ interview was the feeling that his previous life was stolen from him, his past identity suddenly taken away from him. He had no choice in it. He described the loss of his previous self and his previous life path in reference to the most important part of his former identity.

“The illness that I got, the results, it meant that I couldn’t do that anymore [play the drums].” (Pg 2, Ln 29)

“That’s who I was before the illness [a drummer] so that’s who I should have been after the illness.” (Pg 25, Ln 779)

I consider Chris saying ‘*who I should have been*’ as him lamenting the loss of the person he had always considered himself to be, mourning his past self. This acknowledgement that he no longer had the identity he was once so connected to prompted Chris’ contemplation from the former day ‘Chris’ to the present day ‘Chris’ as a journey of sorrow, torment and resurrection.

Despite the experience of his illness being traumatic, Chris attempted to normalise the experience by remembering his reactions to his brain surgery. Yet he admitted that this may have been a coping mechanism for him to deal with the ensuing difficulty.

“Luckily I had the benefit of being 18, and having that typical ‘it’ll be alright, nothing’s gonna happen, what’s the worst that can happen’ sort of attitude towards it” (Pg 17, Ln 512)

“I don’t know if it was just me you know my brain just shutting it out or if it was me being an 18 year old lad but I think my family took it a lot worse than I did.” (Pg 2, Ln 514)

Knowing that his surgery happened almost a decade ago, I consider that Chris’ reaction to it now and how he remembered it may have been different to how he experienced it at the time. I consider that to use the word ‘luckily’ Chris is almost demeaning his experience by attempting to normalize his emotions – attempting to justify that his reactions were similar to the considered would be reactions of any 18 year old male. In his account he seemed very mature yet reflective about such a severe diagnosis.

“It wasn’t as devastating as it could have been <pause> it wasn’t you know <pause> it wasn’t the end of my life because everything I’d ever wanted was taken away from me no, but it was quite devastating though.” (Pg 24, Ln 719)

Following on from this, Chris highlighted the struggle that whilst the illness caused major disruption to his life, it led him to becoming the person he identified himself as today.

“(…) to have that [RAF Career] taken away from me that was quite devastating (…) it was like now I don’t have a clue and not only do I not have a clue but a lot of doors were closed to me that was the thing that was hard to deal with”. (Pg 24, L 726)

The above extracts indicate that Chris found it difficult to reconcile what the event actually meant to him at the time, and what it meant to him now that he had found himself in a better place. The contradiction in language demonstrates the turmoil Chris faced at the time, the difficulties he has faced

since but also the ways in which the illness brought with it unexpected, yet positive life changes. However, his life event was far from 'normal', and consequentially, regardless of the outcome of elite sport, caused him years of suffering and anguish. Yet I consider that for Chris to use the term '*luckily*' whilst talking about his past shows he has acquiesced. He knew his situation was bad, but understood that the outcome of this situation could have been markedly worse. Chris was reflexive of the situation, perhaps reluctantly aware of the favourable outcomes of his illness but remembered the emotional agony he suffered at the time of this event as 'devastating'.

I felt that Chris, although honest, remained relatively emotionless, almost stoic when reflecting on the loss of his previous life. The account of his past self-displayed underlying tension, anger and frustration at remembering the life he lost and the misery he suffered. Yet this was intermittently diffused with affirming examples of the life he leads now. Chris' illness had left him with a permanent disability - he will constantly wrestle the known and the unknowns of who he was against who he has become. And who he had become was a world class wheelchair fencer.

Theme 2: Reborn as a Paralympic athlete

The notion of the athlete identity being linked to specific characteristics is demonstrated well in this study. Bauman postulates that whilst fate sets the options it is the character of the individual that makes the choice. It would appear that Chris' 'fate' (or biological predisposition) was to have a brain tumour removed, causing both physical and psychological damage. Seven years on, through a journey of Otherness, of belonging, of a crisis of identity and of

discovery, Chris' actions had led to him competing internationally as a wheelchair fencer for his country.

Chris described how he experienced these characteristics in relation to his disability and to his sport. I interpret these as almost a rebirth, with Chris experiencing characteristics of will, strength, determination and drive in a way that he had not experienced in himself previously with the identity as an able bodied musician.

"I wasn't sporty growing up, I'd never come across these characteristics to the extent that I've got them now." (Pg 22, Ln 670)

"(...) I had to pull myself out of it to make myself better, so probably I guess the more I think about it I guess the characteristics I've got to become an elite level athlete I came across then." (Pg 22, Ln 674)

Chris commenting that he pulled himself 'out of it' suggested that he was aware of the options his illness had presented to him. In order to be pulled out he must have experienced himself as 'in' something which he knew was not where he was supposed to be. Theme 3 explores this concept further as Chris explained the emotionally destitute state of mind he found himself in after his operation. It seems the options presented to Chris were to either pull himself out of his depression, or sink further and further in.

Becoming an athlete has allowed Chris to experience himself in new, positive ways. Despite losing his previous identity, Chris expressed almost a limitation to his personal growth before his illness. Being faced with such a test of character revealed to Chris just how capable, resilient and enduring he could

be; something that he had not yet discovered about himself previously. His new identity as an elite athlete allowed him to experience himself daily as strong, as purposeful and as developing.

“I’m very surprised that I can put myself through things that I’d never thought of doing back when I was younger (...) I surprise myself most days with what I can do.” (Pg 23, Ln 693)

I consider that this almost rebirth of Chris as an elite level student-athlete had transformed his experience of himself. Additionally Chris identified himself as an elite level athlete based on his own standards and criteria for what he considers to be elite. When asked if Chris would classify himself as an elite level athlete he answered without hesitation.

“Yes I would” (Pg 9, Ln, 250)

Chris explained that his transition to becoming an elite level athlete was progressive. As is discussed in Theme 5, he discovered his aptitude for wheelchair fencing by chance. However, his dedication to the sport meant that he now experienced his life in a completely different way. The decision to become a musician or a member of the RAF seemed at complete odds with his decision to become a full time athlete.

“(...) all of a sudden I’ve got no student loan, I’ve got no income (...) obviously everything stopped in terms of normal life” (Pg 10, Ln 258)

Chris expressed that he had reached a stage after his illness where he felt he had returned to ‘normal’ life. However, it was evident that the joy and positivity he experienced from sport, how it allowed him to experience a better sense of

self, began to develop into more than just a sense of wellbeing. Chris developed such a strong affinity with his sport that he found himself changing, developing into a completely new individual. Chris identified with his athlete identity so much that he was prepared to sacrifice the *'normal life'* he so desperately sought during the years after his illness. Becoming a medal winning Paralympic athlete was now Chris' priority, regardless of how it prevented him progressing in other areas of his life.

"I'm making huge sacrifices, (...) like my friends that I've grown up with are now in their own places, got jobs (...) I'm still living with my parents" (Pg 7, Ln 195)

Chris described what he considered to be the benchmark achievable objectives in liquid modern living – the boxes that for him should be ticked along the way to demonstrate purpose, worth and place. I consider that whilst his desire to achieve in fencing was pulling him in one direction, he linked the above examples of life's targets to ambitions he once had before his illness, almost as if the lives his friends have reminded him of the life he had once hoped for. But Chris was quick to pull himself away from such reminiscent thoughts and returned back to being reflexive and pragmatic about his athletic focus.

" (...) but my sport is what I do, it's my career choice at the moment so rather than going out and putting on a suit and a tie and go to an office every day I go out training" (Pg 7, Ln 203)

He recognised that participation in elite level sport was his choice, and it was therefore his choice that he did not have the same badges of an expected adult life around him like his friends. As is with most athletes, his tie to his athlete identity prevented him from progressing beyond the solid structures of sport and

embracing the opportunities and potentials of a liquid modern existence. Indeed the life of an athlete could even be likened to the life of Bauman's Vagabond, as Chris demonstrated.

"I've got the luxury of being offered a bedsit (...) but I have to buy food too to be able to survive so <pause> and without any income to do that at the moment" (Pg 8, Ln 225)

The juxtaposition of Chris' words fully demonstrated the difficulty of his condition – a liquid modern contradiction of 'luxury' and 'bedsit'. This was the life that Chris was currently choosing to lead because of the sense of self-affirmation and self-esteem gained from sport. I consider Chris' athlete identity to be of such importance to him because he perceived sport as the primary reason he was able to rediscover a sense of meaning and purpose in his life. As he spoke I felt like he almost felt like he had a debt of gratitude to pay to sport for the metaphysical support and encouragement it gave him at his darkest hour. This darkest hour was one of the feeling of Otherness.

Theme 3: From Otherness to 'back on track'

The dramatic change to Chris' life was not welcomed nor was it invited. The discovery of the tumour on his brain ended a potential career as a serviceman meaning his future had become severely limited; options no longer available, possible plans laid out to ruin. It disrupted his entire sense of self-worth and self-efficacy. Whilst talking about the effects the removal of the tumour had on Chris, his account gave rise to deep insights to Chris' state of mind over a long period of physical and personal recovery. At times, I interpreted Chris as a broken individual; faulty and defective as he provided examples about his struggle to accept the complete conversion of who he knew himself to be. The

change to Chris' life was sudden and immediate, but the after effects of this change left him damaged for a number of years. The transition, the journey, to find a new self was painful and enduring. Chris' transition to Otherness was fuelled by a state of what appeared to be uncontrollable instability and unmitigated difference.

Upon release from hospital Chris experienced himself as useless, trapped by his illness, feeling shameful and frustrated by the liquid modern burden of being dependent. The repetition of the word '*confined*' illustrated Chris' association with the experience relating to his expectations of being in a prison or an institution of some kind.

"Initially I was confined because my balance problems were really bad and like I had really bad palsy in my face, my eye was taped shut so there wasn't much really I could do for myself" (Pg 17, Ln 522)

"Um I was sort of confined to home" (Pg 18, Ln 543)

However, Chris experienced his first application to university as an attainable goal for recovery, as a benchmark with which he could measure the return to his previous sense of self. It seemed that it was this initial pressure that Chris put on himself to attend university, to somehow prove to himself that he was healed, that sparked this progression to experiencing himself as other.

"I applied to go to uni the same year I came out of the hospital to go the following year, (...) I was mentally ok and aware enough to apply to go to uni that mentally I was back to where I was before, it was just physically that needed to be improved." (Pg 18, Ln 532)

Chris described how he found university difficult. As is commonly experienced, starting university can be a daunting event – an environment which seemed to magnify and intensify the need for belonging and identity creation. Experiencing himself as different from the person he had been 12 months previously, attending university was a painful process for Chris to adjust to.

“Going to uni the following year was tough because all of a sudden I was in a situation where I had to make friends with that label [disabled]” (Pg 18, Ln 547)

The following quote highlights the immense struggle Chris faced of beginning of university with the label of being disabled. His previous identity as an able bodied musician was removed along with his tumour, leaving Chris with an empty, almost barren personal identity. Chris entered a new life-world, that of university life, as unrecognisable to himself. His physical difference seemed to prove to be an emotional barrier more than anything.

“I had to completely start from scratch again with that label and um and I became very depressed because of that” (Pg 18, Ln 560)

The acquisition of this label led to Chris experiencing a lack of control over who he believed himself to be. Chris described the most devastating consequence of his illness.

“I only managed just over a year of it because of the depression and also I wasn’t in a fit mental state to do the level of study that was needed (Pg 24, Ln 741)

Regardless of how his peers experienced him, he could not identify the Chris he knew in the Chris he now was. I consider that for Chris, this was the cause of

his transition to Otherness. Chris was experiencing himself as Other even to himself. I consider that perhaps to not even recognise oneself is the most frightening form of Other.

Chris described how he removed himself from the negative emotions he was experiencing at university by leaving and later re-enrolling the following September on a different course but at the same university. Chris' inability to accede his label and how it affected his well-being during this period is expressed below.

“Mentally I was all over the place, I was very unstable (...) again I tried it and it wasn't for me and my mental state was getting worse” (Pg 25, Ln 768)

Chris was experiencing himself in a way that he had never known or experienced himself before. I interpret this as Chris desperately contesting to come to terms with his new identity; a new identity tied to a label he desperately rejected. It was without question that the change to Chris' face as a result of the surgery contributed hugely to his inability to 'recognise' himself – both in a visual and emotional way. As well as coming to terms with minor physical differences to his previous self, Chris battled daily with the aesthetic difference, disruption and disturbance to his face. For Chris, I felt that the university environment was oppressive and superficial; a place which induced social anxiety and bred insecurity about his loss of previous identity as an able bodied musician with a face he knew as his own. From his account I consider that Chris found himself feeling alone and vulnerable.

Having lost his previous identity and failing to create a new version of himself that he recognised during his first two years at university, Chris experienced himself as Other like never before. Yet it appeared to be that he was the only person he was aware of experiencing himself as different to the person he once was. After leaving university for the second time, Chris described how he began to reconcile with himself and his new life-world in order to move beyond his feelings of 'self-Otherness'.

"I spent a year or so back at my parents sort of, I don't know, soul searching if you like, trying to work out how to get my life back on track." (Pg 25, Ln 774)

The use of the phrase '*get my life back on track*' could indicate that Chris experienced this transitional period of one of de-railment, with a lack of direction or focus. Chris was without a destination. However, he described that during his year away from university, '*soul searching*', what he actually discovered was the soul of his former self.

"Naturally I went back to the music which consumed my entire life (...) so then that, that naturally sort of came back into my life and I pretty much understood that that was it, you know." (Pg 25, Ln776)

The re-discovery of his former self was almost like the final barrier to Chris' happiness had been lifted. In 2008 he started an undergraduate degree in music. I asked him if he could remember how he felt about it knowing that his previous attempts at university had been such a time of despair for him.

"It had been four years and my recovery had massively improved, so I was going down there not anywhere near as bad as I was when I had my first day at X-University." (Pg 26, Ln 791)

It was clear that it was important to Chris that he started university as the 'Chris' that he knew before his illness; a 'Chris' that he was happy with and could identify with so that he did not start his third attempt at university as someone Other to himself or to those around him. I asked Chris how he felt about attending university once he had re-discovered himself.

"It was like, basically like starting again. A new lease of life." (Pg 26, Ln 794)

This '*new lease of life*' Chris symbolized his re-birth. He had experienced himself as different and then as Other, falling deeper and deeper into depression, his disability erecting an emotional barrier, preventing him from getting back to a self that he knew. His reconnection to music was the link to his former self that he had been searching for; releasing him almost, throwing him a rope of possibility he then used to (as he explained) pull himself out of his sadness.

The below extract demonstrates the extent to how Chris experienced himself at the worst part of his illness and the journey he has undertaken to becoming a Paralympic student-athlete.

"Incredible really (...) going from being almost a social recluse because of the fact that I was ill and I couldn't really do anything to where I am now". (Pg 31, Ln 946)

Chris considered himself a '*social recluse*' – as someone who had voluntarily withdrawn from participating in society. I believe that is it this statement, Chris' reflection on himself, that best draws attention to the extent of how badly Chris

had been affected psychologically by his condition. As my conversation with Chris continued I explored his attitudes and his understanding the part of his disability which caused the most scars. His face.

Theme 4: Facing up to it

Chris was straightforward whilst speaking of the 4 years between from when he was first diagnosed with a brain tumour to when he started his undergraduate degree for the third time. He spoke candidly about his mental stability and his feelings of uncertainty and emotional insecurity during the time he transitioned to becoming disabled, becoming an Other to himself.

The changes to the physical appearance of Chris' face meant he continuously bore a stigma, an affliction, a clear mark of difference. I interpreted Chris' accounts of this period of transition as experiencing himself as faulty, damaged and defective, almost as if the change to Chris' face was the most disabling factor of all. Chris was denied the choice to this change of identity resulting in both physical and mental deterioration. Chris was a completely different person to who he understood himself to be before and experienced adapting to his new life with great difficulty.

I felt Chris struggled with the tension and frustration he experienced at not considering himself disabled but knowing that disability contributed towards him developing an athlete identity. Accepting his label was perhaps the hardest part of his transition.

"It is hard in everyday life, people will label you (...) I slowly started to realise that that was who I was and I started coming to terms with things" (Pg 18, Ln 558)

Chris exposed his self-concept as being dictated by the people in his social surroundings. Even though Chris did not consider himself disabled he became aware that others did. As a result, he self-imposed that same expectation and judgement, actively changing his self-perception, regardless of whether he identified with it or not. This highlights the clash of the psychological self and the sociological self. Chris chose to talk about his disability in regards to two specific physical areas – his limbs and his face. Bauman's thoughts of Otherness consider to what extent do we assume Other within the realms of assumed conventional, normative aesthetics? To what extent does Otherness present itself via embodiment in a liquid modern society? Chris described the difficulties he experienced in regards to the palsy in his face.

"The palsy of the face obviously makes my image not natural so that creates barriers in interactions between people, I mean it's a lot better now than it has been because I've had a lot of work done" (Pg 20, Ln 604)

Reflecting on Chris' description that his face needed to be '*worked on*', I interpret this as Chris experiencing his face as needing to be 'fixed' almost, that his current face was not acceptable to himself nor to those around him. It was obvious that Chris associated his face as an abnormality; that despite his face still being fully functional (in that he could eat, talk, sleep, smile etc), the visual changes to it created a long lasting emotional difficulty for him. To Chris, the face that he had grown up with and had seen every day had been damaged. His face was unnatural to him.

"I don't have the use in my left limbs as well as an able bodied person does (...) I <pause> I look in the mirror and because of the palsy in my face I don't see a natural reflection like an able bodied person does" (Pg 20, Ln 593)

I understand Chris' most disabling factor to be the utter loss of self he felt after his operation. Chris experienced himself as being disabled by the two most important things which he can no longer do when compared to his able bodied self - unable to engage in a self-defining activity (playing the drums) and unable to recognising a self-defining feature (his face). Conceding to this new reality must have been exceptionally difficult for Chris.

Chris's appearance often created barriers which prevented him from being consumed by others as he was before his operation. I consider this to be both a societal and personal difficulty to overcome. Chris appeared to separate the disability of his body from that of his face, indicating that they carried quite different consequences in his every day existence.

"(...) the problems with the nerves in my leg and my arm well people can't see them (...) they're very personal issues that only I deal with whereas the palsy is something that everyone around me has to deal with" (Pg 20, Ln 607)

I asked Chris to explain to me what he meant when he commented to 'deal with' his face.

"(...) people look at you and obviously something is a bit different but I don't think, like it's not an issue that people have a problem dealing with necessarily." (Pg 20, Ln 616)

Chris described the reactions of others to his looks as a problem that people were willing to accept. I think Chris considers that society understands that he

has no choice over the way his face looks, his Otherness is not through choice and so promotes a form of ethical demand from society, reminding us of our own fragility and vulnerability to fates such as his. He admitted that despite the reactions being “small”, they are an obvious daily occurrence in his life-world.

“They can obviously tell that something’s different about you (...) they may not look at you properly or look twice or something like that.” (Pg 21, Ln 627)

Despite this, Chris seemed firm in his attitude towards those who treat him as any less than he viewed himself, demonstrating his lack of desire to feel the need to satiate superfluous considerations of physical aesthetics.

“If they’re not willing to sort of understand you for who you are, not what you look like (...) [then] I’m not interested in getting to know them anyway you know.” (Pg 21, Ln 632)

I do not believe that his above extract was put forward as a defence or a form of coping, rather that Chris arrived at the end of his journey of Otherness almost relinquishing the possible encounters and inimical experiences of in his past. I believe that Chris’ involvement in sport had led him to become more accepting of his situation, providing him with a sense of belonging when he had gone so long with a sense of hopelessness and exclusion.

Theme 5: The chair is just equipment

Although markedly recovered by the time he began university for the third time, Chris still had to maintain a routine of physiotherapy and rehabilitation. It was through this routine that he began to train at the local gym and also became

involved in his university rowing team. He was encouraged to attend a multi-sport classification day in the hope of being classified as an adaptive rower. Unfortunately, things did not work out as he had hoped.

“(...) once I failed my classification for rowing I did I guess have the chance to think you know what would be my options” (Pg 3, Ln 64)

In the above extract Chris chooses to use the word ‘fail’ to describe his classification experience. For him, perhaps the classification was a test; a test to prove that he was on his way to becoming the person he had hoped he could become. To consider his lack of disability for rowing to be a failure demonstrates the extent to which Chris had hoped he would be classified for the sport. However, Chris’ journey into elite level sport was one of hope and promise. After his descriptions of a lack of motivation, direction and identity in the years after his operation, it was almost as if wheelchair fencing provided him with a purpose which had been lacking; a new goal and a realisation that he could become more than what he was. Being an athlete was not part of his previous identity but was certainly within his reach should he choose to grasp it.

“I suppose eventually it was like ‘oh I seem to be pretty good at this’” (Pg 2 Ln45).

For the first 25 years of Chris’ life he had no connection with disability sport and admitted he found it difficult to make the adjustment to being considered a disabled athlete when the disability in his limbs was comparatively small to other athletes around him. Chris described the complex, paradoxical condition that many disabled athletes face during classification, especially those with acquired disability or with disabilities which can fluctuate in severity. Chris

experienced confusion over knowing that, for sport at least, he had to contend with the difficulty of proving to what extent he was indeed disabled by his condition.

“I don’t have the balance which doesn’t come into account during the classification for rowing but it does for fencing” (Pg 3, Ln66)

When Chris was asked about his initial introduction to fencing he described it as a feeling of being wanted, of being pursued and of instant affinity, a feeling that he had not experienced for many years.

“There was a lot offered to me right at the beginning because they knew they wanted me, fencing that is (...) I just fell in love with it quite early on.” (Pg 3, Ln 75)

Here, to explain he just ‘fell in love’ with fencing assumes that Chris adapted to the identity of being a wheelchair fencer relatively quickly and without reservation – despite the use of a wheelchair not being part of his disability. Bauman comments that in liquid modern times we have the tendency to create our identity with the objects that we own, that we use physical items to shape, define and display our chosen identity to others. Despite being able to walk unassisted, Chris had chosen to play a wheelchair sport. Chris’ reaction to my questioning seemed contrary to Bauman’s thoughts about objectifying our identity. Chris seemed to actively remove himself from the idea that the chair shaped his athletic identity, almost dismissing the confliction it created for an able bodied athlete to assume the identity of a wheelchair user. For Chris, his wheelchair was nothing more than a necessary piece of equipment.

"Yeah it's one of the most expensive pieces of equipment we've got but again it's the most important for us , like it's our trainers for able bodied fencers" (Pg 4, Ln 102).

The use of 'us' fully demonstrated his commitment to his identity as a wheelchair fencer. Chris described the first time he wore a Great Britain (GB) vest as a symbolic return to his former self. Despite mourning the loss of his career in the RAF, competing for GB provided him with a sense of self-worth, responsibility and pride - feelings he had previously experienced before his illness. I felt Chris experienced himself as 'repaired', or in Bauman's words 'recycled'. And it is perhaps this that leads to the understanding of Chris' athlete identity and deep need to compete in the Paralympic games.

"To represent the country in some sort of form [as an RAF member], and to have that taken away from me to then do be able to do it again, (...) to represent your country is a pretty incredible thing, I don't know how to describe it (...) you put a GB top on you're not just there for yourself anymore, you're there for everybody." (Pg 5 Ln, 131)

Chris consistently demonstrated persuasion for disability sport, but not for the sake of disability per se, more for the sake of his own personal fight. Chris fights for the identity he lost. He was reborn as an athlete - his conviction was about his own purpose and drive for a new sense of self-worth.

"Those first few months of international competition opened my eyes to what standard you need to be to be good" (Pg 9, Ln 261)

"I plan on changing it by getting good myself, winning the medals to get the money through to change the sport to help everyone else <pause> someone's got to do it." (Pg 12, Ln 344)

His new found direction and purpose as an elite wheelchair fencer caused Chris to reflect on the difficulties he had endured since his

tumour was removed, considering disability (and therefore reality) as incomparable.

Theme 6: My worst is *my* worse – it's all relative

Perhaps what was most difficult to contend with was Chris' description of his experience at university. The majority of Chris' account covered his experiences of being an athlete and as being labelled as disabled, however less of the dialogue uncovered Chris' experience of being a university student. The few times Chris' university life-world was discussed led to conversations about either his difficulties or his discovery of sport. At no point did Chris demonstrate that he participated in any form of assumed university behaviour or the university lifestyle. He made very few references to his friends and no references at all to social experiences. He did however reflect on the process of making friends at university and how his being labelled as disabled contributed to this experience – that he felt his friendships were perhaps more genuine and not based on superficial benefits.

“(...) it was harder to make friends but I suppose it some ways it became easier to make better friends (...) I just think very early on I just made one or two very close friends and I think having that label in that sense did help” (Pg 18, Ln 549)

I felt that Chris did not experience a sense of belonging at university during his first two years. Yet, he talked about his experience of university as if it was very similar to that of his peers. I asked Chris to describe to me what his time at university meant to him (not specifying which university as I wanted him to lead the topic). His response was methodical, almost clinical and justified.

“I think the whole experience is the same as everyone else (...) I experienced the same things able bodied people did just not

exactly the same thing (...) what's my worst is being the same as what a quadriplegics worst is - its being relative" (Pg30, Ln 919)

I suggest that Chris' university experience was in no way similar to the experience of the other participants, and far from similar even to those around him. To begin an undergraduate degree three times at two different universities as well as experiencing depression and self-exclusion is not a familiar university rhetoric. I found this passage from Chris to be somewhat detached from topics covered earlier in the interview, almost as if he did not want to admit to the difficulties he faced during the 4 years after his operation - perhaps shameful of the person he temporarily became. Due to the lack of emotion provided in this answer I interpret this as a painful period in Chris' life. What appeared to be missing from Chris' entire interview was the complete lack of connection or remembrance to the expected culture of university life such as socialising, drinking or enjoying being independent. Chris did not provide an account which demonstrated any happy periods, events or memories from his time at university. I think this critically reflects that Chris experienced a heavily reduced sense of self during his time at university. Chris found himself in an environment in which he could not determine his purpose, studying a subject that was foreign to his earlier career plans and seemingly without any form of self-identity. It is no wonder that Chris did not feel like he belonged at university. Instead of talking about university in terms of a collection of social experiences, Chris chose to express that university was important in terms of developing his self-confidence after his illness and contributing to the self he experiences today.

"[University] has given me massive amounts of life experience and aknowledge (sic) of myself that I never had before" (Pg 30, Ln 936)

"It's made me who I am today I think." (Pg 31 Ln, 952)

Who is Chris?

It was clear that for Chris the value gained from his experiences at university and his involvement with wheelchair fencing was greater than the sum of the individual parts. For Chris, university was not solely about the acquisition of a degree, neither was sport solely about the acquisition of medals. Rather that together they contributed to the creation and acquisition of a completely new identity for Chris.

Me: "And who are you?"

Chris: " <pause> I don't know <pause> me <pause> um I'm I'm I'm <pause> I suppose I'm someone who's got a very lucrative career option available to me in terms of becoming a lawyer um and I'm also someone that comes with, that's got a great deal of life experience, I dunno, and knowledge and maturity just to make me the person that I am rather than not just with the career option, but like with a general life perspective <pause> if you can make any sense of that."

Chris found this question difficult to answer. However, he kept the answer free from facts – it was purely descriptive. He did not tie his identity to being a student, to being an athlete or to being disabled. These were simply labels that others impose upon him. Instead Chris chose to define himself by his character – maturity, knowledge, perspective. It appears that 'life experience' has brought Chris full circle almost from his former identity as an able bodied drummer considering a career in RAF to a new identity of a person with a sense

of ambition and self-efficacy choosing to develop a path for himself as an Paralympic student-athlete.

"I think everybody's got a label, but not everybody's got an identity." (Pg 19, Ln 566)

Beth

About Beth

Beth was 21 years old and in her first year studying at a high performance sport university. At 13 years old Beth was diagnosed with the illness Complex Regional Pain Syndrome. As a result, Beth required daily use of a wheelchair as her leg suffers from fixed dystonia on account of her illness. At the time of interview Beth was in the process of bidding for a spot at the London 2012 Paralympic Games as a Para-Sailor.

Theme 1: The uncertainty of illness

Prior to her illness, Beth had been a very active child and was an accomplished junior athlete in a number of sports. She spoke of the onset of her illness as a transitional process.

“I kinda developed the condition and, um, like over sort of a year I gradually got worse and had to move into the chair” (Pg 1, Ln 15)

Beth explained the two most important difficulties she faced during the slow, painful process of the illness consuming her life – the uncertainty of her condition and the loss of her independence.

“(...) there was um just so much uncertainty with what was going to happen (...) I got quite ill so it was like all my independence had been taken away from me” (Pg 1, Ln 20)

Beth acknowledged that she was an active, inclusive part of her transition to disability. Unlike a suddenly acquired disability, Beth had time to prepare for this change in identity, allowing her to come to terms with what was happening

to her body. The above extract demonstrates that for Beth, despite having the time to adjust to her state of uncertainty, her personal insecurity at her situation was not dependant on intangible risks and logical decisions. For Beth, the uncertainty of her life was a physical reality, manifested in the failing of a body completely outside of her control.

As Beth spoke about her experience of being ill there was most certainly a continuing element of a life lost. Not only was this a stolen physicality of life, but also a loss of who she could have been, knowing she was losing her independence. I asked Beth to describe her illness to me so that I could ascertain a thorough understanding of her experience of it. Her answer was lengthy and detailed. What came through the most was how the utter uncertainty of her condition had caused such disruption to her life. Beth was never fully able to return to a 'normal' life again.

"[I was] completely paralysed (...) in organ failure and then be in ITU for like 3 months and then gradually come out of it and then regain movement and then relapse and that happened like 8 times over the 2 or 3 years" (Pg 16, Ln 500)

As Beth spoke about her illness, she commented on the things that she felt most affected her during her years in and out of hospital. She chose to focus on the loss of a normal teenage life, covering expected social norms during adolescent years such as friendships, education and social occasions. Speaking with a saddened tone, I sensed that she grieved for the years she lost whilst in hospital.

"(...) I did my A-levels in hospital um but like failed them miserably" (Pg 25, Ln 772)

“(...) with my friends um it’s really been just those 4 girls really during the whole kind of thing (...) like you find out who your friends are when you get ill” (Pg 30, Ln 940)

Beth’s illness struck at such a crucial time in the development of her identity as an individual. It was clear that Beth was aware that her illness had deprived her of 4 important years in terms of developing a sense of who she was.

“(...) when you know you’ve got like proms or when you start going out at night or start experimenting with drinking and stuff, that was kind of the time when I was at the worst” (Pg 30, Ln 941)

Beth’s illness meant that she lived in a suspended world of uncertainty. Although she knew she had to live with this illness, the difficulty was knowing that to move on, to start again and attempt to recapture her life and identity (as it once was) was nearly impossible. The daily uncertainty of her life caused by her illness was, paradoxically the only certainty she had.

“(...) they are starting to look into the possibility of maybe doing like orthopaedic surgery (...) but we don’t know if this is the best I’m going to be or if I’m going to get worse or if I’m ever going to get better” (Pg 21, Ln 667)

The theme of uncertainty of her illness carried through Beth’s interview. Her ability to consider such difficulties with such ease demonstrated that she understood her predicament, seemingly now at peace with the situation. The complexity of Beth’s illness meant that her experience of being ill was unending and forever changing. She had no option but to live her life with an utter uncertainty of her daily state of existence and her future.

“(...) if I have an operation then there is yeah the chance that it could possibly maybe make things worse (...) but it’s been like that for years, it’s always been that we don’t know if I’ll get better or worse” (Pg 22, Ln 674)

Beth’s illness meant that her health was her number one priority. Unfortunately this prevented her from participating in her surroundings as much as she would like to.

“I really want to go hell blazing but I kinda have to have to pace things otherwise I can have a bad flare up and get quite ill (...) I want to go and socialise but I don’t want to do it too much that I over do it” (Pg 30, Ln 954)

It seemed that Beth was always trying her best to be positive and to progress herself wherever possible. But in reality her illness would always push her back into the realms uncertainty. This inevitably prevented Beth from moving on with her life and developing a self-image away from her illness. Her experience of uncertainty seemed fuelled by both medical and emotional insecurity.

“(...) if I had been out all day, for me to go out all night would just be asking for trouble” (Pg 31, Ln 977)

By all accounts Beth attempted to be as 'normal' as possible when her health allowed. However, Beth’s disability was problematic – unlike other disabilities in the study which were either unchanging or open to improvement, Beth’s disability could worsen to the point where there was every possibility she may lose her life. I believe that knowing this, Beth’s account of her disabled life-world was markedly revealing about how she understood the reality of her condition.

Theme 2: On disability: Brain Vs Body dichotomy

From the information Beth provided about her illness, I very much believe that Beth considered herself as 'ill' rather than as 'disabled'.

"Um it's kind of weird, <pause> I know technically I am but I wouldn't say that I am disabled" (Pg 18, Ln 545)

I found Beth's account of being 'disabled' difficult to hear at times. Her recollections of the physicality of her illness accented and unveiled actualities of what it means to be 'dis-abled'; to be utterly unable. She spoke of times when she felt her life slipping away from her, unable to perform even the most basic of bodily tasks.

"I couldn't move at all and it was like that for about a year whilst I was in hospital (...) I kinda went into organ failure (...) I was going to die" (Pg 17, Ln 512)

"I was losing the ability to swallow and breathing was getting harder every day" (Pg 20, Ln 635)

Beth spent a total of 4 years continuously in and out of hospital. The two words of 'ill' and 'disabled' seemed to be continuously sparring with each other in Beth's account of being ill / disabled. I found that she attempted to resolve the tension between the two by associating her illness with her brain and the resulting disability to be associated with her body. On the topic of disability, Beth approached the subject rather pragmatically and with honesty. The complexity of Beth's illness meant that her understanding of her illness was only as thorough as the understanding her doctors had of it.

"(...) my condition is quite controversial (...) there's the thought that it's the neural pathways (...) the other school of doctors are

kind of saying 'oh it's in their head' kind of like a trauma" (Pg 22, Ln 685)

I felt that this must be incredibly difficult for Beth to comprehend. Her disability does not come with a simple explanation – it was troublesome to place. She would often talk about what it was that was 'wrong' with her as a result of her illness.

"(...) they decided to do like a deep brain stimulation (...) which sort of corrects the wrong neural pathways" (Pg 17, Ln 517)

"Well all the neural pathways (...) they [are] kinda wired, wired wrong" (Pg 21, Ln 660)

The extracts above demonstrate that Beth associated her illness with an incorrect wiring in her brain; her understanding of her condition was that it is pathological not psychological. In choosing to use the word '*wrong*' to describe her neural pathways I consider that Beth felt she can be 'righted' somehow - that her situation is not fixed or permanent, despite it being present for a number of years. She says '*the neural pathways*' rather than 'my neural pathways' indicating that she is not claiming her illness. It is not that her brain is 'wrong' it is that it is temporarily '*wired wrong*'. However, I did not sense any underlying tone of anger or frustration or fight. It was not just that Beth was a docile, quiet young woman, it was that she did not appear to carry any form of resentment towards her body; her brain was the problem, not her body.

"(...) so when I was in hospital and I couldn't move, it <pause> wasn't <pause> my <pause> body, it wasn't like 'I hate the way my leg looks' it was kinda like 'this is kind of shit, I want to be able to move' kind of thing" (Pg 20, Ln 633)

"(...) not being able to move and only being able to speak (...) you know you're like totally at your mercy" (Pg 26, Ln 796)

Beth highlighted the profoundly disabling affect her illness had on her body. The illness caused her to move beyond any aesthetic corporeal concerns and instead struck at the nucleus of the human body's very purpose. She was at the 'mercy' of her own body. Here, I consider Bauman's societal concept of 'mobility' to be far removed Beth's experience - she was utterly immobile; utterly disabled. Beth had no concern for her self-image, more that her ability to be able to function as a healthy human being was totally questioned. It was not the knowledge that her body looked different that caused such difficulty. The importance of this experience was how Beth felt to have a body that could not move.

Despite the possibility of relapse, Beth had been out of the intensive care unit for nearly 2 years. Her brain was still 'wrong' but for now she continued her life in a wheelchair with fixed dystonia in her leg. Recognising and identifying herself as 'disabled' seemed difficult for Beth as it was not her body that was the most problematic. The issues with her body were resultant manifestations of her illness. Despite this, Beth did talk about her place within the assumed disabled community and how she felt about being labelled as 'disabled'. Rejecting the social model of disability, Beth very much subscribed to the liquid modern attitude (and athlete identity determination) that it is up to the individual to act independently and solve their own problems with as little help or reliance as possible.

"Honestly I think it's in your head (...) I'd say there are people who I'd class as disabled but they are more able than me because they, just their attitudes really, like they say 'oh I can't do

that' and they're just more victims of it really you know" (Pg 18, Ln 559)

I consider Beth's use of the word 'victim' to be demonstrable of her frustration and anger towards people who have not experienced the level of bodily disablement that Beth has repeatedly endured. This was not a community which Beth belonged to. She continued to explain her position on this further. Although her tone remained soft, it was clear she was becoming irate at this thought, perhaps remembering experiences when she encountered such individuals.

"(...) it annoys me sometimes, you know when I see people behaving like that and I think 'well why can't you do it?' (...) it's the poor me attitude that really winds me up, and what I can't stand is when people start comparing their stories" (Pg 18, Ln 563)

I consider that because Beth's condition is so rare, and her experience of her illness and disability are quite uncommon, individuals that display these attitudes described above by Beth could be considered Other to her. The similarity of a less than fully functioning body appears to be Beth's only connection to such people. Throughout the account Beth demonstrated the spectrum of disability that she has encountered as a result of her illness. From being completely locked into her body, losing the ability to swallow, to having speech as her only form of freedom, to her current situation of a wheelchair user with her leg fixed out in front of her. The issue here is that it is far easier to manipulate one's identity than it is to manipulate one's attitudes.

Beth was experiencing a period of gratitude and excitement. Having not relapsed for nearly 2 years meant Beth was at her most healthy and mobile

since her illness set in at 13 years old. Our conversation about her illness, the resulting disability, the tension between her brain and her body all merged to convey that Beth was thoroughly enjoying her life, especially whilst during her time at university. Considering Beth came close to losing her life a number of times, identifying herself as a university student was once inconceivable. She spoke to me in detail about her positive experiences so far, as well as the challenges she has had to confront.

Theme 3: University as giving direction

Beth indicated that she had thought long and hard during her time in hospital about what it was she wanted to study. Her own personal experience of disability – of being unable to communicate whilst in hospital - had directly influenced the course she had chosen to do.

“I would be with people who had communication problems anyway so like I could see like how vital and important it is” (Pg 25, Ln 794)

For Beth, the principle experience of university was her ability to exist in a way which she considered to be independent.

“I’m living independently but I have people (...) [I can] hire someone and just to kind of help me and support me” (Pg 23, Ln 726)

Whilst some would argue that Beth is in fact not living ‘*independently*’, for her she was experiencing her present stage of life as a time where she relied the least on people (and perhaps machines) for her daily existence. I consider this important to Beth as she wanted to demonstrate her ability to live a liquid

modern existence. She chose to express first and foremost that she was able to live 'independently' - a mandatory obligation within the liquid modern society. Following on from this I asked Beth about the people she receives support from whilst at university and she gave an answer which reflects the liquid modern condition of preferring and enjoying options and choice.

"I prefer people my age (...) they've [the agency] created a list of like 4 or 5 people who I get on really well with I kind of get to choose <pause> I'm quite spoilt really [laughs]" (Pg 24, Ln 735)

Whilst Beth is, in absolute terms, heavily dependent on people to help her day to day, she considered herself 'lucky' to have a choice of who provides such help. It was because of this choice of helpers that she was able to participate at university in the way she had always hoped. It was clear that for Beth university had presented her with the opportunity to live again. She described the challenges she had faced and how important being able to do the simplest of things were of such huge significance to her self-esteem and identity away from her illness.

"(...) being at uni I feel a lot more confident in myself (...) its helped me and I think I've developed as a person" (Pg 31, Ln 986)

I felt Beth was creating her self-image through the achievement of new experiences done independently. She spoke with such joy and enthusiasm for the everyday tasks she was now able to complete, drawing attention to how acquiring a disability can transform 'normal things' into 'life challenges'. She knew that what are the minor details of the life of an able bodied person are major accomplishments for her.

"I will explore on my own and I would, like I'm meeting friends up in town on my own which wasn't really well I couldn't really do before (...) [doing activities] that most people wouldn't even think of you know as life challenges, just normal things" (Pg 31, Ln 988)

What was of most importance to Beth was how her time at university had benefitted her, providing a purpose to her life.

"I feel like I've got a direction in my life (...) I kind of feel like it's given me direction, it's definitely a positive experience" (Pg 32, Ln 992)

For Beth to describe university as giving her a '*direction*' in her life accents the divide she felt between the life she leads now against the life she had in hospital. Where she once felt purposeless, aimless almost, she was now experiencing herself as fulfilling with a sense of intent and course.

As well as expressing the independence Beth felt whilst at university, she spoke of two other perhaps important considerations of her academic life-world; that of the assumed university culture and also of her feelings of Otherness. I wanted to know how Beth considered her experience of university to be similar to that of her peers. Her response immediately addressed the issue of the expected social experiences associated with university life.

"(...) I will go out occasionally if I get a rest during the day (...) I don't really have the normal typical student life of get battered all night and then sleep all day" (Pg 27, Ln 855)

Beth was aware that she could not participate in the social elements of university the same way that her peers did, and neither did she pretend that she

can. She was open and honest about how her illness restricted and limited her from participating or acquiring a sense of belonging within this area of university life. She continued to express how proud, confident and mobile she now was at university, experiencing such breakthroughs, and how these all contributed positively to her self-esteem.

“(...) the first week I was like an emotional wreck because I was doing things that I’d never done before (...) I realised I hadn’t crossed the street on my own before you know since I was in the chair” (Pg 27, Ln 895)

Beth described herself as an ‘emotional wreck’, providing an insight into how emotional security can heavily influence an individual’s sense of social security and willingness to participate in their surroundings. I suggest that persistently low levels of emotional insecurity can breed feelings of unwelcome uncertainty – as is demonstrated below with the possibility of getting a puncture to her wheelchair.

“I was like phoning my mum up and saying on like a really big high saying ‘oh my god I did this!’ but then like I’d get something like a puncture (...) so yeah I was like up and down, up and down” (Pg 27, Ln 867)

However, Beth was able to recognise the positive contribution this occasional emotional insecurity had to her academic life-world. What Beth seemed to be so exuberant about was her ability to be mobile, to be free to move and explore her capabilities in her new surroundings. Despite her level of security being reduced, her sense of individual freedom was evidently increased.

*“(...) it was kind of like first time properly on my own in a new city
(...) I was like ‘oh my god I can get on the bus I can go here and
there and I can do that’ you know” (Pg 28, Ln 863)*

Beth expertly demonstrated the link between how the increase in physical mobility increases one's sense of social mobility, which is of major importance and significance in liquid modern world. However, an increase in social mobility does not always equate to an increase in social capital, as Beth explained when discussing the difficulty she experienced of making friends at university.

Theme 4: Is it me or is it them?

Despite university providing Beth with direction, she spoke of a particular challenge she endured daily. Beth would often reflect on how she found the process of making friends at university quite difficult, yet she was unsure if it was her personality or her disability which caused issues. Or even in fact if it was actually anything to do with her.

*“I do find that making friends is quite hard and I didn't know if that
was because I was in the chair or whether [shrugs] everyone's
like that or whether it's just me” (Pg 28, Ln870)*

The issue of making friends at university is usually of concern for anyone, regardless of disability. The social pressures faced and lack of self-confidence can mean the possibility of exclusion is quite high. Beth had obviously experienced this feeling of being disregarded, but was unsure of where the blame for this disregard lies.

*“(...) like some people go off in little cliques and they kinda have
their own tight kinda friendships and the people who aren't really
in those cliques kind of feel a bit left out” (Pg 28, Ln 873)*

I did not get the sense that the ‘*clique*’ Beth described was one built upon ‘able-bodiedness’, more that these cliques were formed on other socially considered aspects of one’s popularity, desirability and usefulness. Beth described the self-questioning a person can administer when someone actively wants to belong to a group or culture but finds themselves being rejected. Beth seemed unsure as to why it was she had not managed to be considered part of one of these ‘cliques’, but did not seem to apportion blame to the prejudice of others. Instead, Beth seemed to comment that perhaps it was the exclusion she encounters in the classroom which could be preventing her from creating friendships. The practicality of her disability meant she was automatically at a disadvantage when it came to socialising and engaging with her classmates.

“(...) sometimes I feel like because I have a scribe and I have to sit next to him (...) it’s a bit kinda um hard to be able to, like sometimes I feel a bit isolated and removed from them” (Pg 28, Ln 881)

Beth using words such as ‘*hard*’ ‘*isolated*’ and ‘*removed*’ showed the extent to which she experienced separation from her peers. However, this physical distance seemed to transcend the classroom, creating a metaphysical barrier between herself and her classmates. Beth knows that she is immediately consumed as different in class on two accounts; that her body is misshapen and that she requires assistance.

“It kind of feels like I’m the one always making the effort (...) even though I’m trying to be all like all up and bubbly and stuff” (Pg 28, Ln 891)

Due to this distance created, Beth spoke about how she would, at times, have to create an inauthentic identity in order to engage with her peers, perhaps

pretending to be something that she is not in order to gain a sense of inclusion. Unfortunately this was often difficult for her to maintain.

“I’m trying to kinda be or show a ‘I can do anything, I’m really sporty, I do this this this, I do 100 things’ kind of thing, but it’s kind of hard” (Pg 29, Ln 909)

Displaying a false identity may not be Beth’s preferred method of interaction but she was aware that if she considered herself to be different then this would allow others to treat her as different. She spoke of the difficulties that can arise when attempting to engage in an initial conversation.

“(…) like a bit of other people’s insecurities ... and then my insecurities coz I’m thinking ‘oh am I....? ‘Is it me...?’ and then I get quiet and I guess if I’m quiet then I guess other people will be quiet wont they” (Pg 30, Ln 900)

Beth was actively attempts to project an identity which she hoped would be consumed by her peers in a manner to reduce difference and potential Otherness. She was aware that she would automatically be judged and did not want to be clustered with the assumption that she was incapable or inadequate. During our conversation about her different life-worlds, Beth would regularly reflect on how she would manage the reactions of others to her illness and disability in order to avoid creating feelings of Otherness both for herself and for those around her.

Theme 5: The reactions of others

Perhaps the hardest thing for Beth to contend with was the tension between her being labelled as ‘ill’ and as being ‘disabled’. Beth expressed that each label carried it with it different prejudices and therefore different reactions. She

commented that she would often make her leg the subject of humour when put in such situations.

“Loads of people think I’ve broken my leg, like ‘oh what’ve you done’ and I’ve made up loads of stories like ‘oh parachute didn’t open’ [laughs]” (Pg 19, Ln 595)

I found this to be of interest as I wondered if people would ask the same question to someone in a wheelchair whose legs were not fixed outright. The fact that Beth looks like she could have broken her leg seemed to allow her to normalise her appearance.

“(…) it’s kinda good because then people think that I’m just normal and I’ve just had an accident” (Pg 19, Ln 597)

Beth enjoyed the feeling of being considered ‘normal’ when the above exchange happens, mainly because Beth seemed to have the most concern for how her physicality affected others.

“(…) people will see me and be like ‘yep she’s disabled’ and will treat me like I am and then some people are like ‘well I thought she was but she’s so able that I wouldn’t class her as disabled’ and then there are other people who think I’m in the chair for temporary reasons” (Pg 20, Ln 611)

This extract demonstrates that there is only so much an aesthetic identity can foster; that people will draw their own conclusions about an individual based on their own system of ordering Otherness, and then treat that individual accordingly. Beth’s identity is ambiguous - her body position does not fit the stereotypical visual image of a wheelchair user. Instead she looks like a pretty, thin, young woman with a broken leg. For some, then, Beth is ‘normal’ until she

decides to explain her illness. But this creation of, or play on a false identity in order to be consumed as 'normal' could be tiring for Beth.

"I mean, sometimes it does bother me and other times it doesn't like I try not to dwell on the fact of it" (Pg 19, Ln 603)

These differing situational experiences created altering feelings of identity and belonging for Beth and so I felt she was never able to ground her position as being ill or disabled. She is consumed in such a variety of ways it is difficult for her to gain a sense of self-image. Perhaps remembering from when she was able bodied, she would often position herself as the onlooker to her disability or illness and would attempt to rationalise any behaviour she may have experienced in the past.

"(...) if I smile first and initiate a conversation first then they feel at ease because then, then, they're kinda like 'oh I guess she's alright' like I guess maybe it's kinda less threatening for them" (Pg 20, Ln 614)

The idea that others may find her *'threatening'* was discomforting for Beth and I interpret this as being a reflection on how she possibly felt towards disability when she was able bodied.

"(...) people who haven't been amongst others with limitations or special needs um can find it a bit daunting (...) I guess I was like that before I was in the chair I mean I didn't really know or didn't want to offend people" (Pg 16, Ln 481)

Beth seemed to have a genuine concern for not wanting to create a sense of awkwardness or embarrassment for others when addressing her disability. She was emotionally aware of how her condition could be unpleasant for others.

"I want <pause> so that, that I can make them know that it's OK, yeah yeah that's exactly it, that it's OK and yeah and I won't bite"
(Pg 19, Ln 626)

I regard Beth's movement through what could be described as a continuum of disability to mean that she has compassion for how others could potentially feel about engaging with her because she recognised that she too once felt such caution towards individuals with impairments.

As well as recognising the anxiety she may cause others, Beth drew upon examples of when her disability troubled her, which was markedly linked to social anxiety and the aesthetics of her body. Beth stated that identifying herself as a wheelchair user did not cause her any feelings of low self-esteem or low self-image.

"(...) seeing myself in the chair doesn't really bother me and I don't remember it bothering me previously" (Pg 21, Ln 640)

However, what was of concern for Beth was the way in which her legs would be consumed by others. She was aware that her legs did not conform to societal criteria of aesthetic normality, and it was clear during our conversation that this saddened her.

"(...) I'd like to wear skirts but because my legs are quite bony and a bit misshapen and hmmm well really quite skinny [pulls an unpleasant face] and they're not that pretty then I don't wear them" (Pg 21, Ln 641)

Beth was one of two participants (the other being Chris) who's account drew upon experiences of disfigurement. She was acutely aware that her body could

cause fear or offence, on account of it being locked in an abnormal position. As a result Beth would feign normalcy to fool others those who were curious or frightened of it. To have a broken leg falls well within the social criteria of an acceptable body image; it is non-permanent, it may carry with it a humorous tale. In her pretending that the disfigurement of her body was only temporary she was able to defer the unwanted reactions of others. She was able to prevent being branded with the stigma of being 'disabled'.

Beth was aware that if she wore a skirt her legs would draw an unwelcome and uncomfortable amount of attention. She spoke openly about wanting to actively avoid feelings of being ashamed or embarrassed about her body in front of strangers.

"I don't really want other people to go 'oh gosh' and then stare coz that'll then make me feel weird so perhaps I think I'm kind of protecting myself" (Pg 21, Ln 648)

The fact that Beth wants to 'protect' herself perhaps indicates that she was more concerned about her physical appearance than she may confess. Beth acknowledged her vulnerability and sensitivity to the reactions of others. She did not pretend that the reactions of others to her legs can be hurtful at times. Instead, she was exceptionally truthful in expressing how she felt about her body.

"I think I'm OK with my body but <pause> I'm probably not (...) um yeah I guess I'd prefer them not to look like it but [shrugs, trails off]" (Pg 21, Ln 651)

Beth did not give the above extract impassively, rather her tone was sad and slightly defeatist. I noticed that Beth did not choose to add that she would prefer if her legs 'worked' or prefer if her legs could 'walk'. Instead Beth chose to focus on that her legs 'look' a particular way. Whether this was due to Beth considering that her legs will never be fully functional again I am unsure, however it was clear that the visual consumption of her legs by others, and their potential reaction, was something that evoked a sense of self-concern for Beth. It made her unhappy to think that the look of her legs could be the cause of any negative emotion towards her, as well as possibly promoting the avoidance of any social contact. During the final stages of our discussion regarding how people respond and react to her condition, Beth became sentimental towards her body, declaring ownership of her legs and her predicament.

"(...) it's not, not like I'm 'yeah I hate this!' coz at the end of the day they are my legs, and they're mine [stokes leg, laughs] kinda thing" (Pg 21, Ln 652)

Beth did not disown her legs or make an attempt to remove or separate herself from her body. Her legs were hers and she felt strongly about that. She came across as grudgingly accepting of her situation. She gave no indication that she was angry or devastated or was suffering. Rather Beth was someone who would not allow herself to be the victim of social pressure. And this shone through throughout the interview. Beth's experience of sport, of her time at university and of her future was undoubtedly one of hope. From being minutes away from dying to living independently at university 7 years later, the continuous thread throughout Beth's account was her absolute appreciation for life and the overwhelming joy she experiences each and every time she gets into her boat and onto the ocean.

Theme 6: Better sailing, better body

As Beth was my last interview, I had anticipated that she may weave certain words into her account about her life which had frequented the accounts of the other participants. I was wrong. Beth did not present a need to 'prove' or 'overcome' anything. Instead, Beth tended to relate her achievements and accomplishments to an intrinsic desire to be healthy again, rather than being motivated by any external or societal pressure. It was because of this that I consider that Beth very much sees herself as ill rather than as disabled.

Throughout the account, Beth made numerous correlations between her health and her sailing and it quickly became clear that the sport was so much more than a Paralympic ambition for her. It was her escape from her illness.

"(...) the Paralympic side it kind of starts as a hobby or a release or like an escape and it's kinda like you get addicted to that escape because it kinda feels like before you were ill kinda thing"
(Pg 15, Ln 460)

Beth was 'addicted' to feeling healthy; 'addicted' to the sensation of feeling like the 'Beth' prior to illness. This was why sailing was of such importance to her. Drawing on this, Beth made several other remarks about how sailing allowed to her visualise herself as getting healthier.

"I guess I just think for the moment I just want to focus on getting better and it's [Rio 2016] 4 years down the line and, but it's not like, I won't be devastated if I don't do it, but I am motivated to do it." (Pg 9, Ln 270)

Her words of wanting to focus on ‘*getting better*’ I interpret as going deeper than a sporting performance – that she wants to get better at sailing but also that she wants to get better in regards to her health.

“(...) sailing was just a bit of a hobby but I guess the more I did the better I got and the more I felt better” (Pg 17, Ln 527)

Beth wanted to move forward, away from the days when she was in the hospital unable to move or talk or swallow. She did not bring up material expectations like medals or podiums. She did not mention a need to be a GB athlete or to tackle any inequalities in elite level sport. For Beth, sailing was more than a need to achieve or win for her. Sailing was a release from her illness; a confirmation that she is becoming ‘better’.

“I’m not kinda like ‘I’m going to set my whole life on it’ I guess if it happens it happens (...) it’s not <pause> not something that is on my mind every single day (...) the thing that I want is just to get better and better and better.” (Pg 9, Ln 257)

The absolute joy Beth experienced when sailing was evidenced throughout her account, as was the link between Beth’s health and her love of being on the ocean. Sailing was the reason she was able to have a conversation with me on that day.

“(...) I was in the ITU for like year and it was very touch and go and my family think that sailing like gave me a drive to kind of keep going (Pg 15, Ln 435)

When Beth revealed this, it became clear as to why sailing was so important in her life. Sailing seemed to set Beth free from her illness and allowed her the almost impossible liquid modern experience of complete freedom with absolute security.

Theme 7: Happy to sail another day

The boat Beth sails had been adapted so that it cannot capsize. It has also been designed in a way that allows for different abilities to race each other.

“(...) it doesn’t matter like you could be racing against people with no thumbs or you could be racing against people with broken necks” (Pg 23, Ln 705)

This neutralising of disability in sailing was important to Beth, with her illness and disabilities being hidden in the hulls. Being in a boat provide Beth with such a sense of absolute freedom and exhilaration, experiencing her life so differently when she sails.

“(...) it’s all quite nice and relaxed and stuff so it’s a very nice kinda chilled atmosphere” (Pg 8, Ln 227)

The peacefulness and serenity she experiences seemed to juxtapose the hectic demands of her life on the shore, where she indicated that she must ‘juggle’ her different life-worlds. I felt that the way Beth described being in a boat at times was existentialist.

“When you’re in this big boat bobbing up and down in this huge sea and you’re seeing loads of other boats in the sea around you and it’s really pretty and really calming (...) it’s like everything is just that much clearer and that much prettier” (Pg 17, Ln 535)

When in her boat Beth is free from her chair; she does not have to think about buses and carers and drop down curbs and scribes. On the ocean things are ‘prettier’ where as on land things appear much less so (such as her legs). On shore her life is stressful, accelerated with abundant choice but slow moving

physically, with less control and more dependency. Sailing transports her away from her daily experience of all the pushing and planning and effort it takes to just be Beth.

“(...) on the water it’s like ‘oh I can go where I want and I can do what I want’” (Pg 1, Ln 23)

Beth expressed her freedom in relation to her ability to move physically. Sailing takes her outside of herself almost and allows her to feel completely limitless in terms of her ability to traverse and navigate space. Sailing gives her what her body and chair cannot do on land. Beth used a very fitting metaphor to describe how she experiences sailing her boat.

“(...) when I get into my boat it’s like being in a little cockpit coz we sit down in the boat and it’s like a little formula 1 car really” (Pg 8, Ln 230)

This idea of her boat being a ‘*formula 1 car*’ provides such insight to how much freedom and control and excitement sailing gives Beth. In her boat she is able to be carefree, reckless, and fast, which is utterly polarised by the reality of her slow, cumbersome wheelchair. Sailing has recycled Beth. She experiences joy, freedom, wellness, security – normality.

“(...) the whole experience that sailing has given me is just incredible (...) yeah it’s weird <pause> words can’t really describe it, it’s overwhelming <pause> it’s empowering” (Pg 7, Ln 217)

This level of self-experience through sport was not described nearly as powerfully by other participants. The sea transports Beth away from her illness.

Her chair is left on land, whilst her sense of security, of self-achievement and of self-content are realised at sea.

What shone through Beth's account of how her sport made her feel was the unconditional sense of hope she had for her life. Everyday Beth was faced with the challenges of what she cannot do and sailing removed this.

"I feel with sailing it's focused more on what you can do not what stuff you can't do" (Pg 16, Ln 479)

The notion of too much stability is unwelcome in the liquid modern world, leading to staleness, predictability and routine. What Beth's account of her life demonstrated was that when an individual is faced with years of personal uncertainty and emotional insecurity, the idea of certainty and consistence can be favourable. My conversation with Beth, and the themes produced subtly bring to light the difference between an uncontrollable, unpleasant uncertainty and a pleasant, invited uncertainty. Years of the former had left Beth in a position where she did not necessarily subscribe to the liquid modern problems of accelerated anxiety or of needing to create a consumerable identity. She may very well live in liquid modern times but at the moment her life is not dictated by it.

"I want to just enjoy and take now as now (...) in school you're like always looking to the future (...) I've kind of got here and I'm like 'OK I'm here, just enjoy it'" (Pg 27, Ln 839)

At that moment in time, Beth was simply happy to just be. She was happy to be at university. She was happy to be able to move her upper body. She was

happy she could speak and swallow. She was happy just to be alive. The issue of value by comparison was uncompromisingly clear.

“I’ve always kind of always appreciated life but like now I really appreciate life yeah like even on the rainy days everything always seems really pretty and nice and I guess since that experience [organ failure] everything just seems so ‘wow – oh my god it’s another day how amazing kind of thing’ (Pg 17, Ln 532)

Who is Beth?

I asked Beth to try to sum herself up to someone who had no idea who she was. She took a long time to answer the request. Nowhere in her response did she mention any specifics to her life-worlds of being an athlete, of being a student or of having disabled disability. Nor did she make reference to her illness. She did not choose to define herself within a category or a label. Instead Beth chose to focus on her personal characteristics. She chose to describe herself as the person she hopes she is.

“<pause> <pause> <pause> that’s hard to answer <pause> <pause> <pause> erm <pause> <pause> <pause> not, its not like I love defying the odds, I er, I love achieving and yeah making a difference <pause> having a laugh and doing good and all that stuff <pause> I don’t think there is like a word or anything that would sum me up or anything but yeah, I’m just me I guess.” (Pg 32, Ln 1003)

To be ‘me’ means that Beth has attached her own meanings and terms of what it is to be here, which is something she cannot articulate. To say ‘I’m just me’ Beth displays the absolute liquid modern paradox – the impossibility of self-definition without social definition. Beth just wants to be Beth. And at the time of interview she was experiencing herself in a way she perhaps never imagined when she became ill at 13 years old and after so many years in the hospital - as

disabled, yet also as a university student who also happened to be a potential Paralympic sailor.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has provided the reader with guidance about how to read the 8 accounts from the participants. In addition it has discussed the importance of explaining how the analysis employs both a psychological and sociological interpretation to the accounts given. It is hoped that by providing the reader with a clear understanding of the structure of each case presented, as well as offering an explanation as to how each was analysed in reference to the contextualisation of the interview the reader was able to engage thoroughly with the accounts and read them as individual, separate experiences of research events.

Chapter Five

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 provided participant accounts as individual, separate explorations of the lived experience, accepting as valid their experiences, thoughts, interpretations and meaning-making. At this point the researcher would like to draw the reader's attention to the primary research question: To what extent is Liquid Modernity an effective metaphor for describing the life of the Paralympic student-athlete? I consider that liquid modernity is an effective metaphor for describing the life-worlds of the participants in this study. This chapter will discuss the accounts in Chapter 4 in relation to the research question as well as the subordinate research questions outlined in Chapter 1.

This chapter aims to move beyond the psychological based foundations of IPA towards the sociological aspect of this study where the lens of Bauman's Liquid Modernity is used to further deepen the analysis. This is done by using examples from experiences in each of the participants' life-worlds.

As aforementioned, the objective of the study was not to promote shared or common experiences across the accounts – each account was exclusive and unique in regards to how each participant experienced, consumed, internalised, made sense of and spoke about their life-worlds. What is comparable is the extent to which each participant demonstrated that they were experiencing living in a stage of liquid modernity to some degree. Participants described their life-worlds in ways which mapped to Bauman's understanding of living a liquid modern life. They individually, without prompting and without knowing, offered

their thoughts on subjects which are at the centre of Bauman's writings; ethics, relationships, and commercialisation. Indeed, although a great number of themes were developed which could be used to exemplify Bauman's work, this chapter will present the themes of most importance to this study and which relate to the above central questions and the outcome of the thesis.

The themes identified from the analysis of the interviews were mapped to Bauman's understandings of the problem of identity, of the creation of Otherness and the sensation of belonging. Thus, this chapter explores each of these in turn, providing extracts which elucidate if Bauman's observations on each were present. The following broad areas are discussed from the consolidation of the individual themes presented in Chapter 4 with the following subordinate sections discussed in turn.

- 1) Sport as a container for liquid life
- 2) The problem of identity
- 3) The social model of disability
- 4) The Paralympic movement
- 5) The creation of Otherness
- 6) Liquid life

At this point in the chapter I would like remind the reader of the subordinate questions identified in Chapter 1:

Subordinate question 1: How do concepts of the self and social identity evolve when conventional and non-conventional experiences of normalisation (at least within Western society) collide?

Subordinate question 2: What is the relationship between the different life-worlds presented by the participants and to what extent are these life-worlds conducive with Bauman's Liquid Modernity?

Subordinate question 3: Is it possible to move beyond the postmodern binary of able/disabled when researching disability within the conceptual framework of Bauman's Liquid Modernity?

Subordinate question 4: Is the social Model of Disability considered valid within Bauman's Liquid Modern society?

Subordinate question 5: How do the participants choose to reflect upon and express their experiences of being disabled, being an athlete and of being a disabled-athlete?

Consequently, what follows is an in-depth discussion of the parallels drawn between the personal and idiographic accounts given by the participants and Bauman's considerations of their life-worlds in liquid modern times.

5.2 Sport as a container for Liquid Life

What immediately became apparent from the data was an immense tension between the attempted liquid life of the athlete and the rigid, solid framework

within which sport operates. Bauman (2004b) comments that we are now passing from the 'solid' to the 'fluid' phase of modernity; and 'fluids' are so called because they cannot keep their shape for long. Unless they are poured into a tight container they will continue to change their shape under the influence of even the slightest force. At present, only a handful of academics have researched disability in the context of liquid modernity. These studies have focused largely on the embodiment of disability, emphasizing that it is the body of the individual which acts as the barrier to a liquid modern existence, concluding that it is the disability which prevents individuality (Hughes, Russell & Patterson, 2005; Roets & Goodley, 2008; Southby, 2011; Titchkosky & Michalko, 2012). However, none of these studies have incorporated the Paralympic athlete into their research. From the accounts given, this study considers that the body is actually less of a restriction to participation in a liquid modern life than sport. Certainly for these participants the issue of embodiment as a prevention of participation was of less concern. Whilst all of the participants gave an indication of how their body contributed to their liquid modern experiences (both positively and negatively), it was sport which 'disabled' them most from complete engagement with their liquid modern surroundings. The suggestion that the body is not the primary restriction to participation in a liquid modern life gives grounds to answer subordinate question 3 in that is it possible to move beyond the postmodern binary of able/disabled when researching disability within the conceptual framework of Bauman's Liquid Modernity.

In answering subordinate question 2, this study suggests that sport can be viewed as a solid container which prevents the leakages, spills or overflow of

the liquid modern life into the world of their athletic ambitions; Sport is the solid, fixed obstacle around which the liquid life of the athletes must flow. Sport therefore becomes an object which the athlete grips on to tightly in order to prevent being swept away by the current of their life-worlds outside of their athletic pursuits. What emerged was that the athletes were choosing to grasp onto this anchor until their sporting ambitions were either externally quashed or internally satiated. Only then would they be willing to let go, to float away into the options and possibilities of the liquid modern world.

5.2.1 Sport as a barrier to liquid living

This study further argues that sports practise rather than the body stopped the participants partaking in liquid life to the same extent as their peers. Regardless of the subject being discussed, each participant gave an indication that the solidity of the sport – the structures, the staff, the policies and the procedures – very much prevented each participant from engaging fully in their liquid modern surroundings. Two main areas of most concern for most participants appeared to be that of how a lack of money was affecting their ability to participate, and the consequential and detrimental effect of a lack of social mobility and social presence. Bauman (2007b) provides his thoughts on the individual who is denied participation to ‘hunt’ for their place in the liquid modern world:

“the non-participation in the on-going hunt can only feel like the ignominy of personal exclusion, and so (presumably) of personal inadequacy” (Pg 109).

For some participants, it was evident that the lack of social engagement at university caused by the rigidity of their sport was an issue they wanted to raise, as indicated by Amy:

Amy: "(...) constantly people are wanting to go on a night out and it's like well no I can't (Pg 16, Ln 188)

For some it was the difficulty they experienced of trying to balance the demands of their liquid academic and social worlds against the conservative solidity of their sporting life-world. For example Helen argued:

Helen: "I can sacrifice my sport to be at uni or I could sacrifice uni to play sport and it's trying to keep the two balanced that's hard" (Pg 29, Ln 905)

Of most concern for Chris, the oldest participant, was that the inflexibility of his training demands were forcing him into a near state of poverty, excluding him from participating in what he considered to be a 'normal' life. He commented:

Chris: "I don't have the money to pay the bills and live a normal life because of what I'm doing" (Pg 7, Ln 188)

These extracts are only a small selection of insights into the participants' predicaments. By all accounts, the participants were Bauman's 'tourists' in these liquid modern times, not 'vagabonds'; this denial of the opportunities and possibilities in regards to social and financial progression and mobility were completely self-appointed. The author argues then that the life-world of participating in elite level sport is not conducive to living in times of Bauman's Liquid Modernity.

The participants used sport as their plea or rationale for a reduced participation in their surroundings. However it was recognised that this demonstration of self-

punishment was carried out in the hope of attaining an experience beyond what was offered within their more fluid social and academic life-worlds. They were allowing the solidity of sport to command their engagement with the liquid modern world, yet fundamentally were allowing this command through their absolute choice. Yet, their lack of contribution to, and experience of their other more liquid worlds was actually within their control. This demonstrates that the presence of the solid in an individual's life has the ability, to an extent, to prevent full participation within liquid modernity, should they choose to let it. Whether this prevention is viewed as a positive or a negative can be regarded as a truth only to the individual; however Bauman would argue the converted liquid individual considers solidity a hindrance. For Bauman (2003) solidity is an anathema - as is all permanence.

“In the liquid modern world solidity of things is resented as a threat: any oath of allegiance, any long-term (let alone timeless) commitment, portends a future burdened with obligations that constrain freedom of movement and reduce the ability to take up new, as yet unknown, chances as they (inevitably) come by”
(p.19)

The participants demonstrated a certain sense of anger and frustration towards the solidity of sport. Yet this lack of participation was internalised differently by each participant, with no seemingly obvious pattern of resistance and resentment being demonstrated. In regards to subordinate question 1, the limitation of opportunities and the confinement of life often felt was shown in examples of feelings of reduced normalcy – the participants knew their committed behaviour and their fixed obligations were not recognised as being similar, or ‘normal’, compared to their peers. This reduction in the feeling of normalcy and reduced acceptance of behaviour would at times lead to

experiences of Otherness. Yet, to be a Paralympian is *not* 'normal'; Amy was the only participant to recognise that her sporting achievements alone made her markedly different to her peers. The other participants did not choose to distinguish themselves as 'abnormal' on account of them identifying themselves as a Paralympic athlete.

What is of importance here to note is the connection between the reduction of participation in liquid life and the increased sensation of Otherness; that being an elite athlete cast them as Other. The more the participant allowed the solidity of the sporting life-world to dominate their other life-worlds, the more the participant displayed feelings of Otherness and an increased athlete identity (Amy and Chris for example). The problems associated with an athlete displaying an exceptionally strong athlete identity are discussed widely, most notably with Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, (1993) who developed the Athlete Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS). Tasiemski, Kennedy, Gardner, & Blaikley (2004) have summarised the latest AIMS findings of the pros and cons of identifying with the athletic role. From a positive vantage, strong athlete identity is related to health, self-esteem, social relationships, confidence, and sport participation. However, it has been recognised that a strong athlete identity is also related to over-commitment to the athletic role, identity foreclosure, and delays in career maturity. Again, in relation to subordinate question 1, this study also suggests that the development of a strong athlete identity has the potential to deny an individual a coherent relationship with their liquid modern surroundings. This could have implications in regards to transitional stages from the solid sporting world to the overlapping fluid worlds outside of the sporting environment when the athlete chooses to exit elite sport either on their

own terms and merits, or more of concern, when the athlete is no longer recognised as a commodity and is forced to let go. In regards to an increasing investment in their sporting endeavours the participants appear to be sacrificing both the multi-dimensionality of their current selves as well as the potential expansion of their future selves. A reduction in participation in the liquid modern world could ultimately lead to various dimensions of their current self, becoming diminished and detached from their peers, potentially finding themselves as declining towards Otherness once outside of their sporting life-worlds. Sport as a container for the liquid modern life, therefore, is problematic.

Answering the primary research question and subordinate research question 1, the problem with Sport in the liquid modern world is that it exists in such a dichotomised state. The capital 'S' is utilised here to demonstrate that I am not discussing the verb sport, more that I consider Sport in the substantive form, as a named entity in its entirety. Furiously stiff, quantifiable and rigid on the one hand, yet ever changing, developing and evolving on the other, the issue is that Sport very much has a one directional relationship with its athletes. It demands commitment from them without ever providing the promise of return. It demands sacrifice without the promise of salvation. The athlete must be fluid enough to drop their anchor at whichever solid (yet temporary) dock Sport dictates. They are not Sport's only choice, but Sport must be theirs. As is evidenced in their accounts, Sport takes their freedom, but not in exchange for security.

As Bauman suggests, it is the people who cannot move as quickly, and more conspicuously, the category of people who cannot, at will, leave their place at all

who are ruled. The participants were, by definition categorised as athletes, and these athletes were ruled by Sport. What was obvious in the accounts was the absolute clash of how the liquid modern athlete must exist within such confounding constraints mandated by Sport.

With adaptability being the most coveted virtue in the liquid modern world, the athletes must also contend with demonstrating competitiveness, productivity and effectiveness. The athletes are required to be flexible when Sport demands it yet must be willing to accept and adapt to the solidity of life imperative to becoming an elite athlete. Engaging in sport at such a high level has inevitably prevented the participants from being able to move as quickly as liquid life demands. Adding disability to this demand in regards to geographical relocation and indeed simply the foundational aspect of physical movement (often slowed down by an impairment), the athletes very much allow Sport to govern their level of participation in their liquid modern surroundings. Yet they are allowing it – this level of rule is chosen. As Bauman (2000) suggests, life is a sequences of episodes and obstacles - each to be calculated separately, as each has its own balance of gains and losses. The athletes in this study are currently negotiating the obstacle of Sport, balancing the gains and losses of reduced participation and exposure to liquid modern experiences outside of their sporting life-worlds against the potential for self-fulfilment via sporting glory.

Although the reasons for practicing sport varied significantly across the participants, the commitment shown to their sporting endeavours was unquestionable. The development of some form of athlete identity would be

inevitable - some quite weak (Beth for example), some exceptionally strong (Amy for example). However, the participants had (as the study suggests) two other identities to contend with – that of being a student and that of being disabled. The following section discusses the formation of identity in the liquid modern world and how the participants chose to express their identities in each of their accounts.

5.3 The problem of Identity

Identity is by its very nature elusive and ambivalent, with the question of identity being a constant presence in Bauman's work. The problem of identity can be traced through his discussions of globalisation, individualisation, marginalisation, poverty and consumerism with much thought provided to the production of individual identity through to global symbols of identity. Bauman (2004b) suggests that in the liquid modern society:

“one becomes aware that ‘belonging’ and ‘identity’ are (...) eminently negotiable and revocable; and that one's own decisions, the steps one takes, the way one acts – and the determination to stick by all that – are crucial factors of both.”
(p.11)

In order to explore to what extent Bauman's considerations of identity can be recognised through the explanations of their life-worlds, the issue of identity in relation to how the participants chose to identify themselves is discussed further in the following sections, providing a range of considerations for the primary research question, as well as subordinate questions 1 and 5.

5.3.1 The formation of identities in liquid modern times

Identities seem fixed and solid only when seen, in a flash, from outside (Bauman, 2000). In the liquid modern world identities are becoming more intrinsically volatile and unfixed. Bauman (2004a) suggests that we now have the ability to make and unmake identities at will. In the liquid modern society, identity is complex and problematic. In an individualistic and rapidly changing society it can become an increasingly precarious source of solidarity. In each account, the notion of what it meant to be identified, and to identify oneself, as a particular category of person was discussed – both directly and indirectly. What was clear from the interviews was that the issue of the creation of identity is indeed problematic. It is multiple; it is stratified; it is singular and it is aggregated. Identity, therefore, is truly a liquid commodity.

Bauman (2007b) argues that the process of constructing an identity is sold to us as something that should be pleasurable, and as something that is indicative of individual freedom, purporting that in a liquid modern society we experience a sense of belonging when our emotional securities are harvested by those around us – that we are emotionally secure in ourselves and our purpose within a particular culture. However, he reminds us that although we may think we are free, the continual flux of our social existence obliges us to engage in this process of continual reinvention. Furthermore, that most identities are not rooted in the local, the social or the political; instead they float lightly, with a transient nature. Bauman (2000) interprets many of these strategies as individual attempts to escape from a world over which they have no control. It is without question that the participants demonstrated one of Bauman's (2004b) primary arguments; that identity is a socially necessary convention. Indeed, a

number of the participants evidenced this by expressing that many saw university as an opportunity to create a new identity, as Amy exemplified best:

Amy: "(...) not to sound clichéd but I could completely re-invent myself" (Pg 22, Ln 660)

The accounts suggest that any alteration or enhancement of their identity whilst at university was done for one of two reasons; either on account of an internal dissatisfaction with their identity in their new academic surrounding; or altering their identity in response to an external sign that their chosen identity conflicted with their new academic surrounding. For Bauman (2004b) individuality is an infuriating paradox, commenting that the liquid modern, now more than ever, is willing to proclaim 'I am who I am' – that is a "unique being".

*"In a society of individuals – our 'individualised society' – we are all required, and indeed crave and try hard, to be individual."
(Bauman, 2004b, p.15)*

Yet the contradiction of living in liquid modern times according to Bauman (2000, p.96) is that it is not in the fabric of the liquid modern to *not* alter their identity in response to a newly experienced social environment; that we wear a "public mask" as an act of engagement and participation, ever increasingly withdrawing our "true self" from mutual involvements with others.

The vast majority of studies which encompass the subject of disability are (initially at least) disposed with the vantage of the disabled individual being a marginalised individual (Sparkes, 1998; Thomas, 2004; Mawyer, 2005; Wilson 2006; Watson, 2010; Hughes & Paterson, 2010 as a small example). Yet, in answering subordinate questions 1 and 5, from the accounts produced, it was

evident that the issue of marginalisation was not a resonating concern with the participants. Kay (2005, p.3) argues that in reality most marginalised people steer a path between the two extremes of normalcy and Otherness, developing a “multifaceted identity and negotiating complex relationships with a wide variety of individuals and groups”, whilst Bauman (2004b) argues that who we are and how we are, is much more difficult in times of liquid modernity. He comments that we no longer see the world in terms of clear moral and political choices, rather the collision of the abundant conundrums facing the liquid modern makes this task of knowing ourselves almost impossible. Taking both Kay’s and Bauman’s thoughts into account, what therefore could be deduced from the participants’ accounts regarding their identities?

The challenge of separating the psychological self from the sociological self is unimaginable. As demonstrated in the final section of each analysis (Who is X?), our own complex and ambivalent identities as choosing, acting persons provides endless, unfolding, meaningful and meaningless systems of how we identify who we are to ourselves and to those around us.

The themes for each participant ultimately drew on their identity and their experiences of identity. However, what was clear was that despite the knowledge that all the participants broadly share similar life environments (sport, university, disability), the accounts provided regarding identity were thoroughly different. This highlights then that I was not working with a ‘group’ of Paralympic student-athletes, but rather with a collective of individuals; all experiencing their multiple yet individual personal and social identities in very different phases of liquid modernity. Anderson (2009) argues that personal

identity is concerned with an individual's core characteristics, whereas social identity is a definition of oneself in relation to others. The important issue of the overlap, or junction of the psychological and the sociological can be explored at length when discussing the creation of the 'athlete identity' for each of the participants.

5.3.2 The shared identity of the 'athlete' in liquid modern times

Bauman (2004b) presents a particularly pertinent argument in regards to the universalistic thought on the meaning and terms attached to the word 'identity'.

He proposes that:

"Identity battles cannot do their job of identification without dividing as much as, or more than, they unite. Their inclusive intensions mingle with (or rather are complemented by) intentions to segregate, exempt and exclude." (p.79)

Dawson (2007) postulates that in the liquid modern society, socially stratifying terms are no longer relevant in their original form, since there is no shared identity to bind the liquid modern; that these terms have shed their attached meanings and are open for adoption, to define anyone who wishes to define themselves with such a term. Taking both Bauman's and Dawson's thoughts into consideration, the issue of sport still presents a solid application to the lives of the participants. The participant accounts show that there *is* in fact the shared identity of the 'athlete', with each providing examples of what they consider to be the similar characteristics displayed by individuals who claim the term 'athlete', presenting a unified and shared identity:

Amy: "Athletes are athletes you know" (Pg18, Ln 529)

The majority of the participants proudly identified themselves as an athlete in some form or another. This shared identity of being an 'athlete' was regarded as an important component of their self-identity. Smith (2003) identified athletic competence and physical appearance as key to social status attainment, especially among young adults, holding high value in academic settings as determined by social interaction with peers. But, these participants did not have the assumed or expected appearance of able bodied athletes. These athletes were Paralympic athletes. Brittain (2004, p.441) suggests that many people with disabilities do not become involved in sport due to "their own self-perceptions learned through numerous interactions with able-bodied members of society, leading to low self-confidence". This study contends that having an expected, shared assumption of the characteristics of an athlete, coupled with the creation of an athlete/non-athlete identity markedly diluted the development of a poor self-image and low levels of confidence for the participants, regardless of the severity of the disability. For example:

*James: "(...) the fastest group [able bodied] was the 7 minute mile group [but] I can cruise at 6 minute miles for an hour easily
"(Pg 26, Ln 808)*

Beth: "I really do like it because I can be sailing against a very fit, able man and completely trash them" (Pg 15, Ln 473)

In providing evidence for subordinate question 5, whilst some participants gave examples of possible causes for low levels of self-esteem, identifying themselves as an athlete did not appear to be of concern. The term 'athlete' did not appear to carry any negative associated meanings according to the participants. To define themselves as an athlete was a positive self-concept.

Bauman (2004b, p.49) considers that the construction of one's identity is guided by the logic of "goal rationality". Certainly then, it is possible to assess from the accounts if and when participants gave information on what their goal was. It is perhaps to be expected that those who tied their "goal" to the production of a Paralympic gold medal strongly identified themselves as athletes. However, the majority of participants gave accounts that did not define their goal within sporting parameters; the construction of their identity went beyond the material. For some, their goal was to demonstrate a life of purpose, of accomplishment outside of the sporting arena. Most (Chris, Emily, Hannah, Robert, Claire) expressed their ultimate goal as having a traditional, 'normal' life – a family, a career:

Emily: "(...) eventually, few years down the line settle down get married you know – kids dog car" (Pg 19, Ln 576)

Bauman & Tester (2001) summarized Bauman's observations of contemporary society as "the era of dis-embedding without the re-embedding" (p.81), most notably referring to the more Western traditional behaviours associated with a past, once solid form of society (e.g. marriage, family and careers). Lee (2011) considers that Bauman's dismissal of the possibility of re-embedding is too generalist, failing to recognise the specific areas of the liquid modern's life which has either not yet thawed, or is indeed in the process of re-solidification. The accounts seemed to indicate that for some of the participants the perhaps traditional ideals of a future self-image have not completely liquidised.

However, whilst an idealised future self-image may have been easier for the participants to articulate, being able to configure their multiple present day images in regards to their sense of self-affirmation, self-concept and self-identity proved to be unsettled and disparate. This ever present loom of uncertainty and of change highlighted the seemingly widening gap between their present selves and their hoped for, perhaps even expected, future selves, creating a clash of identity and the difficulty of self-recognition in times of liquid modernity.

5.3.3 The clash of identities in liquid modern times

The creation of an identity based on an ideal future self-image did not appear to be as problematic as the creation of an identity in the present day. Whilst there was an apparent agreement about the general characteristics associated with possession of an athlete identity, the issue of the creation of identity beyond this was at times incomparable between accounts.

Identifying themselves as an 'athlete' (regardless of the level) was relatively easy and simplistic for each of the participants – collective almost. However, identifying themselves as 'disabled' was a much more challenging and complex labyrinth for each to negotiate – there was no shared identity in the same way there was with the term 'athlete'. Neither was there with the term 'disabled athlete'. When considering the creation of the athlete/non-athlete identity, each participant expressed the former as the more favourable category to be identified as. The opposite was true of the binary opposite of able/disabled, proving evidence for subordinate question 4. The term 'disabled athlete' appeared to be most contentious. For some (Beth, Emily, Katy and Robert) the two terms were allowed to merge or overlap in regards to their definition and

function. For others (Amy, Joe, Helen and Chris) the two terms were utterly divergent; to consider the terms similar was insulting.

Robert: "I'd rather people be like "oh there's that guy, the footballer, the blind one" (Pg 35, Ln 1076)

Helen: "I'm an athlete not a disabled athlete" (Pg 16, Ln 500)

In contributing to answering subordinate question 5, the three examples below best demonstrate the many difficulties and indeed the breadth of differences experienced by the participants in regards to their thoughts on the topic of being identified as 'disabled'.

Emily: "I never have swum in a disability club, in a lane full of disabled athletes, I've never wanted to do that" (Pg 7, Ln 196)

Katy: "I don't really see myself as disabled, which sounds silly (...) because I am disabled really" (Pg 19, Ln 405)

Amy: "(...) the GB able bodied squad, I feel as if they kind of slightly do look down on us" (Pg 7, Ln 185)

Shakespeare (1996b) argues that 'disability' as a fluid identity causes major conflict between disability studies and mainstream social sciences. Indeed, the issue of labelling oneself as 'disabled' was either difficult (as per Chris' example) or dismissed entirely (as per Beth's examples) by all the participants:

Chris: "I think <pause> I'm one of the least disabled athletes that you may come across" (Pg19, Ln 577)

Beth: "I wouldn't say that I am disabled, I mean, I don't feel disabled because I feel that I can do so much" (Pg 18, Ln 545)

Of key concern to any analysis of disability is to address the issue of the production of knowledge in regards to disability. Watson (2002) asks:

“Do disabled people know who they are because of the fact that they have an impairment, because of the fact that they are faced with discrimination or because of who they, ontologically, believe themselves to be?” (p.512)

Every participant commented that they did not regard themselves as being disabled. If the self, as it is argued by Cooley (1902), arises as a result of self-objectification, the process of seeing oneself as others see yourself, then the participants demonstrated that (at times at least) they had not necessarily experienced enough ‘disabling’ behaviours or ‘disablist’ attitudes from their peers in order to consider themselves ‘disabled’. The combination of positive self-esteem created through their engagement in sport and the sociological, political and cultural shifts in considerations of what it now means to be a ‘disability athlete’ or indeed ‘disabled’ has facilitated such change (via mediums such as the London 2012 Paralympic Games for example). Furthermore the participants demonstrated that it was they who decided what was symbolically important in their self-identity. Bauman (2001c) comments significantly on the indeterminable relationship between the individual creation of identity and the societal factors which shape and influence this creation:

“That our individuality is socially produced is by now a trivial truth; but the obverse of that truth still needs to be repeated more often: the shape of our sociality, and so of the society we share, depends in its turn on the way in which the task of ‘individualization’ is framed and responded to.” (p.4)

This, therefore, questions to what extent does the liquid modern individual have the freedom to decide the makeup of their ‘self’ identity if that identity is indeed forged and framed by the individual’s environment? It is this interplay of the psychological and the sociological perspectives of identity formation which

provides such a breadth of difference between all of the participants. Their identity as 'disabled' cannot be clustered or homogenised. The participants rejected how others saw them, and through an interpersonal and social process, challenged the assumptions about disability. Bauman (2004b) suggests that:

“The idea of ‘identity’ was born out of the crisis of belonging and out of the effort it triggered to bridge the gap between the ‘ought’ and the ‘is’” (p.20)

Identity therefore aims to lift ‘reality’ (is) to the standards set by our ‘idea’ (ought) of how we should be; that we attempt to remake the reality in the likeness of the idea. Herein lies tension between the ‘ought’ and the ‘is’ for the disabled individual - what Bauman (2004b) refers to as the ‘individual de jure’ and the ‘individual de facto’. In order to compete as a Paralympic athlete each participant is disabled de jure; medically classified as disabled. However the individual as disabled de facto is altogether different. Knowing this, the study considers that the information provided by each participant is their ‘bridge’ between de jure and de facto.

The dichotomy of ‘am I/aren’t I?’ label of disabled was troublesome, partially providing evidence for subordinate question 3. This difficulty was perhaps most apparent for the participants who had acquired their disability. Of the eight participants, three (Beth, Helen and Chris) had acquired their disability. Bauman discusses at length his considerations of identity, presuming that identity is controllable, that in liquid modern times we have become masters of our identities. An identity is something to be managed. How, therefore, is

identity considered when an uninvited or unwelcomed change in identity – such as ‘disabled’ - is forced upon an individual? Chris commented:

Chris: “I knew where I was going and then all of a sudden I had it taken away from me at 18” (Pg 18, Ln 559)

Bauman (2005a) comments that when changes in an individual’s life conditions are presented, it is not the new realities resulting from the change which causes the most resentment, rather that it is the lack of consent given by the individual for such changes which provides the most anger and discontent. The three participants with acquired disabilities had to cope with and adapt to the changes in their lives brought about not only by the physicality of impairment but also by the accompanying psychological and sociological disorder which undoubtedly ensues, as Hogan (1999) points out:

“Acquired disability signifies a massive change in a person’s social position and constitutes a personal crisis for the individual. Identity as a social phenomenon becomes apparent as individuals are perceived by themselves and others as different” (p.80)

The concept of value by comparison is spoken of in many of the accounts – crossing over all life-worlds (athletic, academic and social), not just the able/disabled divide. Bauman (2004b) argues that one explores the value of something in full only when it vanishes from view, goes missing or falls into disrepair. The body, therefore, seems to disappear from consciousness when it functions in an unproblematic state. In regards to disability this was evident in Helen and Beth’s accounts:

Helen: "(...) if you're not born with it you've got to change your entire life." (Pg 15, Ln 458)

Beth: (...) not being able to move and only being able to speak kinda hits home " (Pg 26, Ln 767)

As is argued by Nettelbeck (2008), when serious alterations to the body happen in a culture that takes health for granted, the utter shock of one's own body becoming so unfamiliar brings about a total re-imagination of Self. Sparkes (1998) considers that negative life events disrupt the ability to engage in preferred activities that have special relevance to a person's identity. However, the accounts produced by the three participants (and indirectly through peer experiences in the other five accounts) that acquiring a disability has led to the discovery or birth of a new identity – that of a Paralympic athlete. For example Chris comments:

Chris: "I guess my identity has changed even more now because of fencing" (Pg 19, Ln 565)

Bauman does not write specifically on the subject of 'disability', rather he speaks of the physical and the metaphysical make up of disability – the 'body' and Otherness. However, I use the issue of disability to demonstrate a flaw in Bauman's work on identity. Bauman (2004b) contests that identity in the liquid modern era needs to be 'made' first, and once made it can be changed endlessly, that in the liquid modern society, identity is a freely chosen game, a theatrical presentation of the Self. The liquid modern problem of identity is to avoid fixation and keep options open. Is this possible for the disabled individual? Disability imposes itself on the individual – either at birth or through acquirement – and is never changeable. Disability is an irreversible and inescapable identity. Bauman's (2004c) understanding of 'individualization'

carries with it the emancipation of the individual from the ascribed, inherited and inborn determination of disposition; transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task'; charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task. Yet for these participants, the task of transforming themselves into an able bodied individual is un-performable. It is an impossible task. Their embodied identity as disabled is permanent, therefore signifying Bauman's ideas can *only* be assigned to their social character. Therefore, in contributing to answering subordinate question 1 and 2, perhaps this is why the issue of the 'body' was largely untouched by the participants – why would they task themselves with a problem that is unsolvable? Rather they focused on discussing the problematic task of creating a flexible, consumable social identity linked to athleticism and education.

Bauman (2004b) suggests that identity is revealed to us as something to be invented rather than discovered; as the crafted target of effort. All eight participants told personal stories of identity creation building on their experiences as an athlete and as a university student. However, not one participant spoke of an active effort or an obvious objective to create the identity of being 'disabled'. In fact, no one appeared to be creating an identity which accentuated their disability. As is noted by Parsons (1999, cited in Ellis, 2009)

“The women's movement does not (...) emphasise the 'maleness' of women. (...) The gay and lesbian movement does not (...) emphasise the 'heterosexualness' of gay and lesbians. But the disability movement does, it seems, very much emphasis the 'ableness' of people with disabilities” (p.12)

The quote above can be considered in light of the responses the participants gave in regards to negative feelings of associations as a part of the 'disabled

community' as opposed to the 'Paralympic community' as it were. Indeed the Paralympic athlete could be considered one of Bauman's (1991) "true hybrids" (p.58). Each of the participants had been officially classified by their NGB's as unable to perform certain bodily movements and functions – this is unquestionable. However, for the Paralympic athlete, the social and cultural boundaries become uncertain – when 'elite athlete' and 'disabled' meet, the person becomes *socially* unclassifiable. To this extent, it can be argued that it is indeed possible, if not probable for neither society, nor the individual to identify their 'place' in liquid modern times.

Hargreaves (2000, p.185) states that people with disabilities "are looked upon, identified, judged and represented primarily through their bodies, which are perceived in popular consciousness to be perfect, incomplete and inadequate". This study does not deny this possibility, as the issue of the embodiment of Self was raised by a number of participants. However, there was for all participants an active, open and honest attempt to create distance from this perception of being an invalid. In liquid modern times it is not necessary to consider this active distancing to be primarily grounded in the perception of 'disability', more that this distance was created to demonstrate the participants desire to be seen by their peers (and others) as an active member of the liquid modern community. As Bauman understands it to be, the true stake of the liquid modern is a (temporary) rescue from exclusion, to avoid being consigned as human waste. The researcher proposes that this is at the core of the conflict of the 'disabled' identity. It is not the 'disability' itself which they were rejecting or disowning, rather the assumption, made by the able bodied community that they

are unable to contribute independently to the liquid modern society which they feared the most.

5.4 Moving beyond the Social Model of Disability

This research suggests that impairment must be considered as more than simply a medical issue. It is both an experience and a discursive construction (Lang, 2001), having phenomenological parameters, and being analysed as an effect of discourse and language (Arney & Bergen, 1983). Hughes & Paterson (2010) contend that in the social model of disability the body – reduced to impairment – is afforded only instrumental and objective status, whilst Marks (1999, p.611) argues that by “excluding personal experience from the cultural analysis of disability the social model contributes to the individualisation of disability”. I argue that the social model of disability counsels people to see ‘disability’ as ‘disadvantage’, a potential reason as to why each participant had difficulty identifying themselves as ‘disabled’. However, what did not appear to be difficult for the participants to contend with was the disengagement and disassociation each felt with the label of the ‘disabled community’. The following section firmly answers subordinate questions 3 and 4.

5.4.1 A separation from the perceived disabled community

Through the social model, disability is understood as an unequal relationship within a society in which the needs of people with impairments are often given little or no consideration (Carson, 2009). Additionally, it is grounded in a consideration that people with impairments are disabled by the fact that they are excluded from participation within the mainstream of society as a result of physical, organisational and attitudinal barriers. Yet, some of the experiences

recorded by the participants towards the disabled community were markedly at odds with the social model of disability.

It appeared that those most physically affected by their disability (Beth and Robert for example) were strongly opposed to the demonstration by others of their disability as an 'excuse' not to participate:

Beth: "(...) just their attitudes really, like they say 'oh I can't do that' and they're just more victims of it really you know (...) it annoys me sometimes, you know when I see people behaving like that" (Pg 18, Ln 562)

Robert: "(...) these people that kind of go on disability marches and stuff, all that does my head in to be honest" (Pg 14, Ln 405)

However the participants whose disability affected their physicality the least (Katy for example) displayed a more general upset towards the term 'disabled' being misused and misinterpreted:

Katy: "I think it's much more acceptable now, it's almost like it's gone the other way now though hasn't it like people are too, like too <pause> PC [politically correct], you know" (Pg 32, Ln 872)

Each account displayed a distinct separation between the psychological and the sociological consideration of disability. Helen, Beth and Robert had impairments which limited their everyday physicality much more so than Amy, Emily, Chris, James and Katy. Helen, Beth and Robert demonstrated the internalisation of anger and frustration felt towards disabled individuals who do not demonstrate the same strengths towards self-improvement and independency that they had. The remarks were forcefully disapproving of disabled individuals behaving in a way that drew attention to the link of disability

and dependency on society. There was certainly a 'hierarchy' of disability identity present in the accounts. One could argue that perhaps here the talk of the three participants corresponded with the expected characteristics of will and self-belief associated with being an elite level athlete. The other participants however discussed their understanding of the term 'disabled' in a much broader, sociological context. The issue was not as internalised; it was relevant but not necessarily of great concern. The researcher argues that because their disabilities affected them the least, they were less likely to be categorised as 'disabled', therefore experiencing disability as a label much less outside of their sporting worlds.

Kay (2005) argues that marginalised people often use identities, both individually and collectively as a means of challenging normative assumptions and prescriptive values. The participants appeared to demonstrate that they were themselves rejecting the collective identity of 'disability', rejecting the protection that the social model can provide regarding the place of the disabled individual within society. To be labelled as 'disabled' but not identifying oneself as 'disabled' leaves the social model of disability in question. Is a pre-requisite therefore of the social model of disability that an individual must first identify themselves as 'disabled'? And indeed if one does not identify oneself as disabled does that result in a complete disengagement with the social model of disability? In regards to these questions it would seem that individualism and conformity are irrevocably at odds.

5.4.2 A continuum of disability

The participants demonstrated a divide between themselves and others in the disabled community, in that their accounts indicated that each found it difficult to negotiate a realistic and meaningful place within the liquid modern society. The social model of disability provides a framework for living which the participants did not seem to adopt. At present, the social model of disability is employed by both the disabled and the able body community across a variety of research, projects and policies. However, as the cultural analyst Molefi Kete Asante argues (as cited in Somers, 1994, p.610) “How can the oppressed use the same theories as the oppressors?” How can this model be upheld in the liquid modern world if there are individuals (at least the individuals in this study) with disabilities disagreeing with its premise?

The struggle over identity could then be framed in the recognition that new voices require new theories. Chapter 4 brings attention to the idea that the social model of disability fails to account for the level of individualism experienced in the differing life-worlds of a disabled person. The social model aims to reduce, ‘disablist’ attitudes from the able bodied community, however, those with impairments may still possess and indeed exhibit the same socially constructed perceptions towards people with more severe or different disabilities from their own, as James demonstrated:

James: “(...) it’s the obvious difference between sort of a proper athlete, in my eyes, and someone who’s just sort of doing it for different reasons” (Pg 3, Ln 71)

Hunt (1966, as cited in Sherrill, 1986, p.23) argues that “people with less stigmatized disabilities are often quite prejudiced against individuals who are

more stigmatized". Analysis of the accounts suggests that this is still evident, highlighting the need to address the social model of disability as purporting to be the definitive alternative to the medical model; that it can stand to represent the voices of all persons with a disability.

Contrary to the methodology of this study, Finklestein (2001, p.4) states the social model of disability allows too much of an "introspective dwelling on experience rather than on impairment or disability". In his view, any focus on personal experience is only acceptable if it is in service of galvanising the broader struggle for social change. However, Hughes & Paterson (1997) suggest that:

"phenomenology might be a useful theoretical tool; a means of reconstructing the impairment/disability distinction without opening discursive opportunities for reactionary elements".
(p.338)

To think about the body (and therefore impairment) and society in the Cartesian/Kantian fashion is no longer supported by researching grand social movements. The study argues that perhaps a new theoretical perspective could be introduced which incorporates impairment from both a physiological, psychological and sociological vantage.

This thesis argues that whilst both the social and the medical model are still important to disability research, the development of a new model which challenges the binary nature of the social / medical model of disability is very much required. Based on the accounts given for this study, it is suggested that a positive progression could be research into a model accounting for a

continuum of disability. Arguably the experience of disability is ephemeral and changeable according to the individual and their surroundings. The primary dilemma with each model is that the extent of the disability is not decided by the individual in question. The accounts by the participants demonstrate that the experience of disability is utterly different for each individual on account of their physiological, psychological and sociological experiences of their disability. A continuum of disability which allows for both the separation and the overlap of these three spheres of life would ultimately produce a much more personal approach to disability. Once such a model is drawn, what should be of utmost importance is that it is the responsibility, indeed the right, of the individual to place *themselves* on the continuum in regards to their experiences of and attitude towards their abilities and difficulties. Given Bauman's (2000) assertion that it is the responsibility of the individual to position and establish their place within a liquid modern society, it could be argued that a continuum of disability would indeed allow, if not encourage such freedom and fluidity. In doing so, it would no longer be the privilege of the medical profession nor of the able or disabled community or movement to permanently fix the individual's place in society by being restricted to only two immovable models to which define, determine and divide disability.

An important aspect of the participants' difficulty in developing a strong affinity with the disability community was that the participants very much placed themselves as existing in liquid modern times. They did not appear to conform to the rhetoric presented by some that (certainly within Western society) disabled individuals are regularly denied opportunity (Barnes, Shakespeare & Mercer, 1999; Robert & Harlen, 2006; Lubeta, 2009). The social model of

disability argues that it is the responsibility of society to include the individual. Yet Bauman would argue that in liquid modern times it is the responsibility of the individual to include society, and it is the responsibility of the individual to acquire such knowledge and resource to be able to facilitate this. Therefore, a continuum of disability would fit well with Bauman's concerns regarding the production of the 'flawed consumer'. The issue of individuals who cannot include themselves in society (on account of the severity of their disability) is perhaps best located in Bauman's thoughts on moral and ethical demand (which is beyond the scope of this research). However, for those who can include themselves, Bauman considers that *they* are accountable for demonstrating, improving and acquiring both tangible and metaphysical worth, not society. An individual's place in the liquid modern world would therefore very much depend on where the individual chooses to place themselves on the continuum.

5.5 Belonging to the Paralympic Movement

A final difficulty of identity, and additionally the issue of belonging, to arise from the accounts was that of being a Paralympic athlete and the ties each participant experienced to the Paralympic Games. As with the label of 'disabled', there did not appear to be a shared consensus of the meanings attached to the word 'Paralympic'. This caused some participants to contemplate the strength of their connection to the concept of becoming a Paralympian.

To identify oneself as a Paralympic athlete carries with it a deeper responsibility than to be a disabled athlete. It supposes that the Paralympic athlete must, out

of duty, be a representation of 'ableness', as Wendell (1989, as cited in Overboe, 1999) suggests:

"the image of the disabled hero validates the lived experience of a few disabled people and invalidates the lived experience of the majority of disabled people because they cannot meet such expectations" (p. 116).

Cottingham & Pate (2012) wrote of how disabled athletes are commonly perceived as 'inspirations' rather than 'athletes' due to the perception of them having to overcome greater challenges than other disabled individuals. Excessive praise thus became a tool of degradation, with attention emphasising the athletes' inspirational potential rather than their performance.

The case studies show that there was no demonstrable pattern in regards to which participants wanted to be considered inspiration and which did not, nor was there a pattern as to who considered their fellow athletes as inspirational and who did not. It seems that neither the level of Paralympic achievement nor the severity of disability provided a link to demonstrate the very different attitudes expressed about what it meant to be a Paralympic athlete. A diversity of opinion is expressed between Katy and Amy:

Katy: "I mean the people I've met are the most inspirational people you could wish to meet" (Pg 14, Ln 367)

Amy: "(...) it should be more inspirational <pause> but then again I don't know if I find that a bit patronising <pause> why can't they just look at our achievements?" (Pg 12, Ln 352)

The extent to which the participants demonstrated their affinity with an interest in the Games as a cultural representation of either sport or of disability was

largely disparate. There did not seem to be anything categorical or thematic to explain the differences in the positive or negative levels of commitment to the Paralympic Games and to fellow Paralympic athletes. I consider then that the relationship the participant had with the term Paralympic (both for Games and athlete) was the result of two factors; the degree of belonging to which they felt, and the detail in their own personal attachment to the meaning of the term.

Any request for the Paralympic Games to be divorced from its relationship with disability is futile, incomprehensible almost. With disability being a constant, but the severity of disability being diverse, the Paralympic Games cannot help but prick at the consciousness of both the spectators and the athletes. It reminds us of the fragility and potential ugliness of our body. The participants of this study were thankful of this on a regular basis, knowing that their body could still serve a 'function' both in and away from their sporting environments. The Paralympic classification process seeks to ensure fair competition by grouping athletes according to their functional ability for the sport, yet the differences between each athlete's functional ability to perform daily tasks was distinctly obvious. It is possible then to comprehend why some of the participants found it problematic, burdensome or even morally questionable to subscribe to belonging to the Paralympic movement. Bauman (2010, p.143) argues that the plight of the liquid modern is the "freedom to choose what is right for you; for you – not for other people". However, when the individual in question is unsure of what is right for them, they seek temporary ease in finding groups to which they can experience belonging and facilitate identity creation. This is important to the relationship of the data with the questions posed at the start of this chapter. This research argues that this thought from Bauman can help partially

provide an understanding to the difficulties the participants have in placing themselves within Paralympic sport, and / or the disabled community.

Bauman (2004b) suggests that identity is inherently related to yearning for (communal) belonging, emerging under the condition of insecurity. Perhaps then what links the participants is that those who experienced the most uncertainty regarding their identity as disabled would undoubtedly question their belonging to the Paralympic identity. Those who either fiercely embraced or rejected an identity of disability would easily be able to place their level of belonging. However, those who struggled with identifying themselves as disabled could of course feel fraudulent at times, perhaps even dissociating themselves from the very principles of the Paralympic movement of celebrating difference through sport. The case studies show that whilst the participants (varyingly) associated themselves with a Paralympic identity, they did so in regards to identifying themselves as an athlete rather than identifying themselves as disabled. They yearned for the communal belonging to elite sport.

Watson (2002, p.513) comments that “there is a need to document experiences from a variety of disabled people” and it is important, therefore, to remember that the accounts produced were from Paralympic student-athletes. The participants were elite athletes with a recognised sporting talent to be on a Paralympic Pathway and to be attending (or have recently graduated from) university. If knowledge is socially anchored in experience, and multiple social standpoints produce plurality of knowledge then the accounts produced for this study must be considered by both the disabled and non-disabled community.

The rejection of what the participants identified as a disability rhetoric of 'poor me', of the 'victim' or of 'uselessness' stand to highlight not only Bauman's consideration of the need to avoid becoming 'human waste' but also that an alternative voice of a collective of disabled athletes can be explored. It is possible that these voices can contribute to disability studies in allowing others to potentially adopt similar strategies in their own construction of self, providing alternative discourse through which to understand their experiences of self of belonging and of disability.

The Paralympic Games reluctantly force the participant to acknowledge their disabled identity through the process of classification. The ambiguity experienced by some of the participants towards their own sense of belonging, and the consideration of the belonging of others to the Paralympic Games was at times a struggle – the elite athlete and the disabled athlete were in opposition. Bauman (2004b, *ibid*:77) contends that "the oppositions that battle under the current condition of liquid modernity concern the belonging by primordial assignment and belonging by choice". It could be argued that for the participant uncertain of their identity as disabled in the liquid modern world, choosing to belong to the term 'Paralympic' ultimately removes their choice of association with the term 'disabled' - a vexing clash between autonomy and belonging.

The removal of choice in liquid modern times elicits Bauman's consideration of Otherness, especially in regards to his metaphors of the 'tourist' and the 'vagabond'. The tourist has the luxury of choice, whereas the vagabond does not. The more freedom of choice a person has the higher rank that person

holds. The notion then of 'choice' over the creation of an identity very much opens up the discussion of how Otherness is constructed at its foundations in the liquid modern society. As is discussed in the literature review, Bauman's discussion of Otherness demonstrates the relational or intersubjective concept of identity, where the 'Self's' identity is constituted through its opposition to the Other (Marotta, 2002). Additionally, Bauman (2004a) demonstrates how an 'us and them' mentality underlies the construction of a collective identity, seen very much in the above sections concerning the 'athlete identity' and the 'disabled' identity'. Indeed Hume (in Arneil, 2009) suggests that what we refer to as the Self is in actuality a collection or succession of experiences; experiences as the individual and as a collective part of humankind. The study accedes with this argument in regards to the discussions presented above concerning identity, as well as the forthcoming discussions on Otherness.

5.6 The creation of Otherness

Bauman's concern with the Other is prevalent in much of his work. From the participant accounts, an in answering subordinate question 1, it became evident that the issue of Otherness was not necessarily restricted to the issue of disability. The variation in how each participant identified themselves as being either similar, different or something else brought about thoughtful considerations in relations to Bauman's understanding of what it means to be Other.

5.6.1 Disability as Otherness

Abberley (1993, as cited in Brittain 2004) argues that the range of disciplines, from medical sociology to social psychology still retain the notion that the

disabled individual is abnormal, in the sense that their impairment can be explained only in terms of a deviation from a 'standard norm'. Therefore the concept of 'normality' plays an important role in people's attitudes and perceptions of the world around them and the people in it.

In Chapter 4 it was argued that the participants with the more severe disabilities encountered feelings of Otherness much more so than those with a lesser disability. However, there does not appear to be an explicit pattern between the participants who encountered Otherness more with those who associated themselves more with the identity of 'disabled'. Consequently, it is suggested that (for these participants at least) experiences of Otherness do not necessarily contribute negatively to one's creation of identity. Whilst it can be argued that the words of Abberley (1993) still hold true; that the more deviated someone is from a 'standard norm' the more they may encounter experiences of Otherness, these experiences will not necessarily harbour feelings of shame or guilt, nor will it manifest into a wholly negative self-image.

It is possible that disability (at least the disabilities of the participants) was not enough for them to truly be considered Other by those around them. Bauman (2000, p.77) considers that "to be healthy means in most cases to be employable, which allows for the satisfaction of the demands of the socially designed and assigned role", and it is this which is the foremost concern for Otherness in the liquid modern world. Can the body fulfil the purpose? The participants were 'healthy' enough to be studying full time at university and also 'healthy' enough to be Paralympic athletes. It is contended that in liquid modern times the issue of the functionality of the body is not the primary indicator for

Otherness. If an individual exhibits usefulness and purpose (as a student or as an athlete for example) then the argument of the body as a problem of, and catalyst for, Otherness does not uphold. There is, however, a production of meaning and identity assigned to the body. The visible features of the body are important signs to be interpreted, displaying signs of identity, and therefore symbols of Otherness which are not necessarily linked to its physicality per se. If considering Bauman's Liquid Modernity as an emerging way of constructing understandings of 'being' and of apprehending the nature and purpose of the social, the accounts suggest that the liquid modern society has moved beyond corporeal Otherness. If the body is purposeful then it cannot be the physical body itself that causes such Othering. Whilst the disabled body may present the visual representation of Otherness to some, the participants acknowledged that these experiences of Otherness subsided once a connection was made with the other individual in question. The transition from Other to 'different' and eventually to 'equal' appeared to be grounded in Bauman's (1990) concept of familiarizing the unfamiliar.

Upon analysing the different accounts given, the notion developed that the reason many participants experienced Otherness (as themselves as Other or as others as Other) was primarily due to a lack of mutual positive experience or gain. The value and advantageous benefit of each individual to the other was missing. However, when both parties assessed to what extent they were willing to alter their personal perceptions of Otherness and allow for some form of engagement, most often the result was friendship and camaraderie. A 'connection' had been made which allowed the transparency of value to eclipse the abnormality of the body – overcoming a perceived social distance allowed

the Other to become 'us'. It seemed that a similarity in value, in respect and in regard, could potentially reduce the sensation of Otherness. As Bauman (2000) comments:

“Efforts to keep the Other, the different and the strange and the foreign at a distance, the decision to preclude the need for communication, negotiation and mutual commitment is not only the conceivable but the expected response.” (p.108)

Indeed, as this thesis argues the determining factor between difference and Otherness is defined by the personal boundaries set by each individual living in liquid modern times. Bauman (1990) comments that to better understand ourselves and the 'porousness' of our own boundaries allows us to better attempt to understand those around us. This also extends to understanding the boundaries of the cultures that we link our identity to, determining what it is we find to be Other.

5.6.2 Personal boundaries, culture and Otherness

In Bauman's liquid modern society, the problems of Otherness occur if a particular environment or culture is rigid, restrictive and disallowing of the inclusion of those who could potentially be considered Other. Yet he also writes that the 'strangers', 'the flawed consumers' are needed to reinforce the boundaries between Self and Other. In times of liquid modernity, binary cuts do still exist –there cannot be 'us' without Other.

A number of the participants gave examples of experiencing Otherness that were removed from the issue of disability.

Robert: "(...) most of them kind of never went to uni for whatever reason , and they're all kind of working in construction or whatever" (Pg 24, Ln 719)

Emily: "(...) full of girls that were just like bright orange [fake tan] and just saying 'oh my god' at everything and I was just like 'are you for real?!'" (Pg 33, Ln 1001)

James: "(...) they were mostly Christians, and I know that's a different sort of topic but <pause> but I had to sort of adapt slightly to mixing with them" (Pg 24, Ln 387)

The above extracts are not only linked to individual construction of Otherness, but also the cultural construction of Otherness. The extracts show that the participants experienced people within their life-worlds who did not appear to share the same meaning and value of attachment to a particular area of their identity as they did. For Robert, excelling academically was a key part of his identity and so to be content in working in '*construction or whatever*' constitutes Other. For Emily, who spends all day with wet hair and no make-up, to be '*bright orange*' constitutes Other.

But it is not always the individual who creates Otherness. For Bauman (2004b) a longing for identity comes from the desire for security; that the ideal existence for any liquid modern is one of complete security but also one of utter independence. More often than not, this security is thought to be gained by the culture to which the individual chooses to belong. The athlete identity will be fostered more in the sporting environment than in an engineering environment for example, strengthening and shaping the identity according to the assumed rules of the culture. However, at times boundaries are crossed between the acceptance of Otherness for the individual and the acceptance of Otherness from the group. Bauman (2000) comments that the pressure of identity creation will ultimately leave the liquid modern with absolutely no choice but to choose

the specific group to which he or she belongs. But as has been discussed above, the contention of 'belonging' is exceedingly complex. For example, only two participants (Amy and Chris) chose to belong to the group 'elite athlete', even though by definition of having competed for their country all the participants were. The cultural construction of Otherness can be seen explicitly in each of the above extracts. Indeed, it can be argued that cultural boundaries are erected with the very purpose of excluding the Other.

Bauman (2001a) writes at length about the boundaries of culture as praxis and individualisation. However, Bauman does not offer enough thought on his observations on which is more dominant in the creation of Otherness – the culture that the group operates within or the group that the individuals belong to. Or is it indeed the individual who create his or her own boundary of Otherness? And to what extent does each influence each within the liquid modern world?

Whist this certainly requires further research, from the accounts it is clear the participants conceived that it is the individual who is responsible for the creation and dissolving of Otherness. It is the permeability of the individuals' personal boundaries that determine the stages of Other to 'different' to 'equal'. The following comment by James appears to have answered perfectly the conundrum of how Otherness is created by the individual:

James: "I didn't really you know, didn't really connect with most of them" (Pg 24, Ln 744)

This study considers the issue of 'connection' to be a significant aspect of the rendering of Otherness a noteworthy outcome of this study. However, the initial

recognition of the Other is also important in the liquid modern world. Bauman (2001d) argues that it is only through maintaining the identity of Others that the diversity with which one's own identity can thrive will be established. He continues to suggest that maintaining this identity is not about exclusion, but about acceptance; for it is only through the acceptance and the responsibility taken towards the Other that one's 'true' identity is constituted. To identify and recognise in someone else what one identifies and recognises in oneself is crucial to the transitioning of the Other. In attempting to answer the primary research question, this leads to considering the entangled relationship between ambivalence, tolerance, acceptance and understanding in the liquid modern world, and if Bauman's metaphor of Liquid Modernity does actually address this complex topic.

5.6.3 Ambivalence, Tolerance, Acceptance and Understanding

Although Bauman engages in discussion about moral indifference versus ethical demand towards the Other, there is gap in his work concerning the journey of how ambivalence has the potential to transform into a different contemplation of Otherness. Analysis of the accounts shows that whilst the issue of ambivalence towards Otherness exists, the possibility of remoulding such ambivalence is available.

Bauman's suggestion of ambivalence towards the Other (in this case disabled athletes) was evidenced indirectly by Beth and Chris who acquired their disability as young adults. They commented:

Beth: "I didn't have any experience of disability sport (...) it's just not something that I needed to think about" (Pg 16, Ln 419)

Chris: "I didn't really know much about disability sport, I'd not really been introduced to it so I didn't know it was there" (Pg 27, Ln 839)

The above extracts demonstrate perhaps the core reasoning for ambivalence in the liquid modern society; that something is only of concern when it has the direct ability to either disrupt or enhance one's life. However, the researcher argues that every liquid modern displays at least some form of ambivalence towards the Other. Primarily, as is discussed above, the creation of the Other is exceptionally individual. Additionally, the extent to which the liquid modern recognises the Other and experiences a form of ethical demand towards the Other is also deeply individual. The issue of ethical demand and morality can be found in most of Bauman's texts. However he tends to be broad and general in his thoughts – observing more the nature of ambivalence at the macro level of society, rather than penetrating deeper. Chapter 4 offers an insight into the issue of 'ambivalence' at an individual level, with some participants displaying Bauman's observation of the ambivalent nature of society. However, some individuals (Helen, Beth and Amy) were not ambivalent towards the needs of others and actively chose a university course that would facilitate this impulse:

Helen: "I just want to help people and help them feel better about themselves" (Pg 23, Ln 698)

As Jacobsen & Poder (2008, p.8) explain, a crucial point of Bauman's work is that ambivalence has come to stay and therefore sociology should be better at appreciating the "inherently ambivalent character of social life". Yet the extract above demonstrates that even in times of liquid modernity there are individuals who do not subscribe to Bauman's predictions. However, the extent to which a

person chooses to exercise their consideration for the Other based on personal experience requires further investigation. Despite all the participants having a disability, why was it that only some chose to contribute to the lives of others with disabilities while some remained ambivalent, choosing courses which served to enhance their own interest? This is a question that only the participants can answer, if they could answer it at all. However, this question could be asked to any person whose actions foster and facilitate care for the Other. The author suggests that research which examines this question deeper, which asks why it is that in times of liquid modernity an ethical demand towards the Other is felt more by some than by others, and would contribute well to framing Bauman's work in contemporary society.

The place of 'disability' as Otherness, and its attached meanings and representations are immensely stratified within the many cultures which exist within the liquid modern society. The study suggests that disability is no longer a 'fixed' aspect of Western society in light of Bauman's (1999) observations of culture within the liquid modern world: For as he suggests:

“cultural borders are fluid and cultures are unfinished projects, where ambivalence, confusion and uncertainty are mixed with tolerance and moral responsibility towards the Other” (p.li)

Every participant touched on the issue of the consumption of disability in regards to notions of ambivalence, tolerance, acceptance and understanding. Yet each offered a different vantage of how they considered the construction of Otherness based on the reciprocal nature of the individual, but perhaps James provided the best example of this:

James: "I guess it's quite normal, just being apprehensive about something you just don't understand really (Pg 33, Ln 1083)

It appeared that the resolution to removing disability from the realms of Otherness was concerned with increased awareness. They all considered that to familiarise the unfamiliar was the key to acceptance and understanding. However, in regards to the liquid modern society, Bauman does not provide any suggestion that increased exposure to the Other will necessarily correlate with an increased acceptance. If it is then, as Bauman (2000, p.127) suggests, that "ignorance leads to paralysis of the will", it can only serve to stand that it is the individual who must make the choice as to what they wish to be ignorant of.

I consider James's comment on not having a 'connection' with those he encountered as Other to be the axial point of departure from Otherness to 'difference'. Whatever the individual defines as a 'connection' is personal and intimate; it can be physical or metaphysical, broad or parochial. Yet it is clear from the accounts that the shift from Other to 'different' via this connection does not necessarily remove the nature of ambivalence. This was seen most prominently when considering the possible afterthoughts of the London 2012 Paralympic Games as best exemplified by Robert:

Robert: "I think it'll fizzle out to be honest (...) I'd like to think they'd [Channel 4] carry on doing something (...) it would be a bit, almost hypocritical you know, if they just dropped it altogether" (Pg 14, Ln 413)

The Paralympic Games may indeed evoke feelings of Otherness or 'difference', depending on the individual. Bauman (2010, p.151) states that it is the "art of living with difference" which fosters ambivalence. Yet, the ability to live with

difference, to be able to enjoy and benefit from it does not come easily. Bauman (2000) comments that the more threatening the difference appears the deeper anxiety is bred. The researcher would argue then that the Paralympic Games and the Paralympic student-athlete do not breed excessive fear or anxiety in the able bodied liquid modern individuals, and that both have transitioned from Other to 'different' on account of increased awareness, but not necessarily with reduced ambivalence. The Paralympic Games and the Paralympic athletes involved would be of little concern to those who are not directly affected by them. And so whilst the London 2012 Paralympic Games may have aided this transition on account of the sensationalism of 'Team GB' being a catalyst for change, once the Games are over, all of the participants in this research considered most people would return to a state of ambivalence towards the Paralympic movement.

The network of psychological and sociological influences which factor into a person being ambivalent, tolerant, accepting and understanding of the Other is exceptionally complicated. However, the burden to resolve ambivalence falls, ultimately, on the person cast into this ambivalent condition of liquid modernity. Perhaps what this study shows from investigating attitudes of Otherness at the individual level is that a more scholarly insight is required to further understanding; to examine how people begin to untangle and separate the notions of tolerance, acceptance and understanding if their initial contemplation towards the Other (as Bauman would consider) is rooted in ambivalence. A revision of the sociology of the study of difference and Otherness would be welcome in light of Bauman's work of Liquid Modernity.

5.7 The Liquid life of the Paralympic Student-Athlete

This final section aims to address the primary research question that has informed this study: To what extent is liquid modernity an effective metaphor for describing the life of the Paralympic Student-athlete? Upon analysis of the data gathered, it is clear that each participant demonstrated that they were experiencing existing in times of Bauman's Liquid Modernity. However, it is important to add that each was experiencing different degrees of liquidity in each life-world. What follows is a discussion on how the participants experienced their different life-worlds in times of liquid modernity.

5.7.1 Fixed Sport, Flexible student, Liquid athlete

The primary constraint on the participants participating in liquid modernity was not the (perhaps assumed) limits of their physicality, but more the limits imposed by the solid structures of sport. As Bauman (2000) notes, in order to completely exist within the liquid modern world 'flexibility' is the slogan of the day. The desire to be 'flexible' means developing a need to accept everything, to not commit to anything with excess. The participants expressed that their commitment to sport very much hindered this ability to be flexible, best illustrated by Amy:

Amy: "I'm just so unflexible (sic) and also I don't have, I just don't have the time" (Pg 3, Ln 79)

However, away from the sporting environment the issue of commitment, to a career for example, was dismissed by most. For example Emily and Beth commented:

Emily: "I guess I should probably start thinking about that [career] but I'm not really sure yet" (Pg 18, Ln 558)

Beth: "(...) the job market, things can change so rapidly so I'm not really too concerned about that [a career]" (Pg 28, Ln 843)

The participants expressed concerns, fears almost, of not being able to grasp new opportunities which the future may offer, simply on account of being tied to previously taken obligations and commitments. They appeared to actively avoid the many structures (apart from sport) which could determine any constraints imposed on their life. They wished to "position [themselves] in a network of possibilities rather than paralyze [themselves] in one particular job". (Bauman, 2000, p.124). These student-athletes saw the paralysis of commitment as more limiting than the paralysis of the body.

However, contrary to the others, Katy and Helen both displayed a firm commitment to their chosen career paths.

Katy: "No! It's not an option! [to not become her profession]" (Pg 18, Ln 471)

Helen: "I'll get my masters in clinical or counselling psychology (...) and come back somewhere to do my doctorate afterwards." (Pg 24m Ln 737)

Bauman (2010) argues that working life in liquid modern times is saturated with uncertainty, and that graduates in a liquid modern society are now faced with an opposing conflict of future possibilities. On one hand they are told of the excess of overwhelming options and opportunities waiting for them upon entering the adult world. However, they must also learn to cope with the very real situation of living in a world afflicted by the dearth of career prospects available. This duel between freedom and security is a constant theme in Bauman's work, often

linked to the notion of social mobility. He considers that those who demonstrate the least ability (or want) to be mobile, choosing to be immobile, exclude themselves from liquid modern living – stigmatising themselves by remaining at the bottom of the stratification of freedom. Whether this is the fate of Helen and Katy is something only liquid modern times can determine.

The accounts provided many more examples of the phase of liquidity that each participant was experiencing in their different life-worlds, especially in regards to the resistance of responsibility and obligation. Further analysis of the accounts brought about a consideration of smaller themes raised in Bauman's work concerning the difficulties of living a life in times of liquid modernity, with each theme hinting that Bauman's observations do (to an extent) hold for each participant.

5.7.2 The fragility of bonds

Putnam (2000) suggests that for most of us, our deepest sense of belonging is to our most intimate social networks, especially family and friends as it helps to build a sense of self and individuality. Allan (1996, p.2) also comments that informal relationships "enable us to navigate our way around the demands and contingencies of everyday living". However, Bauman (2009) purports that in liquid modern times, face to face encounters with peers, colleagues and friends are becoming increasingly brief, shallow and disposable. Scattered through the interviews was evidence that each participant had an understanding of the complexities of creating and solidifying friendships within the liquid modern world, in regards to both physical (James) and metaphysical (Beth) distance.

James: "(...) you can have a certain quality of conversation online but you don't really have that sort of really personal, expressive rapport with someone if it's not face to face" (Pg 23, Ln 724)

Beth: "You find out who your friends are when you get ill and so many just kind of drop by the wayside" (Pg 30, Ln 451)

In Bauman's Liquid Modernity, the notion of the fluid individual is related to the theme of self-created alienation, with Lee (2006, p.359) commenting that a "lack of institutional stability provides the condition leading to less enduring relationships". This can be extended to suggest that the fragility of friendships in the liquid modern world eventually begets new forms of alienation and loneliness. The notion of the fragility of bonds in the liquid modern world, as Bauman sees it, is the unavoidable price of the individuals' right to pursue their individual goals. He considers an emotional bond to be a major limitation on the effectiveness to which one can pursue their goals. This can, to an extent, be seen from the extracts above. However, Bauman cannot disagree that bonds, be they friendships or otherwise, do still exist in the liquid modern world, and at times, he fails to address this point with much depth or significance. Whilst many participants spoke of failed and frayed friendships, they still all referred to the few people (old and new) in their lives who they both supported, and received support from even though each friend was pursuing their own direction in their present day life.

Chris remarked that he considered his disability to be an important factor in creating the few, but long lasting friendships he now had. He considered that the overt nature and obviousness of his label as 'disabled' afforded him the opportunity to engage with people who were able to disregard it almost immediately. To some extent he felt this saved him from many false or

fallacious experiences with others during his time at university. What then does this imply in light then of Bauman's considerations of the fickleness of relationships? Bauman often overlooks the reality of deep, personal and long lasting relationships, throwing into question again a need to assess liquid modernity at the individual level. The participant accounts show that at the macro level relationships and friendships have become, and are indeed still becoming, more transient, brittle and fleeting; that a greater fluidity of environment allows for the greater corrosion of bonds. Additionally, times of liquid modernity seem to suggest that as bonds become most needed, they become most difficult to construct. Bauman (2003) explores 'liquid love' at length, providing observations for why he considers that bonds have become so frail in nature and easily broken. But, what has not been tackled in his sociology is to examine why it is that some bonds *do* hold, and in fact strengthen, in his liquid modern times. A deeper look at the individual decision making and risk taking process could well serve to understand why it is that sometimes the liquid modern hoists up their anchor and departs for more (assumed) desirable ports, and why sometimes they do not.

5.7.3 Self-regulation and Self-improvement

Lee (2005) comments that during the second half of the 20th century, 'development' became a code word for not wanting to be left behind in a world of rapid discoveries and changes. With Bauman's discussions of market forces now dictating to the masses in place of the State, the role of individualisation is an inherent feature of liquid modernity. Bauman (2000, p.32) suggests "self-performance rather than a given identity comes to constitute a person's autonomy". Giddens (1991) suggests that:

“we are all ‘reflexive beings’ who look closely at every move we take, who are seldom satisfied with results and always eager to correct them.” (p.52)

The issue of self-regulation and self-improvement surfaced regularly in the interviews. And, as would be expected when questioning athletes, the need to govern athletic performances appeared frequently. Indeed as Bauman (2009, p.161) argues the life wisdom of the liquid modern is that “you are only as good as your last success”. However, outside of the sporting environment, this need to self-regulate permeated their other life-worlds also, for example education (Emily), rehabilitation (Chris) and career prospects (Robert):

Emily: “(...) just keep working hard, like I know what I’ve got to do so I just make sure I do it [course work].” (Pg 20, Ln 607)

Chris: “I know the extent of what I have to do to do that so it’s all, it’s all, like the weight is entirely on my shoulders [rehabilitation]” (Pg 21, Ln 641)

Robert: “I should teach myself some programme languages to you know, improve my computational skills a lot more” (Pg 28, Ln 830)

The above are a small selection of extracts which demonstrate the levels of self-regulation and self-responsibility experienced daily by the participants. Each participant very much subscribed to the liquid modern philosophy of dreading personal inadequacy, which would manifest, to a degree, in making the wrong decision. Bauman (2005a) postulates that to declare oneself as an individual in the liquid modern world must mean that the individual is therefore responsible for their own merits and failings; that it is the sole task of the individual to cultivate, develop and repair themselves. Bauman’s observations are present in this study. Each participant took full responsibility for their place

in society – from improving at their sport, to mastering their degree to living independently with their impairment. The need to constantly and consistently improve was forever present – modernising oneself wherever possible was the key to progression. Bauman (2000) argues:

“Being an individual *de jure* means having no one to blame for one’s own misery, seeking the causes of one’s own defeats nowhere except in one’s own indolence and sloth, and looking for no remedies other than trying harder and harder still.(p.38)

This need to constantly revise one’s efficacy is a common and prevalent practice of contemporary society. Bauman offers anecdotes on the culture of life-long learning as being the protagonist and perpetrator of this new found need to self-improve. Knowing that this was demonstrated by the participants, and that Bauman talks about the topic broadly in reference to society as a whole, to bridge the gap in knowledge of how this culture of continuous improvement filters down and truly penetrates and persuades the individual, the question of ‘*why*’ should be put forward.

Perhaps it is obvious in regards to their sporting life-world why the participants want to improve – the possible, indeed hoped for and wanted end result is a tangible gold medal declaring that they are the absolute best in the world at their sport. Why then do they feel such need to maintain this constant search for self-development outside of the sporting arena? What is the possible, hoped for, wanted end result of this in their liquid modern world? A possible assumption is that those living in times of liquid modernity undertake the majority of their actions based on an individualised calculation of freedom

versus security, of uncertainty very stability. It is this which constitutes the final section of this chapter.

5.7.4 Uncertainty, Insecurity and Emotional Stability

Within sport, an exemplary performance does not always result in a Paralympic position. Within the job market, an outstanding class of degree does not always result in employment. Regardless of effort, of ambition and of commitment, the participants unanimously acknowledged that absolutely nothing was guaranteed for them. Their sporting and academic life-worlds were fraught with uncertainty. Indeed, for Bauman (2007b, p.38) liquid times are defined by uncertainty. In liquid modernity the “individual must act, plan actions and calculate the likely gains and losses of acting (or failing to act) under conditions of endemic uncertainty”.

As has been demonstrated throughout the chapter, the degree of liquidity (and therefore state of uncertainty) varied between participants. However, when discussing the issue of sporting selection, the majority of the participants gave an indication that the root of their uncertainty lay in their absolute lack of control of the situation, regardless of their performances, as was shown best by Helen:

Helen: “Yeah and I’ve got no control over it <pause> I’ve just got to sit and wait” (Pg 5, Ln 134)

The aporia that sport presents is that it does not fall neatly into Bauman’s rhetoric of freedom versus security. The participants are not free to determine their selection (read ‘place’) in elite sport as that is the privilege of those who manage them. Neither do they gain any form of security from the end result of

the process, regardless of if selected or not. They must wait for their sporting fate in perpetual limbo. To highlight the aforementioned, Sport provides absolutely no placation between the freedom/security dichotomy. It simply provides the participants with a paradoxical condition of certain uncertainty to which they, by admission, must be willing to submit.

As well as their sporting careers progressing, the academic life-worlds of the participants were progressing at an ever accelerating rate. Each participant responded differently when asked about their future after graduating. Some (Emily, Robert and Amy) were excited and open to the uncertainty they felt would greet them:

Emily: "I just want to see the world and go to really cool places and so I can say that I've been there and to just go experience it all" (Pg 19, Ln 574)

Some (Beth and James) displayed a sense of ambivalence towards the uncertainty of their future:

James: "I guess I've never really thought about it [employment] because I've always been so focused on the athletics" (Pg 20, Ln 623)

Whilst others (Chris, Helen and Katy) displayed anxiety over the uncertainty of their future.

Katy: "(...) a bit scared, like I don't know what I'd do. That's just all I've thought, like all I've thought about [becoming her desired profession]" (Pg 18, Ln 480)

Bauman (2009) suggests that for those leaving education (and sport one could argue), the future is no longer a time to look forward to. Instead, to look at the

future only serves to magnify the troubles of present day; that regardless of endeavour, a guarantee is never guaranteed. He continues to purport that the unnerving feeling of unmitigated uncertainty can, therefore, do nothing but create a state of constant anxiety. Bauman's vision of the current world is one in which individuals must splice together an unending series of short-term projects and episodes that do not resemble a sequence to which concepts like a "career" could be meaningfully applied. The unfortunate condition of the liquid modern (according to Bauman, 2000) is that for most the majority of their life will be spent agonizing about choices of goals. The accounts showed that the once embedded and engendered roles of the university graduate have strayed far from their traditional linear development.

Drawing on the thoughts of Ulrich Beck, Bauman (2000, p.XV) states the modern individual now plots their life "along the axes of emancipation, growing autonomy and freedom of self-assertion". The world has now become an infinite collection of possibilities. Yet these possibilities, or at least the ability to pursue these possibilities, are dependent upon three decisive factors; 1) fiscal availability; 2) the victor of the freedom versus security battle; and 3) emotional security. Perhaps the caveat here is that emotional security very much depends upon points one and two.

The potential for risk is inherent in every choice the liquid modern is tasked to make. Undoubtedly therefore, the level of uncertainty is the dependant variable in any and every decision made. Throughout his work, Bauman will subtly harvest societal uncertainty with personal insecurity. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the author suggests the argument that Bauman omits the emotional

stability of the individual when making this claim. Bauman's body of work is often described as being closer to a "sociology of art" as opposed to a "sociology of science" (Davis, 2008, p.1238), and perhaps this is why Bauman does not attempt to travel more towards the intersection of where the science of the psychological and the 'art' of his sociological meet. He prefers to observe the actions of the masses rather than question the behaviours of the individual. Cummings & Davies (1996) argue that emotional security can only be assessed when it is conceptualised from a contextual perspective, emphasising in their work the interplay between the socio-emotional and the biological processes that determine it. To discuss the plethora of work available on the theoretical psychology of emotional security is beyond the scope of this study. However it has been evidenced that the level of emotional stability does indeed factor into an individual's process of decision-making and risk taking, with sadness, anxiety and attachment being key psychological parameters with which to measure this (Raghunathan & Pham, 1999; Marsh, 2002; Gati & Saka, 2007; Hastie & Dawes, 2010). This is the primary reason for addressing Bauman's need to consider emotional stability when discussing the following section - current day humankind's contemplation of uncertainty.

Throughout his work it seems the best Bauman does, and perhaps feels all he is entitled to do, is to simply explore the causes of this new found uncertainty, elucidating the many obstacles which prevent the safety of certainty for the individual in times of liquid modernity. Unpredictability breeds anxiety and fear: the world is full of accidents and surprises, yet the new liquid unsteadiness, softness and pliability of life may also trigger ambition and resolve; the link to

these feelings of negative emotional control being rooted in both abstract and absolute uncertainty.

It is suggested that Bauman's blanket observation of growing levels of uncertainty in Western society (as a response to the growth of globalisation and commercialisation) is supported in the participants' expressions of multiple examples of uncertainty within their life-worlds. However, it is clear in the accounts that this growing uncertainty was not necessarily married to increased insecurity, and at times for some participants the prospect of uncertainty was welcomed. At the individual level, it can be seen that the level of insecurity felt by each participant was deeply personal and ultimately individualised. Whilst the situation that created this uncertainty was similar for each individual (team selection or graduating from university for example), factors on how the participant chose to view, internalise and calculate future decisions and actions based on that uncertainty was entirely unique. Indeed, at the very centre of the intersection of the psychological and sociological vantage of the prospect of uncertainty for the liquid modern is their own understanding of the emotional stability present in each of their life-worlds. The question then is how is emotional security perceived and constructed at the individual level in times of liquid modernity? And can this question then be extrapolated to represent Bauman's more generic concerns of fear and insecurity at a more generalised level? That by itself, however, is an entirely new study.

5.8 Summary

This chapter has reflected on the primary research question as well as the subordinate research questions posed in Chapter 1 and has answered them in relation to Bauman's proposition of Liquid Modernity and the methodological considerations of IPA.

Predominately, this chapter has shown the tensions that exist when applying the filter of Bauman's Liquid Modernity to individualised accounts of life-worlds. At the extended level of analysis it can be seen that Bauman's key observations regarding identity, Otherness and belonging were represented, to some degree, in all the accounts provided for this study. In this regard the author suggests that Bauman's metaphor of Liquid Modernity is effective for describing the lives of the Paralympic student-athlete. It certainly serves to demonstrate his thoughts on coming to terms with the notion of "self-fluidity in a world of excess without ultimate satisfaction" (Lee, 2011, p.654). Themes such as uncertainty of future directions, the desire to create an identity which matched self-image and the representation of the Other were regularly brought up by the participants. However, careful analysis of each account shows that the application of a grand, overarching social observation should be done with caution and with forethought across all levels of social stratification at the macro and micro levels of society.

Turner (2010, p.2) considers Bauman's sociology to be "nebulous but influential". I consider this to be an exemplary explanation of how the filter of Bauman's Liquid Modernity has influenced this study and its resulting discussion. It is clear that significant transformation in polity, economy and

morality during this time of interregnum has indeed affected each of the participants, allowing the concept of a liquid modernity to trickle into their life-worlds. What is also evident is the way in which these transformations, in so much as the degree of liquidity present, has affected each life. Chapter 4 demonstrates that despite the similarities in their acquisition of socially defined 'labels', the experience of the liquid life was exceptionally individualised. Perhaps at times Bauman's arguments are too one sided and could potentially lead social theory to ignore the individual. Whilst it is possible, as Bauman's arguments suggest, that the demise of the solid structure and the loss of tradition in Western society has opened the metaphorical flood gates to the entrenchment of liquid life, this study demonstrates that not everyone is drowning in their aqueous surroundings.

As Bauman (in Dawes, 2011) astutely comments about his own observations, liquid modernity is far from globally synchronised. The passage to the 'liquid stage', like any other passages in history, happens in different parts of the globe on different dates and proceeds at a different pace (if at all). Yet, the analyses of the accounts given for this study demonstrate that this lack of synchronisation is also true at the individual level. Therefore, not only is it that individuals within the same social space show variability of liquidity, but that there is demonstrated levels of variability of liquidity within each life-world of the individual. Even within a small collective of individuals who (at least to some degree) share similar life environments, the way in which these environments are experienced and the stage and extent of liquidity each participant experiences their life-worlds was thoroughly unique. And it is this uniqueness of

experience which prevents Bauman's metaphor of Liquid Modernity being wholly endorsed for this study.

This study and in particular this chapter has attempted to answer the question 'To what extent is Liquid Modernity an effective metaphor for describing the lives of the Paralympic student-athlete?' In addition, sub questions identified in Chapter 1 have also been addressed. It is concluded that the metaphor can be used to provide insight to the phases of liquidity being experienced at the individual level. This chapter has provided an initial demonstration of how Bauman's Liquid Modernity might be explored within the realms of the sociology of sport, with a specific focus on the Paralympic student-athlete. However, the conclusion demonstrates a need to explore Bauman's Liquid Modernity at the singular level to elucidate why some of his global observations withstand for the individual life and why some seem very much at odds with personal experience. As Lee (2011) explains, to do this, and to therefore understand these lived lives, it is necessary to pose specific questions that explicate the intricate relationship between liquidity and solidity in a world that appears borderless but is still highly structured.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

“Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both”.

C. Wright Mills (1916 – 1962)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will consider some of the implications that this research has uncovered concerning the use of Bauman’s Liquid Modernity as a conceptual framework for exploring the lived experience of the Paralympic student-athlete. It will discuss the significance of the study, as well as suggesting recommendations for further research. It then addresses the limitations of the study prior to presenting some concluding thoughts.

6.2 Significance of the study

This study appears to be the first to combine the conceptual framework of liquid modernity with the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of experience within the domain of the sociology of sport. Literature searches within academic journals indicate that there is a paucity of qualitative research concerning the Paralympic student-athlete generally. Thus, this research is innovative within the field of the sociology of sport and provides a valuable addition in the fields of Disability studies and Education, whilst adding to existing research employing IPA.

Of important consideration is that this study confronts complex issues within the field of sociology of sport, highlighting new approaches not only methodologically, epistemologically and theoretically, but whilst breaking boundaries of disability studies within sport, whilst being idiographic in nature to allow the voices of individual participants to be heard. Furthermore, I believe this research continues the valuable task of destabilizing the easy binary of able/disable. Finally, the study has highlighted the importance of representation, self-definition and collective identities and the tensions between these aspects of identity formation and experiences of in/exclusion in times of liquid modernity.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

The volume of data collected for this study was overwhelming and unanticipated. The depth and breadth of the subjects covered could not possibly have all been discussed and included in this thesis. It is therefore suggested that future research could narrow the focus to more specific areas of the liquid modern life-worlds of the participants based on the information generated from the interviews. Possible areas for future research could include: The commodification of the Paralympic Athlete and the Paralympic Games; The experiences of university culture for the Paralympic student-athlete; and Experiences of family and friendship for the Paralympic student-athlete.

Finlay (2009) argues that phenomenology needs to move forward and take its place beyond the modernist-postmodernist divide. This study has shown that Bauman's Liquid modernity can be used as a conceptual framework with which to research the lives of the Paralympic student-athlete. Additionally it has

demonstrated support for a strong link for using IPA as a tool for analysis when examining the phenomenon of liquid modernity. Knowing this, the study illuminates the path for more research within the sociology of sport in particular respect to Bauman's Liquid Modernity. As Bauman's work is so diverse and can be applied to multiple areas of the sociology of sport, potential future research should (where possible) attempt to direct its focus to one particular thread of Bauman's concerns.

In regards to studies pertaining to Bauman's Otherness within the sociology of sport, research could be conducted into more taboo subjects such as able bodied athletes experiences of disability sport; homosexuality within sport; Religion and sport; and also actions of deviance from elite athletes. To understand via detailed, idiographic accounts the issues of such matters to athletes through Bauman's concept of the creation of Otherness would greatly progress studies within the domain of the sociology of sport.

The current study has highlighted a particular need, within the UK especially, for more qualitative research pertaining to the phenomenology of the life of the elite level athlete (Paralympic or otherwise) that moves beyond the postmodern but is not limited to being purely narrative. The benefit of employing Bauman is that his work reaches into almost every area of the sociology of sport; Uncertainty; Ethics; Commercialisation; Globalisation; Health; Relationships; Poverty; Otherness; Commodification to mention but a few. I suggest that research within the sociology of sport must begin to research the individual lived experience of the elite athlete as well as those wishing to achieve at elite level. I suggest that by employing IPA and Bauman's Liquid Modernity in research

within the many individuals who participate in sport the varying stages of liquidity can be assessed in order to better explore the phenomenon of the global concept and place of sport. Indeed, the phases of melting of the solids to liquids in reference to Bauman can only truly be seen by studying the minutiae of the individual's everyday lives.

6.4 Methodological considerations

To address the methodological concern that interview accounts are retrospective and may not accurately capture the nature of past experience, future research could incorporate longitudinal studies of the experience of being a Paralympic student-athlete in times of liquid modernity. However, it is acknowledged that this would be expensive and exceptionally difficult to organise and monitor, particularly if a prospective design was used.

A potential criticism of the methodology of this study is that a small sampling pool was used. However the required criteria of the study were such that a limited number of participants were eligible to take part. As IPA only requires a small number of participants, the original intent was to recruit six to eight Paralympic student-athletes. Upon reflection it may have been worthwhile to the study to recruit a more homogenous sample in regards to gender or attendance at a high-performance sport university as this could have narrowed the questions to perceived differences in treatment or services for example. Had this been undertaken, the participants for the study would not have changed from the original 8 who came forward as willing to participate, more that perhaps only the 5 females could have been interviewed, or the 4 participants attending a high-performance sport university. However I feel this

would have been too small a sample size for this study. To attempt to homogenise the sample by sport or by disability would not have been possible.

Initial recommendations are that it would be informative for this study to be repeated with more individuals. However, research does not have to be limited to Paralympic athletes. Themes explored in this study such as shared athlete identity and the athlete / non-athlete divide could be deepened with more studies conducted both in and out of the academic environment. Additionally, the creation of the athlete identity in relation to Bauman's Liquid Modernity could be addressed across a number of sports as well as between genders.

Qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process. Finlay (2009) explains that researchers of a hermeneutic sensibility would deny that it is possible (or even desirable) to set aside or bracket researchers' experience and understanding. Therefore, at all times in this study I have attempted to ensure a critical self-awareness of my own subjectivity, vested interest, predilections and assumptions and have been conscious of how these might impact on the research process and findings. Gadamer (1975b) argues that knowledge in the human sciences always involves some self-knowledge. I therefore consider this study in the thoughts of Eisner (1991, p.58) who comments that good qualitative research can help the reader "understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing".

6.5 Reflexivity and limitations of the method

The ability to compartmentalise personal experiences and preconceptions during the research process is more a function of how reflexive one is rather

than how objective one can be, argued by Ahern (1999), as it is not possible for researchers to set aside things about which they are not aware. Myerhoff & Ruby (1992, p.307) define reflexivity as “the capacity of any system of signification to turn back upon itself, to make itself its own object by referring to itself”. Heidegger advocates the use of reflexivity not as a tool for bracketing off judgement, but also as a tool for encouraging self-understanding and self-acquaintance – a concept central to the production of interpretative phenomenological research, and for a psych-social study such as this.

Marotta (2002) argues that although at both the individual and the societal levels structuring leads to the imposition of social, cultural and symbolic boundaries, it is at the societal level that the ordering process leads to the establishment of a meta-order, consequently suppressing and excluding any individual or group that comes to symbolize disorder. The multiple tensions between order and disorder in the study are approached with a detailed consideration of perspective which is outlined thoroughly in each chapter where necessary. Harris (2006, p.1) comments that within the research area of sport, “perspectival approach to data collection is required to explore the textual construction of qualitative research accounts”. Furthermore, he argues that as research moves from the macro to micro, it becomes increasingly important for the increased need for theoretical analyses of the social world within the sociology of sport to present alternative ways to tell of the meeting of the psychological and the sociological. This research has addressed this issue and what follows is a reflection on my position as a researcher throughout this study (for a more detailed analysis of the researcher reflexivity undertaken for this study please see Appendix G).

6.5.1 Researching and Representing the Other

The notion of Otherness is complex, and whilst Chapter 2 explores at length the issues of marginalization, Otherness and alienation, particularly from a literary perspective, the practical and pragmatic complexities of such issues need to be discussed. Agyeman (2008) comments that:

“Sensitive research should be a journey of discovery in which the researcher becomes ‘sensitised’ to the potential challenges and dilemmas that their chosen topic may hold. When researcher the Other in the role of an outsider, this also means addressing the role of self in research and engaging in critical questioning of one’s own role and scope.” (p.272)

As a researcher, the primary difficulty presented in the study was to identify why it was that something was perceived as Other. Therefore, the understandings of my own culture, of my own behaviour and of my own judgements were needed for critical self-reflection. According to Hańderek (2008, p.2), the problem of Otherness lies mainly in diversity, with this diversity being recognised through “the discovery of who we are in confrontation with Otherness”. In regards to research, the issue of Otherness depends on both what is meant by Otherness and how that Otherness is engaged with both by the researcher and the participant. Different epistemologies and methodologies have different approaches to these two issues, emphasizing different forms of Otherness as significant (Fawcett and Hearn, 2004). Fawcett and Hearn (2004) comment that when conducting research, one is not, at least not usually, in only one social relation with the researched. There is not only one existent, dominant or possible form of Otherness. Therefore I must recognise my social relation to the participants as a white, able bodied, female researcher with professional

experience and understanding of disability, of university education and of high performance sport (and of disability high performance sport). Despite having similar cultural interests and experiences (e.g. socialising with friends and attending university), I will never experience those experiences in the same way that my participants had, and throughout the reflexive process I continued to note that I am (according to the literature) researching the Other.

Despite the consensus that the primary aim of sociological research is to provide a voice for a particular group, there is disagreement amongst the academic community as to how Otherness is articulated between the researcher and the researched. Aygman (2008) argues that when researching Otherness, it is not the label of the researcher themselves (male; black; disabled for example) that creates Otherness, rather that it is whether the researcher is writing from the *perspective* of the Other they are researching. However, Fawcett and Hearn (2004) disagree, stating that it is never possible, and is wholly unacceptable, for a researcher to presume they can speak *for* a particular group – even if the researcher is not classed as Other by the participants. Finkelstein (1996) argues that at times, research written from direct experience from a member of the group being researched is at risk of being over-privileged and over sentimentalized. He argues that whilst direct experience is important, that by itself falls short of what is required for sound and serious political analysis. These continued clashes of the subjectivity of Otherness within interpretative research are acknowledged as an epistemological limitation and are discussed below briefly in regards to the researcher continuum, the researcher / participant relationship and the politics of interpretation.

6.5.2 The Researcher Continuum

Personal experience as a foundational drive for research is argued to create anxiety and tension. Reinharz (1992, p.261) is concerned that “it violates the conventional expectation that a researcher can be detached, objective and value-neutral”. Traditionally, researchers have been expected to remain objective and value free in the production of truth or the Truth in order to protect and preserve the integrity of research (Harding, 1987). Harding (1987) however insists on the need to avoid the objectivist stance that attempts to make the researcher’s cultural beliefs, social understandings and practices invisible. She argues:

“Only in this way can we hope to produce understandings and explanations which are free (or at least more free) of distortion from the unexamined beliefs and behaviours of social scientists themselves”. (p.7)

Indeed Bauman puts the point more forcefully when, in conversation with sociologist Keith Tester, he argues: 'the "ethical neutrality" often demanded of sociologists is either hypocrisy or self-delusion.' (Bauman &Tester, 2001, p.45). Smith et al (1999) note that whilst conducting interviews of the phenomenological nature, one is trying to get close to the participant’s world, to take, in Conrad’s (1987) words, an ‘insider’s perspective’, but they note that one cannot do this directly or completely. IPA argues that access to a participant’s perspective relies upon, and is confounded by, the researcher’s own conceptions and perspectives of the world they are attempting to investigate. This is when the researcher must recognise the play of double hermeneutics within their research, and also recognise the limitation of interpretation.

It is becoming increasingly important for social and behavioural researchers to clarify their personal motivation for their research, especially for those utilising qualitative methodologies that require reflexivity (Creswell, 1994; Crotty, 1998; Etherington, 2004; Patton, 2002). As a component of clarifying their role in the research, these researchers often position themselves as either 'insiders' or 'outsiders' to their research domain (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). Generally, insider-researchers are those who chose to study a group to which they consider they belong, whilst outsider researchers do not consider that they belong to the group under study. My personal motivations can be found in Appendix F and it is due to these motivations that I choose to not subscribe to the dichotomy of either / or / insider / outsider; more that my position occupies the space in-between.

6.5.3 Developing a Non-Hierarchical Relationship

Stone and Priestly (1996) suggest that important methodological questions are raised by the act of researching disablement. They comment that there is:

“(...) an inherent power relationship between researcher and researched which is accentuated by the unequal power relationship which exists between disabled people and non-disabled people in the wider world.” (p.700)

There are a number of criticisms and limitations put forward regarding the power balance between an able-bodied researcher and a disabled participant, highlighting that the anti-oppressive practices must begin with the research process itself. The theoretical approach taken towards the interviews was that of Feminism. In feminist interviewing, researchers make a concerted effort to

reduce the hierarchy of the interviewer–interviewee relationship by engaging in mutual dialogue and disclosure (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983). Oakley (1988) encouraged feminist researchers to give more control to their participants over the environment and direction of the interview, whilst Campbell et al (2010) state that interviewers should not just ask questions, but answer them as well to share back with participants, which helps equalize the power imbalance by letting participants see into the world of the researcher, both personally and professionally. I felt this was achieved by encouraging the participants to ask questions regarding the research, my background, my personal interests and pursuits should they wish to do so. Proponents of the social model of disability (Oliver, 1992; Zarb, 1992) argue that the disabled population must be active doers of research, rather than passive subjects, and that research cannot be value free (Barnes, 1996). I felt it appropriate within the context of this study to answer any questions and express my comments on their responses to make each participant feel more engaged in the research process and help promote an egalitarian situation. However as Campbell et al (2010) comment, whether research participants benefit from such engagement merits further empirical evaluation, and is therefore acknowledged as a potential limitation to the process of data gathering.

6.5.4 The Politics of Interpretation

Ang (1996) argues that when collecting either qualitative or quantitative data, it can never truly be separated from interpretation and consequently cannot but lead to a politicised conception of performing research:

“It is not the search for (objective, scientific) Truth in which the researcher is engaged, but the construction of interpretations, in

certain ways of understanding the world always historically located, subjective and relative (p.46)

Therefore, if interpretation is profoundly and inevitably concerned with constructing methods of ways of understanding the world it can never be objective, neutral, value-free or merely descriptive. The 'empirical' findings captured in either quantitative or qualitative form do not yield self-evident meanings; it is through an interpretative process by the researcher that 'empirical' findings become meaningful and understood (Sangster, 1994).

Throughout the research process, every effort was made by the researcher to reduce the limitations the subjectivity of interpretation could place on this study via academic rigour and consistent reflexivity and positioning. Participants were encouraged to express their personal experiences and perceptions and were documented accurately as possible, and whilst every effort was made to minimise the exercise of power that ultimately comes with interpretation, my position and privilege as the researcher was in every attempt recognised throughout. However, it is acknowledged that the use of a method which requires interpretation is in itself a limitation to a qualitative study such as this. I have attempted to present my understandings of the academic use of interpretation for qualitative research in Chapter 3, and have further detailed my considerations and acceptations of the limits of interpretation from an epistemological vantage.

6.5.5 Trustworthiness

Throughout the research I have drawn on the reflexive notes of Mawyer (2005) as to the credibility to conduct research as a socially and culturally privileged

white abled-bodied individual within the area of disability studies. Disability is a narrative of being human: all human beings are touched immediately, if not by disability itself then, then by its *potential*. For illness and injury (from sport or otherwise) are themselves inevitable and unpredictable disabling consequences of being human. To this end then disability studies is not, indeed must not, be the private property of the disabled community.

To conclude on reflexivity, the relationship between the knower and the known is made less obscure and perhaps safer when researchers practice reflexivity and take steps to ensure that ethical consideration is given to their participants' needs. As Nespor & Barber (1995, p.53) succinctly argue, "No one is detached or 'neutral'" and, as Pinar (1988, p.150) has argued, "understanding of self is not narcissism; it is a precondition and concomitant condition to the understanding of others". As was articulated by Dewey (1938, cited in Chitpin & Simon, 2009, p.78) "We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience".

The need for reflexivity in this study has been invaluable to not only improve myself as a research, but to improve the quality of the research I have produced.

6.6 Overall considered limitations of the study

A limitation of this work is that it has not set out to be generalizable. The object of this research is not to purport that the findings can be extrapolated to the entire Paralympic student-athlete community, nor to assume that the findings can be mapped across to framework of analytical socially for explanation

concerning disability or Paralympic sport. Williams (1998, p.9) suggests that if those who argue that the variability between individuals and situations makes generalisation impossible are correct then “research can suggest nothing beyond itself”. Taylor (1987) argues that social practices cannot be reduced to the individual subject experiences of people that make up a particular community or society, suggesting that all social sciences should concern themselves with the interior life of individuals as well as aspects of the human experience which are socially constructed. However, I agree with Elliott (2005, p.28) that narrative accounts provide not only an insight into individual experiences and the meanings they make of them, but also “their form tells us something about the cultural framework within which individuals make sense of their lives”. From this it can be argued that studies such as this which closely analyses narratives produced by a relatively small sample of individuals may produce evidence that is considered to provide an understanding to the intersubjective meanings shared by the ‘group’ or ‘community’ as a whole. This research is then in part an attempt to understand more about the broader cultures shared by a community of individuals. However, this requires further consideration within the domain of qualitative research.

The use of liquid modernity as a conceptual framework for a sociological study could be argued to be contentious. Bauman’s sociology is one of metaphors and as such is not sufficient as empirical evidence in any scientific or sociological sense and cannot stand alone – his work is not cumulative, exact or verifiable. Throughout the study I have maintained the knowledge set out by Jacobsen & Poder (2008, p.2) that “Bauman has never aspired to build elaborate or all-encompassing theoretical systems” such as his peers may have

done. Nowhere in his many books, articles or essays will one find a definitive and self-proclaimed theoretical testament. Knowing this, this research project has not set out to evidence Bauman's work in its entirety, or to declare his metaphors as an actuality. It is more that his arguments and ideas have been deployed to enable research within the domain of the sociology of sport to move beyond the postmodern to produce enriched, insightful and fascinating accounts of the participants' life experiences in contemporary society.

There are limitations of using IPA as a tool for qualitative data analysis and some of these are discussed in Chapter 3, relating primarily to employing the method prospectively to research. However a small number of limitations were uncovered as the study progressed. Although a homogenous group of participants would have been advantageous, it was clear from the beginning of the recruitment process that this would not be possible (as is mentioned above in 6.3) on account of the limited athletes who not only matched the required criteria but who also came forward as part of the recruitment process.

My position of power as a researcher was prevalent throughout the research process, and whilst it was discussed in Chapter 3 (and section 6.4 of this chapter), I felt it became magnified and more pronounced during the analysis and writing up stage. Throughout the entire study I have been placed in a position in which I have tried to gain access to experiences and to make sense of them through my own interpretations (hermeneutic circle). I acknowledge that a power imbalance has existed throughout the study as the methodology did not allow for my interpretations to be checked with the views of the participants. To seek the views of the participants upon completion of the data

analysis would not have been in keeping with the hermeneutic aspect of the IPA process. Had this been done and participants disagreed, the result would be in a change or modification of my original interpretation of the accounts given, which is not consistent with the IPA principles. In order to address this issue the participants would have had to be co-researchers.

6.7 Conclusion

This IPA study aimed to explore the academic, athletic and social experiences of the Paralympic student-athlete in times of liquid modernity and in doing so was able to answer the question: *To what extent is liquid modernity an effective metaphor for describing the life of the Paralympic student-athlete?* In addition to the research question being answered, this study has also shown the character of the individuals who participate in these life-worlds; and it was the character of each individual which allowed for the very different themes in each account to emerge. As Bauman (2010) comments:

“Fate and accidents beyond the actor’s control make some choices more probable than others. Character, however, defies those statistical probabilities.” (p.181)

The character of these individuals set the framework for each emerging theme, allowing a thorough exploration of the intersection of structure and agency. Relating these themes to Bauman’s Liquid Modernity was discussed at length, with similarities and differences in life-world experiences being uncovered.

The analysis of the individual accounts in Chapter 4 demonstrated diverse, individualistic and exceptionally personal constructions of the participants

overlapping life-worlds. A later analysis of the meeting of themes in regards to the conceptual frame work of liquid modernity demonstrated that the participants were experiencing living as liquid moderns, but the melting of their worlds was not synchronised. Their accounts provided both similar and opposing rhetoric regarding the life of a Paralympic student-athlete. The most unexpected theme to emerge was the indication of sport being the greatest container and therefore 'preventer' to their liquid modern experience as opposed to previous disability literature which purports the disabled body to be the most life-limiting factor. Indeed, their disability played a much more secondary role in their (potentially) reduced ability to participate in a liquid society. However, the most dominant and overarching factor of the entire study was the finding that participants view themselves as unique and different from all others, including those who may be considered to be most similar to them.

6.8 Concluding reflections

Blackshaw (2002, p.205) comments that "sociology must come to terms with the ways in which the world has changed around it". Echoing this Dawes (2011, p.142) suggests that sociology has little choice but to follow now as ever "the track of the changing world; the alternative would be nothing less than loss of its relevance". In light of this statement, this study has aimed to address the issue of the sociology of sport apparently stalling at the Postmodern. By introducing the conceptual work of Bauman's Liquid Modernity, the domain of the sociology of sport can begin to consider multiple modernities as the framework for empirical research, not just that of the Postmodern turn. It is hoped that this study will encourage the use of IPA, coupled with liquid modernity within the sociology of sport as a progressive and unconventional theoretical concept.

This research did not anticipate producing universally applicable conclusions about the Paralympic student-athlete population. I feel though that I have demonstrated that by asking people about their worlds, listening to what they say about their experiences and analysing these comments with an open mind, we can learn a great deal from their informative and rich narratives. This research is unique in its conceptual and methodological approach in presenting the accounts of living life as a future (hopeful) Paralympian and future (hopeful) university graduate in times of liquid modernity. This study is the first within the domain of the sociology of sport to marry together the sociology of Zygmunt Bauman and the method of IPA in order to introduce the lived experiences of a small number of Team Great Britain Paralympic student-athletes.

My own practice as an able bodied athlete, as a teacher, as an academic and as a learning support worker will be enhanced immeasurably by the experience of this thesis. I hope that I am now even more able to hear the voices of those with whom I work beside and with.

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