

AN EMBODIED APPROACH TO
DISABILITY SPORT: THE LIVED
EXPERIENCE OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED
CRICKET PLAYERS

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the England Visually Impaired Cricket Team, whose squad members comprise sixteen men aged 18-54, and their lived experiences' of playing visually impaired cricket. This is the first piece of research to examine elite visually impaired cricket and the first to explicitly analyse the social dynamics of any visually impaired sports team. Through an embodied theoretical approach, that accounts for the corporeal experience of impairment alongside the role of social institutions and discourse in the high performance culture of modern disability sport, this thesis establishes the significant aspects of this previously unexamined research 'site', both on and off the pitch.

This study consisted of ten months of ethnographic fieldwork using participant observation and semi-structured interviews shaped by a new method of recording and eliciting data. To capture the participants' sensorial experiences of playing visually impaired cricket, 'soundscape elicitation', the process of composing auditory 'tracks' of the players' participation and then using these recordings during semi-structured interviews to prompt sensorial discussions, was utilised. This original and innovative method was central to the production of previously unexamined knowledge and is a significant methodological advancement in the wider field of sensory studies.

The findings present a number of original contributions to knowledge regarding 'sporting bodies', the sensorial experiences of sport, and the construction of identity through disability sport. The participants' embodied experiences of playing visually impaired cricket reveal an alternative way of 'being' in sport and physical activity. However, it is the inescapable ocularcentric value of 'sight' that inhibits the resistive potential of the game. Instead of the presumed empowering experience, elite visually impaired cricket is disempowering for many participants due to the irreversible

relationship of blind cricket institutions with mainstream cricketing bodies. Furthermore, a 'hierarchy of sight' based upon the official sight classification process emerges that highly values those players with the highest sight classifications and marginalises the blind players. All of these factors inform visually impaired cricket players' construction of their own identities. Although many players view visually impaired cricket as a way of demonstrating their 'normality', it actually accentuates the impairment that they are attempting to dissociate from and is one of the few social situations where they are 'outed' as disabled or blind.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Table of Contents	3
List of Figures	6
Abbreviations and Definitions	7
Abbreviations.....	7
Definitions	7
Acknowledgements.....	10
Author’s Declaration	12
Chapter One- Cricket. But not as you know it: An Introduction.....	13
Research Rationale	13
Overview of this Thesis.....	16
Chapter Two- An Embodied Approach to Disability Sport: The Conceptual Framework of this Study	20
Introduction.....	20
Conceptualisation of Embodiment.....	22
Reviving the Body: An Embodied Understanding of Impairment.....	26
Breaking Down Binaries: Able-Bodied/Disabled and Sightedness/Blindness.....	32
Agency and Resistance: The Personal Embodied Experiences' of Disabled People	34
Conclusion	36
Chapter Three- The Methodological Approach	39
Introduction.....	39
My Epistemological Position.....	40
Selecting the Research Sample.....	45
Protecting the Participants: Consent and Anonymity	48

My Position in the Field: Initiating and Negotiating Access.....	51
This Study’s Ethnographic Approach	54
Analysis and Presentation of Results.....	76
Conclusion	80
Chapter Four- “They are just thinking 'Wow! How can they do that?'”: The Sensuous Experiences of Visually Impaired Cricket	82
Introduction.....	82
Sensorial Experiences of Sport and Physical Activity.....	83
“You can say a cricket pitch is twenty-two yards but what is twenty-two yards?”: Conceptualisation and Negotiation of the Sporting Space.....	86
“I’m definitely listening out for what that batsman is doing. Is he shuffling? Is he moving away from me? Is he trying to advance?”: The Auditory Structure of Visually Impaired Cricket	95
“You can usually feel when you play the shot how well you have hit that ball”: Visually Impaired Cricket as a Multi-Sensory Experience	119
Conclusion	129
Chapter Five- “We are playing for England...just because I have a disability it doesn't make me any different”: Visually Impaired Cricket as an Empowering Practice?	133
Introduction.....	133
“No matter how hard I was training; I was getting worse”: Embodied Realisation of Sight Loss Through Sport	137
“I am a big fish in a little pond”: Initial Experiences of Playing Visually Impaired Cricket.....	142
“We see it as a cricket team, an England team”: The Transition from Recreational to Elite Visually Impaired Cricket.....	158
Conclusion	171

Chapter Six- “In a blind man's world, the one eyed man is king”:	The Classification and Valorisation of the Visually Impaired Sporting Body	174
Introduction		174
“‘We know who is a cheat and who is not’”:	The Impact of Sight Classification ...	175
“‘You will class yourself as an international cricketer... then you've got to help your teammate out to go to the buffet’”:	An Examination of the 'B1' and 'Partials' Relationship	191
A 'Hierarchy of Sight'		208
Conclusion		213
Chapter Seven- “A team environment is a team environment, no matter what sort of sport it is.”:	The Construction of Identity Through Visually Impaired Cricket. 216	
Introduction		216
“‘I don't think of myself as disabled, which is weird, because I've got a disabled railcard!’”:	Disabled identity and Sport	219
“‘I'd not interacted with other visually impaired people before and I realised how normal I was’”:	Negotiation of a Blind Identity	228
“‘I think it was more like being in a sighted world... it was more practical, more tough’”:	The Construction of a Shared Team Identity	248
Conclusion		261
Chapter Eight - The Close of Play: Concluding Thoughts	264	
Introduction		264
Methodological Contribution to Knowledge		264
Theoretical Contribution to Knowledge		266
Empirical Contributions to Knowledge		269
References	277	
Appendices	296	
Appendix One- Research Agreement		296

List of Figures

Figure 1- Bullet Point Field Notes (<i>Author's Collection</i>).....	66
Figure 2- Interview Areas Mindmap (<i>Author's Collection</i>).....	69
Figure 3- Analysis Themes Mindmap (<i>Author's Collection</i>).....	78
Figure 4: Empowerment through Disability Sport (Pensgaard and Sørensen 2002)	134

Abbreviations and Definitions

Abbreviations

BACD British Association for Cricketers with Disabilities

BBS British Blind Sport

BCEW Blind Cricket England and Wales

BCODP The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People

BSA The British Sociological Association

DPI Disabled Peoples' International

ECB England and Wales Cricket Board

IBSA International Blind Sports Federation

IOC International Olympic Committee

IPC International Paralympic Committee

NCDS National Deaf Children's Society

ODI Office for Disability Issues

RNIB Royal National Institute of Blind People

UKDPC United Kingdom's Disabled People's Council

UPIAS Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation

VI Visually Impaired

WBCC World Blind Cricket Council

WHO World Health Organisation

Definitions

B1 Visual acuity poorer than LogMAR 2.60 (IBSA 2015). Also a term used to signify a form of identity.

B2 Visual acuity ranging from LogMAR 1.50 to 2.60 (inclusive) and/or Visual field constricted to a diameter of less than 10 degrees (IBSA 2015).

B3 Visual acuity ranging from LogMAR 1.40 to 1 (inclusive) and/or Visual field constricted to a diameter of less than 40 degrees (IBSA 2015).

Blind In the context of this study, this term relates to the players who are classified as B1.

Disability A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities' (Equality Act 2010).

Impairment Represents a deviation from certain generally accepted population standards in the biomedical status of the body and its functions, and definition of their constituents is undertaken primarily by those qualified to judge physical and mental functioning according to these standards. (World Health Organisation 2001)

Low Partial A term used in domestic cricket: "This category is designed for those players who fall in the lower half of the B2 category, and who would struggle to bat or field when playing as a partially sighted player due to insufficient sight. A player shall be classified as low partial, by discretion based on how they manage while playing, not purely on acuity measurements." (BCEW 2016).

Partially Sighted In the context of this study, this term relates to the players who are classified as B2 and as B3.

Partials A slang term used within the team environment when discussing the partially sighted players.

Red ball cricket A common term used by the participants to refer to sighted cricket.

Sensorium The collective sensory apparatus of the body.

Visually Impaired In the context of this study, this is a collective term for both the blind and the partially sighted players. In the context of describing the game both visually impaired and blind are used interchangeably to mean the same thing.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed: 

Dated: 16.02.2017

Chapter One- Cricket. But not as you know it: An Introduction

In the build-up to England's much anticipated 2015 home series against India, the reigning world champions, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) adopted a new marketing strategy to advertise the game of visually impaired cricket. Alongside increased mass media coverage, which began with the hiring of a media officer for the 2014 World Cup in South Africa, a strapline was created: 'Cricket. But not as you know it.' It was used on poster campaigns and during promotional videos to publicise the upcoming series which featured prestigious fixtures at Arundel Castle and The Oval. In an attempt to reach a larger and more mainstream audience, the strapline suggests a level of intrigue and draws upon any pre-existing interest in sighted cricket. As an audience, we are prompted to ask the questions: how does visually impaired cricket differ from 'red ball' cricket and why should we watch it?

'Cricket. But not as you know it' also encapsulates the underlying purpose of this doctoral thesis. Throughout the three years of this study, when the topic of visually impaired cricket is discussed, whether that be at a conference or in the chair at a barbershop, there is a novel curiosity as to how the game works. Whilst intrigue is to be expected when initially introduced to the concept of blind and partially sighted people playing cricket, this thesis goes beyond the 'novelty' of the game and establishes visually impaired cricket as a significant 'site' for original and enlightening social research.

Research Rationale

In 2008, I coached my first visually impaired cricket session. As a recently qualified coach with no previous experience of this format, I was apprehensive to say the least. To further compound my nerves, during my first coaching drill I instinctively asked the players to go and stand by a

particular cone. I know now that the cone is the bane of the visually impaired cricket player: they are small, easily stepped on and even more problematic when referred to by colour. I felt I had committed an awful social faux pas by using a visual marker, but, it was quickly laughed off by the players. Despite my nerves and a fear of saying the wrong thing, I was fascinated by my introduction to visually impaired cricket. Here was a sport that I was so used to watching, coaching, and playing, yet, it was being played in a different and remarkable way. However, I did not pursue my interest in visually impaired cricket any further. I coached one more session before focusing my attention on university work and my own cricket season.

I did not encounter visually impaired sport again until the London 2012 Paralympic Games. My family and I had day tickets for the games which allowed us to attend a variety of events including blind football. We were instantly enthralled by the game. For us, it was a new way of playing sport with a different understanding of space and the senses: the use of touch and sound to recognise their position on the pitch, having a coach hit the posts and crossbar so the player knows where the bottom corner of the goal is, requiring a crowd to be silent for the players to concentrate on the ball. It even challenged our very understanding of how to be in the world. Whilst appearing to be a familiar experience of watching a football match with all the same components, it was in fact a new and engrossing way of understanding sport.

My Paralympic experience prompted a re-evaluation of my initial experiences of visually impaired cricket and the potential academic significance of this previously unexamined field of research. As with both blind football and visually impaired cricket, these are sports played in an alternative way to their mainstream versions and the players utilise sensory modes neglected in sighted sport. This thesis examines why this original approach to sport is academically significant and how the players' embodied participation challenges dominant notions of blindness, disability, and, more broadly, sport

and physical culture. Through an examination of the blind and partially sighted players' lived experiences, a paradigmatic shift in the conceptualisation of the 'sporting body' is established in which sight is not the prioritised, dominant mode of perception.

Another important aspect of this study, and to the slogan 'Cricket. But not as you know it', is the extent to which visually impaired cricket differs from the mainstream version, both on and off the pitch, and the consequences of forming a close relationship with a non-disabled governing body. In the context of the widespread professionalisation of modern disability sport, this thesis examines how the organisation of visually impaired cricket is indicative of the broader relationship between elite sport and disability.

As evident in this thesis' title, an embodied approach to disability sport, which is the first of its kind, is devised. Whilst overtly focusing on visually impaired cricket, the theoretical approach of this study, as outlined in the next chapter, provides a framework that engages with current disability studies literature and can be used to examine disabled athletes' lived experiences' from all sports. To employ this embodied approach effectively, a tailored methodological approach which accounts for the needs of the participants and captures their experiences accurately is of the utmost importance. The aims and objectives of this doctoral study, as outlined above, are formalised below:

Aims

- To establish an embodied approach to disability sport.
- To investigate how the participants' sensorial experiences challenge dominant understandings of blindness, disability, and sport.
- To examine the role that visually impaired cricket plays in the construction of identity.

Objectives

- To conduct social research that values and accurately represents the traditionally marginalised 'voices' of the participants.
- To employ an accessible and inclusive methodological approach for this study's visually impaired participants.
- To create an innovative methodological approach that elicits the participants' sensorial experiences of playing visually impaired cricket.

Overview of this Thesis

Following this brief introduction, Chapter Two establishes this study's original theoretical framework: 'an embodied approach to disability sport'. It outlines an understanding of embodiment which draws upon the phenomenological concept of the 'lived body' alongside the 'social' dimension of the body. Building upon this interpretation of embodiment, the three key theoretical components of this study's approach: 'Reviving the Body', 'Breaking Down Binaries', and 'Agency and Resistance' are outlined and the significance of these components is illustrated, both in the context of this doctoral study and for future disability sport research.

Chapter Three provides a reflexive account of the methodological process from the selection of the participants and the negotiation of access to adoption of an ethnographic approach using participant observation and semi-structured interviews. As established in the objectives above, there are methodological considerations and innovations required when conducting research into the lived experience of visually impaired cricket players. Two major methodological considerations underpin this study's ethnographic approach, which are detailed in this chapter. Firstly, creating an accessible and inclusive method for the visually impaired participants that prioritises their often marginalised voices in social research. Central to this position is my epistemological standpoint which is established alongside a discussion of the non-disabled researcher/disabled participant relationship. Secondly, how

best to elicit the participants' multi-sensory experiences of a fleeting and fast-paced activity such as visually impaired cricket. Given the paucity of research in this area, there is a lack of methodological precedent thus this chapter analyses the successes and limitations of this innovative approach through the use of field notes and interview extracts.

Chapter Four is the first of four discussion chapters and focuses on the sensuous experience of playing visually impaired cricket. Two questions are posed: firstly, how do the blind and partially sighted players both conceptualise and negotiate this sporting space and, secondly, do these embodied experiences resist the dominant conceptions of blindness, disability, and sport? The answers to these questions have significant implications for wider understandings of physical performance and reveals an unexamined dimension of the body/sport relationship. Previous research into the sensuous experience of sport and physical activity is analysed and the gaps in knowledge are identified. The chapter then examines how the participants conceptualise and negotiate both the sporting space and everyday spaces such as the supermarket or a train station. The auditory structure of visually impaired cricket is then discussed which is split into two sections: perception as an intercorporeal social experience and 'Auditory Knowledge', the role of non-linguistic sound. Following this, the multi-sensory experience of participation is acknowledged through the use of haptic, kinaesthetic, and visual perception. The chapter concludes by addressing the two questions posed in the introduction.

The second discussion chapter, Chapter Five, examines whether visually impaired cricket is an empowering practice. The topic of empowerment and disability sport has been well debated, yet, the context of visually impaired cricket provides a new perspective. Firstly, the players' sporting narratives are analysed to gauge the role of sport and physical activities in their lives both pre and post-sight degeneration or loss. These initial experiences of playing visually impaired cricket demonstrate the empowering potential that

this sport can have through both the social element of participation and also the 'embodied reconceptualisation of self' that individuals may undergo whilst playing. Despite these empowering experiences, this chapter then evaluates the transition from recreational to elite level cricket and the disempowering consequences of these changes upon the participants. Issues of media coverage, professionalism, and the relationship with non-disabled sporting organisations are presented and how these seemingly positive steps forward are impeding the empowering potential of visually impaired cricket, and more broadly, elite disability sport.

Chapter Six investigates the classification and valorisation of the visually impaired sporting body and is the first study to document this intrinsic aspect of visually impaired sport. Firstly, the role of official sight classification is discussed in the context of an elite environment that focuses on high level performance and the impact this has on players with particular forms of visual impairment. Due to such scrutiny upon classification, the existence of rumour and gossip amongst the team members is examined and why blind players are commonly the target of accusations. The remainder of the chapter examines the relationship between the 'B1s', the blind players, and the 'Partials', the partially sighted players, and the significance of these established groups both on and off the pitch. Due to the embodied expectations of the classification system being internalised within the squad, each sight category becomes a signifier of identity that has set physical and social characteristics. Consequently, a 'hierarchy of sight' that values players with the highest levels of sight is established which, in part, is due to the organisation of visually impaired cricket and the social expectations placed upon players according to their classification.

The final discussion chapter, Chapter Seven, examines how the blind and partially sighted players construct their identities within this sporting space. Firstly, the absence of disabled terminology is documented, which draws upon discussions in previous chapters regarding the professionalisation of

disability sport and the close relationship to mainstream sports. Whilst a disabled identity is rejected, the chapter then examines how a blind identity is negotiated, a previously unresearched aspect of visually impaired sport. This is split into two sections: 1) the role of language and terminology and 2) the embodied realities of identifying and being identified as visually impaired. The remainder of the chapter examines the construction of a shared team identity that does not celebrate disability or blindness. Through the rejection of these terms and the existence of banter, a masculine 'sighted world' is created that, again, values those who have the highest levels of sight and can perform to the highest level.

Finally, Chapter Eight brings the thesis to conclusion and draws together the significant findings of this study to demonstrate the original contributions to knowledge. This final chapter is split into three sections. Firstly, the methodological contribution to knowledge is outlined and discusses the innovative 'soundscape' approach created to elicit the participants' sensorial experiences of visually impaired cricket. Secondly, the embodied approach to disability sport, this study's theoretical framework, is examined to gauge the success of this approach. Finally, the key empirical findings of this study are re-established and the originality of these findings are made clear.

Chapter Two- An Embodied Approach to Disability Sport: The Conceptual Framework of this Study

Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical approach that underpins this thesis. As will become apparent, an embodied approach to disability sport is integral to investigating the visually impaired participants' lived experiences. Whilst embodiment has been previously examined in the context of disability sport (Hargreaves 2000; Howe 2008a; Peers 2012b; Bush et al 2013; Purdue 2013; Standal 2014, Brighton 2015), this thesis is the first to overtly establish an embodied approach to disability sport.

An understanding of sport, physical activity, and the sporting body is key to critically investigating disability sport and, more specifically, visually impaired cricket as socially constructed spaces whilst recognising the lived body as an active presence in these social interactions. Whilst this thesis' use of 'space' refers to the physical location of the cricket pitch, it is also a socially produced phenomenon (Lefebvre 1991; Muller 2007) endowed with established norms and values constructed by social institutions and the embodied inhabitants. Sport and physical activity are “particularly productive sites for the exploration of embodiment, body practices and embodied selves” (Woodward 2009 p. 4), however, in the context of disability sport, there is a paucity of such embodied explorations.

This study's embodied approach to disability sport rejects the dominant medical/social model binary conceptualisation of disability, which is prevalent in disability sport research- if there is any evidence of social theory to begin with! Alternatives to traditional and dominant academic understandings of disability do exist and are continually evolving and these are drawn upon in

this chapter. Alongside the rejection of the medical/social model binary, this study's approach also resists and challenges the binaries of able-bodied/disabled and sightedness/blindness through the multiple accounts of personal experience provided by the visually impaired cricket players. Forming an embodied understanding of disability that accounts for both an impairment and also social factors is something that has been lacking from the dominant approaches to disability. By incorporating updated academic understandings of disability that engage with and challenge the fixed paradigms of the medical and social models, this study re-frames the debates surrounding the relationship between disability and sport.

By viewing 'embodiment as a site of pedagogic possibility' (Bush et al 2013), the embodied approach established here answers Bush et al's (2013) call:

We need academic work that can understand sport, sporting bodies and physical activity as important 'sites' through which social forces, discourses, institutions and processes congregate, congeal and are contested in a manner that contributes to the shaping of human relations, subjectivities, and experiences in particular, contextually contingent ways (p. 645).

The motivation for creating an embodied approach to disability sport is to bring together the embodiment literature with the traditional debates surrounding the theorisation of disability and establish an informed theoretical approach. The above call for academic work acknowledges the potential areas of research that can be investigated through an embodied approach to disability sport and, as is demonstrated through this thesis, visually impaired cricket is an important, and previously unexamined, 'site' for research.

This chapter is organised into four main sections. Firstly, this study's interpretation of 'embodiment' is outlined by evaluating selected theorists' approaches to this concept and the significance of their ideas within an embodied approach. The remainder of the chapter is split into three sections that correspond with the three theoretical components of this study's

embodied approach to disability sport: 'Reviving the Body', 'Breaking Down Binaries', and 'Agency and Resistance'. These sections establish the significance of each theoretical components and how they relate to this study of visually impaired cricket.

Conceptualisation of Embodiment

Disability, sport, and disability sport are all inextricably connected with notions of the body and physicality. It is untenable to conceptualise these phenomena without acknowledging the corporeal basis. Yet, simultaneously, they are social constructions formed through discourse and social interaction. To achieve the aims of this study, established in the previous chapter, it is vitally important to capture the participants' physical experiences of playing visually impaired cricket whilst recognising the socially constructed expectations and value placed upon these 'sporting bodies'. An embodied approach, which “lies ambiguously across the nature/culture divide” (Williams and Bendelow 1998 p.3), has been selected as it most accurately captures the blind and partially sighted participants' lived experiences.

Following the 'corporeal turn' of the 1990s (Witz 2000; Howes 2006), the concept of embodiment has gained academic prominence when conceptualising human experience and perception (Johnson 1987; Csordas 1994; Seymour 1998; Crossley 1995, 2006, 2007; Williams and Bendelow 1998; Lakoff & Johnson 1999; Turner, 2008). Due to the interdisciplinary usage of 'embodiment', it is important to establish *this* study's interpretation of this concept.

The Lived Body

Central to this embodied approach is the phenomenological concept of the 'lived body' which draws upon Husserl's distinction between the Leib (Lived) body and the Körper body: “in German, the term Leib is employed when one

is referring to living bodies, while the term Körper is used to designate inanimate or dead bodies: the body of a rock, for example, or of a human corpse” (Leder, 1998 p. 122). However, it is the existential phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's development of the notion of a lived body that is integral to this study's conceptualisation of embodiment. Merleau-Ponty (1945 [2002] p.273) views the body as the vantage point for perception by articulating that “my body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my 'comprehension’”. By moving beyond the reductive Cartesian dualism towards an embodied understanding of human existence, Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that the body is a detached object that is separate from the mind and conceptualises it as the 'body-subject'. The notion of a 'lived body' allows this study to fully document the participants' heterogeneous experiences of being visually impaired whilst playing cricket and how these multiple ways of 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger 1927 [1996] p.55) challenge the dominant sensory mode of 'being', which prioritises sight as the only true way of gaining knowledge.

Understanding that the active, subjective nature of perception is from the vantage point of the body (Seymour 1998) emphasises that there must be an engagement with the senses (Hughson and Inglis 2002; Paterson 2007; Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2009, 2013). Merleau-Ponty (1945) states that the senses are key to understanding the world; if our bodies are the window to the world then the senses are how we perceive it. He conceptualises this as 'sense experience', defined as “that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life. It is to it that the perceived object and the perceiving subject owe their thickness.” (1945 [2002] p. 61). This vital communication with the world takes on a greater significance when sensory experience is disrupted. By acknowledging the vital role of the senses in perception, this embodied approach to disability investigates how the participants' diagnosed sensory impairments impact upon their multi-sensory experiences of playing visually impaired cricket.

The Social Dimension of Embodiment

Whilst the concept of the 'lived body' is integral to my conceptualisation of embodiment, I will not be adopting a phenomenological approach as there is no acknowledgment of the social dimension of the body. To be wholly reliant on a phenomenological approach in a sociological study, such as this, is untenable. The strength of an embodied approach, as discussed above, is that it simultaneously recognises the social and biological aspects of the body: "social relations may take up and transform our embodied capacities in all manner of ways, but they still have a basis in human bodies" (Shilling 2003 p. 12). This study's embodied approach to disability sport distinctively draws upon the phenomenological concept of the 'lived body whilst still acknowledging the 'social'. Dominant discourses surrounding blindness, disability and the 'sporting body' are scrutinised throughout this thesis but, significantly, it is how these discourses are embodied and enacted by the participants.

This study's embodied approach to the senses is also simultaneously social and biological, to 'make sense' is grounded in the lived bodies' previous experiences and wider social conditions. The senses are "both a reaching out to the world as a source of information and an understanding of that world so gathered" (Rodaway 1994 p.5) which Vannini et al (2014) conceptualises as the 'sensuous self'. This notion perfectly encapsulates the theoretical approach of this investigation and builds on the conceptualisation of embodiment: "the embodied self is both the material basis and reflective outcome of perceived sensations and sense-making practices. In this way, sensations and sense-making body forth a *sensuous self*: a performative, reflexive, perceptive, intentional, indeterminate, emergent, embodied being-in-the-world" (p.85). The 'sensuous self' engages with the idea that sensory experience is not just the material basis of perception, it is also an active, social interaction.

Embodiment as a Shared Process

The process of embodiment may be portrayed as an individual project but it is located in a social world of interconnected social actors (Turner 2008). In the context of visually impaired cricket, a team sport in which the blind players are reliant upon their partially sighted teammates for physical and verbal guidance, it is vital to acknowledge the shared nature of this process. Although Merleau-Ponty (1968 p.143) did not overtly discuss the role of society, he examines the shared carnal bond between humans through the concept of intercorporeality and how it is key to our engagement with the world. Embodiment as a shared experience: “to describe embodiment as intercorporeality is to emphasise that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and non-human bodies” (Weiss 1999 p.5) It is the constant interaction with other individuals that shapes our knowledge of the environment around us, but, also our understanding of self.

Attention to the body of others is also termed 'intersubjectivity' (Csordas 1993) and is integral when conceptualising perception in team sport: “attending to others' bodily movements is even more clear cut in the cases of dancing, making love, playing sports, and in the uncanny sense of a presence over one's shoulder” (p. 139). As discussed above, the continual intercorporeal interactions between the cricket players, through a reliance on physical and verbal guidance, is central to visually impaired cricket. Yet, these intercorporeal interactions between the visually impaired participants are not necessarily equal but are power ridden and full of norms of practice (Macpherson 2009a p. 1047). This is evident in the context of visually impaired cricket, which is examined in Chapter Six, and demonstrates the need for an acknowledgment of the shared nature of embodiment in this study's theoretical approach.

So far, this chapter has outlined my conceptualisation of 'embodiment' by identifying a number of key theorists and evaluating the significance of their

approaches to this study's conceptual framework. Building upon this understanding of embodiment, the remainder of this chapter identifies the three theoretical components distinct to this study's embodied approach to disability sport: 'Reviving the Body', 'Breaking Down Binaries', and 'Agency and Resistance'.

Reviving the Body: An Embodied Understanding of Impairment

As I acknowledged in the introductory chapter of this thesis, researching disability sport is a long held passion. During my undergraduate and Master's dissertations, I worked with cricket players with learning disabilities, physically disabled cricket players, and amputee track and field athletes, yet, there was an underlying frustration; the theory did not reflect the reality of their experiences. My readings of the literature followed the same organisational structure: outlining the dominant medical and social models of disability, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of these models, rejecting these models and then calling for a new theoretical approach. The fundamental reason in calling for an alternative approach was the inadequate conceptualisation of the 'body' within the medical and social models. This inadequacy still exists and this study's first theoretical component 'Reviving the Body' addresses the theoretical weaknesses in the existing literature.

The 'Body' in the Medical and Social Models

This brief sub-section establishes the theoretical shortcomings of these approaches when conceptualising the body (see Barnes and Mercer (2003) for a comprehensive account of the theorisation of disability) and why they are unsuitable models when researching disability sport. Traditionally, medical professionals and disability studies scholars in the United Kingdom have aligned to two distinct models: the medical model and the social model (Fawcett 2000; Barnes and Mercer 2003; Shillmeier 2010). These

dichotomous approaches conceptualise disability in contrasting ways with both models “forming opposing parts of the same frame” (Fawcett 2000, p.18) and at the foundation of this debate is the body.

Throughout the twentieth-century in Western culture, disability had been defined as a medical issue and a social deviance to be fixed (Davis 2002; Barnes and Mercer 2003). The medical model of understanding disability has been central to the healthcare profession where the root of all disadvantage lies with a physical impairment rather than any other factors (Crow 1996) and, once diagnosed, a cure or rehabilitation for the disabled person is essential (Campbell and Oliver 1996; Marks 1999). By focusing squarely on the physical, the individual is seen to be 'incomplete' and is something that Oliver (1990), the founder of the social model, defines as the 'personal tragedy' approach to disability. This negative and biological understanding of disability is clearly unsuitable for this study for a number of reasons: it is an individualistic understanding of disability that does not account for wider social barriers, it reinforces the notion that all disabled people are fragile and helpless, and views disability as something to overcome.

The 'overcoming story' is a well-established trope, especially in the media, which devalues the individual that it is focusing on: “the complexity of embodied existence is textually enacted *and* ordered *and* ignored by the overcoming narrative” (Titchkosky 2007 p. 194). To 'overcome' disability is also central to disability sport coverage. Athletes are portrayed as bravely 'overcoming' their physical impairment thus reinforcing being disabled as a physical condition to 'conquer'. By treating disabled people as victims, there are various consequences for everyday life, social policies (Oliver 1990) and the dominant attitudes of health professionals and government officials.

Due to the opposition towards medicalised approaches to disability and multiple forms of inequality, the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) was founded in the early 1970s to campaign for social

change and against the social segregation of disabled people. Various disability groups including the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP) and Disabled People's International (DPI) were set up with similar goals to that of the UPIAS; having social equality and being a representative public voice. The DPI's schema outlined that disability "is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers" (DPI 1982). Oliver (1996) claimed that for those committed to the DPI schema "disability is wholly and elusively social... disablement is nothing to do with the body" (pg. 41). This bold and inaccurate statement created a dualistic understanding of disability and impairment that continues to underpins the social model today.

By cutting impairment loose from disability (Hughes 2002) and viewing impairment as a secondary concern (French 2004), the social model created a paradigm shift that contested the very nature of what constitutes a disability. From disability being understood as a wholly medical condition, disability was now understood as a social construction. The formation of a disability/impairment dichotomy, through the social model, is problematic. Ignoring the physical body in an understanding of disability is an untenable position (Hughes and Paterson 1997) and this perspective leaves the social model without a grounding in reality. Without a corporeal basis, personal experiences of both pain and impairment cannot be accounted for (Crow 1996; Hughes and Paterson 1997; Thomas 1999; Freund 2001; French 2004; Shakespeare 2006). Although pain is not an issue for all disabled people, to deny its existence is alienating. The usefulness of the social model as a political statement is undeniable, however, it does not truly represent the nature of being disabled because of the over socialised nature of the model.

There are a number of reasons for the reticence of disability theorists to engage with the body: how it reduces an individual to their level of function

(Overboe 1999) or it being 'the terrain of the oppressor' (Hughes 1999) i.e. the medical model or understanding the physical as a fixed, biological fact. Although the social model approach was a political statement to reinforce the social marginalisation that disabled people experience, it is clearly an inaccurate portrayal of the lived experiences of being disabled. In the context of sport and physical activity, it is illogical to understand disability sport without an acknowledgment of a physical impairment. The purpose of creating and adapting sporting activities for disabled people is to accommodate the participants' various impairments. Without a physical/learning/sensory impairment, disability sport is nonsensical.

An Embodied Understanding of Impairment

Both the medical and social model approaches reproduce the Cartesian dualism which leaves the body “devoid of meaning, a dysfunctional, anatomical, corporeal mass obdurate in its resistance to signification and phenomenologically dead, without intentionality or agency.” (Hughes and Paterson, 1997, p. 329). By viewing the body as a 'corporeal mass', neither approach recognises the reality of being disabled. This study's embodied understanding of disability engages with the biological reality of impairment, in sport and everyday life, whilst demonstrating the influence that society plays in demarcating what constitutes an impairment and in creating institutional barriers. For example, “many disabled people are fully healthy, and many sick people are not disabled” (Shildrick and Price 1996 p. 94). At what point does an illness or injury become an impairment? Why are certain bodies considered to be disabled when others are not? These questions emphasise the socialised nature of impairment rather than being an objectified biological fact. Whilst the social relational model (Thomas 2007; Smith and Perrier 2014; Townsend et al 2015) also acknowledges the 'bodily reality' of impairment within the social and cultural constructed notion of disability, this thesis' embodied approach distinctively conceptualises disability from the vantage point of the 'lived' body.

Although the social model approach is commonly criticised for being over-socialised, it does not, in fact, go far enough. Rather than being ignored by social theorists or understood as a biological fact, the notion of impairment needs to be socially interrogated and how “an aspect of the body– physical or mental– only counts as a bodily impairment under specific social, cultural and political conditions” (Cole 2007 p. 175). A social understanding of impairment is particularly important within visually impaired cricket and all disability sports. Undergoing regular testing and classification during competition is a common occurrence for the blind and partially sighted participants of this study. In order to participate, they are constantly subjected to medical and social valorisation of their impairment and their role within the team is defined by their diagnosis. As is discussed later in this thesis, many of the participants embodied the social expectations placed upon their bodies thus reinforcing the social and political aspect of impairment.

Impairments should be understood as “dynamic, contingent conditions affected by many external factors and usually fluctuating over time” (Garland-Thomson 1997 p. 13) and society should be acknowledged as a key external factor in attaching “the tissue of myths, fears and misunderstandings” (Murphy 1990 p. 113) to particular bodies. Hughes and Paterson (1997; 1999) argue for a sociology of impairment that both challenges ideas of disablement and also suggests the need to overcome the disembodied view of disability. Using a phenomenological framework, they argue that impairment is an embodied experience that includes both self-perception (corporeal) and the perception of other non-disabled actors (intercorporeal). Despite sharing many similar characteristics with this study's approach, Hughes and Paterson inadvertently created an unhelpful dualism between 'impairment' and disability. Disability arises from a physical/mental impairment; these two terms cannot be separated (see Abbreviations and Definitions section for more detail). A dualistic sociology of impairment is not required. The embodied approach established in this study is far more effective in overcoming the disembodied view of disability by accounting for

the role of social discourse in the diagnosis of a physical/mental impairment, yet, positioning 'impairment' within the broader social process of being defined as disabled.

Whilst the need to engage with ideas of both culture and embodiment (Hughes 1999) in disability theory is identified by several theorists (Swan 2002; Goodley 2011; Siebers 2010; Loja et al 2013), this study's embodied approach is specifically focused on disability sport and physical activity. As discussed above, the notion of impairment takes on an even greater significance in a sporting context where the bodies, and specifically, the athletes' impairments are under constant scrutiny:

Sport is one of the arenas in which the social struggle for control of the physical body occurs, processes of individual identity testing and formation are conducted, and multiple notions of identity are embodied (Huang and Brittain 2006 p. 353).

An embodied approach to disability sport is significant because, within sport, it is the physical body of a disabled person that is the primary way "they are looked upon, identified, judged and represented" (Hargreaves 2000 p. 185). These social reactions are always framed by dominant understandings of the human body which reinforces the social constructed nature of physical performance and the idealised 'sporting body' (Seymour 1998; Brittain 2004; Berger 2009). To fully understand disabled sporting practice, any analysis needs to contain the concept of embodiment and how "the physical manifestation of culture through embodied action is fundamental to exploring the importance of the body in the context of sport." (Howe 2008a p. 103). The physical body is at the centre of disabled sporting practice, yet it is crucial to recognise that the "capacities, abilities, or movement difficulties are relational phenomena that are produced in an interchange between the person and the environment he or she is acting in" (Standal 2014 p. 40). The use of environment is not just amenities or facilities but how norms, values and expectations underpin reactions to the sporting body and the athletes' impairment.

Breaking Down Binaries: Able-Bodied/Disabled and Sightedness/Blindness

The second characteristic of this study's embodied approach challenges the dichotomy of able-bodied/disabled by adopting an anti-essentialist standpoint that breaks down “entrenched assumptions that 'able-bodiedness' and its conceptual opposite, disability are self-evident physical conditions” (Garland-Thomson 1997 p. 6). These assumptions are formed within a social system that values particular bodies and discriminates against others. Such discrimination is conceptualised as 'ableism' (Zola 1991; Campbell 2009) and represents another-ism in the same vein as racism or sexism. Campbell (2009 p.44) describes ableism as “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect species-typical and therefore essential and fully human.”

The core element of the process of 'ableism' is the creation of the 'normative' individual upon which everybody is measured thus inscribing certain bodies as inadequate. Normalcy is deeply ingrained within all aspects of our culture from art to literature. The ideal of the 'normate' allows people to “represent themselves as definitive human beings” (Garland-Thomson 1997 p. 8) and separate themselves from those who do not fit this ideal model (Davis 1995). This oversimplified nature of thinking has become so ingrained that it happens unconsciously: “binary thinking is merely a habit of mind, and despite the comfort of order and familiarity it offers, it doesn't apprehend reality, which is, let's face it, a frightful jumble” (Mairs 1996 p. 16). The dominance of binary thinking leads to 'compulsory able-bodiedness' (McRuer 2006) and disabled people becoming the 'Other' in the eyes of society. This is reinforced through social interaction and also through discourse (Shildrick and Price 1996; French and Corker 1999; Titchkosky 2007).

This notion of the 'normate' (Garland-Thomson 1997) is especially useful when examining sport and physical activity and the social expectations of the 'normate' sporting body. The conflicting preconceptions attached to disability and sporting physicality means that the disabled sporting body “clearly offers the most challenges to the hegemonic ideal of the athletic body” (Promis et al 2001 p. 39). Through the visually impaired cricket players’ experiences, the constructed hegemonic ideals and the blurred nature of the disabled/non-disabled dichotomy are interrogated.

As well as breaking down the binary of able-bodied/disabled, the sightedness/blindness binary is also challenged. In the same way that able-bodiedness is perceived to be the norm (McRuer 2006), our society is both culturally and physically organised for those with sight. If having sight is an unchallenged norm, then blindness is understood as the abnormal opposite. In the context of visually impaired cricket, challenging the sightedness/blindness dichotomy is of the utmost importance. This binary does not acknowledge how blind people and partially sighted people may use residual vision in particular situations and how levels of residual vision may change due to the environmental conditions. Despite being a sport for visually impaired people, the use of visual perception is integral when playing thus reinforcing the inaccuracy of this binary mode of conceptualising sight.

There are several issues with a dichotomous understanding of sight and blindness. Firstly, as discussed above, blindness continues to be represented negatively and as a state of ignorance because sight is the 'normal' way of being. Secondly, the very nature of a binary is that it contains two distinct composites, which in this case is sightedness and blindness, however, the clear distinction between these two states of being is not clear cut. Being a sighted person does not mean having perfect 20/20 vision and being blind does not necessarily mean a complete lack of sight. The nature of terminology and language surrounding visual impairment contributes to this confused binary way of thinking and is further scrutinised, in the context

of identity formation, in Chapter Seven. This anti-essentialist standpoint is a key component of this study's approach and should guide researchers' interrogation of these bodily dichotomies. It is also important to acknowledge that whilst I would encourage the players to overtly challenge these binaries, I do not assume that this will happen and, in fact, I expect they are more likely to reinforce these fixed ways of thinking.

Agency and Resistance: The Personal Embodied Experiences' of Disabled People

The final characteristic central to this approach is the role of agency and resistance in the participants' embodied experiences. Whilst Finkelstein (1996) felt that a focus on personal experience would be detrimental to the disability movement due to the subjective nature of experience, this study's embodied approach values the participants' personal experiences, as is further discussed in the next chapter. Finkelstein, and other academics who adopted the social model approach, wanted to create a shared, common disabled identity, yet, this was problematic (Humphrey 2000; French 2004; Scott-Hill 2004) as it only represented a small section of disabled people. In a unified movement (French 2004) certain disabled people are ignored or under-represented, such as those with sensory impairments or intellectual disabilities. In response to this lack of representation, academics started to use personal experience (Zola 1991; Morris 1992; Crow 1996) to account for the under-represented members of the disabled community and challenge the 'reality' of being disabled. This study's theoretical approach continues the tradition of representing personal experience by valuing the 'voices' of the blind and partially sighted participants.

An embodied approach allows for the documenting of the 'lived experience' of disabled people (Toombs 1995; Tremain 2002; Peuravaara 2013) whilst still acknowledging external social and political structures. Yet, these structures and dominant discourses can be resisted. Disabled people may confront physical and attitudinal barriers and "demand recognition for who

they are and what they want to become” (Loja et al 2013 p. 198). Resistance is a common theme within disability theory (Gabel and Peters 2004) and how, through agency, disabled people “are productive in conforming to, reiterating and contesting normative standards of 'acceptable' bodies through which they are seen and known.” (Zitzelsberger 2005 p. 400). Whilst such resistive attitudes may not be present amongst the visually impaired cricket players in this study, as is examined in Chapter Seven, it is still important to recognise the role that agency plays in accepting/rejecting notions of disability.

Sport can be an ideal platform for resisting dominant discourses in which the “creative interactions of embodied subjects with sporting 'social facts'” (Shilling 2005 p. 123) can confront the dominant notions of disability. As well as challenging the notion of sport, it can also be a way of challenging the dominant notions of the 'bodies' that are taking part. Sport and physical activity can be sites that invite transformations of the body and provide the possibilities “for reconsidering body practices and embodied selves which permit and explain political action and change” (Woodward 2009 p. 105). This idea of embodied resistance through sport is constant presence throughout this thesis.

Major social movements such as the American civil rights movement of the 1960s and the Ghandian revolution used 'culturally relevant strategies' (Gabel and Peters 2004) to communicate their message. In a similar way, the rising popularity and exposure of disability sport can be a suitable arena to resist the dichotomous understanding of able-bodied/disabled and sightedness/blindness. The function of resistance is “for disabled people to push against dominance while also attempting to pull society into disabled people's way of seeing” (Gabel and Peters 2004 p. 594) and sport is clearly an influential platform where agency can be exerted.

Wedgewood (2013) argues that disability sport should be utilised by disabled activists during events such as the Paralympics where “the idea being not just to critique disablist discourses from afar but rather to hijack/challenge and/or reframe disablist discourses using the Paralympics as a medium to gain attention.” (p. 8). Wedgewood's intentions are admirable but, as will become clear throughout this thesis, reframing dominant discourses is an extremely difficult task to achieve. The value system of sport needs to be re-conceived by challenging understandings of the body, ability and athletic performance by understanding sport as a social construction (De Pauw 1997). Sport can be a site for resistance because of its cultural significance: “the lens of disability allows us to make problematic the socially constructed nature of sport and once we have done so, opens us to alternative constructions, actions, and solutions.” (De Pauw 1997 p. 428). An integral aim of this thesis is to investigate how visually impaired cricket can create 'alternative constructions' of sport and the bodies that participate in those spaces. At the foundation of uncovering such 'alternative' ways of 'being' in sport are the participants' embodied, personal experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter has established the embodied approach to disability sport, the theoretical framework of this study, and demonstrated why it is a significant contribution to the field of disability sport. As acknowledged in the introduction, there is a dearth of sociological research into disability sport and physical culture that engages with disability theory beyond a cursory reference to the 'social model'. Despite the recent trend in conducting research with reference to embodiment and disability sport (Hargreaves 2000; Howe 2008a; Peers 2012b; Bush et al 2013; Purdue 2013; Standal 2014, Brighton 2015), this is the first study to establish an embodied approach and integral to this approach is an engagement with current disability studies literature. Whilst this approach can be used in a variety of disabled sporting contexts, it has been specifically constructed to investigate the blind and partially sighted participants' lived experiences of playing visually impaired cricket.

Due to the interdisciplinary use of 'embodiment', it was imperative to outline my interpretation of this concept which engages with phenomenological and sociological theory. Drawing upon this theoretical basis, the three theoretical components of this approach were established. Firstly, *Reviving the Body* re-frames the traditional approaches to disability that renders the 'body' as a physical object. Within the context of visually impaired cricket, the players' impairments are in constant focus due to medical examinations and classification. In fact, the combination of being visually impaired and playing cricket is a fascinating aspect of this environment and so it would be untenable to ignore the corporeal aspect of disability. By using the phenomenological concept of the 'lived body' alongside the social roles of discourse and interaction, this embodied approach acknowledges the biological reality of having a physical/mental impairment, such as pain or illness, whilst recognising the role of social institutions in the impact of diagnosis and demarcating disability.

Secondly, *Breaking down Binaries* challenges the dominant binary of 'able-bodied/disabled' and, significantly in the context of this study, 'sightedness/blindness'. The use of visual perception whilst playing cricket, a central theme of this thesis, is a contentious issue and plays a critical role in the establishment of social roles and the valorisation of particular players. By demonstrating that these binaries are social constructions, this study's embodied approach interrogates the social structure within the team and the 'grey areas' between sightedness and blindness.

The final component *Agency and Resistance* proposes that visually impaired cricket, and more broadly, disability sport can be a platform to resist dominant understandings of blindness, disability, and the 'sporting body'. This is achieved by investigating the blind and partially sighted players' personal experiences and evaluating how these experiences demonstrate a high level of agency. The valuing of the participants' 'voices' and accurately representing their experiences is an integral aspect of my epistemological

position which, as part of an in-depth reflexive account of the research process, is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three- The Methodological Approach

Introduction

This chapter provides a reflexive account of the empirical research process undertaken during this study. By drawing upon my own experiences initially recorded in the field, and now further developed in this chapter, the methodological journey of this ethnographic study, from the selection of participants to the presentation of data, is documented. According to Wellard (2015 p. 197) embodied research of sport and physical activity “rather than being a distinct discipline in its own right, is more usefully considered as a ‘frame of mind’ or a specific orientation to the research process.” This broad conceptualisation of embodied research means that it is especially important to outline *my* orientation to the research process and the methodological approach taken.

Firstly, my epistemological standpoint is established by discussing the representation of marginalised 'voices' in social research and my position as a non-disabled/sighted researcher in a disabled/visually impaired field. Building upon this epistemological foundation, the process of selecting the research sample is then discussed alongside the ethical considerations of informed consent and anonymity for the visually impaired participants. The process of negotiating access to the England Visually Impaired Cricket team is recounted and how these negotiations affected the methodological approach selected and created an opportunity to significantly impact upon the professional practices of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB).

The ethnographic approach of this study, that uses participant observation and semi-structured interviews, is then outlined and draws upon reflexive field-note extracts to recount how these methods were utilised in the field. This section also explains the methodological innovations formulated when examining the participants' sensory experiences and how this study's

approach has rethought traditional methods to produce in-depth and rich data. The final section of this chapter discusses how the raw data produced during this study was analysed through thematic analysis and then presented through the written word and other alternative forms of presentation.

My Epistemological Position

One of the objectives of this study, as established in the introductory chapter, is to conduct social research that values and accurately represents the 'voices' of the blind and partially sighted participants of this study. Whilst not overtly focusing on social justice, my epistemological standpoint inherently values the participants' testimonies and positions them as the authoritative 'knowers' within the social space of visually impaired cricket. My position has developed through my academic career as a non-disabled researcher in various disabled research fields. Working with physically disabled people and people with learning disabilities as participants in my undergraduate and Master's dissertations affirmed my belief that an integral aspect of social research should be to provide a public platform for marginalised people to share their knowledge and experiences. The beliefs, attitudes, and values of the visually impaired people in this study are of vital importance and the ethnographic approach, using participant observation and semi-structured interviews, as outlined later in this chapter, has facilitated a sharing of these experiences.

My constructivist epistemological position recognises that "meaning is *constructed* not discovered, so subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. Hence, multiple, contradictory but equally valid accounts of the world can exist." (Gray 2009 p.20). This relativist ontological position (Markula and Silk 2011) acknowledges that individuals construct multiple meanings of reality. By adopting this approach, the participants' multifaceted experiences can be authentically recorded. As established in this chapter, my ontological and

epistemological position underpins the methodological 'tools' (Silk 2005) selected for this doctoral study.

The 'knowers', the visually impaired cricket players, and the researcher are inter-dependent in the research process and “the 'findings' are the creation of a process of interaction between the two” (Sparkes and Smith 2014 p. 13). As will be discussed later when outlining this study's ethnographic approach, my role is to 'interpret the interpretations of others' (Sparkes and Smith 2014) and to critically analyse the significance of the participants' experiences from their point of view. The methodological challenge, which this chapter examines, has been how to authentically represent the 'voices' of the participants whilst still retaining a level of detachment as an 'outsider' to critically evaluate their testimonies (Silk 2005).

Traditionally marginalised in social research (Duckett and Pratt 2001; 2007), visually impaired people occupy a position on the fringes of the disability studies movement. The lack of empowering and inclusive research practices is evident in the current disability sport literature. This follows a general trend within much sports related research in which “disabled people have a subservient role, as research subjects, and the research findings seem not to challenge social oppression” (Fitzgerald 2009 p. 147). Yet, providing disabled participants with a 'voice' through social research can also be a problematic practice (Ashby 2011) that reinforces the able-bodied/disabled dichotomy outlined in the previous chapter. Providing the participants with a 'voice' can imply that a non-disabled researcher is needed to represent this 'separate' social group and disabled researchers are unable to conduct such research.

It is important to acknowledge that I am not a non-disabled 'knight in shining armour' heroically representing helpless visually impaired people nor do I think that visually impaired researchers are incapable of conducting research. I am a social researcher and disability advocate who is passionate

about documenting the experiences of visually impaired people who have not previously had the opportunities to share their 'voices'.

As will be discussed later, I fulfilled the role of support coach whilst undertaking this ethnography and, despite the positives gained for this role, it positioned me as part of a coaching staff that was predominantly male, white, and non-disabled. Stone and Priestley (1996) argue that the disparity of power within social research is indicative of wider society: “the inherent power relationship between researcher and researched is accentuated by the unequal power relationship which exists between disabled people and non-disabled people in the wider world.” (p. 701). As a sighted, non-disabled researcher, I was conscious of the status and the power that I had and was aware of the historical hostility towards non-disabled researchers (Branfield 1998).

The role of the non-disabled researcher is a well examined issue within disability research (Drake 1997; French and Swain 1997; Branfield 1998; Duckett 1998; Goodley and Moore 2000; Humphrey 2000; Kitchin 2000). Branfield (1998) warns against non-disabled people hijacking the disability movement and claims that “for disabled people to be free from oppression, there needs to be a degree of exclusion of non-disabled people from the movement” (p. 143). However, Branfield's argument demonstrates a binary of disabled and non-disabled that the disability movement (Duckett 1998), and this thesis, is trying to eradicate. Branfield's politicised- almost militant- statement causes more harm than good to the disability movement. By reinforcing this dichotomy (Humphrey 2000), both the quality and quantity of high quality and influential social research will decrease. Researchers, whether disabled or non-disabled, should be embraced as it is vital to the development of the field. Advocacy should be encouraged rather than rejected.

Being an 'outsider' in an ethnographic study, as discussed above, is also an advantage. This study's participants articulate a multitude of differing experiences of being visually impaired and, having not experienced visual impairment, I had no preconceived ideas or fixed notions of what it is to be visually impaired. Rather than relying on a pre-existing subjective experience that attempts to articulate a singular 'true' experience of being visually impaired, I drew upon the participants' multifaceted experiences.

A number of methodological paradigms were considered during this study's creation of a positive and empowering research approach. The 'emancipatory research' paradigm (Oliver 1992, 1997) was formulated by the early disability studies movement and "is about the facilitating of politics of the possible by confronting social oppression at whatever level it occurs" (1992 p. 110). Undertaking disability research, using an emancipatory paradigm, requires the researcher to surrender objectivity and reverse the social relations of research production by allowing the participants to dictate the content of the study. The researcher is in the difficult position of wanting to represent the participants fully but also wanting to produce work that is of value within a professional institution (Goodley and Moore 2000; Barton 2005).

Whilst claiming to be breaking down the traditional research relationships, the emancipatory framework's strict adherence to the social model alienates those who do not conform (Vernon 1997; Davis 2000). In my opinion, due to the complete reversal in researcher-participant relationship, conducting social research using the emancipatory paradigm is not attainable for any researcher, disabled or non-disabled, who has particular issues to investigate and wants to have overarching academic control of the project.

Participatory research (Zarb 1992; French and Swain 1997), the partnership approach (Kitchin 2000), collaboration research (Office for Disability Issues (ODI) 2011) and participatory action research (Goodley and Lawthom 2005;

Buettgen et al 2012), despite using different names, have the same central tenets of conducting research with disabled people that do not necessarily conform with the emancipatory paradigm. All of the approaches cited above encourage differing levels of participant involvement throughout all aspects of the research process. In the early stages of this doctoral study, I selected the participatory research paradigm to conduct my research, however, my approach later changed. By selecting this framework, I felt I was reinforcing my commitment to disability rights and social justice. Yet, as my project developed, the participatory research approach was too restrictive in demanding that the participants must be involved in the design, conduct, and evaluation of the research (Zarb 1992). During the data collection phase, I did ask the players if there were any issues or areas of interests that I had neglected during the interviews, but overall, I structured the questions to suit the aims and objectives of this study thus even these less radical approaches were unsuitable.

Despite not adopting such approaches, I still strive to create empowering research that provides an underrepresented group with an opportunity to voice their experiences and opinions. Power inequalities will always exist in social research, whatever the approach, so it was important to utilise appropriate strategies in an attempt to counter the imbalance of the researcher/participant relationship. If the researcher is reflexively aware of the issues surrounding authority and empowerment, ethnographic writing can be strategically used to challenge inequality (Davis 2000). Central to Davis' (2000) approach, and the approach adopted by this study, is producing 'counter hegemonic writing'. Acknowledging that the disabled participants occupy insider positions (Barnes and Mercer 1997; Kitchin 2000), the written account should privilege the participants' experiences thus "the authority of the writer is dispersed, not by letting others actually write the final text, but by letting their variety of voices have equal authority" (Davis 2000 p. 197).

Whereas the emancipatory paradigm restricts the intellectual freedom of the researcher (Davis 2000), a reflexive ethnographic study can represent the heterogeneous nature of disability experience and “provide voices within the academy for those who have not had them in the past and to explain the prevailing systems of domination and oppression within contemporary (sporting) cultures” (Silk 2005 p. 70). My expertise in representing social reality, through the written word, can be utilised to contribute to social change for the participants. Despite not adopting an overtly emancipatory approach to research, the ethnographic approach, that is outlined later in this chapter, was selected to provide the participants with a platform to share their opinions and experiences and that recognises their position as ‘knowers’.

Selecting the Research Sample

The combination of my abiding academic interest in disability cricket and a developing interest relating to blindness and visually impaired sport, as discussed in the introductory chapter, led to the selection of visually impaired cricket as the research field. Although I was unclear of the methodological approach at this early stage, my epistemological position relating to research with disabled people was well established and underpinned the selection of methodology.

Due to the paucity of research into visually impaired cricket, and more generally, disability sports teams, an understanding of both the structure and the organisation of the sport needed to be established. Blind cricket, like many early disability sports, was created in the 1940s by injured servicemen who still wanted to participate in sport and physical activity post-injury (Blind Cricket England and Wales (BCEW) 2016). Whilst originally founded as a form of rehabilitation, modern visually impaired cricket is now a highly organised and competitive sport that is played by both blind and partially sighted people.

The organisation of visually impaired cricket in the United Kingdom is complex due to the separate formats of the domestic and international game: “the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) oversees blind cricket in the UK but BBS (British Blind Sport) and Blind Cricket England and Wales (BCEW) are the organisations who are responsible for the day to day running of the sport, including making rules and development work.” (BCEW 2016). BBS organise the domestic cup competition, the BCEW organise the domestic league and the ECB organises international cricket. In order to participate, an individual must have an official classification that ranges from B1-B4 in domestic cricket and B1-B3 in international cricket (see Abbreviations and Definitions section for more detail). Each format has a specific quota that must be adhered to at all times in an attempt to provide an equal balance of sight levels on each team. When participating, players must wear coloured wrist bands that correspond with their classification category.

There are currently two formats of visually impaired cricket in the United Kingdom: domestic and international. Both of these formats share many similarities with the mainstream version of the game such as field placings and pitch dimensions. Domestic cricket uses a size three football with ball-bearings within it, which is bowled overarm, and the size of the wicket is larger than sighted cricket. There are also specific rules according the players' classification such as a B1 player can make a catch after the ball has bounced once. A national league has been running since 1996 and now has three additional regional leagues. Domestic cricket currently has “over 400 players, 22 teams across 19 counties, 4 league competitions and 3 cups” (BCEW 2016).

International visually impaired cricket, the focus of this study, is played in a different way to domestic cricket. The ball is of a similar size to the red ball used in sighted cricket, but has a hard white plastic shell with ball-bearings within it. The ball is bowled underarm by the bowler towards a set of stumps, which are the same size used in sighted cricket, and the batsmen typically

play horizontal shots such as the sweep. The World Blind Cricket Council (WBCC) is the international governing body for the game which is played by ten full member countries (WBCC 2016). Within the United Kingdom, the ECB organises the national team. Additionally, the ECB also run four regional talent centres that act as pathways to all four of the ECB disability cricket teams: physical disability, learning disability, deaf, and visually impaired (BACD 2016).

The decision to draw participants from the England visually impaired cricket team was made using purposive sampling which is when “the researcher samples on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions” (Bryman 2008 p. 458). The national squad was selected deliberately as there were individuals with sight classifications ranging from B1 (no light perception) to B3. It was important to have this representational spread as the participants’ level of sight may impact on their experience of being visually impaired and of playing cricket. As well as representing all sight levels, the sample represents a variety of ages (18-54), ethnicities and geographical locations. The playing members of this squad (sixteen people) were interviewed and involved, to varying extents, with participant observation. The sample consists of male participants only which is due to being granted access to the England men’s team and that a female equivalent squad does not exist. Women’s visually impaired cricket is currently a very marginal activity with only one all-female team in the country (The Change Foundation 2014) currently competing in the male dominated domestic leagues.

The participants in this study all play the international version of the game with the majority also playing domestic cricket simultaneously. I had originally planned to interview both international players and domestic players in order to hear from a variety of ‘voices’ at both ends of the performance spectrum, however, due to the generous access granted, the direction of my research quickly changed.

Protecting the Participants: Consent and Anonymity

When conducting social research with disabled people, the British Sociological Association (2004) explains that participants may be vulnerable due to their age, disability, their physical or mental health (BSA 2004) and this must be taken into account both ethically and methodologically.

'Vulnerable participants' is a highly contested phrase (Renzetti and Lee 1993; Pitts and Smith 2007; Markula and Silk 2011) and is problematic as it is socially constructed (Liamputtong 2007) and levels of vulnerability can change due to the social context.

This study's participants are blind and partially sighted, however, this does not automatically equate with vulnerability as this reproduces the outdated ideas of the medical model and of viewing disabled people as a homogenous group (Newagaba and Rule 2015). This is not to say that I was overlooking the potential ethical issues that could arise due to the participants being visually impaired, the ethical principles of "informed consent, confidentiality and issues concerning risk and harm" (Liamputtong 2007 p. 33) should always be of central importance.

Gathering the participants' informed consent is an essential ethical principle (Christians 2005; Potter 2006; Liamputtong 2007; Pitts and Smith 2007). Homan (1991 p.69) defines that the key principle of informed consent "is that the human subjects of research should be allowed to agree or refuse to participate in the light of comprehensive information concerning the nature and purpose of the research". This process allows the participant to fully understand the research project, their role within the project and also the potential risks and benefits that they may encounter (Pitts and Smith 2007). It also provides the researcher with official confirmation, either using a written consent form or verbal consent, that the participant is voluntarily willing to take part.

There are potential issues when obtaining informed consent from visually impaired participants such as the accessibility of the consent form and the recording of a signature. The participants had varied levels of sight and, for some, it affected their ability to read both the consent form and information sheet. In light of this, all printed material that was used during this study referred to guidelines created by the charity Action for Blind People (2015). It recommends that a sans-serif font is used at all times with a minimum point size of 14. I also adhered to their further regarding the typeface, layout and colour contrast of a printed page. The participants had a number of different requirements when it came to accessing printed materials thus it was important to follow the advice provided by such an organisation.

Although blind people regularly sign documents that they cannot read and rely on a sighted person to read the content, I felt that it was important to provide an alternative way of providing consent if the participants could not or decided not to access the printed version. The information sheet and consent form were sent electronically to all participants to be accessed through a computer screen-reading programme. The option of giving verbal consent at the beginning of the recorded individual interview was also offered.

Pseudonyms are used throughout the study to anonymise the participants. Anonymity can be difficult to achieve even if pseudonyms are used (Liamputtong 2007) because the participants may be identified due to the small sample in this case study and recognisable opinions or patterns of speech that may be evident in the presentation of findings. Not all of the participants wanted to be anonymised, especially those who felt that the sharing of their experiences could cause positive changes and raise advocacy (Newagaba and Rule 2015). However, it was important to allow the participants to speak openly whilst protecting them from the potential risks that openly criticising a teammate or wider institutions may cause thus anonymity was used. At the beginning of each interview, the participant was

allowed to choose their own pseudonym to be used in the transcript and in any further publications of data.

Whilst it is important to consider procedural ethics, social researchers must be aware of process ethics when undertaking research in the field. Sparkes and Smith (2014 p.235) distinguish between the two concepts: “while issues relating to procedural ethics are foreground as a pre-study task framed by applications to RECs and IRBs, there is a rapid shift to process ethics on entry to the messy realities of the field.” When in the field, unexpected ethical dilemmas continually emerge and the researcher has to negotiate and adapt their position accordingly.

As discussed above, viewing participants as vulnerable because of their disability or visual impairment can be misleading. Macpherson (2011b) recognises the ‘complex personhood’ of the blind and partially sighted participants in her research with a visually impaired walking group and how their experiences are more complex than a binary differentiation from the sighted. Once in the field, my experience was very similar. Although informed consent was gathered from all participants, the reality was more complex; the participants’ variety of sight-levels posed a potential ethical issue that I had to address. Unless I made my presence clear, the blind players were unaware that they were being observed and this placed me in a potentially voyeuristic position. This was especially pertinent in social situations where cricket was not the focus and discussions were of a personal nature. Whilst the partially sighted players could use their residual vision to gauge my presence, the blind players could not. I countered this ethical issue by making my presence clear, either through talking, when appropriate, or simply coughing. It was important to find a balance between not abusing my position through covert observation and also not disrupting the significant social interactions that were taking place. Unexpected ethical and methodological issues continued to emerge over the course of this study and

these innovative changes in approach are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

My Position in the Field: Initiating and Negotiating Access

As discussed above, due to the complex organisation of visually impaired cricket, I felt that the most influential organisation to support my research project would be the ECB. Although BBS and BCEW organise the domestic game, the ECB oversee the sport as a whole and I needed to gain their permission to work with the national squad. In December 2013, an email that outlined my personal background and my initial doctoral ideas was sent to Ian Martin, head of disability cricket for the ECB. He would be my 'gatekeeper' in accessing visually impaired cricket and without his co-operation, my study would have been unachievable. Frustratingly, a number of weeks passed without a response and I feared the worst. After resending the email and calling his mobile phone, I finally managed to speak to Ian Martin. He was excited to be involved in the project and passed on the email addresses of four other important contacts: Ross Hunter, the head coach of the nation team; Peter Sugg, BCEW International Director; David Townley, BCEW Chairman, and David Gavrilovic, BCEW Vice Chairman. Contact was made with each of these individuals to make them aware of the prospective research project and support of the ECB going forward.

Access to the national team was eventually discussed and agreed by Ross Hunter, the head coach, in March 2014. He was as equally enthused to be involved in the project and it was agreed that I could attend the monthly training weekends and, whilst undertaking research, fulfil the role of support coach. Although I knew I wanted to research visually impaired cricket, I was unsure of what methodological approach to take. During discussions with Ross Hunter, it became clear that he wanted to use my coaching expertise and this provided me with a status in the team, which will be further discussed later. At this point, everything methodologically 'fell into place'.

Rather than just interview international and domestic players, I had been provided with the opportunity to undertake an in-depth, ethnographic study with the national team. The regular nature of the training weekends meant I could spend a substantial amount of time in the field undertaking my research.

Alongside Ross Hunter and Ian Martin, an additional gatekeeper was John Cook, the assistant coach. I received one-to-one bowling coaching with him when I was 15 years old and is someone I have worked with in various roles (coach, cricket administration, net bowling) in the intervening years. I was not aware of his involvement with the visually impaired team until he emailed me prior to the first training weekend and asked me to help support his coaching drills. Without asking, John Cook had taken me 'under his wing' and instantaneously provided me with a social status.

Whilst the ECB were happy to be involved in the project, Ian Martin made it clear that they could not offer any financial support to my study. However, I proposed an agreement that in exchange for travel and hotel expenses over the course of my field-work, I would act as an external researcher for the ECB and present the organisation with relevant findings at the end of the study, such as motivations for playing the sport and any organisational improvements that could be made. They agreed to the proposal, which was confirmed in writing, and a 5,000-word report was submitted to the ECB in June 2016 that discusses the key findings and recommendations resulting from this doctoral study.

There was clearly potential tension between my role as an independent researcher whilst simultaneously conducting research for the ECB and I was aware of not letting the ECB, or any other organisation, dictate the purpose of this thesis. Thus formalising the 'research relationship' between myself and the ECB in a signed agreement (see Appendix One) was an important step in outlining the expectations of both parties and insuring that the data

produced remained under my control. The document recorded that I would “endeavour to investigate areas of relevance to the ECB, contributing to a wider understanding of particular issues within visual impaired cricket”. Through discussions with both Ian Martin and Ross Hunter, the two areas of relevance that emerged were firstly, why do visually impaired people choose to play cricket rather than other visually impaired sports and, secondly, why are players reticent to progress from domestic to international cricket. I feel that these areas of investigation did not compromise my position as an independent researcher, the purpose of the thesis, or the anonymity of the participants.

In fact, the report was a positive opportunity to create, as discussed earlier, 'counter hegemonic writing' (Davis 2000) and share the players' opinions and experiences that may have been otherwise ignored. The key recommendations were based upon observations and issues identified by the players during interviews which, in certain cases, were critical of particular aspects of the organisational setup. Whilst pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis, I took further steps to anonymise the participants in the report by referring to their classification only. The pseudonyms that have been used in the thesis are appropriate to the ethnicity of the participant thus, due to the small nature of the sample, it may be easy for the coaches or management to identify the identity of the interviewee. The act of providing a public 'voice' for the blind and partially sighted participants, integral to the methodological approach and the study's objectives, has been achieved through the writing of this report.

The report was well received with Ian Martin asking permission to circulate the report internally within the ECB and to share with BBS. This demonstrates the impact upon professional practice that this doctoral study has had and will continue to have in the future. It was important to present my sociological findings in a palatable way for a non-academic audience and illustrate why these findings were significant for their organisation. In doing

so, this piece of 'public sociology' (Burawoy 2005) has implications that extend beyond the academy by impacting upon the organisational setup of visually impaired cricket and, more significantly, the social relationships within the squad. As will be argued in Chapter Six, there are a number of engrained social behaviours that have negatively impacted upon the valorisation of blind players in comparison to their partially sighted teammates. These behaviours may have gone unnoticed by the coaching staff thus this report acknowledges the existence of these issues and makes a number of recommendations to bring about positive change.

This Study's Ethnographic Approach

As briefly acknowledged above, the process of selecting the research sample and negotiating access to the field had a positive impact when choosing the methodological approach of this study. The comprehensive level of access that was granted in combination with the financial support of the ECB meant that a long-term ethnographic study was possible. Whilst it made logistical sense, more significant was the ability to build relationships with the participants in the field and produce rich data through an ethnographic study. The issues that were alluded to above, when discussing the content of the report, would not have emerged without the long periods of participant observation in combination with semi-structured interviews used in this study.

To "listen deeply to and/or to observe as closely as possible the beliefs, the values, the material conditions and structural forces" (Forsey 2010 p. 567) that shape the behaviour and interactions of this social group is a central aspect of my epistemological position and is also one the characteristics of ethnography, the methodological approach utilised in this study. Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) note that the definition of 'ethnography' has been well-debated with some academics understanding it as a philosophical paradigm whereas, for others, it designates a fixed method thus it is important to outline my understanding of ethnography. In the context of this

investigation, ethnography is understood as a paradigm for conducting research rather than a singular method.

It is of equal importance to acknowledge that the field of sporting ethnography consists of a “proliferation of styles, texts and influences” (Silk 2005 p.68) and there is no singular way of conducting an ethnography. There are multiple ways to conduct ethnographic research that are innovative and progressive rather than a fixed, exacting framework. The five key ethnographic characteristics outlined by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.3), quoted below, are all present in this study's methodological approach. Whilst these characteristics are somewhat prescriptive, it is a useful framework for understanding the key criteria for ethnographic research:

1. People's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, rather than conditions created by the researcher- such as experimental setups or in highly structured interview situations. In other words, research takes place in the field.
2. Data are gathered from a range of sources, including documentary evidence of various kinds, but participant observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.
3. Data collection is, for the most part, relatively 'unstructured', in two senses. First, it does not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start. Second, the categories that are used for interpreting what people say or do are not built into the data collection process through the use of observation schedules or questionnaires. Instead, they are generated out of the process of data analysis.
4. The focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting or group of people. This is to facilitate in-depth study.
5. The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts. What are produced, for the most part, are verbal

descriptions, explanations, and theories; quantification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role at most.

Although 'relatively informal conversations' is ambiguously worded, I would argue that semi-structured interviews should be included in point two, these characteristics are all evident in this study. The research takes place in the 'field' of visually impaired cricket with the majority of interviews taking place during the monthly training weekends. Due to the nature of the national squad, the group of participants is small which has facilitated an in-depth study. My experience of going into the field with few preconceived ideas and without a fixed research plan was integral to the original subject matter that emerged. This realist ethnographic approach (Atkinson 2012 p. 25) generates "blended substantive and theoretical understandings of culture through systematic analyses of multiple insiders' points of view." My extended interaction with the squad members, both formally and informally, created an in-depth, and previously unacknowledged, insight into the team's social dynamics.

The influence of the researcher on both the social environment, and creating an account of said environment, means that the "large constructional and reflexive character" (Walsh 2004 p. 228) of an ethnography needs to be acknowledged. The constructed nature of these social 'accounts' is inescapable (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994) due to the fact that the researcher is playing the role of observer who is attempting to represent this social world through personal interpretation. This does not discredit ethnography as a viable approach to social research as all research, qualitative or quantitative, involves a level of interpretation on the part of the researcher, but, it required me to be continually reflexive of my 'position'.

My 'realist tale' (Sparkes 2002; Sparkes and Smith 2014) is characterised by "experiential author(ity); the participant's point of view; and interpretive omnipotence" (Sparkes and Smith 2014 p. 155). Whilst my embodied

presence as the researcher is recognised, the voices of the participants, in accordance with my epistemological position, are placed at the centre of this ethnography. The rich description of the England visually impaired cricket team and their lived experiences is an underlying strength of this ethnographic study. The ‘thickness’ of this account provides the reader with an immersive understanding of this social group and it also contributes to the possibility of naturalistic generalisation.

Whilst qualitative work cannot be statistically generalised, like much quantitative research, well crafted description of the field allows the readers themselves to “reflect upon it and make connections (that is, naturalistic generalisations) to their own situations.” (Sparkes and Smith 2014 p. 184). Delmar (2010) talks about the ‘doubleness’ of qualitative research- how it can be simultaneously typical and unique- and this is clearly evident in this study. This is the first sociological study that examines visually impaired cricket, however, the emergent qualitative data make a significant contribution to wider discussions regarding blindness, disability, and sport/physical activity. Both the researcher and the reader is attempting “to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context” (Tedlock 2000 p. 455). As is examined in the discussion chapters of this thesis, the setting may be unique but the discourses, social relationships and identities correspond with those found in other elite sports and in wider society.

Sensorial Research and Ethnography

As discussed in the previous chapter, an integral aspect of this study is recording the multi-sensory experience of playing visually impaired sport. It was necessary to produce data that did not just record the experience but also recognised the role of the social in constructing the players’ sensory experiences. Acknowledging the sociology of sensory interaction “reminds us of the way normative and/or deviant behaviours and values instigated are interpreted through culturally specific sensory expectations and memories”

(Pink 2009 p. 55). Academic examination of the senses has been conceptualised as 'sensuous scholarship' (Stoller 1997; Vannini et al 2014) and refers "to research, theory, and methodology that are *about the senses, through the senses, and for the senses*" (Vannini et al 2014 p. 63). This notion of 'sensuous scholarship' guided the methodological choices and how the methods selected could be re-thought to access the participants' experiences.

Hammer (2013; 2015b) argues for a specific 'ethnography of blindness' that allows the researcher to create a more nuanced understanding of blindness and sightedness and counter the ocularcentrism of much qualitative work. She encourages the researcher to have a greater 'sensory awareness' when undertaking fieldwork that defamiliarises the 'sighted' norm. The author also makes a number of practical points about non-visual communication and the role of body intimacy during the research process. However, due to the wide ranging experiences of being visually impaired, I do not think that a blind ethnography is necessary. It is vital to be 'open' to the sensorial modes and experiences of the participants, yet this should be the case in ethnographic research.

Although not fully adopted, due to this study's sensorial investigations only being an aspect of the thesis, Pink's (2009) concept of a 'sensory ethnography' was useful in conceptualising how the senses could be critically examined through an ethnographic approach. Much like a traditional ethnography, in which the researcher examines the social relationships and institutions within a field, examining the participants' sensorial experiences means that the researcher is a 'sensory apprentice' learning to know as others do and how they produce such knowledge. Sport and physical activity is a potentially fertile field for a sensorial investigation (de Garis 1999; Sands 2002; Sparkes 2009). Due to the physical practice of sport, the methodological approach selected needs to reflect the sensory reality of playing visually impaired cricket. Sands (2002) encourages experimental

methodologies in sport that challenge the domination of traditional approaches and, as will become clear, this study's methodological approach utilises innovative and original methodology.

There were two main challenges in creating a suitable methodology for the examination of sensory experience. Firstly, the challenge in finding a balance in creating data “that invites our audiences to imagine themselves into the place of others, while simultaneously invoking theoretical and practical points of meaning and learning” (Pink 2009 p. 42). Secondly, the challenge of recording the participants’ sensory experiences through traditional methods and representing these results through the written word (de Garis 1999; Spinney 2007; Macpherson 2009b; Pink 2009; Sparkes 2009). The sensorial aspect of this study's ethnographic approach resolved these potential challenges through the use of a composed auditory soundscape for elicitation. This original methodological tool drew upon the concept of sensory elicitation, which came to my attention through Pink (2009), and was used during semi-structured interviews. The process of creating and utilising soundscape elicitation will be documented in-depth later.

There are multiple ways to engage with the senses in sport and physical activity. The role of the senses in social roles and interactions, especially in sport, is important to consider and that “all senses deserve serious attention in ethnographic work if we are to better understand the life world of others and our own locations in relation to these” (Sparkes 2009 p. 26). Researchers should be “methodologically attuned to the interconnectedness of the different senses and elements of the sensory” (Mason and Davies 2009 p. 598). As will become clear throughout this thesis, the multi-sensory, multi-method ethnographic approach of this study demonstrates an attunement to the sensory that has facilitated the creation of previously uninvestigated dimensions of sports and physical activity.

Phase One: Participant Observation

The first method used within this ethnographic approach, due to fulfilling the role of support coach, was participant observation. Observation has traditionally been seen as a central method within ethnography and, at times, has been understood as the same thing (Forsey 2010). This is understandable as both concepts share the same underlying principle: “a special interest in human meaning and interaction as viewed from the perspective of people who are insiders or members of particular situations and settings” (Jorgensen 1989 p. 13). However, observation is a particular mode of accessing such knowledge and participant observation is a particular branch of this approach where the researcher has a participative role within the social world that is being studied.

After preliminary phone-calls with Ross Hunter, the head coach, it was clear that he wanted to use my cricket coaching experience during the training weekends and I was asked to support the other coaching staff whilst I was with the team. However, my position as coach meant that my role within the environment was altered and this is discussed later. The players’ motivations to attend these weekends are primarily based around training and retaining their place in the national squad. There were also plenty of opportunities for social interactions away from practice time.

Fieldwork started in July 2014, however, the impending World Cup (November 2014) meant that the training weekends were wholly focused on this tournament. This meant there was no allocated time for semi-structured interviews, the second method used in this study, until February 2015. Although the dual phased nature of this approach was not originally planned, the participant observation phase was critical in endowing me with a status within the squad that allowed for more in-depth interactions, building of a strong rapport with the participants, and an understanding of the key issues in the environment. Being a participant in social research is an exercise of trust, especially for those from a marginalised group (Pitts and Smith 2007),

such as being visually impaired, and I recognise that “research relationships should be characterised, whenever possible, by trust and integrity” (British Sociological Association 2004). By giving up time voluntarily, when coaching or supporting the players during travelling or at the hotel, I wanted to demonstrate to the players that I was trustworthy and willing to contribute to the group.

Adler and Adler (1994), one of whom had previously been an assistant basketball coach whilst researching, understand the active membership within the group during participant observation as becoming “involved in the setting's central activities, assuming responsibilities that advance the group, but without fully committing themselves to members' values and goals” (p. 380). It is a continual balancing act of observation and participation where the “participant observer must be immersed in these (social worlds) as a participant while retaining an almost ironic awareness in order to render the world which is briefly, perhaps theirs, problematic” (Ashworth 1995 p. 380). Although my membership within the group was principally as a researcher and then as coach, assimilation into the group structure and behaviour was a quick process, as is clear from the following field note extract:

The minibus is ready to go and as we grab our bags, Tim tells me “You've done well this weekend”. I ask him in “In what way have I done well?” and he replies “You know, joined in the banter and you've become one of the team.” And he is right, I do feel part of the team already. Despite only meeting the players yesterday, the intensity of the weekend has served to integrate me very quickly. The more training weekends I attend then the rapport with the players will only grow stronger and make for honest responses in the interview. 20th July 2014

Although the positive tone of the field note entry records the first weekend with the team as a success, through reflection, this excerpt demonstrates the difficulty of retaining the role of social researcher whilst integrating and the possibility of 'over-rapport' (Ashworth 1995). Tim's comment: “You know, joined in the banter and you've become one of the team” shows swift integration, yet, adopting the banter shared within the squad is fraught with

social risk and, if taken too far, will have undermined my position as a researcher. These initial social interactions begin to reveal the masculine culture within the team and the role that banter plays in enforcing this culture, which is fully examined in Chapter Seven.

During the initial meeting with the players, when the banter is clearly directed at me, it served a clear purpose:

At the first weekend in Leamington, I felt like certain players were seeing how I would react to banter and also how far they could push me. This was not done in an aggressive way but as a form of vetting: How would I react? Would I be able to 'take' it? Would I give it back? Is he just like one of us? It is completely understandable to be wary of any new person and especially one that is here to form a research study about them. 8th November 2014

As recognised in the first extract, rapport with the players did increase over the period of participant observation and banter was a central part of this process in proving my worth. Brighton (2015 p.164), who similarly was a non-disabled researcher in a disabled sporting space, termed this reciprocal engagement in masculine banter as 'inti(mate)ship' and was vital in being 'accepted' during his ethnographic study. As a sighted 'outsider', like Brighton's experience, I was also being tested by the dominant members of the group and my conformity was rewarded as it was with these players that I formed the greatest bond.

Despite referring to myself as a sighted 'outsider' in my field notes and in this chapter, the 'insider/outsider' binary is misleading (Wheaton 2002; Woodward 2008). Wheaton's (2002) notion of 'shifting positionality' is significant when recognising that my position was fluid and depended on the social situation. Whilst not being visually impaired, my status as a young male cricket player who shared similar interests and cultural references with many of the players provided me with a unique status within the group. In comparison to Mike, a nutritionist, and Lara, a sports psychologist, who were

part of the support staff, my relationships with the players were distinctly different and humour played an integral role:

My biggest success, so far, is to ingratiate myself and using banter has been a key tool in this process of moving from the periphery of the group to the inner circle. My relationship with the players is very different in comparison with Mike or Lara because they have a clearly authoritative role and focus from the beginning of their own studies. I have had/made the opportunities to interact with the players outside of just the sporting environment through travelling with them and eating with them. 7th November 2014

On a few occasions, the support staff ate their evening meal privately to discuss plans for the upcoming World Cup which meant I had the opportunity to dine with the players away from other members of authority. Alongside these such instances, there were regular opportunities to 'hang out' (Woodward 2008) with the players outside of the training sessions, such as in the hotel bar or a local restaurant.

Yet, the most fruitful aspect of these interactions was the train journey to and from the monthly training weekends. Three members of the squad lived in Brighton, and at least seven others would be travelling from London, and we would all travel together on the long trips to Birmingham or Great Malvern. I would regularly travel with two of the Brighton-based players and, despite the early morning starts and various bus replacement services, these occasions provided time to strengthen these relationships. These 'naturally occurring' oral accounts (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007 p. 99) were vital in understanding more about the players in the squad and the organisation of the set-up prior to semi-structured interviews. Alongside cards games, quoting Alan Partridge, and general conversation about their lives outside of cricket, I used these journeys to ask questions and to gauge their opinions on various visually impaired cricket-specific issues. Although wary of overly relying on the same people for information (Ashworth 1995), the train journey provided a setting where the players felt comfortable in speaking openly and honestly.

Whilst building relationships with the players was a success, it changed my social position within the team set-up. Despite being a level two qualified cricket coach, I was not specifically employed to fulfil a role within the team, such as physiotherapist or strength and conditioning coach, and, at points, felt redundant:

Sometimes I do feel like a spare part who continually needs to be accommodated by Ross and Cookie and not as an integral part of the team. I sometimes forget what the point of my being at the training weekend is and my main concern becomes my own ego and feeling wanted. I am becoming so emerged in the culture that, at certain points, I forego my role as a sociologist just so I can fit in. This is bound to happen in an ethnography but I must stay consciously aware of not losing the focus of my study. It feels like a balancing act where I want to be recognised by my fellow coaches as playing an important role whilst also concentrating on my priorities which are my project and the players. 12th October 2014

My engrossment in the environment meant I became preoccupied with my own status amongst the support staff. Due to my socialising with the players, I adopted the middle ground in which I was not fully part of either social group. The advantage of having a foot in each camp was the ability to socialise with the staff and the players at separate points during the observation phase and converse with them. At the time, I clearly wanted to fit in with the other staff but, on reflection, my marginal status allowed for a stronger bond with the blind and partially sighted players in the squad.

Whilst the potential influence that a participant observer may have on their field of study has been discussed, it is also important to recognise the embodied relationship between researcher and informants within participant observation (Savage 2000). Due to being present in the research environment, the researcher must be reflexively aware of their embodied position within the particular environment (Sandelowski 2002; Carrington 2008) and also their own sensory experiences of it. As well as recording the participants' experiences through semi-structured interviews, an integral aspect of the analysis was my own sensory experiences. My immersion in the field, through participant observation, developed "embodied ways of

knowing through an engagement with all of the senses” (Sparkes and Smith 2014 p. 37). These reflections, that are quoted throughout this thesis, range from my interpretation of the auditory structuring of the cricket space to participating in a training drill. They served as a sensory 'benchmark' in which I could compare my own experiences to those of the players and evaluate the significant differences or similarities in their perception of the game.

My personal sensory experiences of visually impaired cricket were recorded in the initial stages of observation whilst these experiences were still new and unfamiliar. As Stoller (1989) notes during his ethnographic fieldwork in Niger, although this setting assailed his senses at the beginning, his “sensual openness, however, was short-lived” (p. 4) thus it was important to capture my own experiences of the environment in the early phase of participant observation before I became sensorially acclimatised.

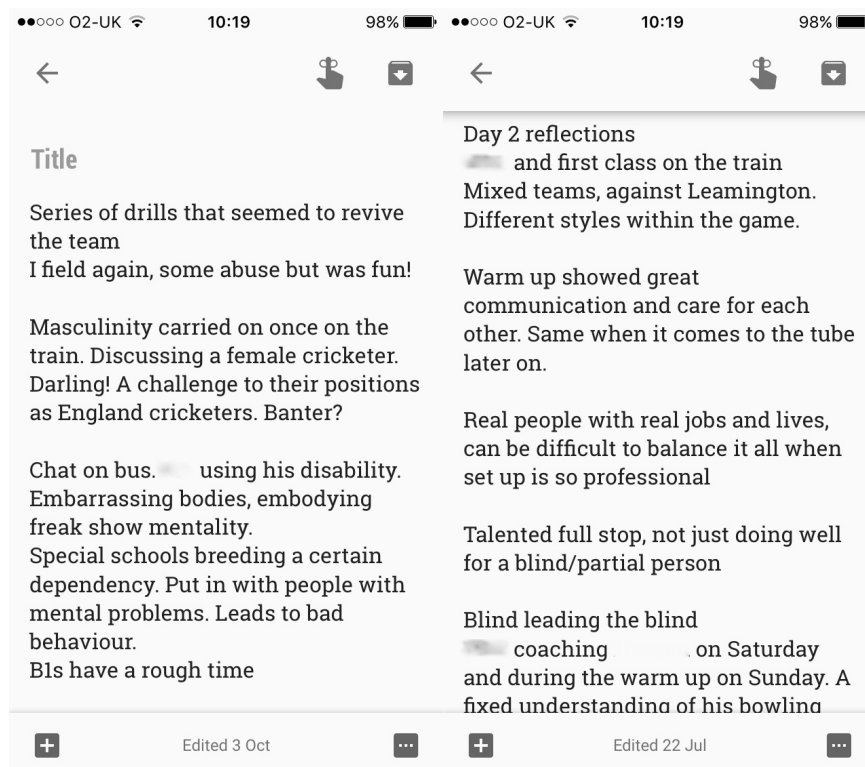
Observation may imply a visual pursuit, however, it needs to be conceptualised as a multi-sensory method (Savage 2000) as “by physically and sensuously taking direct part in the social activity- with various degrees of involvement- we learn from the inside” (Vannini et al 2014 p. 74). However, the notion of 'learning from the inside' is problematic when it comes to recording individual embodied experiences. The field-notes produced during participant observation recorded initial findings, in-depth discussion of emerging areas of interests and my own multi-sensory experiences of the social space but not the participants' lived experiences.

The process of creating field-notes is central to any ethnography. It is a record of what has happened within the field and also a way of identifying emerging topics that can be followed up in a formalised interview with a participant. Adler and Adler (1994) note how the nature of the field notes “inevitably shifts in range and character from the early to later stages of an observational project” (p. 381). In the initial stages of participant observation,

the field-notes produced broadly documented the social setting and the relationships within the team. It was important to write down everything in as much detail as possible at the beginning of the study because the 'alien' social setting soon becomes normalised for the immersed researcher (Walsh 2004). As the project advanced, the field note entries became more focused on emergent topics of interest that later became central themes during semi-structured interviews.

It was important to record the field-notes quickly and accurately so during the training weekend 'Google Keep', a note-taking application on my mobile phone, was used to make bullet points of the key details. Due to the common usage of mobile phones in public, it did not draw attention like a notebook might. At the end of the day, in private, more details to the bullet point notes (see below) were added so that there was a clearly established structure to the particular event discussed. Once the training weekend had finished, the notes were fully written up within the next week so they could be analysed at a later date.

Figure 1- Bullet Point Field Notes (*Author's Collection*)



Phase Two: Semi-Structured Interviews

Creating a collaborative relationship between the researcher and participant, where information and knowledge is transferred (Sands 2002), is central to a traditional ethnography. Semi-structured interviews, a popular method to achieve a sharing of knowledge, were used in the second phase of this study. To fully understand the participants' experiences "the well-conducted interview is a powerful tool for eliciting rich data on people's views, attitudes and the meanings that underpin their lives and behaviours" (Gray 2009 p. 213). This method also allows for flexibility during the interview to investigate themes that emerge from the participants' responses to questions because it does not follow a strict framework of questions (May 2011).

Interviews are used in the understanding that "people have particular and essential knowledge about the social world that is obtainable through verbal messages. It necessitates 'active asking and listening'" (Liamputtong 2007 p. 96). Whilst the participant observation phase of this ethnography allowed for the emergence of areas of interests and issues within the field, semi-structured interviews were vitally important in recording the participants' opinions and interpretations of these areas of interests. As acknowledged earlier, semi-structured interviews prioritise the 'voices' of the blind and partially sighted participants.

Back (2007) views the 'art of listening to the world' as "the most important quality that sociology can offer today" (p. 166). It is the role of the sociologist to pay attention to marginalised voices that are often under-represented or ignored within a culture that "speaks rather than listens" (Back 2007 p.7). The dominant voices of politicians and others in the public eye continually strive to voice their opinions whilst 'sociological listening' requires an attunement to the muted voices in the background of society. Forsey (2010) argues that 'engaged listening' (Forsey 2010) should be central to any ethnographic inquiry and claims that "ethnography is arguably more aural than ocular, the ethnographer more participant listener than observer" (p.

562). Although 'engaged listening' is central to this study's approach, I disagree with the prioritisation of one sensory mode over another; ethnography should be multi-sensory.

The interview phase began in February 2015 as the participant observation phase ended. As agreed with the head coach, I could conduct interviews during the March and April training weekends and he would allocate a timetabled slot of one hour for each player in the weekend schedule. The ODI (Office for Disability Issues) (2011) state that the face to face interview is an appropriate method for research involving visually impaired people. However, Moore (2002) warns that changes may need to be made to the style of interviewing. Non-verbal communication, such as head nodding and eye contact, may be not be understood by the participants, so active listening, that uses verbal cues, was important to make the participant feel comfortable. Having experience of working with visually impaired people prior to the interviews, I knew it was vital to provide continual noises of agreement such as "uh huh", "mmm huh" and "okay" to replace the commonly used head nod to encourage the interviewee. This approach to communication was used throughout the individual interviews.

The location of the interview is also important when interviewing visually impaired people (Moore 2002). A private room at the facilities (Malvern College Sports Centre and Edgbaston Indoor School) was provided. Due to limited amount of time during the training weekends, four interviews were conducted in additional locations with players who were locally positioned to Brighton. These took place at either the player's home or in my flat in Brighton.

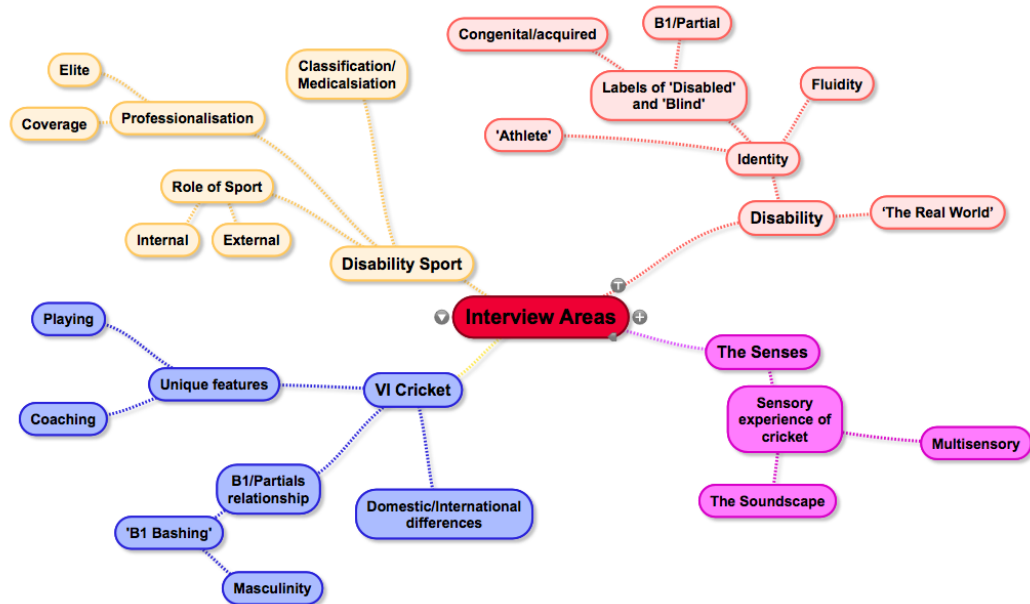
Despite spending a significant amount of time in the field during the first phase of primary research and cultivating meaningful relationship with the players, I had garnered only a snapshot of the participants' narratives through brief moments of conversation or hearing through secondary

sources. Particular relationships were stronger than others, but even in those cases, key pieces of information, such as sight classification and the nature of their impairment, had not been shared.

Once in the interview setting, due to the potentially defensive responses surrounding impairment, I began all interviews with the seemingly innocuous question of “So, when did you start playing VI sport?”. Whilst appearing to be an icebreaker, it quickly established the answer to two important pieces of information. Firstly, whether the impairment of the player is congenital or acquired and, secondly, whether they attended a mainstream educational institution or specialised education. By forming an understanding of the players' narratives, as an interviewer, I was able to ask questions appropriate to their personal experiences. These pieces of information were of particular significance when discussing the players' formative experiences of participating in sport, both sighted and visually impaired, and the perceived role that sport continues to play in their lives.

Figure 2- Interview Areas Mindmap (*Author's Collection*)

Below is a mindmap produced using the 'SimpleMind' application. It was created prior to the formulation of an interview guide for the semi-structured interviews. Four major thematic areas: disability sport, VI cricket, disability, and the senses emerged and within these broad themes, I added to each theme with specific aspects or issues that may be included in an interview guide.



The Multi-Sensory Interview

The semi-structured interviews were an opportunity to discuss the topics that emerged from the observation process, the review of literature and the aims and objectives. They were also used to investigate the multi-sensory experiences of playing visually impaired cricket. Pink (2009) encourages researchers to conceptualise the interview as a multi-sensory event and a process through which “we might learn (in multiple ways) about how research participants represent and categorise their experiences, values, moralities, other people and things (and more) by attending to *their* treatment of the senses” (p. 81). It is a creative arena where experience is communicated rather than where objective truth is created thus it is the participant's understanding of their own sensory experience that the interviewer is trying to grasp.

As acknowledged earlier, the players’ sensorial experiences were analysed during semi-structured interviews through the use of composed soundscapes. Schafer (1994) was the first to use the term soundscape to describe the acoustic environment of a particular space. He discussed how sounds within an environment have referential meaning and it is the role of

the researcher to understand that the sounds “are not merely abstract acoustical events, but must be investigated as acoustic signs, signals and symbols” (p. 169). The soundscape of the visually impaired cricketing space has significant auditory, and further multi-sensory, features that the players recognise and attribute significance to such as the rattle of the ball or the wicket-keeper’s vocal commands.

Historically, elicitation techniques have commonly been used within more traditional ethnographic interviews (Vokes 2007). However, it is a strategy used in more experimental sensory research in which part of the interview is a response to a sensory stimulus, whether that be a series of objects or experiences, presented by the researcher (Pink 2009). The objects used in elicitation are usually in the form of photographs or videos and are especially useful when researching sporting activities that are “difficult to interrupt when they are in progress, yet which are so embodied that it is also problematic to disengage the discussion of them from the practice of them” (Pink 2009 p. 111). The following explanation of the creation and use of auditory soundscapes in this study demonstrates how such a balance was achieved.

Using a recorded soundscape for elicitation within the interview process requires that the audio presented to the participants has been composed by the researcher. It is not merely just recording and playing back the unedited sounds of an environment but the composer uses “sound to tell a story, create meaning or commentary, and help listeners reflect on what they hear” (Hall et al 2008 p. 1030). Much like a landscape painter who actively includes and excludes particular aspects of an environment when painting, the soundscape composer will “detach and amplify the resonance of an environment or a specific place by detaching sounds and magnifying them in such a way that one can reflect on them as sonic images” (Makagon and Neumann 2009 p. 29). This scientific approach to sound (Vokes 2007) allows for a focus upon key aural aspects of the environment to prompt recollection

and reflection of the multi-sensory experiences of playing visually impaired cricket.

The soundscape should not just be understood as a way of analysing auditory experience but, as a representation of the cricketing space to prompt, during semi-structured interviews, a recollection of multi-sensory experience. This was achieved by composing a number of recognisable 'tracks' during a practice match. The players were made aware that recording was taking place and had no objections to it. The audio feed was recorded through four different microphones. A cricket pitch has two sets of stumps at either end of the wicket. Individual microphones were placed at the base of the stumps which allowed the microphones to be close to the action to record the batsmen and bowler but did not interfere with the proceedings. A further two microphones were placed on opposite sides of the boundary to capture the wider ambient sound of the cricket pitch, which is important for recording the experience of the fielders and also the surrounding environment.

The soundscapes were then produced using an audio editing programme called "Mix Pad" in which I combined multiple tracks to create a singular track. During the editing process, the volume on significant sections of the audio was increased and others lowered to create the multiple soundscapes that signified particular specific sensory experiences within the cricket game. Five separate soundscapes were composed that attempted to recreate the experience of batting, bowling and fielding for both the blind and the partially sighted players.

Adopting a similar approach to the 'soundwalk' (Schafer 1994; Adams et al 2008; Hall et al 2008), in which participants negotiate an everyday, familiar space through sound, the multiple tracks available prompted the participants to re-experience the acts of batting, bowling, and fielding whilst in the interview setting. The 're-versioned' (Vokes 2007) soundscapes are a

sporting equivalent of a 'soundwalk' that recreate the dynamic, and instantly recognisable, space of the cricket pitch.

The visually impaired players were invited to consider all of their senses during the practice match but were not required to instantaneously reflect upon them. This encouraged the participants to begin to think about their personal sensory experiences of playing cricket, which was of central importance during the interview process, without impacting upon the quality of the cricket skills during participation. The participants' experiences were then discussed during individual interviews at a later date. A similar approach was utilised by Adams et al (2008), when examining urban experience, who asked the participants to consider their sensory experience during the soundwalk of their local area but not to orally reflect on their experiences until a formalised interview

At the end of each semi-structured interview, the soundscapes were presented to the participants using an iPod that displayed track names related to the topic of the soundscape i.e. 'B1 bowling' or 'Batting soundscape'. Each participant had control over which soundscapes they wanted to listen to and, for those who could not read the track-names, they were read out by the researcher. Over-ear Bluetooth headphones were provided to heighten the immersive experience of interacting with the soundscapes.

I would invite the participants to metaphorically place themselves in the soundscapes. For example, when listening to a batting soundscape, I encouraged Thomas to "imagine that you are there. Think about the senses: what you will be looking out for, what you will be hearing for?" The soundscapes acted as a solid point of reference during the interview and were designed to prompt the players' explanation of their own experiences. Some participants chose to instantaneously reflect upon their experiences by

providing a running commentary and others listened quietly to the soundscapes and then discussed them.

My role was to continually probe their responses and encourage the participants to move beyond mere description of the soundscapes. Certain players needed more encouragement to engage with their own experiences and the questions that I asked reflected this. By specifically questioning their individual approaches through questions such as “What senses do you use when you are batting? What are you doing?”, the players were prompted to think about the strategies that they utilise when playing visually impaired cricket. Although the soundscape is purely auditory, it acted as a multi-sensory trigger. When articulating their bowling, batting or fielding processes, the participants were unprompted in their discussion of multiple sensory modes rather than just focusing on sound.

A benefit of this method for the participants is that they may feel more relaxed if they do not perceive themselves to be the object of the interview and also it “invites a degree of self-expression over and above that which could normally be achieved in an interview context” (Vokes 2007 p. 291). The majority of the interviewees found this process helpful when discussing their experiences. For Mick, a B2 classified player, he realised, through the soundscape, how much he used auditory perception and enthused: “That's quite cool, isn't it!”

The use of soundscape was not successful for all players. Clive, a B2 classified player, is also hearing impaired and, despite attempting to listen, could not fully access the audio format of the soundscape. Whilst wanting to make this aspect of the interview accessible to all players, this was not possible. The alternative would have been to use visual footage of the game which, although a popular form of elicitation in the context of physical activity such, as cycling (Spinney 2007), would not have been accessible for the majority of the players. Two players, Kamran and Rehan, did not find the

process helpful. Kamran could not hear the soundscapes very well but felt able to discuss his sensory experiences without elicitation. For Rehan, he did not respond well to the artificial nature of the soundscape:

“Rehan: No, I don't like that.

Ben: Okay.

Rehan: I don't like that. It is the voices. They frustrate me. It makes you think they are associated with it...I don't like those. They don't really help me at all.

Ben: Would you be able to talk about it without?

Rehan: I can talk about anything. As I said, I would rather use my own mind to construct these things than artificially.”

As the soundscapes were composed using audio captured during a squad training match, the players' voices could be identified which was an issue for Rehan. He could not detach the general experience of batting, bowling or fielding from the voices on the track and, as acknowledged above, he would rather rely on his “own mind to construct these things than artificially.” It is a valid criticism of this method and it was to be expected that not all of the players would find it useful. The soundscape, as an object for elicitation, is merely an approach that attempts to prompt a recollection of sensorial experiences. For some players, it was integral to their description of these experiences and, for others, it did not help in any way. If I were to use auditory elicitation in the future, I would make it clearer that the participants had a choice to listen or not listen to the soundscape during the interview. For Rehan, he was affronted by the idea that he could not recall his experiences without the use of an audio track and would have been less agitated if the soundscape had not been introduced at all. Another solution to this issue and Rehan's complaint would be to record individual soundscapes of each participant bowling and batting to be replayed during the interview. By using more advanced equipment and wireless microphones, a more

realistic soundscape could be created. However, it would be expensive and require someone with greater level of technological expertise.

Pink (2009) explains that when participants do articulate their experiences “they are placing verbal definitions on sensory embodied experiences, and in doing so allocating these experiences to culturally specific sensory categories” (p. 86). As acknowledged earlier, the interview is 'attending to *their* treatment of the senses' rather than an objective experience of playing sport and being visually impaired. Whether the participants utilised the soundscapes or not, I feel that the experiences and opinions of the players were accurately represented. This was the first time that auditory elicitation had been used within a sport and physical activity context to investigate sensorial experience and, in the majority of the interviews, it was essential in eliciting articulate and in-depth responses during this study.

Analysis and Presentation of Results

Thematic Analysis

A range of different research 'documents' including field notes, audio recordings and verbatim transcripts of the semi-structured interviews were created during this study. The analytical process required an interweaving of these materials. This was especially the case when analysing the sensorial experiences of the participants: “analysis in sensory ethnography usually involves a process that moves between different registers of engagement with a variety of research materials” (Pink 2009 p. 128). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the range of documents and I was required to have an active role in the construction of the themes: “themes are not hidden in the data waiting to be discovered by the intrepid researcher, rather the researcher constructs themes” (Clarke and Braun 2013 p. 120). Once again, it is important to reflexively recognise my role in the interpretation during

thematic analysis (Sparkes and Smith 2014) and the impact of my epistemological standpoint in this process. As acknowledged earlier in this chapter, one of the reasons for rejecting an emancipatory approach to disability research was to retain control of the research process. In my opinion, this is crucial during analysis as I can remain as a critical 'outsider' when interpreting the data.

There are six phases when conducting thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006 p.87): “1. Familiarizing yourself with your data, 2. Generating initial codes, 3. Searching for themes, 4. Reviewing themes, 5. Defining and naming themes and 6. Producing the report” and these steps were adopted in this methodological approach. Due to the dual phased research process of this ethnography, the coding and analysing of the various documents was a continual process (Walsh 2004) which began at the end of the participant observation phase. Prior to the semi-structured interviews taking place, the field notes were coded and divided into seven themes:

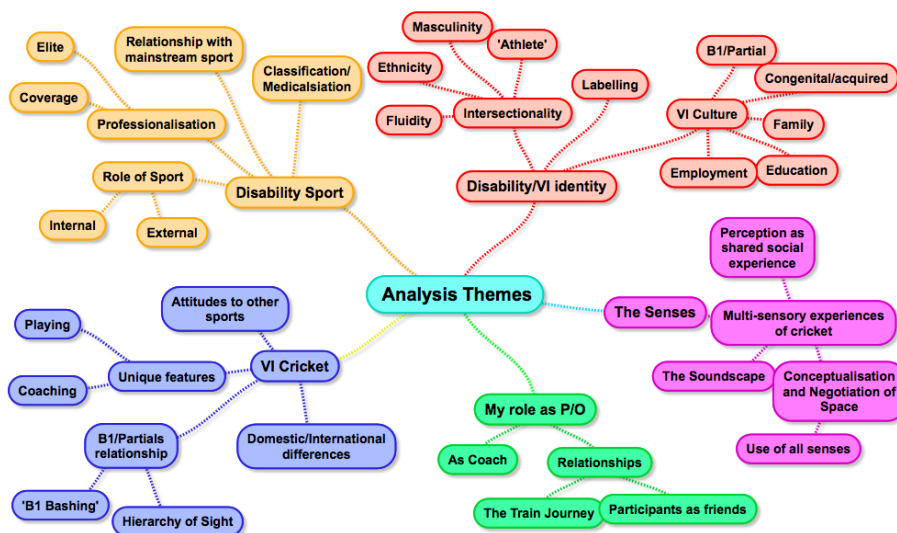
- Classification/Medicalisation
- Disability (identity/relationships)
- Masculinity
- Professionalisation
- The Role of Participant Observer
- The Senses
- VI Cricket and Disability Sport

This thematic coding was initially conducted using highlighter pens on a printed out copy of my field-notes and colour coded into different themes. When the themes were established, I then created seven documents, one for each theme, in which I copied and pasted the relevant extracts. As discussed earlier, these themes were then drawn upon to create an interview guide. However, this simple mode of analysis was not suitable for the analysis of

the interview transcripts together with the field-note extracts, due to the high volume of data. NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package, was used to organise the multitude of materials. The existing themes, identified through the field-note analysis, were reviewed to ascertain whether they were still relevant for a broader analysis of all research 'documents'. Four main themes: Disability Sport, VI Cricket, Disability/VI Identity, and The Senses were kept and the remaining themes were incorporated as sub-themes (see Figure 3 for themes and sub-themes of the thematic analysis). The final phase of thematic analysis is the writing process which was integral in refining the themes and ideas that emerged and in demonstrating, through data extracts, why these themes are significant.

Figure 3- Analysis Themes Mindmap (Author's Collection)

Prior to using NVivo, I again used the 'SimpleMind' application to create a thematic map (Sparkes and Smith 2014) for analysis. Having been immersed in the data for a number of months, whilst transcribing and conducting initial analysis, I was aware of the general themes that had emerged and felt it was a useful process to record using a mindmap as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The themes and sub themes below were then recorded on NVivo and formed the basis of the thematic analysis of the field-notes and interview transcripts.



Presentation of Data

The process of writing up an ethnographic project necessitates 'the art of interpretation' (Denzin 1994 p. 500). It requires the author to transfer the now analysed data into "a body of textual work that communicates these understandings to the reader" (p. 500) through the construction of a narrative. Representation of both the participants and myself, due to the constructed narrative of ethnographic writing (Tedlock 2000; Wheaton 2002) is a potential issue (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994; Denzin 1994). Much like the overarching approach of this study, writing reflexively acknowledges that the writing process is undertaken by an embodied researcher who is present within the ethnographic account.

As discussed earlier, creating 'counter hegemonic writing' (Davis 2000), by portraying the 'voices' of the visually impaired participants accurately, was a key aspect of the writing process. I felt it was important to demonstrate that the players were the authoritative 'knowers' in this space and faithfully present their attitudes and beliefs relating to issues both inside and outside of visually impaired cricket. A balance between investigator as advocate and investigator as critic (Weiss 1994) is required. Whilst there is level of responsibility for the welfare of the participants when representing their 'voices', my role as a social researcher is to also critically examine what is being disclosed and recognise my embodied position within the research. I wanted to retain a 'subjective voice' that befitted my epistemological position but not overplay my individual narrative (Hughson 2008) when recounting the participants' experiences. Throughout the writing process, I felt it was important to find a balance of reflexivity whilst still prioritising the participants' voices.

The greatest challenge when representing the participants' sensorial was providing a written description that did their experiences justice. By combining my own accounts, through field notes, and the players' articulate verbal descriptions, through semi-structured interviews, I feel the discussion

chapters, especially Chapter Four, combine both description and analysis well. It is the combination of evocative description, using the interpretative skills discussed above, alongside an analytical framing within this thesis that places these sensorial interactions within a wider social context. This process “means oscillating between the situation at hand and the wider context in order to make senses of the present situation” (Vannini et al 2014 p. 79) to create an engaging written account.

It was also important to provide the readers with an opportunity to interact with the recorded compositions and create their own interpretations. Pink (2009) acknowledges that the audience needs to be taught to know what to listen for and then how to make “embodied aural knowing meaningful in relation to scholarly understandings” (p. 144). The potential difficulties of presenting audio soundscapes are outweighed by the benefits. The combination of written description and analysis, alongside the soundscapes, allows the reader to become reflexively immersed in the study and form an understanding of the aural experience of visually impaired cricket. Access to the recordings is provided through a link to an external website (<https://soundcloud.com/ben-powis-563472639/sets/visually-impaired-cricket-soundscapes>) where all of the soundscapes can be played. In future academic publications, the website link will feature prominently, and the individual soundscapes could also be embedded directly in the text of online journal articles to make access even easier for the audience.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an in-depth and reflexive account of this study's methodological process. As well as discussing the selection of methodology, my epistemological position has been clearly established which, alongside the conceptual framework of this study (see Chapter Two), is the foundation of this thesis. My commitment to conducting social research that values and accurately represents the 'voices' of the blind and partially sighted

participants, as recorded in the objectives, will continue to be evident in the following four discussion chapters of this thesis.

Chapter Four- “They are just thinking 'Wow! How can they do that?’”: The Sensuous Experiences of Visually Impaired Cricket

Introduction

As established in the introductory chapter, sensory perception is an integral aspect of this study's embodied approach to disability sport. The purpose of this chapter, and a fundamental aim of this thesis, is to investigate how the participants' varied multi-sensory experiences reveal significant insights that interrogate and subvert the dominant conceptualisations of embodied sporting practice. It is also important to recognise the socialised aspect of sensory perception within visually impaired cricket because, as acknowledged by Pow (2000), “the spatial experiences of the visually impaired are not separate from social processes” (p. 176). The reflexive and performative social dimension of the senses is an intrinsic aspect of the players' articulation of their experiences and the value they attach to specific sensory modes.

Sensorial experiences of sport and physical activity is a growing academic field, however, this is the first study to examine the experiences of visually impaired people, or any other form of disability, within the context of elite sport. The unique adaptations of visually impaired cricket, to accommodate blind and partially sighted participants, have created an original, previously unexamined 'mode' of playing team sport. To fully examine the significance of the participants' experiences, this chapter poses two questions. Firstly, how do the blind and partially sighted players conceptualise and negotiate this sporting space? Secondly, how do these embodied experiences resist the dominant conceptions of blindness, disability, and sport? To address these questions, the players' multi-sensory accounts and their varied approaches and strategies for perception of the space are analysed.

The first section of this chapter briefly outlines the existing literature relating to sensorial experiences of sport and physical activity and the current gaps in knowledge within this emerging field. The next section analyses how the blind and partially sighted cricket players conceptualise and negotiate space, both in the context of sport and in everyday life which provides an understanding of visually impaired perception that the remainder of the chapter builds upon. The auditory structuring of the sporting space is then examined and is split into two sub-sections: perception as an intercorporeal, social experience and the role of non-linguistic sound. As is discussed, auditory perception is a key sensory mode when participating in visually impaired cricket, however, other modalities are also important. The participants' use of haptic, kinaesthetic, and visual perception is evaluated in the penultimate section of this chapter.

Sensorial Experiences of Sport and Physical Activity

Although research about the sporting body has increased: “relatively few studies can be found that are actually grounded in the carnal, more ‘fleshy’ realities of that moving, sweating, sensuous sporting body, which also holds meanings, purposes and interest” (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007 p. 127). As established in the introductory chapter, the senses are the foundation of perception thus integral to sporting participation.

A number of accounts acknowledge the significance of sensorial perception and focus specifically on the role of a particular sensory mode during sporting experience. Allen-Collinson and Owton (2012) study how athletes with asthma utilise auditory perception and, in a later paper (2014), the authors investigate the role of heat in running and boxing. Straughan (2012) examines the haptic experience of scuba diving and Lewis (2000) identifies the role of touch in climbing and how knowledge is grasped as “the climbing body orientates itself through tactile navigation” (p. 77). He also acknowledges the importance of kinaesthesia as does Potter (2008), in the context of dance, who explains that it is “a crucial sense that frames the

shaping of all other sensory modes” (p. 453) and intercorporeally connects the dancers with each other.

Whilst the research discussed above examines a singular sensory mode, others document the multi-sensory experience of particular physical activities: such as running (Hockey 2006; Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2013; Allen-Collinson and Owton 2014); the 'sensuous intoxication' of boxing (Wacqaunt 2006); the sensory experience of place for cyclists (Spinney 2007); pro wrestling (de Garis 1999); a series of vignettes on attending the gym and selecting a cricket bat (Sparkes 2009), and sensory ethnographies of athletics, American football and basketball (Sands 2002). Research into sensorial sporting experience is an ever expanding field that reveals original insights into how individuals partake in sport and also how these experiences are socialised.

A recognition of the non-traditional senses is necessary for research into sporting performance. Paterson (2007 p.4) highlights the 'haptic process' within the body that includes: “the modalities of proprioception (the body’s position felt as muscular tension), kinaesthesia (the sense of the movement of body and limbs) and the vestibular sense (a sense of balance derived from information in the inner ear)”. The combination of these senses are the foundation of all physical performance and should be acknowledged if we are to have a coherent understanding of what constitutes a sensory sporting experience. It is especially important within visually impaired cricket as physical feedback, such as feeling how 'well' the ball hits the bat, takes on greater significance in the absence of visual perception.

Sensorial investigations of perception should reveal the lived experience of sport whilst still accounting for the role of society via a “subcultural stock of learnt practical techniques and meanings” (Hockey 2006 p. 198). Physical performance is learnt through practice and reinforcement (Howe 2011b) and the execution of any sporting skill “requires that individuals develop a

spectrum of sensory intelligence and use that intelligence to execute skilful, practical sporting action” (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007 p. 126). Gathering 'sensory intelligence' requires repetitive practice, much like any other physical skill, and of particular interest is how the visually impaired participants use alternative methods to learn such skills. Unlike previous work on how visually impaired individuals make sense of 'fixed' environments, this study is the first to research their experiences within such a dynamic and fluid space with only a few fixed landmarks with which to orientate themselves. In comparison to goalball and football, visually impaired cricket is played in a relatively unstructured space that requires the players to actively utilise their 'sensory intelligence' in a creative and fascinating way.

There is a dearth of sensorial investigation in disability sport, however. Only Howe (2011b) acknowledges the 'sensuous' aspect of these various forms of physical activity. He engages with the theories of Foucault, Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty to create an understanding that the disciplined and habitual body of a disabled sportsperson is also lived and sensuous. Despite not discussing the sensory aspect in any great detail, Howe recognises the potential of a sensuous investigation for disability sport:

What is clear is that the manner in which our senses interpret how our bodies react with the social and physical environment might go some way to allowing us to understand the relationship between movement and identity that will possibly enable us to get to grips with culturally nuanced interpretations of difference (2011b p. 289).

As previously acknowledged, there is a lack of research examining visually impaired sport. Whilst the recreational sensorial experiences of visual impaired walkers (Macpherson 2009a, 2009b, 2011) and tandem cyclists (Hammer 2015a) have been examined, there is no pre-existing research into the sensorial experiences of blind and partially sighted elite athletes (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007). Psychologists Eddy and Mellalieu (2003 p. 359) investigate how visually impaired athletes employ their senses during mental imagery and reveal that “participants reported utilizing a broad range of

sensory modalities in the imagery experiences, including visual, spatial, tactile, kinaesthetic, and auditory forms”. Although the authors do demonstrate the role of the senses in mental imagery and the process of understanding sporting space, they do not document the athletes’ sensorial experiences. As Vannini et al (2014) state “to move and seek equilibrium is a deeply social activity” (p. 26) in the context of sport through rhythm and timing but also intercorporeally with other team members or opposition. This is a central component of visually impaired sport and physical activity (Macpherson 2009a, 2011; Hammer 2015a).

Although the existing literature is an important starting point, the blind and partially sighted players' experiences of cricket are distinctly different to their sighted contemporaries and challenge previous understandings of embodied sporting participation. The unique 'sense-making' strategies devised by the visually impaired participants reveal original ways of participating in team sport and makes a significant contribution to the emerging academic field and broader conceptualisations of the sporting body.

“You can say a cricket pitch is twenty-two yards but what is twenty-two yards?”: Conceptualisation and Negotiation of the Sporting Space

The existence of the 'sighted world' that requires vision for spatial orientation (Saerberg 2010), communication (Kleege 1998) and a variety of other social interactions is articulated by a number of blind authors. Living in a 'sighted world' induces feelings of isolation, difference and shame (French 1999) and according to Michalko (1999 p.4) further reinforces the idea of two distinct groups by separating “blindness and sightedness as 'cultures' possessing different customs, norms, and belief systems”. The idea of difference here is key. There are cultural and social differences of being visually impaired and being sighted, but I feel that it is essential to recognise that “blindness is a way of being in the world rather than a state of deficit or lack” (Kleege 2011 p. 1261). This is not to say that a separate 'blind world' and a 'sighted world'

exist, as this only serves to reinforce the sighted/blind binary, but, certainly, there are different ways of being-in-the-world.

In the context of investigating how blind and partially sighted individuals play cricket, it is of central importance to understand, firstly, how the participants conceptualise sporting space and, secondly, how they negotiate it. Whilst this may be something taken for granted by a sighted person, if one is unable to utilise sight in forming an impression of the dimensions of an environment and objects that are within it, other sensory modes must be employed. The players' approaches to negotiating the space are varied due to a number of factors including their level of sight, type of impairment and whether the visual impairment was acquired or congenital. For example, Jatin, a B1, despite losing his sight over thirty years ago, feels that his visual memories of the cricket pitch layout are still beneficial:

I'm sure it helps, when you've seen how the game is played compared to someone who's born blind and never seen cricket before. Until you walk around the pitch, you wouldn't know. You can say a cricket pitch is twenty-two yards but what is twenty-two yards?

If the distance of twenty-two yards cannot be conceptualised through sight, then how else can it be understood? Can it be heard? Can it be smelled? Can it be touched? The ocularcentric norm of using sight during sport, especially in those events where hand-eye coordination is required, can lead to other sensory modes being neglected or completely ignored. Another enlightening question Jatin poses is how a congenitally blind person conceptualises the space of the game of cricket. Jatin relies on his visual memory to provide context to the various multi-sensory stimuli within the space but this is not possible for the players who are blind from birth. The role of sensory experience contributes to "orientation in space, an awareness of spatial relationships and an appreciation of the specific qualities of different places, both currently experienced and removed in time" (Rodaway 1994 p. 37). As demonstrated by Jatin, his visual experience of cricket, whilst 'removed in time' still plays an integral role in his sporting participation. This

chapter analyses how the players create sense-making strategies to play an intense and fast moving game despite not having seen a ball being bowled or a six being hit.

There are challenges to having a visual impairment and barriers to overcome, however, it is important to recognise that being visually impaired requires an alternative way of interacting in the world. As outlined in the theoretical approach, the world is experienced through the embodied self and perception is an intentional act. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's (1977) work on space and place discusses the importance of both experience and knowledge in understanding the environment. Knowledge is learnt through the "shifting streaming of experience" (p.10) enacted through the 'lived body' that commands and orders space through intention. The senses are key to perceiving space and endowing it with value which is integral to the players' creation of different strategies so that they may negotiate the sporting space.

Both orientation and awareness in space for a visually impaired person may be approached in a significantly different way than a sighted person. Both Davis (1995) and Shillmeier (2010) challenge the dominant understandings of blindness as a disability by viewing blindness as a different sensory practice or modality. These authors do not reduce society to separate blind and sighted worlds but acknowledge the richness of blind experience instead. Blindness is "infinitely more than mere compensation but a unique form of perception, a precious and special mode of being" (Sacks 2003 p. 56) and disrupts the taken-for-granted modes of knowing and demonstrates alternative ways of perceiving the world (Hill 1985; Allen 2004; Macpherson 2011; Hammer 2015a). As established through the aims of this thesis and the theoretical approach, the 'richness' of blind and partially sighted experiences demonstrate an embodied, alternative way of 'being' in sport. Whilst the players' physical impairments impede certain modes of perception, it also leads to the development of innovative approaches to participation.

Everyday sensory cultivation is conceptualised as 'somatic work' (Waskul and Vannini 2008; Waskul et al 2009; Vannini et al 2014) where "sense and sense-making are necessarily conjoined, codetermined, and mutually emergent in active and reflexive practices" (2014 p. 15). Perception is an intentional meaning making process through a 'lived body' and our 'sense-making' is continually mediated by society. 'Somatic work' draws upon Merleau-Ponty's (1945) concept of intentionality where consciousness is always an intentional act. The notion of intentionality is particularly pertinent when examining why different people perceive and experience the 'same' environment in radically different ways (Allen-Collinson 2009). During the semi-structured interviews, the players' experiences, both in sport and everyday life, illustrate the process of 'somatic work'. Whilst shopping in a supermarket or locating a toilet in a pub or restaurant may be taken for granted by a sighted person, for Mick, a participant in this study, it requires a level of rehearsal:

Walking round the supermarket, I will memorise all the aisles so basically I will know where everything is pretty much. I would take a pretty long trip in there to walk around and look at everything but then what I'll do is just go by colour. I won't be able to read anything and you can't pick everything up so again, I've just got it in my head... logos, so you name a logo and I'll tell you what it is pretty much. So I'll know the logos and I will know the packaging, I'll know what colours are what and how thick they are and how they move around or whatever. That is the way I developed to do my shopping myself quickly so I can go in for twenty minutes and do my shopping. It is just stuff like that, you go into a pub or a restaurant or whatever, I'll be shown where the toilet is once and that is it. I won't ever have to go in there again and ask, I will know where it is and it doesn't matter if I haven't been in there for years, I will know where the toilet is. There are little things in my head that I sort of cross off. I want to know where these things are and what these things are and what this is... it is hard work but it is about being clever about it.

To be able to quickly complete his food shop, Mick, a B2, has taken the time to learn the shop layout and also the broad details about the items. Due to his level of sight, he adopts a 'sense-making' strategy to be efficient with his time.

His process appropriately utilises his sensory perception and previous experiences in these environments to negotiate the supermarket aisles. As Allen-Collinson (2009) acknowledges above, the same environment can be experienced in radically different way and Mick's created strategy will differ from a fully sighted person and also a totally blind person.

The player's form of impairment significantly impacts how they negotiate everyday life. Despite both being classified as B2, for the purposes of cricket, Mick's sight is completely different to his teammate Clive and this alters how they interact in the world. Clive explains how his tunnel vision can be a disadvantage in particular situations, such as travelling on busy public transport:

In everyday life, I have to read stuff that is going on around me because working up in London in the rush hour is really busy and tunnel vision is the worst sight you can have because people come from all angles. I am always having to adapt and learn new techniques to get around without walking into people.

Whereas Clive's lack of peripheral vision means that a rush hour train can be difficult to negotiate, he is more efficient than Mick in a supermarket as he can focus on small details, such as food packaging, more easily. Rohan, a B3, encapsulates the different visual abilities of the players within the team in his description of guiding a teammate with tunnel vision through a train station concourse:

I lead him through the train station because he has such a small tunnel that he can't see people walking around, he can't see if there is a bar in front of him and he might trip over it. He grabs my shoulder and we get to, like, the boards. I can't read them but he can read the boards because he has got that tunnel vision, so it is like a massive difference and I think sighted people, I think it is very easy to try and lump people together but, in reality, we are all under this generic umbrella and you have your own different... each case is very different.

As Rohan says "each case is very different" and, although the above quotes focus on everyday interactions, the multifaceted nature of the players'

cricketing experiences must be acknowledged. This thesis is not establishing the definitive 'experience' of playing visually impaired cricket, as a typical blind experience does not exist (Sacks 2003), but draws upon the participants' 'voices' to investigate the various approaches adopted when playing visually impaired cricket.

In the context of the supermarket or the train station concourse, the interviewees describe their 'sense-making' strategies in these social spaces. Their articulation of these strategies clearly demonstrate a high level of agency. Saerberg (2010) conceptualises a 'blind style of perception' when comparing the different approaches of sighted and totally blind pedestrians negotiating a route. Rather than a reliance upon road signs, street names or house numbers, the space is negotiated using an alternative sensually based method of orientation. A similar approach to perception is evident in Allen's (2004) study of visually impaired children. Allen notes how the children have a "higher level of spatial agency than their sighted peers, within the built environment of their home" (p. 730) by interacting with their environment without reliance on visual stimuli. Saerberg (2010) and Allen (2004) analyse the spaces of everyday life however there is a complete dearth of research examining the negotiation of visually impaired sporting spaces

A key finding of the research in this field (Allen 2004; Anvik 2009; Saerberg 2010), reinforced by Mick's example, is the creation of an embodied cognitive map of an environment that is built up through repetition and experience. Whether this is the layout of a house or a town centre, blind and partially sighted individuals actively negotiate the space and demonstrate a high level of agency. However, when obstacles, especially mobile obstacles, are introduced into the learnt environment, these disruptions are problematic. The presence of movement, and especially unexpected movement, increases the difficulty of negotiating the environment. Visually impaired cricket is a fast-paced and intense game that involves multiple moving

objects (a ball, teammates, opposition players) and requires the players to constantly comprehend what is happening in this fluid environment.

Visually impaired cricket is a unique challenge to the blind and partially sighted participants. It is the combination of a fast-paced, fluid game with the lack of physical landmarks that makes the players' experiences both original and fascinating. Apart from the set of three stumps at either end of pitch, the only other landmark is the boundary rope surrounding the outfield. Unless a player is in the middle of the pitch or on the boundary's edge, there is no 'physical' way of discerning one's position in the vast outfield. Their sensory impairment makes the task of creating a stable cognitive map of the cricket space even more complex. Unlike cricket, other popular visually impaired sports such as five-a-side football and goalball are much more spatially confined. Terry, a B3, discusses the sporting space of goalball, in comparison with cricket, and explains the 'reassuring' structure of a goalball court:

I can understand why some people play it because there is a lot of certainties in that game. There is a little raised line where you have to stand and everyone is blindfolded so everyone is the same. There is not a huge amount of space around you which a lot of VI and blind people find very intimidating especially when you are not confident with the use of their sight if they don't fully realise how much sight they have or unable to utilise it or whatever. I can imagine that that kind of thing, of the line and knowing where to stand, is quite comforting, but it does reinforce a lot of stereotypes with a blind person stood there not doing a lot with maybe the odd wobble and chucking to the floor and getting hit.

Terry notes that the certainties of goalball, such as the raised line that signifies where the athlete is to stand and the small but structured pitch, are comforting for the blind and partially sighted participants. He also acknowledges that a number of visually impaired people are intimidated by large areas of featureless and open space. Thus, participating in cricket is a daunting experience. However, there is one central characteristic of visually impaired cricket that allows all players, especially B1 classified players, to orientate within the sporting space: the existence of set fielding positions.

I ask Oliver, a B1, about the importance of hearing and touch when playing cricket and he recognises the significance of being able to locate the fielding positions on the pitch:

I say my hearing is probably the most important but also your ability to orientate yourself in a space by what you know is there. I know the fielding positions and that is really important because if you don't know them, that can be tricky because you are not going to know where the ball is. If someone says it is coming to point and you don't know where point is then it is not really going to help you. You need to be able to have that awareness in your head of where people are, what people are doing, that is really important as a B1 playing sport

In this space of uncertainty, fielding positions provide a constant landmark. When adopting a position such as 'point' or 'cover', a fielder is consequently made aware of their geographical spot on the pitch, their position in relation to the batsman on strike and where their closest teammates should be stood. Rather than being a mass of bodies in a vast space, assigned positions structure the space and aid the creation of a cognitive map through, as Oliver describes, the “awareness in your head of where people are”.

Fielding positions play an important role when batting. Knowing where the opposition fielders are positioned in the field and ‘hitting the gaps’ is central to run scoring in all forms of cricket. Yet, for the blind players who cannot visually access the location of the fielders, other strategies are required. Whilst listening to the B1 batting soundscape composition, the blind players describe their own approaches to batting and where they decide to play their shots. Every B1, and some B2, batsmen have a ‘runner’, a teammate who runs between the wicket for them, and these players also, if required, explain where the opposition fielders are positioned. Kamran, a B1, outlines his batting process and how he comprehends the field set for him:

Kamran: One thing I will do is maybe ask for the field once and not again. But, the one thing I will keep checking, perhaps, is where the B1s are because I know if I hit it to them, I can rotate the strike most of the time. But if someone is bowling at outside off-stump and there is no B1s on the off, I'm literally going to have to play on the off regardless. How I understand space on the field is quite good

because I watch, listen, play cricket so much I know where fielders are, I know what space they have.

Ben: So you have built up a map of it?

Kamran: Yeah. So if someone says to me “You've got a fine leg and a square leg”, I know almost the distance between them but what I can't always do is pick the gap.

As well as knowing where the fielders are positioned, Kamran also wants to know where the B1 fielder is located so he can aim to play his shots in that direction and rotate the strike. His detailed knowledge of the traditional fielding positions supports the creation of a cognitive map to be referred to when batting. Whilst Kamran wants to know where the fielders are located, Xander's approach differs slightly as he focuses on the vacant areas of the field:

Ben: I was quite interested in your understanding of space...so how you work out where you are and where you are going to be hitting it.

Xander: Well... I know the field positions very well having played for a long time so I know where I look to hit the ball. My first thought is to figure out have they left any gaps? Where I am strong? Then if they have covered the areas where I am strong then to try and figure out where there is a gap that I can try and hit so I can push the fielder into those areas.

Again, whilst the act of hitting into gaps and forcing changes in the field will be very familiar to any cricket player, whatever form of the game they play, it is the mode of perception that is different. As explained earlier, the approaches to forming an understanding of the field, as recounted above, are particular to each player. Although they are both B1 classified players, Kamran and Xander use different ways of conceptualising the space. This is also the case when analysing the experiences of those players who have a higher sight classification, such as Thomas, a B3, who utilises his cognitive map in an alternative way:

Beforehand, you get a sense of where the field is. For someone like me, who is a partial, I can see the majority of the fielders so before I face that ball I will have that field mapped in my head.

For Thomas, his understanding of how the field is organised constantly being altered due to his visual perception. He still has the field mapped in his head, yet, is able to independently observe any tactical changes or newly emerged gaps and adjust his own approach accordingly. Cricket is a dynamic game and, although he cannot see all of the fielders, his level of sight supports his perception of movement on the pitch. Yet, many of his blind and partially sighted teammates are unable to utilise such visual perception and, despite conceptualising the space through a stable cognitive map of the field, struggle with the fast-moving environment.

The remainder of this chapter investigates how the participants' engagement with 'somatic work' (Waskul and Vannini 2008; Waskul et al 2009; Vannini et al 2014), through the creation of varied performative strategies, reveals the active, reflexive nature of playing visually impaired cricket and how, and why, the players attach social significance to particular sensory acts.

“I'm definitely listening out for what that batsman is doing. Is he shuffling? Is he moving away from me? Is he trying to advance?”: The Auditory Structure of Visually Impaired Cricket

This section begins with a field-note excerpt from a training weekend in Colwall, a village nestled in the Malvern hills. Whilst the majority of the squad had travelled to the location on the Friday evening, I remained in Brighton to attend my cricket club's end of season dinner. The next morning, feeling worse for wear, I made the arduous four and a half hour train journey and arrived around midday. Due to my late arrival, training had already begun and a practice match was underway. As I near the end of my walk from the train station, I started to hear brief snapshots of the game being played. I

took this opportunity to fully focus on the emerging auditory structure and identify the key aspects of the soundscape. Whilst I was aware of recording my *multi-sensory* observations of visually impaired cricket, it was visual observations that dominated my participant observation field notes. However, as the ground was yet to come into view, I adopted the position of 'sensory apprentice' (Pink 2009) and attempted to understand the game through auditory perception alone. Below is my description of a singular ball being delivered during the training match:

The sun breaks through the clouds and warms the back of my neck. Summer is clinging on for dear life despite the impending arrival of autumn: the crunching of the leaves that lay strewn on the path below my feet, the distant waft of wood smoke from a rural pub. The unseasonal warmth is a perfect accompaniment to the day of cricket to come and is slowly inducing a sensorial revival from my state of hungover numbness.

As I turn the corner, I hear the rattle of the ball and the distant shouts of "bowlers end". Visually impaired cricket has a particular acoustic rhythm that becomes apparent to me without the visual stimulus of watching the game. The layers of sounds slowly build: distant bird song is punctuated by the shouts of support for the bowler from the players dotted around the outfield, the wicket-keeper calls out the bowler's name whilst he aligns himself with the sets of stumps at the other end of the pitch, the tentative shout of "Ready?" from the bowler to the batsman, the confirmation that he is poised for the delivery and then complete quiet. The hum of noise building is replaced by an expectant silence, one that reflects the readiness of all the players on the field of play. The singular shout of "Play!" from the bowler is followed the distinctive sound of the ball-bearings clattering around within the plastic shell of the ball and then the soundscape explodes into a hive of activity. The resonating thwack of ball on wooden bat triggers a mass of noise: the shouts of the wicket-keeper directing the fielders to its location, the call between the batsmen of "Yes, one run!", the thud of several pairs of feet running across the lush turf pursuing the rattling trail of the ball, the clear exclamation of "Mine!" and the instantaneous fizz of the ball being thrown back to the wicket-keeper. The vociferous applause and exclamations of support mark the end of the cycle and it all begins again. 27th September 2014

These acoustic events may seem like an impenetrable mess to the untrained ear. However, for many blind and partially sighted cricket players, it is their main way of negotiating the sporting space. Auditory perception provides a

dynamic element of space that allows us to “decipher an order, a sense of the world, and of people, places and spatial relationships from this complex mass of sensuous information” (Rodaway 1994 p. 92). The participants' multi-modal experiences of playing cricket contain multiple sensory ‘landmarks’ imparted with meaning during the match such as the speed and direction of the ball, the type of shot being played or their own location in the outfield. The difference between a visual and auditory understanding of the world is that “we are always at the edge of visual space looking into it with the eye. But we are always at the centre of the auditory space listening out with the ear” (Schafer 1985 p. 94). We are immersed in a world of sound; it is omnidirectional and central to how we understand space, especially for blind and partially sighted people.

As discussed in the methodological chapter, eliciting the players' experiences of sound was a challenge due to the fast paced, fleeting nature of physical activity. These multi-sensory experiences are so thoroughly embodied that it is difficult for the participants to be reflexive and articulate their own perceptual process. To counter this, auditory soundscapes were used to prompt recollection of playing visually impaired cricket and examine the importance of seemingly mundane and routine sounds. Although this method was deemed unhelpful by a small number of players, the soundscapes encouraged the majority of participants to re-evaluate the way they play the game and this is evident in their rich and evocative descriptions throughout this chapter.

An understanding of sound can be formed through an 'acoustemology' “an exploration of sonic sensibilities, specifically of ways in which sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth” (Feld 1996 p. 97). Feld (1996) documents how sound is central to the Kaluli peoples' construction of 'place' in the Papua New Guianan rainforests. Whilst the rolling hills of Great Malvern may seem like a different world to the jungles of Papua New Guiana, the people within these spaces go through a

comparable auditory process. By identifying and attaching particular meanings to aural events, much like the indigenous Kaluli people, the visually impaired athletes actively conceptualise the space around them.

Understanding the role of auditory senses requires 'agile listening' as it is not straightforward to attend to a mass of noise: "we have to work toward what might be called agile listening and this involves attuning our ears to listen again to the multiple layers of meaning potentially embedded in the same sound" (Back and Bull p. 3). Agile listening is second nature for the experienced participants, however, this next section examines *how* the players develop their knowledge of the cricket space and their auditory strategies. This section is presented in two parts: firstly, the intercorporeal, social experience of auditory perception, and the role of the wicket-keeper within this process, and, secondly, the role of non-linguistic sounds within visually impaired cricket and the cultivation of 'auditory knowledge'.

Perception as an Intercorporeal Social Experience

The blind and partially sighted cricket players conceptualise the sporting space in a variety of ways. A common technique is the creation of a cognitive map that structures this space due to the lack of physical landmarks. Yet, these cognitive maps need animating which is possible through the auditory perception. For the blind players, it is very well to know your location in the outfield, but without an auditory stimulus, it is difficult to instantaneously grasp where your teammates are and what is happening in the match. Jatin explains that seemingly incidental acts, such as general conversation between fielders, helps to improve his conceptualisation of the space:

Ben: So you've got this, say you're at cover, using your old memories of what a cricket pitch would look like, you can work out where you are on that big pitch. How do you know where everybody else is? So obviously people change around and move positions, do you listen to them talking?

Jatin: Yeah I listen when they are talking. The main one I concentrate on is who's on my left and who's on my right because if I miss the ball or screw up then I know that if it's on my left then I've got to know who's on my left. I've got to listen to his call. I keep running to chase the ball but he might shout 'Leave it, it's mine' and I get out of the way.

Ben: So there is constant chatter and things. And just hearing them talking, does that allow you build up an even deeper map...

Jatin: Yeah, a deeper mental picture of where everything is. Yeah.

As established in this study's theoretical approach, embodiment, rather than being an individual project, is a shared process shaped by interactions with other bodies and objects in space. To fully grasp the embodied experience of playing visually impaired cricket, the intercorporeal interactions between various bodies must be recognised. By paying attention to the position of the fielders to his left and right, Jatin judges the space he has to cover on the field. If one of his teammates is in a better position to field the ball, this is vocally communicated. When batting, Jatin goes through a similar process to identify the opposition fielders' positions. Through shouts of encouragement, instruction, or even sledging, he continuously monitors if the opposition's tactics have changed:

Jatin: No I don't really take notice of what they are saying when they are going to sledge you and give you verbals. It is really loud.

Ben: But can that be helpful to know where they are?

Jatin: It does help you where you are, yeah. I mean if it's a good fielder or a good B3 partial fielder, if he is shouting and telling his players or whatever, it helps to know where he is.

Although sledging is an intimidatory tactic to pressurise the opposition into making a mistake, it makes Jatin aware of that fielder's position and also, if he has prior knowledge of the opposition players, who that person is. By knowing where the better fielders are positioned, he attempts to avoid hitting the ball towards them. For Jatin, the use of seemingly incidental auditory

acts, such as conversation and sledging, is an integral 'sense-making' strategy developed through experience. Rather than letting 'the verbals' effect his concentration, he uses it to his own advantage.

Dave, a B2 and one of the team's most proficient fielders, also builds upon his previous cricketing experiences and seemingly incidental sounds. If the ball is out of sight range, he judges the type of delivery being bowled, which the umpire verbally communicates by declaring the bowler's name and length of run-up, and thinks about the batsman's favoured shots:

A lot of it I picked up on patterns and routines of the batsman's shots. That gives me a really good indication from what the pace the sound of the ball is coming down. I know whether that ball will be coming to me if they are going to glide it down, drop the bat and glide it down, or whatever they are going to try.

Dave's awareness of the batsman's strengths in combination with the umpire's directions and sound of the ball off the bat creates a learnt cricket-specific strategy that allows him to field to a very high standard. Although these sounds may seem disparate to the untrained ear, they are clearly significant for Dave's orientation when positioned in the 'deep' and the ball is outside of his field of vision.

Yet, the auditory structuring of the space is not just made up of incidental acts. Visually impaired cricket has a clearly established, and purposeful, structure that intercorporeally involves a number of individuals. As the beginning of this section articulate, there is a particular auditory rhythm that leads up to the delivery of the ball. Brett, whilst explaining his own approach to the conceptualisation of space, provides a deeper description of his process:

Brett: I think about the protocol for batting and bowling. Okay so you get the bowler, here's the thing, let's say it's a B1 so he then says to the keeper "Keeper?" and the keeper then says "Off-stump off-stump off-stump" and then he says "Ready batsman?", he then says "Yes" and then he says "Play" then you've got the noise of the bat. So you get four really good points of...

Ben: Quite solid points?

Brett: Yeah, there has to be this, at least the absolute minimum, is “Ready batsman?” “Yes” “Play” and hit. There has to be at least four noises so that’s a good way to know if you’re in the right sort of place. We’ve seen B1s facing the wrong way in the field before and it is criminal. What more do you want? Someone is shouting “Ready, yeah, play”!

There is an auditory process undertaken before every delivery to check the players’ readiness. The bowler asks the batsman if they are “Ready?”, the batsman says “Yes” and, finally, the bowler will declare “Play” just before they release the ball. Brett describes these points, in combination with the sound of the ball being hit off the bat, as the four noises that allow him to understand his orientation in the space. He explains that when a blind player is bowling, the number of auditory points increases because the wicket-keeper provides a verbal stimulus so the bowler can locate the stumps. The wicket-keeper’s role is examined in greater depth in the coming paragraphs.

Whether it is a blind or partially sighted bowler, Brett argues that, due to the clearly defined auditory structure, there is no excuse for a B1 player to be incorrectly orientated to the pitch. Even if the batsman does not have the visual perception to watch the bowler running in and bowling the ball, they are made aware of every stage of the delivery. Much like a sighted cricketer having particular trigger movements when batting, based on a sequence of visual stimuli, the call of ‘Play’ serves an identical function:

I will almost be in a squat position by the time the bowler says “Ready?” and once he has said “Play”, I will be on the ground to play the shot. I will be picking up the line of the ball with my ear, with my left ear, and I try to, I was going to say see, but I will try to pick up where the line might be so I can play the shot according to that.
(Kamran)

Kamran’s batting process begins with two fixed calls of “Ready?” and “Play” and these allow him to be in position and play a shot. His overall body position is key for shot execution, yet, the most important aspect is the

positioning of his left ear to perceive the ball. Rather than keeping his eye on the ball, as encouraged in sighted cricket, Kamran aims to keep his ear on the ball.

Even for partially sighted batsmen in the team, the auditory rhythm of each delivery is key to their setup. Due to the multitude of impairments, each player visually picks up the bowler or the ball at different points in the delivery, if at all, however, the auditory stimuli is a constant presence. Although Terry, a B3 classified player, has the highest sight level within the team, the sounds in the build-up to the release are integral to his batting:

Listening to that is the one thing that helps you relax because there is also the 'ready' and 'play' and all that in cricket and as soon as you hear the guy running in, you know what is going to happen now in terms of the ball.

For Terry the familiarity of these words are relaxing. The bowler's dual calls structure the process of facing the ball and are a constant presence when batting. Whilst used to establish if the batsman is ready to face the ball, verbal calls animate the game for all players. It is also clear that auditory perception is not an individual act but an intercorporeal social experience. The players' examples articulate the various roles the opposition, the umpire, fellow fielders, the bowler and the batsman play in the aural structuring of this space. By attaching 'meaning' to the multiple bodies on the pitch, the players engage in 'somatic work' (Waskul and Vannini 2008; Waskul et al 2009; Vannini et al 2014) and, through experience and interaction, create a structure within the vast, featureless cricketing space.

The Wicket-Keeper

The wicket-keeper is greatest example of auditory perception as a intercorporeal social experience. This complex position in the team is performed by a B3 classified player, who has a relatively high level of sight in comparison to his teammates, and fulfils the same duties as any sighted wicket-keeper. However, additionally, the wicket-keeper acts as the team

communicator and provides constant instruction to his teammates during the game. He utilises his superior visual perception to pass on key pieces of information that may not be accessible through an alternative sensory mode. Mick reinforces the importance of the wicket-keeper in this following quote:

Mick: Really, it is all about the wicket-keeper... if he gets it wrong...

Ben: So you are relying on that guy?

Mick: I'm relying on him a lot, definitely. If he gets it wrong, then I am probably going to get it wrong. So yeah... it is a big role.

Mick acknowledges the high level of responsibility placed upon the wicket-keeper to communicate the game's intricacies to all players. For example, once the ball is hit off the bat, the wicket-keeper informs all fielders: where the ball has been hit, who it is going to, which hand is it travelling towards and then provides a vocal target for the fielder to throw back to. Terry, who is the team wicket-keeper and one of the world's best, describes how his process is mainly based upon his visual perception. However, when the ball is out of his field of vision, both memory and auditory stimuli become important:

Ben: And then how... so when they have picked it up, would you be able to see them pick it up?

Terry: So the ball will make different sounds. You will hear it rattle around in their hands and you want to give them a very loud, clear call so there is constant source of noise that they are throwing to. But, at the same point, you don't want it to be too aggressive because that will then create panic and tension. My thing is as soon as they've got it in their hand is that I keep calling until they've released the ball and that is when I will stop that constant, constant noise. That pretty much works for everyone.

He describes his role as providing a 'constant source of noise' and target for the fielders to throw at, yet it is much more nuanced than just being a wall of sound. In a split second, he makes a number of key decisions that impact the game. He quickly evaluates which fielder is going to receive the ball, makes

them aware of this and, if possible, tells them “Left hand down” or “Right hand down” to signify which hand it is going to. Whilst shouting instructions, he re-orientates his own perspective to provide accurate directions for the fielders, i.e., when facing opposite somebody, your left-hand side is their right-hand side. Even if the ball is out of sight, he uses the distinctive sound of the ball being stopped and his knowledge of the set field to create an auditory target for the fielder to throw the ball towards. This process is repeated every ball.

Terry and fellow player Thomas were the first to develop this communicative approach to wicket-keeping. Prior to their innovation, wicket-keepers would only deliver the most basic of information to the fielders rather than the running commentary that they now provide. The auditory stimulus provided by the wicket-keeper is a performative act and very much, demonstrates the social dimension of sensory perception. The individual purposefully structures the cricketing space with a sonic identity that is significant to those individuals who inhabit it. Research into the how auditory perception is performed came to prominence through the anthropological work of Sullivan (1986), Stoller (1989), and Feld (1990; 1996). These authors analyse particular performances such as chanting, stylised weeping and song within non-Western cultures. Sullivan's (1986) fieldwork in South America found that “sound identifies and gives shape to societal values and structures” (p. 15). Whilst in a completely different context, the wicket-keeper is 'giving shape' to this intercorporeal space and is central to the sensory perception of his teammates.

Although a complex process for the wicket-keeper, the constant calling simplifies the process of fielding for the other players on the pitch. Rohan usually fields in the deep and recognises the importance of the wicket-keeper's call in allowing him to anticipate the trajectory of the ball:

It is surprising and I surprised myself, especially in South Africa, knowing how much I actually used my hearing because when I'm on the boundary, I maybe don't pick the balls up sometimes, especially if

it is into the sun, until it is about three quarters of the way towards me. But I know it is on my left with Terry shouting “Left, left, left”. I am running to my left and then “Oh there is it” and I can sort of track if I'm keeping up with it or I've gone too far, I can go back and pick it up.

Rohan places his trust in Terry's decision making and did not initially realise how reliant he is on the wicket-keeper's instructions. Much like the role of sledging, as discussed earlier, John, B2, explains that if the opposition wicket-keeper is also from an English speaking country then, as the batsman, he will always know the ball's location in the outfield even if he cannot see it thus making running between the wickets much easier.

Having observed the importance of the wicket-keeper, I was given the opportunity to experience it first-hand. Although fulfilling the role of support coach during the participant observation phase, I was also asked to take part in a number of different training drills as an additional fielder. Whilst initially reticent to get involved, due to my relative ineptitude when fielding, my experiences during these drills were vital in truly understanding the players' sensorial articulations. Below is a field-note excerpt that describes an outdoor batting drill. My role was to field on the boundary and, when attempting to field the ball, I quickly grasped the wicket-keeper's integral role:

I field deep on the boundary to collect the balls that go past the infielders and I begin to appreciate the difficulty of fielding. Due to the nature of international cricket, wristy shots are played by a number of the VI players. This fact, in combination with the movement of the ball-bearings within the ball mean it can spin in problematic ways when fielding in the deep. As a participant, only now can I recognise the important role that the wicket-keeper plays in communicating where the ball is and even when it is going to spin. I benefit from his clear directions when the ball comes towards me and, despite being fully sighted, his guidance tells me where the ball is coming from and, most importantly, when it is going to spin.

Having not played any VI cricket, I am unaware as to when the ball would deviate from its path. I am at an advantage as I watch the batsmen intently to gauge the type of shot that he is playing and I make a split second judgement to whether he is shaping up to hit it to me. When it is clear that he is, I feel the adrenaline momentarily kick in and the heightened nature of my senses as I focus everything on to

the ball. The white VI ball has no visually discernible seam whereas the seam on red leather cricket ball is clearly visible from a distance and is something I would use to judge whether it is spinning. I feel my body weight shifting from the balls of my feet to the tip of my toes as I run towards the ball whilst still trying to predict how the ball will behave. I place my trust in Terry's shout of "Left hand down- watch the spin...now" and as he loudly calls this, the ball jerks to my left like being controlled on the end of a string. Due to responding to the wicket-keeper's instructions, the ball settles in my hands with the hard plastic shell and coarse seam held between two fingers and thumb. I return the ball flat and hard towards Terry behind the stumps; the whizz of ball-bearings as the ball leaves my hand and then the satisfying thud of it hitting the keeper's gloves. 27th September 2014

His ability to provide important sensory information through clear communication is central to the functioning of the team. Terry's guidance is clearly important, even for an experienced sighted cricketer, in the above extract, and demonstrates how his sensory knowledge of visually cricket is continually being imparted to his teammates. Whilst his visually perception is an integral part of his process, Terry's role is far more sophisticated than just watching the ball. As discussed earlier, the construction of a cognitive map during a game is vital, yet, Terry takes this one step further. As well as knowing where the fielders are, he knows who is in that position, their visual abilities, and what form of 'call' they require. His knowledge of how the ball spins and swerves has been built through repetitive experience and, through auditory communication, he shares this information with his teammates. As is evident, visually impaired cricket is a thoroughly intercorporeal practice and the wicket-keeper is the orchestrator.

Although the partially sighted players do benefit from his communication, it is the blind players who rely most heavily upon the wicket-keeper. When a B1 classified player is bowling, the wicket-keeper helps the bowler line up correctly to the stumps by providing auditory feedback on their body position: "All the feedback they will receive from me is audible but it is purely from visual information that I've given them" (Terry). Again, Terry is using his sight to correct the position of the bowler's hips and arms and, when ready, repetitively shout the bowler's name whilst standing over off-stump. Without

the wicket-keeper, the blind players are unable to receive purposeful feedback during a match situation which severely impact upon their bowling accuracy. A trusting relationship develop in which the wicket-keeper knows the bowler's action inside-out and the bowler positively responds to the wicket-keeper's guidance. However, an even greater level of trust is required when a blind player responds to the wicket-keeper's instructions when fielding in close proximity to the bat:

Sometimes with the B1s, when if the ball is smashed at them, they don't have a huge amount of time to react to the ball. Purely, they have to react to me screaming so and so left/right or, it's near them, just "down" and that takes a wild amount of trust from them. If there is one where they go down and going to get hit in the face, then I will let it go because I don't want anyone getting hit in the face. They've got to trust me that I'm telling them where to go and they are not going to get hurt. (Terry)

When the ball moves too quickly, the players trust Terry's instincts and trust that he is not going to place them in harm's way. It is yet another responsibility placed upon the wicket-keeper alongside his expected duties behind the stumps. Terry explains the importance of these interactions in maintaining the overall performance of the fielding unit and to also keep the blind players involved:

Terry: Everyone needs to know what is happening and it is the only way really to keep the B1s in the game with that running commentary. They are usually the guys who have the best count of overs in terms of how many overs have been bowled, whether it is left hander/right hander on strike. They are usually pretty good at all that because they are being told what is going on and if they don't know what is going on then they are massively going to: a) stop concentrating because they are getting not a lot of stimulation in the game, and b) you really can't have players not knowing what is going on in the game.

Ben: You are almost reanimating the game for them.

Terry: Yes, in quite a dramatic fashion!

His running commentary, alongside the other additional linguistic input of the umpire and teammates, "keeps the B1s in the game". As discussed earlier in

this section, the blind players use every piece of auditory stimuli they can to negotiate the sporting space, yet Terry acknowledges that without such stimulation, they can lose concentration. Rather than passively assuming there is a sufficient amount of auditory stimuli in the environment, the wicket-keeper makes an active decision to create sensory acts that form the blind players' foundation of perception.

'Auditory Knowledge': The Role of Non-Linguistic Sound

An analysis of the sonic environment of everyday life, including sporting participation, needs to account for those mundane non-musical and non-linguistic sounds (Vannini et al 2010) that structure our experience of life. These sound acts are given meaning through our own 'somatic work' (Waskul and Vannini 2008; Waskul et al 2009; Vannini et al 2014) which is our way of making sense of the world by attaching a 'social meaning' to these aural events.

'Sonic alignment' (Vannini et al 2010 p. 343) is central to our everyday negotiation of the sensorial world. It is an active process where "our acting on sound is a way of negotiating and manipulating the somatic order of a particular situation". To grasp how the senses form modes of knowing, we must look beneath the surface of 'everyday' encounters that are perceived to be normal occurrences: "one studies the banal, the mundane and taken-for-granted aspect of social life which then come to bear upon sensory embodiment in connection with sociality through different sociocultural dimensions" (Low 2012 p. 274). This chapter examines the role of linguistic sound in the structuring of visually impaired cricket but has not yet acknowledged the importance of non-linguistic sounds during participation. Although these aural events may not be as obvious as wicket-keeper's 'running commentary', the impact upon the players' perception is still as significant.

The most significant non-linguistic sound in the cricketing space is the ball. Similar in size to the red ball used in sighted cricket, it has a hard plastic covering rather than leather and inside the hollow shell of the ball are ball-bearings. When the ball is thrown or hit, it emits a rattling noise. As discussed above, the wicket-keeper provides intermittent auditory commentary during the match, however, the sound of the ball, or absence of it, is a constant stimulus. The ball-bearings are especially significant during batting where, apart from the “Ready?” and “Play” calls, the only auditory stimulus is the sound of the ball. For example, Xander describes how he perceives the rhythm of the bowler's run-up through the slowly increasing 'jangling' of the ball as the bowler reaches the crease.

The ball is also crucial for a number of partially sighted players. Due to his degenerative sight, Dave explains that, against the faster bowlers, he is close to the point where he is wholly reliant on sound:

Like from two years ago, I would be able to see it when it was released out their hand but now there is like a blank spot. A big patch where it is just picking up half way down or a quarter way down.

When the ball is outside of his field of vision, Dave uses the sound of the ball-bearings to perceive the speed and direction of the ball and selects a shot accordingly. For Thomas, even though he has a relatively high level of sight that he utilises when batting, the sound of ball-bearings provides a deeper knowledge of the ball's movement:

The rest of it is keeping an eye on where the ball is but also listening to the ball because in mid-air, it may not look like it has moved much but the sound of the ball rattling side to side will give you an indication of the ball moving. The rest of it is... you don't always see the ball off the bat so some of the shots that I play will be slingshots so I don't always see the ball when I make contact but the sound of the ball being in an open area is quite distinguished.

When bowled at certain pace, or if a bowler uses a particular grip, the ball can swing and spin due to the movement of the ball-bearings within the ball. Thomas claims that he can judge the extent to which the ball is moving

through the sound made by the ball-bearings. As explained earlier, the seam on the white ball is difficult to see, so the batsman must either watch the ball in the air or, as Thomas describes, listen to the ball. For blind players who cannot “watch the ball in the air”, the ball-bearings are the main stimulus when judging the type of delivery. Sandy explains how each delivery will have a distinctive sound which allows him to gauge the speed:

Sandy: Yeah, you can hear how fast the ball-bearings are turning in the ball. When like John is throwing it at you or Thomas is throwing it at you. Yeah, it is not actually a rattle. If you have a listen, and you probably hear it now I've told you, it is not actually a rattle but it is a whir when it is a Partial. Whereas if a B1 rolls it at you, you can hear the balls jiggling about because the ball isn't going as quick. It depends on what is happening. Surface has a little bit to do with it but not too much I don't think.

Ben: How long did it take you to learn that or is it just repetition?

Sandy: No. It is something else that you have to learn. I used to go home quite black and blue from these practices. Yeah, I don't anymore though.

The whir of the fast bowler's ball is very different to the slower rotation of ball-bearings during a B1 delivery. His knowledge is formed through repetitive batting experience and is the result of many training sessions that left him 'black and blue'. It is not something he was naturally predisposed to, because of his visual impairment or a mythical 'sixth sense', but is a skill he had to work on. Although this approach to batting, in comparison to sighted cricket, requires an alternative sensory mode, the foundation of both of these physical skills is repetitive practice.

Thomas discusses running between the wickets, another integral aspect of batting, and how the auditory feedback, or lack of it, after playing a shot informs him whether he find a gap. The speed of his 'slingshot' stroke means that the trajectory of the ball may not be gauged through sight. Thomas goes into more detail to explain the auditory differences in hitting a fielder and finding a gap:

So if it gone straight to someone's hands then you automatically get that sling off the bat, a little bit of rattle then a big thud of it being stopped. That is you thinking there is no run. Whereas if you don't get that straight away, then now you have hit a gap. You know there is at least a single there.

Running between the wickets requires quick decision making and knowledge of the field that has been set for you. Thomas' vast experience of playing visually impaired cricket has led to the establishment of a deep understanding of the auditory soundscape and reduces the need to rely on his sight. He explains that the absence of a 'big thud' is a positive for a batsman as the ball has hit a gap and at least one run can be taken. In this case, it is the absence of noise that is a significant stimulus.

When fielding, the auditory interplay between the bat and ball is also significant. Whilst the importance of vocal commands has been discussed, there are other auditory acts integral to fielding performance. Terry discusses how he tailors his instructions to each player's requirements. Some players are wholly reliant on the wicket-keeper to guide their movements, whereas, others prefer to listen to the sound of the ball to judge its location in the outfield.

Again, using sound to identify the ball is not a passive act. As with the role of the wicket-keeper, this process is far more nuanced than that. During the soundscape section of the interview, Mick's response to a composed batting soundscape reveals an in-depth auditory knowledge of the environment. The following is his description of the soundscape track:

The drive will always be more of a solid...always sounds like a more solid contact. With the sweep... well I knew that was the sweep because you can basically see it in your head. He has swept and his hands have come just slightly over to the right so his bat...bat-face has gone up so the ball sounds more hollow when you hit like that. He has gone aerial and he has cleared the fielder and got the one. But...I forgot what I was going to say then... so yeah, the drive is a much more solid contact yet the sweep you can hear that... also you can hear sometimes, I didn't hear it on there, but the bat sweeping across

the floor before it hits the ball. Particularly if it is a slower bowler, you sort of know that is coming.

The batting soundscape is comprised of a number different shots and, through the sound of the ball off the bat, Mick judges the type of shot that had been played, whether it was hit on the floor or in the air, and, consequently, the area of the outfield it had been hit into. In combination with the cognitive map of the field, Mick articulates his developed strategy to fielding the ball without a reliance on sight. Yet, for Mick, this is something that comes as a surprise. When I ask how he has developed such intricate knowledge, as demonstrated through his description of the soundscape, Mick cannot explain it:

Mick: I don't know really because I wasn't quite aware that I was that aware of it (laughs) so... I think I know my hearing is quite good but I didn't realise how... well, if I've got that right...(laughs).

Ben: You have, yeah.

Mick: So I didn't realise that I was quite that susceptible to it...

Until prompted to specifically focus on the auditory dimension of a familiar environment, he was unaware of the significant impact that sound has on his perception during cricket. Playing visually impaired cricket is a multi-sensory experience for all players, whether blind or partially sighted. However, until prompted to re-evaluate, many players were unaware that they use a number of sensory modes. This lack of awareness is especially prevalent amongst certain partially sighted players who, consciously or subconsciously, value their ability to use sight, and demonstrate this by distancing themselves from other sensory modes.

For Xander, who is well aware of his auditory perception in cricket, it is not the wicket-keeper or the ball that he listens for when fielding; it is the sound of the batsman:

I'm definitely, definitely listening out for what that batsman is doing. Is he shuffling? Is he moving away from me? Is he trying to advance or whatever? Because you need to give yourself as much time as possible to know: is that thing coming my way? To be honest with you, quite often, if you are hearing it well and feeling good about what it is you're doing, you tend to make the right decision without even thinking about it. You know what ball is coming down to your right. Somehow you just instinctively feel that there is where it is going to be.

As a B1 classified player who fields close to the batsman, Xander explains, due to the minimal reaction time, how he tries to pre-empt the batsman's movements by listening for the smallest of auditory acts. Even the shuffle of a spiked boot on the crease is significant for an experienced fielder whose 'trained ear' can perceive what shot a batsman may be shaping to hit. When feeling good, Xander's active listening becomes an autonomous process in which he "instinctively" perceives movement in the space. Much like Mick's subconscious auditory perception when fielding, the repetitive experience of playing cricket has led to a point where Xander feels that he "tends to make the right decision without thinking about it." His sophisticated process of negotiating the sporting space, developed through his previous experiences of playing sport as both a partially sighted person and a blind person, becomes a 'natural' practice.

These varied strategies are forms of 'auditory knowledge' (Rice 2010) cultivated through habit, experience and training. Much like trainee doctors learn the art of auscultation and how, over time, they learn to identify those important acoustic objects from the initial mass of indecipherable noise (Rice 2010). Rather than just identifying the key internal noises of the human body, the students begin to attend to how efficiently the organs are working through aural exploration. Similarly, Downey (2002) discusses being 'trained in listening' in the context of the Afro-Brazilian art of capoeira. The mixture of dance and martial arts requires an embodied 'apprenticeship in listening' through repetition, practice, and active listening to the musical landmarks.

Rice and Downey both document the social dimension of listening by learning to identify and respond to the key sonic acts “with a trained and responsive body, through habits copied from others and socially reinforced, and by means of their own musical skills, arduously acquired and actively engaged in listening” (Downey 2002 p. 490). In both the context of capoeira and the hospital, each have a specific collection of sounds unique to that environment. Rice's (2003) acoustemological study of Edinburgh Royal Infirmary found that acoustic dimension of hospital life is heightened due to the deprivation of other sensory modes. The sonic structure of the hospital from the medical machinery to the sound of nurses hurriedly rushing around the ward “plays an integral role in the creation of the reality of that place, and in the way they (the patients) perceive themselves to exist within it” (Rice 2003 p. 9).

Much like a medical practitioner or dancer actively listening to their environment, the visually impaired cricket players articulate an engagement with the sonic acts produced during participation. Their engagement demonstrates their 'auditory knowledge', created through their experiences of playing the game and also through purposeful strategies. Terry, whilst explaining the importance of auditory stimuli in his batting setup, refers to the response to sound as “an internal thing rather than external”. Again, the processing of aural information, in the context of cricket, becomes autonomous and integral to the execution of multiple skills within the game.

'Auditory knowledge' of playing visually impaired cricket requires an in-depth knowledge of the sporting space. The attachment of significant meaning to both linguistic and non-linguistic aural acts is based upon, as discussed above, the repetitive experience of interacting in this space over a number of years. Mick's understanding of the auditory structure is due to his experiences of playing cricket: “It must just be experience, mustn't it...I guess, I've put it into the bank when I have lost the ball, and what that

sounded like.” Mick’s ‘bank of sounds’ is the product of embodied practice, making mistakes, and the subsequent creation of learnt strategies.

The Cultivation of 'Auditory Knowledge'

Whilst experience of playing visually impaired cricket is integral to forming 'auditory knowledge', a 'bank' of significant aural stimuli are also cultivated through alternative means. For a number of blind players, listening to the intricacies of the game whilst spectating or tuning in to the radio has influenced their auditory perception. Jatin explains that, although he could not see the pitch, regular attendance at his brother's sighted cricket games in the 1980's meant he could follow the game through sound alone:

From the way they hit the ball, I would roughly know where the ball has gone, square or mid-on or whatever. Not one hundred percent I would be right but most of the time I would be right.

Although he did not play cricket until 2000, Jatin had been formulating his 'auditory knowledge' of the game for a number of decades. He attached meaning to the multiple aural events in the space which enabled him to understand what was going on from the edge of the boundary. When he started playing, due to the familiarity of the environment, he quickly grasped the game and conceptualised the space in which it is played.

Kamran's cricketing 'auditory knowledge' began with radio commentary. He credits 'Test Match Special' with helping him learn English and, also, developing his conceptualisation of cricket. When I ask whether it had taken a long time to understanding this complex environment, he explains that it had not: “No, no. The only reason is because I listen to so much cricket, especially radio, where everything is so descriptive that I haven't had to think about it too much.” The descriptive radio commentary contextualises cricket’s disparate aural events by explaining their significance. For example, the loud crack of bat on ball and the subsequent clapping of a crowd is contextualised by the commentator as a “cover drive that has been driven for four”. Through

the commentator's narrative, a listener can begin to attach social meaning to such noises and, eventually, be able to identify a well-executed shot without the aid of commentary. Although the soundscapes differ slightly, the auditory similarities between sighted and visually impaired cricket have allowed Kamran to build up an 'auditory knowledge' applicable to his own participation.

However, as is clear throughout this chapter, to have an 'instinctive feel' for a certain mode of sensory perception requires a process of learning. It is not something endowed upon someone because of their visual impairment but is formed through experience and habit. Thomas explains how the general attitude of the public, when watching visually impaired cricket, is one of amazement, yet, he feels there is a simple explanation for their success:

Thomas: They are just thinking “Wow! How can they do that?” That is the practice of focusing your ears, focusing how to react to sound, where it is and pinpointing it perfectly. They are like “We can't do that” and actually you can, you put a blindfold on and train your hearing.

Ben: It's just practice?

Thomas: It's practice, practice, practice and you will become as good as someone else and it is trying to get that responsibility into younger players who see the older players doing what we do and getting them to believe that what they have now is what we had when we first started.

He recognises that it may be daunting for young or inexperienced players to join a team alongside such autonomous performers. Although the experienced players' performance levels may seem unattainable, Thomas asserts that it can be achieved through 'practice, practice, practice'. Much like the dancer's being 'trained in listening' (Downey 2002), practice, in a cricketing context, is learning the aural events of the soundscape and understanding their significance. Experience is important but so is actively practising the art of listening, which may be seem like a strange concept.

Within the squad, Brett is the greatest proponent of practiced listening. As will be discussed in a later chapter, Brett, a B1, was scrutinised for his high level of performance during an Ashes series and he makes the following point when his abilities are questioned: “They are phrasing the question wrong. Instead of saying 'How did you do that?'- he must be able to see- but it should be 'How *did* he do that?'- what can *I* do then?”. He develops his own innovative drills that can be used around the house to improve the multiple facets of his game. One of these drills involves turning the volume of his television to its highest setting whilst throwing a ball around his living room in an attempt to hone his auditory perception in a loud environment. Another drill called the 'Apple Snatch' follows similar lines in which “you get someone to stand in front of you with two balls and they would just move the balls around and then shake it and you've got to grab it or touch it.” Despite not practicing any cricket related skills, Brett credits these drills as encouraging him to think about the sounds in the environment.

During the interview, he describes the best drill for increasing 'auditory knowledge' of the environment which, once again, does not involve playing cricket. Although his teammates are reticent to be involved, Brett explains the significance of his drill and the impact it has had on his auditory perception:

The best drill that I used to do is, and this is one that I did try to get other people to do and they just told me to fuck off, is pointing at the ball. So you stand there and you say “Right he is going to bowl it” so track, track, track, track and he hits it so track, track, track, track. So you are trying to keep a track of the ball by pointing at it and if the ball starts coming to you, actually you can just put your hand to get it. I did that for so many years that I could just stop it using my finger. Then what you want is your body facing towards the ball. Our heads have evolved to take in information from the front so if you hear a big bang behind you, you turn your head because your body is saying “I want maximal information here” and that is what we do. Instead of pointing at it, actually you square your shoulders up and things like that and is often why, when I'm trying to back up in the field, and start running towards the ball then back away is if I run towards the ball I've got everything facing forward and I can get maximal information.

Rather than mentally 'switching off' once he realises the ball is not coming to him, Brett is constantly tracking the location of the ball both aurally and physically by pointing with his finger. By repeating this drill over a number of years, he now tracks the pathway of ball during a match with relative ease. Brett also considers his optimum body position to improve his sensory perception and receive maximal auditory information. He is the most proficient B1 fielder, by far, because of his detailed approach outlined above. Brett's 'auditory knowledge' has not been created through merely attending a few training sessions but through the creation of purposeful strategies and, even, an awareness of how best to perceive the environment. Responding to the auditory structure of visually impaired cricket is not a passive act; active, and informed, listening is required.

The Disruption of 'Auditory Knowledge'

However, even if a high level of 'auditory knowledge' is cultivated, it can be easily disrupted. For blind players, who are predominantly reliant upon auditory perception, these disruptions have a monumental impact on performance. Both Kamran and Xander discuss the disorientating impact of high winds during a match. Xander describes an experience at the World Cup in South Africa when the combination of wearing blackout shades and windy conditions meant that bowling was almost impossible:

That was the most difficult game I've ever played in and when that wind was up so badly, so gusty... you feel like you are in a washing machine. You feel completely devoid of anything that is happening around you and I could not get the ball straight down the wicket. I must have bowled about twelve, thirteen, fourteen wides in one over and it was just pointless. It was the lowest I have ever felt at playing the game.

He felt 'completely devoid of anything': no auditory perception, no light perception, no haptic landmarks. The absence of sound, for Xander, forces a disembodied detachment from the game and the environment. He struggled to deliver the ball to the batsman and, when he did, described it as a

complete fluke. Without the wicket-keeper's call or clapping, it felt as if he was bowling into the abyss.

Whereas the lack of auditory stimuli is a disruption, Rehan, a B1, explains the disruptive nature of random noise. It is most common during indoor training where there are multiple balls being bowled, people chatting, or even music. He attempts to concentrate on the singular stimulus of the ball but it is competing with the wholly disruptive mass of noise:

It is when it is people throwing balls and hitting balls and balls hitting walls, smashing this. It is too random, too random and that really messes with my head. So yeah I do use my hearing but I can't rely on that.

The randomness of the noise 'messes' with Rehan's head. He has an in-depth knowledge of the soundscape, but, when disrupted, his ability to perceive the environment is severely impeded. Much like Xander, when his auditory perception is affected, it has an impact on his overall perception: "People don't realise but the thing is when I can't hear well that also affects my other senses and I can't work out where I am." As acknowledged throughout this chapter, the lack of haptic landmarks within this space mean the blind players, and some partially sighted players, must rely on the auditory structure. Yet, when disrupted by unexpected noise or an absence of noise, particular players' mode of playing cricket are completely eliminated. In such situations, without auditory perception, B1 classified players are unable to execute their skills.

“You can usually feel when you play the shot how well you have hit that ball”: Visually Impaired Cricket as a Multi-Sensory Experience

As explained earlier, there is no definitive blind or partially sighted experience of playing visually impaired cricket. Much of this chapter focuses upon the importance of auditory perception within this space, yet, the players

also identify a number of other sensory modes integral to participation. The participants' experiences are multi-sensory and are not confined to one particular sensory mode. It may seem reductive to analyse each mode separately, rather than the intertwined reality of sensory perception, but for the clarity of this discussion, it is important to examine how each mode is utilised and also how the players value each mode.

The Role of Haptic Perception

Whilst auditory perception is significant for a number of the participants, the role of haptic perception, especially for blind players, is integral to negotiating the sporting space. Rather than conceptualising haptic as just 'touch', Paterson (2009) defines the haptic system as consisting of kinaesthesia, the sense of movement; proprioception – the sense of bodily position; and the vestibular system – the sense of balance. By adopting this broad definition, the players' embodied haptic experiences are more accurately reflected.

The haptic dimension of cricket, both sighted and visually impaired, may be taken for granted by those players who do not realise that it is central to their participation. From a bowler's grip on the seam to the feel of a ball hitting the middle of the bat, haptic stimuli are central facets of the environment. For the blind players, in combination with auditory perception, haptic perception is the foundation of their orientation in space. Ingold (2000) calls this “the multimodal feeling-hearing of the blind, which is neither touch, echo nor motion but a blending of all of these” (p. 274). Ingold reinforces the importance of understanding perception as a multimodal process in which the senses are in constant interaction rather than viewing the senses as working independently of each other. He argues that blind perception can be hard for sighted individuals to grasp due to a reliance on vision and a regimented understanding of the sensorium. By sharing the participants' 'voices', this thesis reveals previously neglected ways of playing sport and reinforces that “the loss of vision does not make the individual any less of a person but rather opens up his or her life to a new dimension, one generally

ignored and unfortunately undeveloped by the ordinary population (Hill 1985 p. 108). It is the players' embodied participation that demonstrates their physical abilities and how sport can be played without a reliance on vision.

Hull (1990), a blind author, identifies himself as a 'whole-body-seer' who is "simply someone in whom the specialist function of sight is now devolved upon the whole body, and no longer specialised in a particular organ" (3161). The notion of a 'whole-body-seer' may be difficult to understand for a sighted audience and is not applicable to the majority of the team. Hull's experience of perception, as a totally blind person, reveals a different way of being-in-the-world which includes the ability of echolocation. Described by Hull as an extraordinary guidance mechanism and how "it is like a sense of physical pressure. One wants to put up a hand to protect oneself, so intense is the awareness" (p.609), echolocation is a form of perception that responds to sound waves in the creation of a visual image. When noise is made, whether purposefully or not, the sound waves bounce back carrying imprints of a material's dimensions and texture which then creates images in the visual cortex of the brain. Originally described as 'facial vision', this form of perception, as recognised by Ingold (2000) above, is a mixture of feeling and hearing and is an aspect of visually impaired perception that is rarely acknowledged.

Kamran discusses how, when bowling, he can gauge the direction of the ball after release using echolocation. As is evident in the follow quote, this is first time he articulates his process of perception:

Kamran: It's literally having so much control over that ball and the strangest thing that I can't explain is when I let go of the ball, I listen for... the space between, the width of the wicket. It is really bizarre to explain it, I'll hear where the ball has landed and I will gauge in my head if that ball is going to anywhere near the stumps.

Ben: That is very interesting.

Kamran: I try to do it in the nets. Say the ball has landed like there, I will almost hear an echo off the ground which will tell me how big the crease is, how big the width of the pitch is and I think "Oh yeah, that might be straight." That is literally what happens in my head but I've never actually said it out loud, it is strange.

Ben: It is very interesting so... it is difficult to explain isn't it.

Kamran: It is very difficult.

Ben: So you are hearing...

Kamran: It is almost like echolocation. I will hear...

Ben: Yeah so is it the reverberation between the stumps then?

Kamran: Maybe, yeah. Maybe it is. Maybe that echo is being created between... because you know when you click and there is no one in the way then there is more of a sound than if there was a body. Maybe because there is a body in front of me and there are two stumps and an umpire behind me, maybe all those things play a part in me hearing, or not hearing, stuff. In a strange way, the sound is bouncing off all of those things. It is strange!

His blind and partially sighted teammates may have similar experiences, however, they do articulate this during semi-structured interviews. Kamran's illuminating description reveals an aspect of visually impaired cricket that has not been previously discussed. Despite echolocation not altering the direction of his bowling, it allows a deeper understanding of the environment and a level of physical feedback that cannot be attained unless provided by a teammate. This thoroughly embodied experience challenges the traditional, fixed approach to the senses and, for Kamran, is something he can improve upon and utilise in other areas of cricket.

Kamran also uses conventional haptic perception in his bowling setup which, again, is in combination with auditory perception. Before he receives aural instructions to adjust his body position, he places his foot so it is touching the

edge of the off-stump, as a starting point, and takes one step to his left. When ready, he asks for a call from the wicket-keeper. In a similar way, when batting, he also touches the stumps with his hand before the delivery to re-orientate himself. Haptic feedback is also used whilst batting through the external object of the bat. In combination with the sound of the ball off the bat, a performer, experienced or not, feels whether the ball has come out of the middle of the bat through reverberation. In visually impaired cricket, the 'feel' takes on an additional significance:

You can usually feel when you play the shot how well you have hit that ball so it is using that sense of "that felt good" as it's come off the middle. The slingshot has come off perfectly as I wanted it to so it should have gone in the place I wanted it to. (Thomas)

Thomas judges how far the ball has gone, thus how many runs he can take, on the feel of the connection. Although a B3, he is not always able to visually gauge the ball so he utilises instantaneous haptic feedback to make a judgment. Whilst 'middling' the ball is a satisfying act in sighted cricket, it serves a more significant purpose in this space

Another player who relies on haptic feedback, but in a different context, is Clive. He has tunnel vision, as well as a hearing impairment, and has developed a strategy for fielding that relies on haptic perception. Tracking the ball's path when fielding is relatively easy for an individual with tunnel vision but issues arise when the ball is momentarily lost. When the ball is out of his visual field, regaining sight of the ball is problematic. As Clive cannot rely on the ball's auditory feed, the haptic dimension of fielding is even more important. During the interview, he outlines his rehearsed strategy used when scanning for the ball which involves deliberately misfielding the ball, losing sight of it and then feeling for its location:

Working out what happens when it hits different body parts. I've tried to teach my brother that because he has no hearing whatsoever. So I would let the balls hit my feet or hit my legs to try and really... what that feels like to where it goes. If it hits a part of my leg, then I know the ball normally acts like this. If it hits my feet, well the feet are a little bit different because you've got the rubber on your shoes sometimes

but if it hits something, it is just trying to remember last time it hit me there, it was down by my knee. It is difficult because not every situation is the same, it is just trying to make that area I am scanning just making sure I am scanning the right areas.

The embodied experience of the ball hitting certain body parts and finding its location is an unorthodox way to practice fielding. However, it is a perfect fit for Clive's mode of being-in-the-world. He acknowledges every situation is not the same, but the strategy articulated above saves him precious seconds in the field, and in the world of elite sport, every marginal gain is essential.

Rehearsed strategies are integral to utilise the players' sensory 'strengths' and to minimise mistakes. Oliver, a B1, explains the importance of having a repeatable setup when bowling or batting to maintain a high level of consistency. This is especially important for blind players who rely more readily on 'feel' than their partially sighted peers:

I've got a set routine that I try to stick to because I think it is always better to be consistent in what you do. What way your muscles kind of remember the movement so the movements become instinct rather than something you have to think about, which I think is helpful. It eliminates as many variables as possible. At the end of the day, the simpler you can get your action and the less movement you can get in it the better, especially as a B1.

This form of kinaesthetic perception is difficult to conceptualise but is a common experience. Through experience and habit, the individual embodied the correct 'body technique' (Mauss 1979) and, when performed, 'feels' right. Whether it is rhythm when running or hitting a golf ball off a tee, an experienced individual is aware of successful skill execution through their own learnt perception. As Oliver describes, B1 classified bowlers attempt to keep their bowling action as simple as possible to minimise potential unintended changes, such as pointing in the wrong direction, and rely upon muscle memory to deliver the ball. Although the blind players orientate with the stumps through touch and receive aural instructions from the wicket-

keeper, at the point of delivery, they are wholly using their pre-existing muscle memory.

When bowling, Mick also relies on muscle memory. He can only see halfway down the pitch thus combines a well-practised action and a measured run-up to bowl accurately. His bowling is just based on “how it feels” and he likens this embodied kinaesthetic experience to playing darts:

Mick: You know when you have thrown a bad dart immediately. It doesn't have to go in the board... I don't know.

Ben: Yeah, I am exactly the same. You feel in your arm if it doesn't come out just right.

Mick: You know if you've flicked it or twisted it badly or whatever and it is exactly the same with the bowling. Sometimes you just feel it. Yep, that has come out clean, that is a beauty or oh that's... you can feel where it has gone and you know what is going to happen.

Mick explains how he cannot clearly see the board when playing darts and, when bowling, he cannot see the opposing batsman. For both activities, he uses his muscle memory and relies on the ‘feel’ of bowling, or throwing, accurately. Kinaesthetic perception is the foundation of all physical sporting performance, but, in the absence of other sensory modes such as visual perception, it takes on a greater significance in visually impaired cricket.

The Role of Visual Perception

Despite the players' rich and fascinating multi-sensory experiences, many of the participants still feel the need to emphasise their visual abilities over other sensory modes. This has significant implications upon the resistive potential of visually impaired cricket. As long as the players claim to rely on visual perception to play the game, the dominant understanding of embodied sporting practice and the sporting body will remain unchallenged.

In Western society “we have, over time, come to regard sight as providing our immediate access to the external world” (Jenks 1995 p.1). This ocularcentric point of view (Jay 1994; Jenks 1995; Stoller 1997), in which sight is understood as the most vital sense in living a 'full' life, also dominates modern sport and, especially, cricket. Coaches reinforce the importance of hand-eye coordination when batting and fielding by continually encouraging players to “watch the ball” onto the bat or into the hands. Vision itself is seen to be central to cognition and can deem the experiences of an individual without sight as incomplete. Whether it be a reliance on visual images, body language or playing sport: “sight is equated with understanding and knowledge” (Synnott 1993 p. 208) and other sensory modes are viewed as inferior. The use of visual perception, in this space, has significant social implications upon an individuals' identity. For these reasons, it is essential for a number of players, during the interview process, to establish the importance of sight in their own negotiation of the sporting space.

When batting, Clive admits he has “pretty good” hand-eye coordination and watches the ball onto the bat all the way from the bowler's hand. Although his field of vision is small, if his head is in the correct position, Clive has a clear picture of the game in front of him. Rohan's sight condition means that he has a blind spot in the centre of his vision, the opposite to Clive, and he also claims to rely “nearly entirely” on his visual perception. As his interview goes on, Rohan acknowledges that he does in fact use other sensory modes during a game but sight is still the most dominant. Mick sums up the overarching attitude towards the use of sight: “I think if you have got a little bit of sight, you are always going to try and see. So I still rely more on my sight than my ears. You got to try and use it the best you can.”

Having visual perception is an advantage in a number of different contexts during a game. John explains how he locates the ball through sight and, significantly, is able to watch the oppositions players' movements:

Because I've come from a cricket background anyway, the one thing that has really helped me is being able to read the movement of other people. I can see how a batsman would shape up to play a shot and I kind of have a good idea, if he's connected with that ball, where it's gone.

Whilst demonstrating previously gathered experiential knowledge of cricket, John's visual perception allows him to utilise his knowledge of the game. Through sighted cricket, he has learnt to read the opposition batsman's movements and can pre-empt the shot being played. As his sight condition does not impede this aspect of his visual perception, he continues to use this process in visually impaired cricket. Marcus also describes the advantage of using sight when bowling as he can pick up on where the batsman is aiming to hit the ball and also whether their mannerisms reveal any nervousness.

The advantage gained through having visual perception comes at the expense of the opposition and, more specifically, the blind players. Terry explains the clear disadvantage of being a B1 classified bowler when bowling to a partially sighted batsman:

B1 bowlers are in a rubbish position because, as a batsman, I can see what they are doing to a certain extent. I can see where the keeper is lining them up. You can do what you want, you can walk down the pitch... the B1s can't stop you doing anything. At least if you are a quicker bowler, you have that second where it looks like they are going to wander down and you do something different. You've got none of that in your armoury. A B1 has to be supported by their fielders, you cannot... teams target, we do it, everyone targets B1s.

Paradoxically, those players who have the highest level of sight are at an advantage. Although the game is adapted for the abilities of blind and partially sighted people, as Terry admits, "everyone targets B1s". The sensory disparity is further widened due to, as previously noted, all B1 classified players wearing blackout shades to eliminate light perception. It is an attempt to create a 'level playing field' amongst the B1 classified players. Xander has a small degree of light perception, yet, the sensory disruption of wearing blackout glasses adversely affects his performance:

Being in the dark for the entire game can be very disorientating. It can be hugely disorientating because when I'm walking around usually I've got this sort of openness around my head.

This 'openness' is artificially eliminated and puts the blind players at a further disadvantage. As Xander indicates, visual perception is not just being able to watch the action unfold; it is also an awareness of light and shadow.

Although this can be taken for granted by sighted individuals, when removed, Xander's mode of being-in-the-world is completely altered and leads to disorientation. The blackout shades are used to eradicate light, yet, lead to other unintended consequences for the blind players' overall perception of the space.

Without their teammates' visual perception, the blind players are judged to be the 'weak links'. Jatin recognises the impact visual perception has on an individual's cricketing ability:

I always think that the more sight you've got, the better you will be, I think. I know it's the wrong way of thinking but I've noticed that the more sight you've got, obviously you need ability, I am not saying that, but the more sight you have, the better you are.

When I ask how the senses are valued within the squad, Thomas declares that "sight is the biggest one for most people", followed by hearing which he describes as a "fallback" sense. Despite the engaging multi-sensory accounts of playing visually impaired articulated in this chapter, the majority of the players acknowledge that sight is the most valued of these sensory modes. Visual perception, for those players who have it, is clearly important, however, it is also a statement of their identity. This reinforces the pertinence of this study's embodied approach to disability sport. The physical implications of being visually impaired affects how an individual plays cricket, but, clearly, it is role of social discourse and intercorporeal interactions that assign value to different sensory modes and players' abilities.

Being blind or partially sighted means perceiving the world in a different way to those who are sighted. Yet, it is the dominant social discourses that portray this altered state of perception as a 'lack' which negatively impacts upon an individuals' function in the world. To rely upon auditory or haptic perception is seen to be fulfilling the negative blind stereotype. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, the group's dominant identity is built upon a rejection of blindness and visual impairment as positive characteristics. This is continued through the valuing of visual perception. Those players with the highest amounts of sight are most valued. Consequently, the participants want to demonstrate their own visual abilities and downplay other forms of sensory perception.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to address two questions: firstly, how do the blind and partially sighted players both conceptualise and negotiate this sporting space and, secondly, do these embodied experiences challenge the dominant conceptions of blindness, disability, and sport? To address the first question, the players' multi-sensory experiences revealed a number of significant points relating to the sensory perception of the environment. Whilst visually impaired perception has been previously researched (Allen 2004; Anvik 2009; Saerberg 2010), this study is the first to examine blind and partially sighted peoples' sporting experiences and the findings are fascinating.

The visually impaired participants' experiences reveal an original way of playing sport that re-frames the ocularcentric conceptualisation of the sporting body. Sporting perception is an active process in which the players demonstrate a high level of agency when, firstly, conceptualising the space and, secondly, negotiating the game itself. By attaching social meaning to key sensory acts, 'sense-making' strategies allow the participants to utilise their embodied knowledge of the environment through a variety of sensory modes. As established in the auditory perception section, 'auditory

knowledge' of the game allows the B1 classified players to participate and even perceive intricate, yet, integral aspects of the space, such as distinguishing the type of delivery through the sound of the ball-bearings within the ball. The players are not merely compensating for an absence of visual perception; this is an innovative, ground-breaking approach to sport and physical activity.

Another significant aspect of negotiating this sporting space is how perception is an intercorporeal socialised act. As established in this study's theoretical approach, to be embodied is an intercorporeal process and playing visually impaired cricket is a perfect example of this. Although interaction between teammates is central to all team sports, these interactions take on a greater importance in visually impaired cricket. Whether it is an opponent's 'sledging', a teammate's haptic guidance or the wicket-keeper's 'commentary', the shared nature of these sensorial interactions serve to structure the environment. In the case of the wicket-keeper, his role is to purposefully provide linguistic (vocal commands) and non-linguistic (clapping) stimuli so all players, whatever their visual impairment, are aware of the game situation and location of the ball in the field. Although many aspects of the auditory structure require the players to attach their own 'meaning' to sensory acts, these deliberate strategies provide vital information to those players who would otherwise be unable to perceive it. Rather than passively perceiving the world, the players are actively creating the world around them.

Whilst this study's focus is sport, these findings also make a considerable contribution to broader understandings of the visually impaired body. Saerberg (2010) claims that a 'blind style of perception' exists, however, as the players' varied approaches to constructing and negotiating space demonstrates, there is no singular experience of being blind. As a sighted 'outsider', I was able to analyse how each participant plays the game and the strategies they adopt rather than relying on an individual autoethnographic

account of blindness. The inaccuracies of the constructed blind/sighted binary are also accentuated by the players' experiences. Firstly, to be sighted, as evident through my own multi-sensory accounts of field, does not necessarily equate with a reliance on visual perception and, conversely, to be visually impaired does equate with an absence of visual perception. The presence of sight, both perceptually and socially is an underlying, significant aspect of this sporting space.

To address the second question, and integral aim of this thesis, the blind and partially sighted cricket players' embodied experiences do challenge the dominant conceptions of blindness, disability, and sport. By not understanding the body as a passive phenomenon (Shilling 1997) but as “grounds for configuring an alternative way of being that eludes the grasp of power” (Radley 1995 p. 9), the blind and the partially sighted players' physical proficiency demonstrate an alternative way of being-in-the-world. In Frank's (1991) conceptualisation of multiple 'bodies', he describes 'the communicative body' as having the capacity for recognition “through the sharing of narratives which are fully embodied” (p. 89). The embodied act of playing visually impaired cricket communicates to a wider audience the abilities of blind and partially sighted people. As established in this study's theoretical components, sport can be a platform where participants disrupt and re-frame dominant discourses and the embodied act of playing visually impaired cricket has the potential to do this.

However, it is the players' interpretations of their sensory experiences that restrict the game's resistive potential. As noted in Chapter Three, this aspect of the thesis records the participants' articulations of their experiences and attends to *their* treatment of the senses. The players' 'sense-making' strategies are clearly original and captivating, yet, of equal importance, is how they describe and value these experiences. Their embodied experiences cannot be separated from social discourse and interaction. For

example, by ranking non-visual sensory modes as a 'fallback', those players with no visual perception have a lower 'value' within the squad.

Visually impaired cricket is played in an innovative way and should be celebrated for the astonishing feats of physical performance. However, many players do not want to be seen as challenging dominant notions of the sporting body. As reinforced during a number of interviews, certain partially sighted players claim that the team plays in the same way as their sighted contemporaries. This reinforces the 'normality' of their sporting experiences and that their visual impairment does not affect their participation. An attitude of wanting to prove their 'normality' is inherent within this group and is a theme that underpins the remaining analytical chapters of this thesis. Utilising visual perception is a significant factor in demonstrating their 'normality'. Although, it appears that these players are resisting the dominant ideal of the sport and the sporting body, this is in fact the opposite of what many of the partially sighted players are trying to achieve. Whilst the act of visually impaired cricket is resistive, many of the players' attitudes are not.

Chapter Five- “We are playing for England...just because I have a disability it doesn't make me any different”: Visually Impaired Cricket as an Empowering Practice?

Introduction

This chapter considers the extent to which participation in visually impaired cricket is an empowering practice and whether such empowerment can have a wider impact upon blind and partially sighted people who do not participate in sport and physical activity. Central to the IPC's (International Paralympic Committee) vision is “creating conditions for athlete empowerment” (IPC 2016) and, in fact, Sir Phillip Craven, IPC president, boldly claims that “the Paralympic Games are the greatest showcase on earth of inclusion and empowerment in action.” (IPC 2015). The IPC do not offer a definition of empowerment thus it is unclear whether they are referring to the personal empowerment of athletes, as referred to in their vision statement, or a process of widespread empowerment for the whole disabled community. This is an important distinction to make as empowerment operates at an individual, group and societal level (Pensgaard and Sørensen 2002) and, as analysed through this chapter, this affects the 'form' of empowerment acquired.

The notion of disability sport as empowering dominates current thinking (Blinde and Taub 1999; Ashton-Shaeffer et al 2001; Sørensen 2003; Huang and Brittain 2006; Berger 2008, 2009; Gaskin et al 2010; Peers 2012a; Silva and Howe 2012), yet, there is no consensus when defining ‘empowerment’. Drawing upon Pensgaard and Sørensen's (2002) three tiered model (Figure 4), this study defines empowerment as “the process by which individuals develop skills and abilities to gain control over their lives and to take action to improve their life situation” (Sørensen 2003 p.1). In accordance with this

study's embodied approach, the empowering potential of disability sport is experienced through a lived body. Whether that be the intercorporeal experience of being in a team or acquiring physical abilities and skills through sport and physical activity, empowerment is thoroughly embodied. To 'gain control' and 'take action' also recognises the role of agency in the process of empowerment, a central component of this study's theoretical approach, and how athletes can challenge dominant social structures.

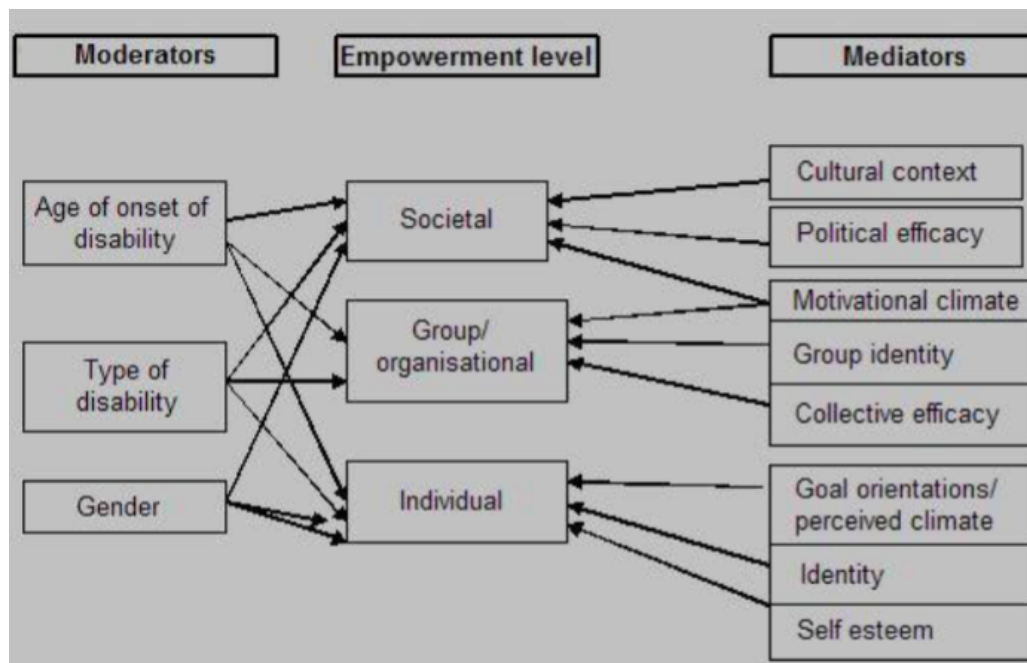


Figure 4: Empowerment through Disability Sport (Pensgaard and Sørensen 2002)

Pensgaard and Sørensen's (2002) approach is a useful starting point for conceptualising empowerment, yet, it has a number of shortcomings. The 'moderators' selected do have an effect on the empowering potential of sport, although, ethnicity and age should also be included as they are significant intersections within this study. The 'mediators' also accurately capture the potential outcomes of empowerment and recognise the importance of 'motivational climate'- whether there is a focus on high level performance or not. However, the biggest issue with this model and other approaches (Blinde and Taub 1999; Ashton-Shaeffer et al 2001; Huang and Brittain

2006) is that the notion of empowerment within disability sport is not critically scrutinised. There is clear potential for empowerment, yet, in the context of elite disability sport, the reality is much more complex.

The idea that excelling in disability sport is empowering for both the participant and also for the wider 'disabled community' is continually reinforced through media reportage and promotional material of various governing bodies. Yet, the process of being empowered through disability sport is contradictory: "few athletes are empowered by a mode of practice, ostensibly established for their benefit, which actively promotes a body culture that necessarily excludes them" (Howe 2008b p. 515). By adopting the mainstream values of elite sport and physical activity, the 'body culture' in which disabled people are continuously objectified by their impairment and level of function appears to be disempowering rather than empowering. This is a central concern of this chapter: how has the adoption of an institutional elite structure affected the empowering potential of visually impaired cricket?

This chapter also examines whether being empowered can transcend an individual athlete and be shared with other visually impaired people. The definition adopted states that those who are empowered "gain control over their lives and take action to improve their life situation". But can empowerment be a shared process? This is only possible if the disabled athletes and non-athletes in question "identify a commonality of existence and purpose" (Purdue and Howe 2012a p. 912) through a shared disabled identity. However, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven, many athletes choose to reject a disabled identity and 'escape' their disability through sport thus reinforcing the 'differences' between the two groups.

Due to such identity rejection, many members of the Disability Movement view disabled athletes as uninformed, too far removed from 'typical' disabled people and even "colluding with the non-disabled establishment" (Braye et al 2013 p.990). Empowering a small number of individuals, who are physically

capable of playing sport, can actually lead to further marginalisation of the majority of disabled people who cannot or choose not to play sport (Wedgewood 2013). Prior to this doctoral study, the relationship between visually impaired athletes and visually impaired non-athletes had not been investigated. This study is the first to analyse the empowering impact of visually impaired cricket amongst blind and partially sighted people and the role that it plays in 'blind culture', the existence of which is also discussed.

This chapter is essentially divided into two main sections: 1) the players' experiences of recreational cricket, both sighted and visually impaired, and 2) the players' experiences of international visually impaired cricket. The reason for this is to gauge how the participants' experiences of empowerment have changed over time and the impact of institutional structures upon the empowering potential of visually impaired cricket. Firstly, the players' initial experiences of playing visually impaired cricket are analysed. Central to *how* empowerment is experienced is whether an individual's impairment is congenital or acquired. For those players with acquired impairments, their pre-sight loss sporting experiences are discussed to provide some context to their relationship with sport and physical activity. The players' initial experiences of discovering visually impaired cricket, through school or a local club, are then considered and to what extent these empowering and varied experiences provided access to a 'blind culture'. The players' understanding of their physical capabilities, conceptualised as '*an embodied reconceptualisation of self*', is then examined alongside a discussion of visually impaired cricket as a tool for resistance.

The remainder of the chapter then focuses on the players' experiences of playing international visually impaired cricket. Firstly, the impact of media coverage and increased exposure upon the game is discussed. Professionalisation and the relationship with mainstream cricket, a recurring theme of this thesis, is then examined and how an elite approach to visually

impaired cricket introduced by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has irreversibly changed the empowering potential of visually impaired cricket.

“No matter how hard I was training; I was getting worse”: Embodied Realisation of Sight Loss Through Sport

For many players, sighted sport was a central part of their lives and their identities prior to acquiring a visual impairment or further degeneration of a sight condition. The purpose of this section is to contextualise the significant impact that giving up sighted sport had in the participants' lives prior to discovering visually impaired sport. For many of the players, it was through the embodied act of playing cricket, a game central to their identities, that they realised the extent of their visual deterioration. This reoccurring narrative theme is crucial in understanding the players' pre-existing relationship with the sport and, as examined later, the potentially negative consequences of these pre-sight loss experiences.

Terry, B3, describes growing up in a “cricket mad” family and, despite his visual impairment, played sport with his sighted classmates and friends after school. However, when he reached the age of twelve, he could not keep up with his sighted peers anymore:

My sight decreased a bit and I wasn't big enough or strong enough to keep up with the hard-ball. I wasn't confident enough, the same with football, that people were a lot bigger and stronger than me... I couldn't see the ball in the air and it became a real confidence issue.

Both Bill, also B3, and Mick, B2, had similar experiences at the same age. As games became more competitive and the opposition became more imposing, the mainstream sporting environment quickly became a disempowering and unsafe space. Even if the players' sight levels were stable, puberty meant that their peers' size and strength were ever increasing causing team games

to be quicker and more physical. The ball was suddenly being hit harder and being bowled faster. As Terry acknowledges, playing sighted sport became a “real confidence issue”. The benefits of participation that he had experienced, both physically and socially, were now non-existent and self-belief in his embodied skills and abilities diminished. Cricket had become a wholly disempowering activity.

Despite their struggles, a small number of players continued to play sighted sport throughout their teenage years, either exclusively or whilst also playing visual impaired sport. Xander's degenerative condition meant that he continually changed the games he played: “I started changing what sports I was playing to fit around what I could see rather than what I was enjoying necessarily as a sport”. Xander, B1, moved from activities that required high levels of hand-eye coordination to other pursuits such as swimming and, in his words, more “contained sports” such as pool and snooker. Xander, who continues to swim and scuba dive, explains that he feels a greater sense of control in water as he has a better grasp of what he may encounter. Whereas a space with few physical landmarks such as cricket is challenging for a visually impaired person to negotiate, the open water, in Xander's experience, feels both contained and predictable.

During the interviews, it was clear that those players who continued to play sighted sport as teenagers had retained their stubbornness. Their embodied resistance, as established in the previous chapter, was focused on proving certain people wrong and demonstrating that they could play sighted sport. For Thomas, B3, who played both sighted and visually impaired cricket simultaneously for five years, it was the school bullies and P.E teachers that he wanted to prove wrong. Thomas felt he could gain their respect, and even their fear, through playing sighted cricket:

I got quite bullied at school for the visual impairment I had and I know a lot of the kids they said “You're blind, you can't play football, you can't do this, you can't play cricket” but then they realised I could bowl at sixty miles per hour as a fifteen-year-old and they were the

batsman! They were a little bit scared, they were the ones who were scared.

This quote articulates his struggles within mainstream education and the significant value that he placed upon sighted cricket to change his social position. It was more than playing on a level playing field with his peers, Thomas wanted to prove his physical superiority and he found that bowling at high pace was a way of intimidating the bullies. His phrasing of the last line “they were a little bit scared, they were the ones who were scared” reveals a momentary insight into his difficult experiences at school. He is trying to convince me and, more significantly, himself, that he had swapped roles with the bullies; the intimidated became the intimidator. However, I do not think Thomas’ description captures the reality of the situation. I feel his bravado is a defensive mechanism when reflecting upon his evidently tough school days in which being able to play cricket was a rare positive.

However, a near miss during a sighted school match put an end to Thomas' participation in red ball cricket. When playing the sighted game, he would position himself either far from the action or close in to hear what was going on. Whilst at short mid-wicket, he completely lost track of the backwards defensive shot being played:

Everybody else had seen it but, obviously, I hadn't seen it and it was about a millimetre from my face. At which point, I shot down like a turtle going into its shell and just turned to my Dad, at the end of it, and said “I can't do this no more.” It scared the life out of me to be honest.

Thomas' stubborn persistence with sighted cricket almost had severe consequences. He was a valued and talented member of the school team and battled throughout secondary school to play sighted cricket to such an extent that, when batting during school fixtures, the opposition changed from a red ball to a white ball to accommodate his participation. However, this incident prompted a reconsideration of his participation in sighted cricket. It is interesting to note that he also played visually impaired cricket alongside the

mainstream version. Thomas still wanted to play the red ball game and was seemingly willing to risk injury to do so. His decision demonstrates the greater social value of playing sighted cricket in comparison to the adapted version, especially during his formative years at school. Due to his mainstream schooling, a clear motivation was to participate alongside his sighted peers.

Thus far, the players' experiences of sight loss have all come from those who played sighted sport whilst diagnosed as visually impaired. However, two players, Rohan, B3, and John, B2, both describe how sighted cricket was an integral factor in realising their diminished sight level prior to official diagnosis. Rohan noticed a severe deterioration in his sight, but ignored the warning signs and continued life as ever. It was during his first week at university that he realised the extent to which his eyesight had changed:

I was actually going to try and play cricket at university and I went along to one of the taster sessions you get at the start. I went with one of the guys in my halls and I was like "Just to let you know, I don't have great sight" I said sort of jokingly "If the ball is coming right at my head, push me out of the way' or something like that" and that exact thing happened! I was on the back wall and then he pushed me out of the way and the ball, I had no idea it was coming, and it would have smashed me right in the head.

After an attempt to play sighted cricket, Rohan was forced to re-evaluate his participation in the sport he loved. This was especially difficult in the first weeks of university where interests and hobbies are key identity signifiers. He realised that he could not play cricket anymore or join the university team and, significantly, the impact that being visually impaired would have on his academic and social life. The players' experiences articulated in this section coincide with formative phases of their lives, such as being at secondary school or university. Sport, an integral aspect of their identities, was swiftly taken away.

The majority of the players participated in visually impaired sports, including cricket, very quickly after giving up sighted activities and found the transition to be positive. John's experience was not like this. Despite playing academy cricket from a young age, his performance levels were decreasing and, as he describes here, became something that he could not halt: "no matter how hard I was training, I was getting worse just in term of being able to see the ball and pick it up". Due to his falling cricketing ability and involvement in a few minor car crashes, John visited a doctor and was officially diagnosed at the age of twenty-one. He quickly found that his everyday life changed dramatically:

There are lots of changes at that point of life, like really kind of... just changes that are quite challenging on a day to day basis. I was able to drive and then, all of a sudden, I had my driving license taken away and I also then got told that I probably can't play the sports that I love, all within the same sort of day. Yeah, it was pretty tough.

Acquiring a visual impairment in his early twenties changed John's life. He went from being an active team sports player, with the independence to drive a car, to being unable to do either. The loss of athletic identity (Sparkes 1998; Sparkes and Smith 2002) alongside the loss of independence was clearly traumatic for John. In comparison to those with congenital impairments or those who are diagnosed in childhood, the impact of diagnosis later in life is arguably more disruptive. In Rohan's and John's stories, whilst being unable to play sport may appear to be a superficial concern, their lives were meaningfully disrupted at an age where they were beginning to have a settled identity. John, who knew nothing about visually impaired sport, was restricted to training at the gym for four to five years following his diagnosis and felt extremely isolated from his previous way of being and of experiencing his lived body.

“I am a big fish in a little pond”: Initial Experiences of Playing Visually Impaired Cricket

As established above, the period of time between diagnosis and participating in visually impaired sport varied. For some, it was only a number of months, yet others had to wait significantly longer. Jatin, who is visually impaired from birth, did not start playing sport of any kind until his early thirties when introduced to cricket by a college friend. The players' initial experiences of visually impaired cricket also varied: through a domestic cricket club, a local charity, or attendance at a specialist school for blind and partially sighted pupils. Despite the diverse points at which visually impaired cricket entered the players' personal narratives, the positive and empowering benefits of participation, that emerge through this study, were identified by the majority of the squad.

The benefits of participating in sport and physical activity for disabled people are very similar to the eulogised benefits of playing non-disabled sport: basic socialisation, determination, and competitiveness (Blinde and Taub 1999; Berger 2008, 2009; Lundberg et al 2011). The disabled participants in these cited studies had various forms of impairment, including visual impairment. However, because of the unique impact that a sensory impairment has upon embodied sporting experience, it is important to specifically engage with research analysing visually impaired experiences.

Yet, visually impaired sport research generally focuses on issues of access and participation in grassroots sport (de Haan et al 2013) and elite football (Macbeth and Magee 2006; Macbeth 2008) rather than discussing the embodied experience of sport and physical activity. Jaarsma et al's (2014) quantitative study, that outlines the barriers and facilitators of sports for the visually impaired, identifies the reasons why the interviewees participate in sport. However, the data produced is limited in its usefulness for this study because of the quantitative nature of the results. A qualitative approach is

needed to fully understand the participants' responses. British Blind Sport's (2014) report 'Overcoming Barriers to Participation' telephone interviews over two hundred visually impaired people including forty-five cricket players but, once again, has a direct focus on barriers that restrict participation rather than analysing their experiences.

Prior to this thesis, the sole mention of visually impaired cricket in social research is a study into how various leisure activities foster a resilience in young Australian blind people (Jessup et al 2010). Through playing cricket, amongst other sports, and developing physical skills, the participants develop a high level of self-efficacy that has benefits that extend “well beyond the temporal boundaries of an activity” (p. 428). Self-efficacy is also a central aspect of this study's understanding of empowerment: how the skills acquired through playing visually impaired cricket can strengthen players' self-belief in their embodied abilities. An integral factor of developing such self-efficacy is establishing supportive relationships within the team. Building intercorporeal relationships emerged as an important theme and central to how the players understand their own impairment. This will now be discussed in the context of both specialist education and organised competitive cricket.

Access to a Unique Blind Culture? The Social Impact of Playing Visually Impaired Cricket

For the majority of the participants, discovering visually impaired cricket was an empowering experience. Due to John's tumultuous experience of sight loss, discussed earlier, he felt his life was on a “downward spiral” prior to finding domestic visually impaired cricket. He also met his future wife at a similar time and these two events changed his life dramatically. Clive, B2, was also going through a comparably negative experience. He admits that his life lacked purpose and was frustrated at being unable to play sighted sport:

Without sport, I was just drifting into... other things, you just drift into other things that kids around twenty sort of do. When you are at college and you haven't got a job, you just end of sort of just doing stuff that really isn't that beneficial to anyone.

However, Clive's outlook on life changed after his dad spotted a flyer advertising for players to join a local visually impaired sports club. His subsequent involvement with the cricket team has created a positive outlook that impacts other areas of his life:

I felt a lot better about myself, I felt more confident, I got myself a full time job and it gave me that, sort of, there is something else... another sort of pathway.

Clive's use of the language when talking about "another sort of pathway" informs us about the empowering nature of playing cricket. He found an accepting environment where he could once again play sport and learn new skills that incorporated his impairment. His self-efficacy increased and consequently felt empowered to get a full time job. Recreational visually impaired cricket provides the participants with a new social world that does not ignore their disability but incorporates it.

For Bill, he found an environment that was similar to the sighted team sport and it improved his confidence:

Well it sort of made me come out of my shell a little bit more. I went away from cricket and sport and then went back to cricket and sport and it made me feel comfortable again.

He felt comfortable in this environment because it was so familiar. Bill had previously played sighted cricket, however, when forced to give up the game, the social network that team sport provides was suddenly withdrawn. Yet, when he found visually impaired cricket, the atmosphere and environment was replicated and a part of his life, which he thought had been lost, had returned. Much like Bill, John's experiences of sighted sport, prior to sight loss, meant he was comfortable in the competitive team environment and,

after being restricted to just gym work for a number of years, he finally had the opportunity to meet like-minded teammates:

I think it kind of helped me on a social level in that there were people I could speak to about how it affects me day to day. Even if it is just making a joke about it, it's just nice to have something in common with somebody.

The relaxed and familiar context of team sport allowed John to openly discuss his disability for the first time. Through the medicalised, sterile language of diagnosis and dual blows of losing his driving license *and* giving up sighted sport, John's experience of having an impairment had been wholly negative. The previous struggles to negotiate fast-paced sighted sports were no more and, as Thomas describes, all players were now participating on a "level playing field". Whether visually impaired cricket should ever be described as a "level playing field" is something that is scrutinised in more depth later but, broadly speaking, the opportunity to play alongside people with similar impairments was now a possibility.

As the majority of the squad attended mainstream school, a visually impaired sports club was many players' first experience of interacting with other blind and partially sighted people. Both Oliver, B1, and Marcus, B3, emphasise these social interactions with teammates, both on and off the pitch, as a key factor in playing cricket. For someone who is newly diagnosed, sports clubs, whether domestic or international, provide access to a group of people who are going through similar experiences. Sandy, B1, who lost his sight in his late forties, found the social element of the cricket team particularly important in adapting to life after his diagnosis:

It weren't only the cricket, it was the surrounding things as well. Socialising with other people in my eyesight category, if you like, people who've had it for longer than me, people who were just getting it like me. It was nice to be able to see and talk to other people who are in your situation.

Being involved in sports clubs can provide opportunities to meet like-minded people with similar experiences and interests and this has been previously discussed in the context of deaf football (Atherton et al 2001) and other deaf leisure pursuits (Atherton 2009). Socialisation may seem like an obvious outcome of joining a sports club, however, it is of particular importance in a Deaf community where participants “view themselves as members of a social, cultural and linguistic minority” (2009 p. 443). Football clubs are a way for young people to assimilate Deaf culture and 'dip their toes' into the life of the Deaf community (Atherton et al 2001). This is especially significant for those born to hearing parents or who attend a mainstream school due to having no pre-existing ties with Deaf culture.

Atherton et al (2001 p.40) argue that Deaf football “is in essence often more of a cultural than a sporting activity”, yet, the same cannot be said for visually impaired cricket. The importance of meeting other visually impaired people through cricket clearly emerged as a key factor in playing the game. However, there is no comparable shared 'blind culture'. Due to the multitude of differing impairments, and no distinct form of communication, it is the close relationship to mainstream sport, rather than a 'blind culture', that unifies the players.

In the Deaf community, sport and leisure clubs are a continuation of the role played by residential deaf schools in the formation of relationships and a shared identity (Atherton 2009). Yet, it is a minority of visually impaired people who attend specialist education: seventy percent of visually impaired children are taught in mainstream schools (British Blind Sport 2014) which is a similar percentage to the eighty-five percent of deaf pupils (National Deaf Children's Society 2010). Within the England squad, only four out of the sixteen members attended a specialist visually impaired school and sixth form college. Despite the low percentage of attendees, Atherton (2009) still feels that the team sport environment is a continuation of the role that schooling played on relationships and identity. To understand if this is the

case in visually impaired cricket, the players' educational experiences need to be analysed.

Mick recounts the decision to attend boarding school and the implications that it had on his life and his sporting opportunities:

Well basically because I lived in a... can I swear on here? I lived in a shithole basically. I lived in a really bad area and I wasn't really accepted for my disability and I was bullied a lot. I would get beaten up quite a lot and then I couldn't really play sport anymore because I couldn't really keep up. I guess, like you know, your education suffers because of those reasons and don't really want to be in that environment etc. so my parents took the pretty tough decision, I imagine, to send me away. I was the best thing that could have happened to me, absolutely definitely because it opened up this whole world of sport. I was sport mad anyway so it alleviated that frustration.

Prior to boarding school, he was an obsessive football and cricket fan but was unable to join a team or even keep up with his peers. However, Mick quickly found he could join the various teams at his new school and that, in fact, he had a talent for the sports he loved:

Then at boarding school, I could play all of those sports on a level footing with people of the same sort of condition as me and, actually, I was better than most of them, mate... and it was great. It also gave me some achievement in sport as well, so not only was I sports mad, I found that I was pretty decent at it as well.

Being able to participate in sport was now a reality and he drew great self-confidence from his new bodily experiences and being able to excel alongside students who were older and more experienced than him. Due to the residential nature of the school, sport was constantly being played and, much like any mainstream institution, divides formed between those who played sport and those who did not. Kamran, B1, also experienced how sport quickly took over his school life using every bit of free time to play either football or cricket:

Sport was everything. It made me more confident. It meant I was more active, I didn't put on weight, I was much fitter and also I socialised. So much so that we managed to get so many people to stay that even

the teachers were staying outside of school hours to play cricket with us.

For all England team members who attended a specialist boarding school, a segregated education meant that their sporting lives had been completely reversed. The barriers that existed, when participating in sighted sport, had disappeared and school sport provided an accessible outlet for their passions. Due to their success, the players' performances began to be recognised. Brett, a B1 who played a multitude of sports at school, describes the prestige that the student athletes received:

One of the advantages of having segregated education is that you can be the big fish in a small pond and we had all sorts of resources available to us for sport...it was great. You were suddenly this world beater! You were best in your school at this, that, and the other and things like that. There was a certain admiration amongst people to physical athletes, isn't there? We are like "Wow look at that guy" and we all do it, whatever sport we are watching, we can easily spot who is really good at it and things like that and it is just the same at school.

Not surprisingly, the experience of physically excelling and being celebrated fostered a particular attitude in these young men. For Mick, participating in sport increased his 'credibility' which led to a high level of confidence:

Well it was no different from any other school, if you were decent at sport then people seemed to like you. It was no different there so I had that and I... was probably a bit cocky and stuff like that. I probably turned into... not a bully but somebody who was bullied into suddenly, I am a big fish in a little pond which I probably didn't quite realise at the time as I thought I was a bit better than I was!

Cliques emerge amongst the pupils, due to shared hobbies and interests and, for those playing sport, a specific culture develops. Playing sport in that environment allows the players to distance themselves from the rest of the school population, whether consciously or unconsciously, due to their physical ability. A shared identity is created in those who excel in sport, however, it is not built on a pre-existing cultural heritage but through the experiences of achievement and competition. Whilst the construction of sporting cliques and sub-cultures are found in all educational establishments,

it had a particularly significant impact upon how the participants understood sport. Sport became a way for individuals to change social status and disassociate themselves from other visually impaired people. In the context of viewing visually impaired cricket as an empowering practice, the players' reflections on school life begin to disprove the idea that empowerment through sport can be shared. Whilst some of the participants paint the picture of cricket as providing a socially accepting environment, the nature of competitive sport is that it is exclusionary.

Sports clubs are a continuation of the culture established in specialist schools, however, in the context of visual impairment, this is not necessarily a positive. The empowering aspect of playing cricket is evident during the initial experiences of finding the game. For players who were newly diagnosed, they had the opportunity to meet other visually impaired people and be open about their impairments. For those who had been visually impaired from a young age, they finally found a suitable environment to play the sports they loved. However, the culture that they 'dipped their toes into' was based around the values of competitive sport rather than a specific 'blind culture'.

An Embodied Reconceptualisation of Self

As established in the previous chapter, the sensorial experience of playing visually impaired cricket clearly poses a challenge to the ocularcentric norms that reduce blindness to a negative state of being. The participants reveal their agency by formulating sense-making strategies to negotiate the fast paced game of cricket. As an observer, the embodied performances of the blind and partially sighted players demonstrate an alternative way of conceptualising physicality and ideals relating to the sporting body. For the players, the execution of these skills felt 'natural', due to their autonomous level of performance, however this was not always the case. The process of finding visually impaired cricket and then discovering/re-discovering physical abilities was a common occurrence. An embodied 'reconceptualisation of

self' is a central element for many players in their initial empowering experiences of participation.

An improvement in physical condition and physical mastery of a particular activity underpins the empowering potential of disability sport (Berger 2008; 2009) and can lead to an athlete incorporating impairment as a positive facet of identity (Huang and Brittain 2006). Whilst Huang and Brittain (2006 p.366) argue that participants of their study were "proud of being elite disabled athletes and of their achievement in sport through their bodies", the authors undervalue the significance of embodied participation. The experience of participating in sport or physical activity instigates a feeling more significant than pride, it creates an awareness of their embodied capabilities and athletic potential.

The concept of 'reconceptualisation of self' draws upon certain aspects of 're-embodiment' (Seymour 1998) which conceptualises how disabled people rebuild their embodied selves after a crisis or trauma: "disability has given these people a chance to rethink their bodies: it has highlighted the experience of their lived bodies, and the actions of others toward them" (p. 20). Seymour's focus is on disabled people who acquire an impairment later in life and rethink their newly 'fragmented' embodied identity and 'remake' it in a less restrictive way. Whilst this is a significant idea, the author's negative understanding of disability sport is inaccurate: "disabled sport remains sport for people with damaged bodies" (1998, p. 115). This makes Seymour's approach unworkable. To portray disabled people as 'damaged', no matter the form of impairment, infers a reduction in a person's value or usefulness and makes a moral judgment about what a 'normal' body is. This further reinforces both the able-bodied/disabled binary, a mode of thinking that this study challenges, and a negative understanding of disability sport as inferior to 'able-bodied' sport.

In complete opposition to Seymour's approach, this study views sport and physical activity as the catalyst for embodied change in which the visually impaired individual can experience a 'reconceptualisation of self'. Using terms such as 'damaged bodies', as used by Seymour above, alongside constant medical intervention is bound to internally affect an individual's self-worth and reduce any expectations of their now 'limited' physicality. Nevertheless, through playing cricket, their embodied experiences of corporeal mastery and physical success can lead the players to re-evaluate their abilities. This embodied process is not just restricted to individuals who acquire an impairment later in life but also for those who are congenitally visually impaired.

Jatin, a B1 who is visually impaired from birth, started to play cricket in his thirties and felt empowered through realising his physical capabilities. When I ask whether cricket is a good way of accepting disability and reaching his potential, he responds:

I think so. In the long term. The more you spend time in a visually impaired sporting environment like I did. I was very scared, didn't know what my future was but the more I spent time with visually impaired people, pardon the pun, it opened my eyes!

Before entering the sporting environment, Jatin was isolated and in a "little bubble" away from anybody else with a visual impairment. Before attending an I.T course at an adult education college, he'd had no previously opportunities to interact with other visually impaired people. Also, he'd had no opportunities to experience his physical potential until he was introduced to visually impaired cricket. There was no dramatic moment of realisation for Jatin, but a gradual embodied realisation that he could compete in the sport that meant so much to him and rest of his family. Seymour's notion of re-embodiment talks about a re-making of the body, however, in the case of Jatin and others, it was more of a discovery of what was already there.

For those who had played sighted sport prior to sight loss or degeneration, the experience of playing visually impaired cricket allowed for an embodied re-discovery of their talent. Terry discusses the impact that cricket had on how he understood his own physicality:

Ben: Did it help you realise your capabilities perhaps?

Terry: Yeah, definitely. I think it gave me a huge amount of self-confidence, which I am not exactly short of, to be fair, now! I think it definitely created in me that confidence in my own worth and my own abilities.

The process of 're-conceptualisation' demonstrates the significance of the embodied approach to disability sport. The socially constructed expectations of their 'damaged bodies' led to a number of the participants accepting a negative identity as reality. However, through their lived bodies, the players' physical experience challenged their existing expectations of their own capabilities and also the dominant social understandings of being visually impaired. As evident in the previous chapter, the embodied act of playing visually impaired cricket resists dominant understandings of blindness, disability, and sport, yet, it is not just an external act of resistance. Many players also challenge their internal expectations of their physical abilities. The personal empowerment gained through playing cricket transformed their perception of self.

Integral to the embodied confidence that the players gain is the competitiveness of both domestic and elite cricket. Xander describes the thrill of being able to compete again after sight loss and how playing the game fulfils the competitive streak that he had built up through years of both visually impaired and sighted sport:

I've never not played; I've always played in some sort of competitive sport of some kind. So if that had been taken away from me, I think I'd find that very hard. I am quite competitive in that sort of sense so I've always liked to play in a team or against other teams or by myself against other players, you know.

The competitive nature of the game was clear from the moment John attended his first session:

I remember my first experience of it and I went to Lord's just to have a look at a VI cricket session and I was amazed at how many people were there playing it. The level of it as well and the commitment some people had made me realise that actually it was a bit of a life changing experience in that I knew then that I could play more sport again rather than just going down to the gym. I could actually go and compete at a decent level.

As discussed earlier, John was restricted to gym training for over four years after diagnosis and he thought he would be unable to play team sports again. Whilst still remaining physically active, it did not provide that competitive edge that he craved. The moment he walked through the doors at Lord's, the home of cricket, John re-discovered an accessible world of competitive cricket. His visual impairment did not affect his ability to lift weights or complete a press-up, yet, it stopped him from physically competing with others. The moment he found visually impaired cricket, this central aspect of his identity was reawakened.

The similar demands of sighted and visually impaired cricket are integral to participants choosing this sport over other visually impaired activities. When comparing playing cricket with goalball, Mick feels that there is a vast difference:

I do think it (cricket) is more of an achievement, definitely. Yet again, you are playing a mainstream sport that has been adapted and you have to, to a great degree, have to harness the skills that any person playing that sport would, in a mainstream setting, have to do. You still have to think in exactly the same way in terms of scoring your runs and picking your shots and bowling lines and planning your fielding. You still have to do anything exactly the same, all it is that it has been slightly adapted so that you can play it.

Xander describes his embodied experiences of visually impaired cricket in comparison with his pre-sight loss experiences of sighted cricket:

I think it is the closest VI sport to the real thing. Having played the real thing and feeling the emotions of playing the real thing.... it makes me feel like I used to feel when I could see and bowl and bat and field. It really is the closest thing.

Although he is bowling and batting in an alternative way to how he did when playing red-ball cricket, the physical and emotional familiarity of cricket, for Xander, is of great importance. The role of cricket in the lives of the participants has been discussed throughout this chapter and how participation can be empowering, yet, Xander's quote reveals an alternate view. For those players with pre-sight loss experiences of playing cricket, returning to the sport as a visually impaired person can actually have negative consequences. His description of sighted cricket as "the real thing" positions visually impaired cricket as a second-class version of the game and is clearly a potential drawback of playing an adapted mainstream sport.

The practice of sport can magnify the distinction between non-disabled people and disabled people (Howe 2008b) and some argue that competitive sport "sets the bar too high for people with disabilities and encourages the able-bodied society to think that social reforms are unnecessary" (Berger 2009 p.131). By attempting to imitate the values of the 'non-disabled world', disabled athletes are being set up for failure (Seymour 1998). I do not agree that competitive or elite sport 'sets the bar too high' for disabled people, however in the context of adapted sports such as visually impaired cricket, the players' embodied experiences will always be negatively mediated by their pre-sight loss abilities.

By viewing visually impaired cricket as inferior to the sighted version, the empowering potential of playing cricket is clearly inhibited. Sparkes and Smith (2002) discuss the notion of a 'restored self', the desire to restore previous embodied sporting capabilities that were lost through disability, in the context of people with spinal cord injuries. A comparable process is happening within this cricket team. For Xander, visually impaired cricket

provides the platform to 'restore' his previously held conception of self, yet, he is unable to meet his own internalised expectations. Xander is a highly independent B1 who, when talking about receiving assistance, said "I still see myself as a person with sight and I think that is the difference because I don't necessarily ask for help around the hotel or help getting from point a to point b." As his sight deteriorated, Xander found himself going from playing sighted cricket to then playing visually impaired cricket as a B3 and, finally, playing as a B1 classification. Rather than understanding the similarities of both formats as positive and empowering, as many of the players articulate, participating in an adapted version of his favourite sport actually creates unrealistic and unattainable comparisons with his pre-sight loss physical abilities. Although the embodied experiences of participation can lead to an empowering 'reconceptualisation of self', if an individual's motivation is to 'restore' their previous 'self', then playing visually impaired cricket becomes a disempowering and self-defeating practice.

Visually Impaired Cricket as a Tool of Resistance.

For Marcus, the competitive nature of visually impaired cricket is not just a personal motivation but is a way of challenging social expectations of his disability:

Ben: Was that important to show you were competitive whatever your sight level was?

Marcus: I think so. Just to show the people that just because you can't see very well, does not mean that you can't compete as well, or better, than fully abled or fully sighted people.

He feels that participating in a competitive sport demonstrates visually impaired people can compete on an equal footing with sighted, non-disabled athletes. Marcus is aware of certain preconceptions of blindness and disability and wants to challenge them through his embodied abilities. As evident through the players' experiences, cricket can be individually

empowering, but can this sport positively impact upon public understandings of blindness and disability? Marcus thinks it can:

There are those who label you before they've met you so it is important to show people that being visually impaired doesn't mean that you can't do what you want to do or can't achieve what you want to. If you say the blind cricket team, people may have that conception of seeing those with no sight playing cricket but actually if you get to know the rules, get to know how the game is played, you can see the levels of sight that are within that side and how well the game can be played.

As Marcus explains, cricket can be a tool to resist dominant notions of what constitutes a visual impairment. As discussed in the previous chapter, the game represents the various forms of impairments using the term visually impaired and demonstrates the abilities of the players within the team. By overtly demonstrating their physical capabilities, the players challenge dominant perceptions of disability as a weakness. The very nature of being disabled “offers the most challenges to the hegemonic ideal of the athletic body” (Promis et al 2001 p. 39). A subversion of the 'normal' body (Berger 2009) serves to deconstruct their expected role in society by using sport to claim subjectivity (Wickman 2007; Ashton-Shaeffer et al 2001).

However, there remains a lack of public knowledge surrounding the diversity of blind and partially sighted people. Visually impaired cricket can change this. A number of players feel that if the general public have the opportunity to watch a visually impaired cricket game then it could be a gateway to understand the participants' capabilities. Prior to this thesis, the only study to examine such empowered resistance in the context of elite visually impaired sport was de Haan et al's (2013) study of blind football. Previous research focuses upon recreational leisure pursuits for young people and how the participants challenge expectations through attendance at a sports camp (Lieberman and Wilson 2005) and also in context of a variety of leisure activities (Jessup et al 2010).

In Jessup et al's study, the young participants "resisted and challenged prejudice, stigma, and lowered expectations through participation in leisure activities" (2010 p. 426). The physical mastery that was gained through playing cricket built confidence in the young people which transcended all aspects of their lives. Also, through playing in public parks, their resistance was collective. Clive also identifies the importance of playing in public places. Some domestic league matches are played in public parks and he describes how their games draw interest and inquiries from passers-by:

Yeah I mean every time, and I've played hundreds of games of cricket now, every time we play... most of domestic cricket is played in parks and stuff like that and people stop and ask "What are you doing?", we explain it and they can't quite get their head around it. It definitely changes peoples' perceptions. I mean the international game is even more, it is quicker, it is harder, it tests your visual disability much more than the domestic game. Yeah, definitely, when people see it then it does change their view, especially if they are not used to seeing VI people out there in their everyday lives.

The act of playing in a public place disrupts the normative expectations of the games usually played in those spaces and, in Clive's opinion, leads to a change in attitude regarding visually impaired peoples' capabilities. There is clearly potential for cricket to challenge public understandings of blindness and socially empower visually impaired people. However, the instances of members of the public discovering a game of visually impaired cricket in their local park are few and far between. Clearly, these rare interactions are not enough to cause a revolutionary change in public attitudes which has been recognised by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). There is a conscious effort to raise the public profile of the elite game which, as will be become apparent through the remainder of this chapter, has a significant impact upon the empowering potential of visually impaired cricket.

“We see it as a cricket team, an England team”: The Transition from Recreational to Elite Visually Impaired Cricket

So far, this chapter has examined the participants' initial experiences of playing visually impaired cricket at a recreational level, through school or a local club, and how empowerment is experienced in a multitude of different ways. Building upon these early experiences, the players transition to elite level cricket is now investigated to gauge the significant differences between domestic cricket and representing the national team. Central to this discussion is how the institutional structures imposed by the ECB affect the empowering potential of the game for the participants and, more broadly, all visually impaired people.

For visually impaired cricket to have an impact upon public consciousness, there needs to be a greater engagement with an audience beyond those who are already well-informed about disability sport. De Hahn et al (2013) examines spectators' experiences at the World Blind Football Championships and how the event “provided opportunities to appreciate (arguably novel) displays of humanistic endeavour and physical prowess (in some cases possibly unfamiliar to some spectators)” (p. 13). Spectatorship is an active process that prompts contemplation of wider disability issues such as social identity and equality. Visually impaired cricket also provides an equivalently unique and engaging spectacle, yet, it is the lack of exposure that restricts the sport's public impact.

A central theoretical component of this study's embodied approach is agency and resistance. As has been evident through the players' embodied experiences, disability sport can be a way of challenging dominant discourses. However, this requires two things to happen. Firstly, as discussed, public and media exposure needs to increase to reach a wider, uninformed audience. Secondly, the notions of sport and physical activity

need to be re-conceptualised. Yet, re-conceptualisation is unachievable. In an attempt to increase public exposure, visually impaired cricket and, more broadly, modern disability sport are adopting a value system aligned with mainstream sporting institutions. Rather than challenging the dominant notion of sport, visually impaired cricket is reinforcing it.

The Impact of Media Coverage

The ECB recognise the importance of media coverage in furthering both interest and participation levels. In the context of viewing sport as a platform for resistance, the greater the coverage, then the more widespread the exposure. However, it is important that the coverage moves away from the traditional medicalised style adopted when reporting disability sport:

Terry discusses how the BBC were at a net session at Lords on Thursday filming for a news item about the up-coming World Cup and I ask whether this type of coverage has been commonplace in the past. Both Terry and Mick have been around the squad for a long time and have never seen this level of media coverage in a build up to a major tournament and have especially noticed a change in the style of coverage. There has been a concerted effort from the ECB to market the team as an elite national squad rather than just a feel-good, pat on the back story. At the practice on Thursday they were introduced to Lauren, an ECB press officer who is travelling with the squad to the World Cup to document and communicate how the team are getting on to the mass media. 8th November 2014

Alongside the avoidance of a patronising approach towards disability sport, other issues of representation exist in dominant media coverage of other visually impaired sports. De Haan (2012) documents Paralympic football players' opinions on media coverage. They feel their sport is continually portrayed as a 'novelty' and by framing the game as "it's just football with your eyes closed" detracts from the unique skills and abilities blind footballers have" (2012 p. 187). Blind football was also infamously used by Paddy Power, the betting company, in an advertisement campaign that attracted over 1,300 complaints (de Haan et al 2014) because of its portrayal of blind people and also animal cruelty. Although, visually impaired cricket has not

been portrayed by the mainstream media in such a way, this is due to the relative lack of mainstream media knowledge or interest.

I ask Oliver, B1, if cricket could be a good way of challenging other people's perceptions about visual impairment and disability. He responds positively:

I think definitely, yeah I'd definitely agree with that. I did some interviews for my local paper about being selected for England and it's amazing the response I've got from people. People hadn't realised that VI cricket was even a sport and now they are aware of how it is played and people are always really interested to hear about that kind of stuff.

The change of style indicated by Terry and Mick in the earlier field-note excerpt is indicative of the mass media approach to disability sport post-London 2012 Paralympics. This benchmark event was frequently acknowledged by the participants as a definable turning point in social attitudes towards disabled people and disability sport. Some of the players feel that London 2012 was the first time that the public's attitudes shifted from patronising to respecting the genuine competitive element of disability sport:

The Paralympics captured the imagination of a nation... it's a rhyme, not intended! It was phenomenal and it was so well campaigned and probably, around the world, it got more coverage than any other Paralympics did because of all the T.V and stuff like that. I think people genuinely went to the Paralympics to watch good sport rather than... there was a certain element of intrigue but I think people went there to watch good sport. That was a real good step in the right direction but whether that makes it lasting or makes a difference, I doubt it. (Mick)

Despite the jubilant atmosphere created by both the Olympics and Paralympics of 2012, Mick reflects that the shift in public attitudes was only temporary. When I ask about the potential for cricket, he answers: "Would VI cricket ever make a lasting impression on somebody's life then no, I don't think so." Much like the myth of a post-Olympic and Paralympic 'legacy', perhaps this seemingly enlightened attitude change only lasts for the

duration of the event. For visually impaired cricket, the brief public exposure that the Paralympics received is something that the ECB could only dream of emulating and further demonstrates the sport's marginal position. India and Pakistan, the most successful international teams, have a significantly larger demographic of blind and partially sighted cricket players and even broadcast matches on television. Yet, the extent of media exposure in the United Kingdom is local newspaper coverage of hometown players, occasional featurettes on Sky Sports News and match reports on the ECB website.

Kamran recognises the slight increase of media exposure for the game and the potential role that elite level cricket can have in challenging preconceptions about blindness. However, he feels there is still not enough coverage reaching the general public:

I gave a live interview from South Africa to BBC Asian Network and people who heard it came and said to me "You came across so well but the thing is that we've not heard anything about blind cricket so why isn't there more of it on?" I don't think it is all our fault, I think these radio station/T.Vs don't want to waste their time and spend their money on a sport that won't be watched.

As Kamran describes, mainstream media broadcasters will not invest in covering such a marginal sport but, without such coverage, the ECB is unable to raise visually impaired cricket's profile. It is a Catch-22 situation: media exposure is needed to increase knowledge and popularity of the sport but this lack of wider knowledge is the reason that media outlets are not interested in covering the game. Sandy does not foresee a future where visually impaired cricket is acknowledged as a mainstream sport as long as it is labelled as a disabled sport:

Ben: Do think it could break into the mainstream? Could be featured on Sky Sports? Could get it big crowds?

Sandy: Nah I don't think so.

Ben: No? Why not?

Sandy: I think the magic word disability is always at the front of it and I think people will not sneer at it but I think, because they don't understand, they will be thinking that it is a lower form of the game. Whereas if they came to have a look, I think they would be more surprised. I don't think it ever going to get a big crowd.

The challenge for multiple disabled sporting governing bodies and marketing executives, who recognise the Paralympics' marketability and want to attract a mainstream audience to watch disability sport, is how to commercialise these sports. It is not just attracting committed fans of disability sport but also the 'armchair' sporting enthusiast who would normally watch non-disabled sports only. For the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and the ECB, the answer seems to be forming close and irreversible ties with mainstream, non-disabled sports. Whilst appearing to be a progressive step in the evolution of disability sport from a rehabilitative tool to a legitimate elite pursuit, the potential consequences of such advances will now be discussed.

Professionalism and the Relationship with Non-Disabled Sport

Although the England team are not paid professionals, unlike their male and female sighted contemporaries, the coaching staff expect a professional attitude, the nature of which will become clear, in all aspects of the players' lives. During training weekends, there are regular fitness tests and urine tests to gauge dehydration levels during and after physical exertion. Personal training schedules are devised and the squad are even provided with a recipe book that outlines nutritious meals and snacks to consume when at home. Alongside physical health and fitness, the players' personalities are psychologically profiled and the data is used to understand the different personality types within the team and how best to utilise their skills. In return for the level of organisation and access to high quality services, it is expected that the players buy into a professional ethos of training hard, eating well, being competitive, and utilising the support staff to improve their

performance. The environment created by the coaches is driven by competition and success in major tournaments.

There is also the realisation that the ECB's financial investment may be dependent upon attaining such success and the continual growth of the sport. Unlike Pakistan or India, where the pool of players to select from is vast, the ECB has used its financial clout to invest into a holistic training programme for a small group of players. During the September training weekend, I have the opportunity to discuss the organisational changes in visually impaired cricket with an ECB employee. The following field-note excerpt recalls our informal conversation and raises a number of significant issues:

We discuss how a change in the ethos of VI cricket is needed to raise the profile of the game in both the disabled and non-disabled sporting cultures. He agrees that the new coaching team has been an important step in changing player attitudes and is reflective of a concerted effort, on the part of the ECB, to change the perception of disability cricket. Unlike the ECB's relationship with disability cricket, some of the national governing bodies of other playing nations do not have official partnerships with the disability teams. He feels that to gain more exposure for the game, both nationally and internationally, is for it to be organised much like any other of England's elite cricket squad with fitness testing, top end facilities and a professional ethos. He points out that the official kit that the players are wearing on field is particularly unflattering if the individual is not in elite physical condition and seeing England players with protruding stomachs through skin-tight lycra may be barrier in portraying an elite image of the game.
27th September 2014

It is the ECB's intention to raise the sport's profile and reach a broader, non-disabled audience. To achieve this, the governing body endeavours to organise visually impaired cricket in a similar way to elite sighted cricket. In 2009, the ECB signed a memorandum of understanding, alongside the major institutional bodies that deliver disability cricket, to signify that all disability cricket "falls under the strategic development and delivery of the ECB" (ECB 2009). The blind and partially sighted players are expected to attain the highest level of performance possible and, as made apparent in the extract,

fulfil the idealised notion of a 'sporting body'. Whilst the partially sighted players conform to an 'elite image', many of the blind players do not. As the game develops and becomes more professionalised, it is those players who are most likely to be pushed to the fringes or even dropped from the squad.

The England visually impaired cricket team follows the precedent set by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) in forming an ever closer relationship with the mainstream sporting governing body. Although the focus of this chapter is on visually impaired cricket and the relationship with mainstream sighted cricket, the context of the fractious relationship between the IPC and the IOC (International Olympic Committee) is a useful comparison with many similarities. Purdue (2013) identifies a 2001 agreement between both parties where it became an obligation for the host city to accommodate the Olympic and the Paralympic games. The consequences of such a close relationship are seen economically- one respondent in Purdue's study termed it "a junkie-dealer relationship" (p. 395)- and also culturally. Whilst I would not describe the ECB's relationship with visually impaired cricket in such an evocative way, it is following a worryingly similar pattern of reliance. Yet, it is not an economic problem, the money being invested into support staff and facilities is benefiting the players and their development, it is an attitudinal problem.

Visually impaired cricket is a different game to sighted cricket and, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is played in a different way. However, by wearing the same kit, employing the same coaching staff, and using the same facilities, the ECB expect to develop an elite visually impaired cricket team to emulate their sighted contemporaries. By adopting the same institutional ethos, the marginal visually impaired team will always be unfavourably compared to the sighted team. This has been previously examined in the context of the Paralympic games and how, due to such close ties with the Olympic Movement, the games "risk its cultural capital stemming from identification as a marginal, deviant sports event as opposed

to an elite sport competition involving athletes (with a disability)” (Purdue 2013 p. 393). A close relationship with the Olympic Games places the Paralympics as a mere sideshow or 'freak show' due to the model of competitive elite sport that promotes a “quasi-Darwinist selection by norms and rules which favour ableist standards of function and presentation of the human body” (Gilbert and Schantz 2008 p. 252).

When asking about the professional expectations placed upon them, the majority of players were positive about the elite environment created and credits the ECB with introducing these changes. Marcus, who clearly adopts a professional ethic, recognises the progression of the team and the impact of the governing bodies' funding:

I think, obviously, with the ECB and where we are in comparison to a few years ago, it shows a progression of a disability side. We are in the same bracket as the first team. We have seen a lot more funding over the past few years, we have taken on a lot more support staff that we didn't have before.

Terry, one of the most experienced members of the squad, acknowledges the importance of the support team. Yet it is the professional attitude now being instilled in the squad that motivates the players to seek individual support:

The professionalism within the team is completely different now to two years ago, let alone five-ten years ago when I started. Part of that is because of the nutritional support, there is sport psych support, there are coaches, there are physios but it is the guys learning to use those better.

Rather than a gradual change in approach, the team's professional attitude has rapidly emerged in conjunction with the introduction of an experienced, sighted cricket coaching team and significant ECB investment. Both Mick and Bill feel that a change in attitude positively impacts player selection. Prior to the ECB's involvement, Mick describes the team as a 'boy's club' where selection was based on whether you were friends with the coach or the captain, but, in his opinion, it is now a meritocracy judged on both

performance and attitude. According to Bill, the frustrations of working hard and not being rewarded or fellow teammates not putting in the same level of effort have dissipated:

Yeah it is a much better thing. I've always treated it as a professional environment whereas some lads haven't and then some lads are now buying into it. Obviously the people that haven't have either been chucked out or got replaced.

Those players in the squad who do not adhere to the professional ethos may lose their place and be replaced by a more willing individual. Such cutthroat decision making is now possible due to the ever increasing pool of players. As participation and interest in the international game grows, it easier to replace those players who do not conform to the institutional dictated and enforced team ethos.

Competition for places is to be expected in a representative national team and is even welcomed by the players who understand that strict selection is necessary to improve the team's quality:

It was too easy to play for England five/six years ago. It was far too easy and it shouldn't be! And it is not now, it is not and... I'm sure it could be tougher with a bigger pool of players, and they are working on that, but it is not easy to get into that starting eleven. (Mick)

As well as raising the team's performance levels, taking a professional approach legitimises the elite nature of the game and challenges the stereotypical expectations upon visually impaired sport. According to Rohan, the professional environment allows the players to demonstrate their abilities and be recognised as athletes:

Yeah well, I guess that the focus is more on the professionalism, it's not on being blind and I guess it is proving that "oh", in the negative sense of the word, "I'm not just a blind guy, I'm not just a visually impaired guy, I am a blind athlete or visually impaired athlete".

Rohan feels that a professional ethos draws the focus away from the perceived negatives of being visually impaired by allowing the empowered players to incorporate their disability in an athletic identity. Negotiation of identity within the squad is analysed in greater detail in Chapter Seven, however, Rohan's significant interpretation of blindness and 'athlete' merits a brief discussion here. By affixing 'athlete', and the social connotations of physicality that come with that term, to blind or visually impaired, in his opinion, makes this form of identity more palatable. Rohan's emphasis reveals the social capital gained through being an 'athlete' and also the negative stigma of being visually impaired. Adopting a professional attitude, which incorporates 'athlete' within his identity, means Rohan can re-frame his visual impairment.

However, Marcus has a different understanding of professionalism. He views their work ethic and high level of skills as a way of dissociating international visually impaired cricket from other blind sports:

Marcus: There are some sports that don't have the amount of support or funding as we do and maybe they are labelled. As they are labelled, they like to be seen. They like to be playing blind sports. They like to be seen as that stereotype.

Ben: But you think cricket moves away from that?

Marcus: Yeah but because we are looking to be a professional side I think we are looking to move away from that.

Ben: Is it important to you that it moves away from that?

Marcus: Yeah. We'll never forget that we are a visually impaired cricket team, there is no way of escaping that, but obviously we see it as a cricket team, an England team, that we want to become better and become the best team in the world.

Marcus' language is indicative of the negative impact that a professionalised mainstream-style approach to visually impaired cricket has on the players'

attitudes. He feels that the team needs to “move away” from the other supposedly stereotypical blind sports through professionalism and emulating sighted cricket. Marcus feels it is important that international cricket is perceived differently from other visually impaired sports and that it is, first and foremost, a cricket team. His acknowledgement that “there is no way of escaping” being a visually impaired team illustrates how certain players want to avoid the ‘partially sighted’ or blind label and view sporting success as a way of distancing themselves from these labels. The contradictory position of playing in a disability sports team whilst not identifying as being disabled is further examined in Chapter Seven, but, his attitude begins to reveal the contested nature of being visually impaired within the squad.

Despite the concerns of emulating the values and beliefs of mainstream elite sport stated earlier, many of the participants explain that the closeness between red-ball cricket and visually impaired cricket is one of the key factors in choosing to play the game. In fact, it is the relationship with mainstream sport that legitimises the activity. Whether this is because of their previous pre-sight loss cricketing experiences or the importance that cricket plays in their family lives or community, a pre-existing passion for red-ball cricket is a consistent factor in choosing to play visually impaired cricket.

Cricket was the obvious choice for Sandy as he used to watch it on television with his dad and, for Jatin, being able to play cricket fulfilled a long held ambition. He talks about his brother having a sighted team in the Middlesex league during the 1980s and how he would go along to every match but felt isolated: “I was just sitting there and I felt I missed out and I can't do it”. Once he started playing cricket, he received a high level of admiration from his family and especially from his cricket-mad father:

Yeah I mean my dad is always talking about me. Funnily enough I haven't even told him yet that I'm not picked for this series. It's not that he would be disappointed, it's that he tells his friends about how I'm getting on and he likes to brag about me.

Jatin's interview took place just after the squad selection for the England versus India series had been announced. It seemed that his biggest concern was how he was going to break the news to his dad that he had been dropped. The value that sighted cricket has in Jatin's household means that his participation in visually impaired cricket changed how his father perceived his son's blindness. As discussed when investigating cricket as a way of resisting dominant social understandings, staying close to the mainstream version can attract a wider non-disabled audience. John recognises the importance of close ties with the mainstream game: "I think it needs connections though because that is where support comes from. I think if people generally love cricket, they will love all forms of cricket."

The evolution of the organisation of disability sport as a whole, and international visually impaired cricket specifically, has meant that ties with the mainstream have become more tangible such as the use of the same facilities and wearing the same playing kit. Again on the surface, to be treated like sighted elite cricket players seems incredibly empowering and this was the general impression during the interview phase. Thomas demonstrates the positive experience of being in this environment:

At the end of the day I am still representing my country and that puts more on a par with somebody like Alistair Cook. We are playing for England, we wear the same shirt, just because I have a disability it doesn't make me any different.

Alongside the perks of plush hotels and branded merchandise, there also an elite mindset and an expectation to succeed that the players must now internalise. These are important values to have in an international team, sighted or visually impaired, but strict conformity to such values has disempowering consequences for certain members of the squad. The following field-note excerpt recalls a discussion with John Cook, assistant coaching, regarding the elite nature of the squad in which he reinforces their 'ethos':

The whole team environment feels completely professional and is reflective of the head coaches' and the ECB's intentions. Disability sport has quickly become more and more professionalised and cricket is no exception with the VI, physically disabled, learning disabled and deaf squads all run like the sighted national team. As well as logistical changes, there has been a change in attitude of the coaching staff. Whilst discussing the nature of my study, Cookie talks about Ross' aims when he took over the coaching of the team in April 2013 to create an environment where anything is possible and to push the boundaries. He succeeded a coach who had very set ideas on what the blind and partially sighted players could do so the players were not pushed beyond their comfort zone. Despite having only minimal experience with coaching disability cricket before joining the VI team setup six months ago, Cookie feels that his role, in conjunction with Ross, is to challenge the players to achieve their potential by providing a high level of coaching. 19th July 2014

The ECB are actively aiming to change the public perception of visually impaired cricket, if such a perception even exists, and feel that the most effective way of doing this is through adopting an elite approach in all aspects of the game. Central to their approach is the support staff that includes a physiotherapist, a nutritionist, a psychologist, and the coaches. Both the head coach and assistant coach are highly qualified coaches who have extensive experience and knowledge of sighted cricket but, when appointed, had no previous experience of disability cricket.

As John Cook acknowledges, their aims, from the beginning, were to create an environment to push boundaries and to challenge the players. This is to be expected from an elite organisational structure, yet, needs to be approached with caution in a visually impaired environment. Such is the heterogeneous nature of the players' impairments, the coaching staff need to adapt their coaching style and approach according to the player they are delivering to. Whilst it is possible in a one-to-one situation, it is more difficult when taking whole squad training exercises where, inevitably, those players with the highest sight classifications (B2 and B3) perform at a more proficient level.

Arguably, the pressure and expectation to perform are significantly higher in an elite sporting environment thus the frustrations for those players who cannot meet those standards is even greater. The focus on the players' physicality is further reinforced by the classification system, another consequence of the elite approach. Cricket is the only visually impaired team sport that consist of players from all sight classification, yet not all players wear blackout shades, only the B1 classified players, which makes the need for a stringent classification system even greater. By adopting the same elite approach as the England sighted team, both organisationally and attitudinally, there are disempowering consequences for all squad members and especially those with the least amount of sight. The professionalised focus on results and a medicalised understanding of the players create an environment that marginalises individuals based on their physical ability which sets the precedent for inadvertent social marginalisation.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the players' multifaceted experiences of participating in both domestic and international visually impaired cricket. These experiences were presented to ascertain the extent to which participation in visually impaired cricket is an empowering act and whether such empowerment could have a wider impact upon blind and partially sighted people who do not participate in sport and physical activity. Through the narratives shared by the England players, it is clear that playing cricket has had a positive and empowering impact in their lives. Drawing upon Pensgaard and Sørensen's (2002) model, empowerment is experienced at the individual level through a lived, active body. Self-efficacy and confidence is built through the embodied experiences of visually impaired cricket. For some, it was discovering visually impaired sport at school after years of struggling to play sighted sport with their peers and, for others, they experienced an embodied *re-conceptualisation of self*. However, a number of these empowering experiences took place early in their relationship with sport and before they began to play elite level cricket. This is not to say that the blind and partially sighted players do not feel empowered by the elite

environment, but significantly, it seems that their empowerment is at the expense of other less-able players.

The confidence and self-efficacy drawn from feeling like a 'big fish in a small pond' during the initial stages of playing cricket quickly dissipated and, once again, the limitations and the players' impairment becomes the focus. This demonstrates the importance of social context and the presence of others in the process of embodied empowerment. From being a 'big fish' at school or domestic level, the changes in physical expectations and quality of teammates/opposition in the national team leads to the players' impairments being valued differently. Elite sport is naturally a competitive environment that marginalises those who do not 'make the grade' thus such an environment is only empowering for those who are successful.

When discussing whether visually impaired cricket changes dominant attitudes towards blindness and disability, John feels that this form of cricket needs to be understood in a specific context:

I can imagine people saying "We don't want to go watch a blind cricket game, it's not going to be any good" but if you kind of apply it, a kind of contextual relativism to it, you have to say that they are playing cricket but they are playing cricket within their boundaries. So if you see it as that form of the game and not see it as blind people trying to play red-ball cricket, I think that is where we start moving things forward and accepting that it is a different game and has different people playing it but are performing to the best of their abilities.

As John suggests, a 'contextual relativism' is exactly how visually impaired cricket can both empower all the participants but also be a public platform to change attitudes and understandings of visual impairment. Even the strapline for the 2015 series versus India, that was used on the promotional material, 'Cricket. But not as you know it' demonstrates how a mainstream audience of cricket fans can be attracted whilst still acknowledging that the sport is being played in an alternative way. This point of view allows for an appreciation of the players' physical abilities displayed during a match but does not devalue

visually impaired cricket as a 'sideshow' in comparison to the sighted version. Yet, 'contextual relativism' is unattainable if the visually impaired players are wearing the same kit as the sighted teams and playing at the same prestigious venues. These tangible ties to mainstream cricket make it extremely difficult to recognise the two formats as separate entities. Consequently, for a public audience and, more importantly, for the players, visually impaired cricket will always be in the shadow of the sighted game.

Significantly, the further that elite disability sport persists with the quest to emulate mainstream sport, the more difficult it becomes to view sport as a way of empowering the wider disabled community. Whilst some of the players interviewed were aware of the real life issues faced by many disabled people, and had personally experienced these issues, the elite nature of the team has meant that the demographic of the game is one where the most able dominate and these players do not tend to engage with disabled activism. The potential for widespread social empowerment is clear, yet as long as particular players want to 'escape' being visually impaired through elite sport, widespread social empowerment will not be achieved. To address a central aim of this study, visually impaired cricket does provide a platform to resist dominant notions of blindness, disability, and sport. However, as evident in this chapter and the previous chapter, the embodied act of playing the game cannot be separated from the ECB's institutionally dictated and enforced structure. It is the institutional organisation of the international game that inhibits the empowerment of visually impaired cricket.

Chapter Six- “In a blind man's world, the one eyed man is king”: The Classification and Valorisation of the Visually Impaired Sporting Body

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of official sight classification in imposing fixed corporeal expectations upon the players and the social consequences of this medicalised process. In the context of the professionalised approach established in the previous chapter, the valorisation of particular cricket players, due to their visual impairment, is conceptualised through a 'hierarchy of sight'.

The process of classification and the celebration of disabled sporting bodies is a recurring theme within the disability sport literature (Sherrill 1999; Jones and Howe 2005; Howe and Jones 2006; Howe 2008b, 2011; Macbeth 2008; Peers 2012a). As outlined in the previous chapter, like many disabled governing bodies, visually impaired cricket has adopted a mainstream-style approach to the structure and organisation of the game. An aspect of this approach is monitoring players' fitness, through regular testing, and also the monitoring of physical function through official classification. This dehumanising process, which reduces individuals to objects of medical science and measures 'normality' (Jones and Howe 2005; Howe and Jones 2006; Howe 2008b), is one of the main reasons that disabled activists have distanced themselves from sport (Howe 2008b).

Visually impaired cricket adopts a quota system that requires a minimum of four B1 players, three B2 players, and a maximum of four B3 players in a team of eleven. This unique team composition differs from other visually impaired sports, and many disability sports, by having players with different

classifications on the same team. The effect of this, both on and off the pitch, is significant and reveals a number of original areas of interest previously unexamined in research relating to classification. Despite the growing disability sport academic literature, this is the first sociological study to investigate how official classification, and the rumours surrounding these classifications, underpin the social relationships within an elite visually impaired sports team

Firstly, this chapter examines the impact of sight classification and how the quota system marginalises certain players. The constant scrutiny of the players' categorisation is analysed and how gossip and rumour, where players are accused of cheating by their own teammates, is evident in the context of such infighting and mistrust. The relationships between the blind players and partially sighted players, both on and off the pitch, are analysed to gauge the discrepancies in power that these social groups possess. Finally, the ramifications of a 'hierarchy of sight', a social order in which those players with the highest levels of sight are most valued and have considerably more power, is discussed.

“We know who is a cheat and who is not”: The Impact of Sight Classification

Unlike other popular visually impaired sports such as football (two versions: blind football and partially sighted football), athletics, and goalball, cricket involves both blind and partially sighted participants. Any visually impaired person participating in competitive sport in the United Kingdom must have an official sight classification. In domestic cricket, the classification levels range from B1 to B4, however, international cricket only accepts B1-B3 classified players.

In the case of international cricket, each team must fulfil a specific quota of at least four B1 players on the pitch with the remaining seven places being

made up of B2 and B3 players, with a maximum of four B3s. In an attempt to provide a 'level-playing field', all B1 players are required to wear blackout shades that nullify light perception (World Blind Cricket Council 2016). During the match, when batting, the B1 player must use a runner, with the B2 players also given that option, and any runs that a B1 player scores will be doubled. When fielding, at least 40% of the overs must be bowled by the B1 players in the team. As is evident, the players' classification levels are integral to all aspects of the game and has a significant impact upon the match result.

Discussions of sight tests and classification were inescapable amongst the squad members and support staff in the build-up to the 2015 World Cup. Players were reminded to book appointments with an eye consultant and get an up to date classification certificate, otherwise, they would not be able to participate. Some players' sight is not always stable, due to degenerative conditions, thus continuous testing is an imperative. The International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) states that classification has two important roles: "to determine the eligibility to compete and to group athletes for competition" (IBSA 2015) Yet, for the athletes involved, the clarification process also has a number of unintended consequences.

Former Paralympians Howe (2008b) and Peers (2012b) discuss their own experiences of the classification process through autoethnographic vignettes. Howe (2008b) describes entering a sterile room to be processed as an object of medical science and being treated "as a specimen pickled in formaldehyde and placed on a shelf in a biology classroom" (p. 503). Whilst bodily intrusion is commonplace in all elite level sport, such as drug testing (Dunn et al 2010) or sex testing (Dworkin and Cooky 2012), due to the integral nature of impairment in competition, disabled athletes undergo regular and invasive treatments to 'prove' their physical abilities.

Peers (2012b) adopts Foucault's 'three modes of objectification'- how human beings are transformed into subjects- for disability sport as the processes of diagnosis, classification and subjectification (p. 178). The author documents her narrative journey from being spotted as a potential Paralympic athlete through to the combative classification meetings and dehumanising medical examinations: "the examination functions by rendering a subject's body and actions hyper-visible to the expert, thereby enabling the subject to be more easily and thoroughly judged, documented, diagnosed, objectified, classified, and as a result, disciplined, treated and normalised" (p. 181). Through the classification process, athletes are given a particular medicalised label that relates to their physical 'function'. Whilst a sight test is not as invasive as a physical examination, the visually impaired players are as equally scrutinised and objectified as physically disabled athletes.

Due to the composition of a visually impaired cricket team, the players, especially the B3 classified players, are under pressure to meet the 'expectations' of their particular sight category. Rohan talks about the pressures of meeting the demands imposed upon a B3:

It is frustrating for me, like when we were out in South Africa, I'm a B3 so I field on the boundary. So I think, because I'm a B3, I should be able to field on the boundary and I should be able to see the ball, I should be able to do this. I found myself sometimes getting really frustrated that I lost the ball.

He acknowledges the different pressures on all players, due to their sight classification, but the expectation upon B3 classified players is to do significantly more on the pitch than other categories. Rohan demonstrates the self-imposed nature of these expectations by repeatedly saying "I should be able..." when referring to his own fielding ability. He has learnt that the B3 players need to be able to field in the deep because no-one else can and gets frustrated when he cannot meet these embodied demands. The classification system within visually impaired cricket dominates to such an extent that players place unrealistic expectations upon their own levels of sight. Significantly, to be a 'B3', a 'B2', or a 'B1' is a form of identity, rather

than merely a sight category, and has a number of attached social and physical connotations. These stereotyped embodied expectations are not always accurate and, as will become clear, play a significant role within the creation of the team's social relationships.

Visually impaired sport is simplified into three or four categories based on the individual's visual acuity and it is supposed to ensure that competition is fair and equal. Yet, within these rigidly constructed categories, there are players with a multitude of differing visual impairments that benefit or hinder the individual depending on the sport being played. For example, a B2 classified player with tunnel vision may excel where hand-eye coordination is key, such as batting in cricket, but may struggle in fast paced team sports, such as partially sighted football, due to a lack of peripheral vision.

The discrepancies within the supposedly 'fair' classification system means that players with particular impairments are marginalised from visually impaired cricket. Marginalisation within partially sighted football (Macbeth 2008) is also commonplace in which those individuals with lower levels of sight within the B2 and B3 categories are relegated into lower standard teams. In Macbeth's study, one partially sighted footballer suggests that the players "who fall between a good partial and totally blind are being squeezed out" (2008 p. 77). However, in the context of visually impaired cricket, there is a wider variety of sight levels thus the potential for marginalisation within each category is even greater. Clive, a B2, describes his own inadvertent complicity with the discrepancies in the sight classification system and how a former teammate felt he was to blame for his non-selection:

Yeah. I've been personally involved in that. I've kept someone out the team who is a low partial and he said to me, "Well I can't play international cricket because you're here" which is quite hard to take. At the same time, I thought, "I don't make the rules. I'm not cheating, I'm within the guidelines." I've got tunnel vision so it means I've got central vision... I don't agree with the rules. I think tunnel vision needs their own category because cricket relies a lot on central sight and actually I do know I have a benefit in certain areas, not everywhere because there's a reason that sight category is included. But yeah,

I've personally been on the end where I know I have probably ended someone's career who was a very, very good cricketer.

Having a high level of sight does not necessarily equate with being a higher level performer, but it does provide a distinct advantage. Mick, B2, feels this comes with the territory of playing elite sport and that the players who are the most dedicated and train the hardest, whatever their classification, are the most successful. As discussed earlier, a professional attitude of training hard, eating well and being competitive is an important factor in selection. However, Mick describes a meritocracy that does not exist due to the existence of a quota system. Clive explains how meeting the player quota leads to the selection of those with the most sight:

We've got four B1s in the field so we've got seven partials. If one is bowling and one is keeping, then we've got five partials out there and we need to maximise the area of the field they can cover to be the best team. Their sight needs to be on a level where they can pick it up.

In Clive's opinion, the partially sighted players must be able to cover maximal space because of the blind players' limited movement. This means to physically occupy the space and visually conceptualises the game from all areas of the pitch. Rohan's frustrations at not being able to pick up the ball from the boundary, as discussed earlier, are borne out of not being able to see what a 'B3' should be able to see. However, he may also be fearful for his place in the team. Due to the increasing competition for places and rising elite expectations, the existing players are aware that failure to fulfil these 'roles' could lead to them losing their place in the squad.

Unlike their partially sighted teammates, B1 classified players must wear blackout shades during a match. Wearing shades or a blindfold is a common practice in other popular visually impaired sports such as goalball and blind football. However, it is the rule that only the B1 players must wear them that is questionable. Due to B1 players benefiting from double runs, the purpose of this rule is to create a level playing field within the B1 category by

removing any remaining light perception. It is important to weed out those players who use the sight classification system to their advantage, but it is contradictory to completely eliminate the B1 players' small amount of light perception whilst allowing B2 and B3 classified players full use of their remaining sight. Uniquely, visually impaired cricket is composed of players with a range of sight classifications who compete with and against each other. When residual vision is removed, the disadvantage that a B1 bowler faces when bowling to a B2 or B3 batsman is further compounded.

Xander, a B1 classified player, recognises that his level of light perception is greater than other B1 players in the team. Whilst this could be an advantage during a match, he doesn't think blackout shades are necessary:

I don't really agree with the fact that you should have to wear shades to reduce what you can do as a player just because your vision is poor. It just happens to be, you know, before I started playing this game, this was the rule. These are rules and I play by the rules...I think it should be fairer, it should be fairer in terms of what eye conditions or... just find a way to let everybody just use every last bit of vision that they have. Being in the dark for the entire game can be very disorientating.

Within the B1 category, some players can perceive light but not a significant amount to alter the game. Xander describes how wearing blackout shades removes his "openness" to the world and leads to disorientation. It is the contradictions that exist within the current classification system that need to be challenged. As Clive demonstrates, there are clear discrepancies within the B2 and B3 categories. Due to impairment type, a player can gain a distinct advantage when placed in the same category as a player with less sight. Yet, when faced with the same dilemma in the B1 category, the rules stipulate that all players must wear blackout glasses to even the playing field. The rules regarding classification marginalise those at the lower end of the sight spectrum whilst the players with most sight do not experience such inequality. The unequal relationship between the blind and partially sighted players, which to a large extent is attributed to the classification system,

leads to a preponderance of gossip, rumour and accusations of cheating, amongst teammates.

The Existence of Cheating, Gossip and Rumour

In this competitive environment, many players obsess about the classification of opposing players and, especially, the classification of their own teammates. Whether due to the fear of losing their place in the squad or other motivations, this section analyses the reasons behind such hostility. This behaviour is not just confined to visually impaired cricket. In the context of wheelchair basketball, Peers (2012b) found herself continually trying to justify her 'correct' classification and was under constant surveillance from all around her: "both my classification and diagnosis are debated by my teammates, coaches, adversaries and even fans. Everyone is an expert on disability and classification, it seems" (p. 184). A number of visually impaired cricket players experience similar peer surveillance and accusations. Central to these accusations is the embodied, socially constructed expectations attached to each sight category. If a player exceeds these social expectations, during a game or in training, they are subject to intense scrutiny by their teammates in the form of rumour and gossip.

Rumour and gossip are interrelated concepts, yet, have distinct meanings: "[Rumors] are speculations that arise to fill knowledge gaps or discrepancies. This function differentiates rumor from gossip, which is meant primarily to entertain or convey mores." (DiFonzo, Bordia, & Rosnow 1994, cited in Michelson et al 2010 p. 374). There is a 'sense-making' purpose to rumour whilst gossip is primarily used to further individual status (McAndrew et al 2007). For this study, this is an important distinction to make. Rumour is used by those players who genuinely think that there are 'cheats' in the team. However, there are ulterior motives for using gossip. Within a sports team, individual and group interests overlap and, depending on the context, the use of gossip is both self-serving and group serving (Kniffin and Wilson

2005). This section comprehends why this culture of gossip exists and the motivations behind accusations of cheating.

As said earlier, classification is a constant topic of conversation during the training weekends with both the support staff and players discussing the need to obtain official sight certificates prior to the World Cup. Yet, it is the private conversations with players over dinner and on the train that reveal the extent to which gossip and rumour dominates this space. For example, whilst travelling back from the Birmingham training weekend, two players talk about a magnificent cut shot played by their B1 teammate off the team's quickest bowler. During this conversation, I comment upon how impressed I am by the B1 player and one of the player's retorts: "Yeah, he is the best B3 we've got!" This 'throwaway' comment masks the underlying hostility regarding classification. During my time with the team, there are a number of rumours and jokes following a similar theme- certain players can see more than their classification indicates. The interview phase allowed me to directly question the players about these rumours and ascertain whether these accusations are genuine and, if not, why do they exist?

During the interviews, the majority of the players share their frustrations of being constantly scrutinised or sympathise with those players who are in the spotlight. Brett, a B1 classified player, was infamously accused of cheating during the 2008 Ashes series by the Australian team and media. He scored prolifically, including a double century, which for a B1 is almost unheard of, and his performances were put under incredible scrutiny. Brett made headlines both home and abroad and his B1 classification was openly questioned. He was defended by both the ECB and also the official ophthalmologist who certified his sight classification. When I ask whether such scrutiny is difficult to handle, he has mixed feelings:

I don't know, it depends how I wake up in the morning. Some days I don't really care and other days I'm a bit pissed off about it. At the end of the day, whoever is on the field is subject to the same rules and you can't be looking over your shoulder.

Brett's public experience of having his classification publicly challenged is uncommon as the majority of scrutiny takes the form of gossip and rumour. When I discuss the subject with Sandy, also a B1 classified player, he is clearly aware of the existing gossip surrounding his own classification and feels exasperated by his peers' accusations behind his back:

Ben: Do you find when you are at a tournament and maybe around the camp that there is a lot of focus on peoples' classifications, especially the B1s?

Sandy: Yeah there is. It is frustrating at times.

Ben: The fact that?

Sandy: Why would anybody pretend that they couldn't see to play blind cricket? I don't know how you feel about it Ben, but I've had as many eye tests as anybody could imagine and want to have or not want to have. They all come back... the last one that came back was worse than the previous one.

Ben: Do you get that within this team environment or is it just when...

Sandy: It is everywhere.

Ben: And I guess that doesn't help.

Sandy: No... I don't want to go too far into that.

Sandy's abrupt curtailing of this part of the interview suggests his reticence in discussing this topic. He makes the point that he has been tested numerous times and is taken aback by the fact that someone would want to lie about their sight. Being branded as a cheat by his teammates questions his integrity and implies that he is untrustworthy. Sandy, who uses a guide dog in everyday life, is understandably upset that some of his peers feel that his sight is better than he claims.

Although John, B2, does not directly experience any scrutiny from his teammates, he is frustrated that it exists at all:

It fucks me off, Ben, to be honest. I hear it all the time. They are always having a moan either about players in different teams or players within our team or you hear it from different teams about our own players. It just seems to be a real culture in this sport that they like to have a moan and I don't know where that has come from. I feel sorry for those people they are having a moan about...I find it just bizarre, just crazy and especially when it is your own team! They know they've been through the same process, we all had to give in sight classification forms, we all had an ophthalmologist doing it, I don't know why it is an issue. I honestly don't! Crazy!

Clearly, gossip and rumour play a crucial role within this team. Two interesting points emerge from John's response. Firstly, rumours surrounding particular players' sight classifications is endemic in domestic and international visually impaired cricket. John acknowledges that, in his experience, it has always been an issue, yet, he does not know the root of such behaviour. Secondly, the accusers' behaviour is counter intuitive. To accuse a fellow teammate of cheating the system, unless there is a genuine case of cheating, is wholly disruptive and marginalising. Yet, there have been no official complaints or reported cases of deception within the England team. Thomas discusses how the issue of cheating in international visually impaired cricket has been around for over a decade and Marcus also refers to how players have historically taken advantage of the testing procedure. Both think that improvements are being made to eradicate cheating, yet, neither player make any reference to an individual actually being banned for cheating.

Whilst based upon hearsay, over time, such gossip has grown in credibility and become accepted as reality. Gossip commonly targets those individuals of a higher social status or a potential rival (McAndrew et al 2007), however, within the visually impaired cricket team, the roles are reversed. As evident above, players with the highest sight levels accuse their B1 teammates of cheating with no clear individual gain. Yet, it does serve an important

function: to preserve the set social and 'bodily' structure. The group's norms and values, that position the players with most sight at the top, are undermined if the blind players can play as well, if not better, than their partially sighted teammates. It is within the interest of those with social power to retain that position. Gossip is used to defend and reaffirm the group's norms (Kniffin and Wilson 2005) and, in the context of cricket, reinforce the marginality of the blind players.

The distinction between rumour and gossip is especially pertinent when a player accuses a teammate within the same sight category. Whilst rumour and gossip is used to preserve social structure, it is also used as a genuine means of complaint. For example, Jatin passionately argues that there are cheats amongst the national team's B1 classified players. He disputes the fairness of the classification system in which all players undergo the same examination:

Ben: But with quite stringent classifications from independent doctors and things...

Jatin: Nah, it's rubbish.

Ben: Okay. What do you mean by that?

Jatin: There are people who go to the opticians and I can say what I see, can't I? If I see something, then I don't have to say I can see that. If I want to get a certificate to my needs, I can control what I see and not see when I'm going to the opticians.

Ben: So could this be likened to other types of cheating in sighted sport like drug taking or things like that?

Jatin: It is, it is. Well, yeah.

Ben: Just working the system.

Jatin: Yeah. Cheats will be in every... blind or disability or sighted, black or white or Asian, cheats are cheats.

Ben: But you say the coaches don't recognise this or don't see it?

Jatin: I would be very surprised if they don't see it.

As well as suggesting the coaching staff are aware of this issue, Jatin questions the whole process of sight classification. He argues that by claiming reduced sight during a medical examination, a player can receive a lower classification. Although, one could provide false information when identifying letters on the chart during a Snellen test, classification testing is more advanced than one singular visual acuity test with field of vision and light refraction also being tested. Despite the implications that lying may have upon various aspects of an individual's life, such as being legally allowed to drive, Jatin is sure that certain players are cheating the system.

When discussing cheating, Jatin also refers to his previous struggles to get into the England team. He attributes his non-selection to the presence of B1 players, who he feels, were cheating, and even refers to Brett's Ashes double hundred in 2008 as setting unrealistic expectations:

Jatin: I'm not being bitter but that is how it is. I know my capacity and I play like a B1. I'm a steady player but I am not outstanding. But when there are cheats around then you just look twice as bad.

Ben: And are they definitely cheats or have they just worked really hard and are talented players?

Jatin: No, cheats!

Despite his insistence, the tone of his abrupt retort does reveal some bitterness. As explained in the previous chapter, Jatin had just been dropped for the upcoming series against India, the country of his birth, and he was still coming to terms with this news. This does go some way to explaining his

aggressive stance on the issue of cheating and his reference to Brett, the man who replaced him in the squad. If we look beyond Jatin's emotional response the 'logic' of such an accusation is clear: if a player performs to a greater level than the pre-conceived embodied expectations upon that classification, then they must be cheating.

The most telling sentence from the above quote is "I know my capacity and I play like a B1". He demonstrates how 'being' a particular classification imposes limitations and how the players internalise these corporeal boundaries. Jatin feels that he knows what a B1 classified player is capable of because of his own abilities and limitations. The socially constructed categories are so engrained that, rather than recognising a teammate's talent or hard-work, the only possible explanation is that they are cheating. Although an elite sporting environment, such as this, should be the place where physical boundaries are challenged, certain players are not willing to accept such advances in performance. The socially constructed discourses pertaining to classification are embodied to such an extent that the players accept the medically dictated boundaries of their physicality. If another player excels, the accusation of cheating maintains the status quo and is a form of self-preservation for those athletes making these accusations.

Such defensiveness is completely understandable in this context. Thomas sympathises with the B1 players and explains how they are particularly targeted: "It has been really difficult to keep them on board because it feels like we are using them as a scapegoat to try and eliminate other nations' B1s." Whilst within the team environment, the focus was on certain B1 players and how their classifications are incorrect. Even though there are advantages to being classified as a B1, the fact that all blind players have to wear blackout shades should mean that any accusations of cheating should be irrelevant. Yet, they still persist. Xander, a B1 classified player, has been on the receiving end of such scrutiny due to having a certain amount of light perception. He argues that it makes very little difference:

Once your vision is just so low, you cannot see the ball. So if somebody held the ball up like this and didn't shake it but just held it up like that or threw it, it would hit me. If there was no sound in that ball, I would not have any clue where that ball was. Now, how I am going to turn a game on its head based on something like that?

Xander explains that the real problem are those players who are classified at the higher end of the B3 category and, in his words “could drive a car but actually come to play”. Despite Brett's experience during the 2008 Ashes and being on the receiving end of accusations, he admits that he is unsure about some of his partially sighted teammates' classifications:

But, I mean look I've got... if I was being absolutely honest, I've some question marks about some of our own players but the managers tell the coaches who they can pick and then the coaches pick from that.

An interesting dynamic is present in which blind players are accusing partially sighted players of cheating. Whilst this may be a genuine accusation, it is an opportunity for the B1 classified players to turn the tables and accuse higher sighted players. Jatin, Brett and Xander, the three players who openly claim that there are cheaters within the squad, are all registered as blind, yet they still make accusations despite being unable to watch the players they are scrutinising. Whilst observation is a multi-sensory process, without visual perception, it is extremely difficult to gauge if a teammate can see more than they claim. So once again, there is little basis to these accusations. Unless a player actively admits to cheating the classification system, accusations can only be based on speculation. Rather than preserving the group dynamic through gossip, they are challenging it and, by doing so, disrupting the partially sighted players' high status.

Terry feels that rumours of cheating are commonplace in all elite sport whether sighted or visually impaired. He goes on to liken the act of abusing the classification system as being similar to taking performance enhancing drugs:

Terry: There are plenty of people out there who consider me a cheat. I don't know... again it is not reserved to just us so the deaf team constantly have issues with guys' classifications and Pistorius didn't like the length of another guy's blades. That is no different from...

Ben: So is that about being “too able”, in inverted commas?

Terry: No, that is just sport. Every hundred metre runner will tell you that the other hundred metre runner is juicing, every weightlifter, every bodybuilder will tell you that everyone else is juicing...

Ben: So it just a different form of that?

Terry: It is just competitive. If you are in a competitive environment, then people accuse others of cheating.

Terry argues that rumour and gossip is to be expected in such a competitive environment. By likening this to other sports and reinforcing the competitive element, he legitimises the 'seriousness' of visually impaired cricket. He refutes the suggestion that accusations exist due to players exceeding physical expectations of their sight category by saying “That is just sport”. His attitude further demonstrates how the organisation of visually impaired cricket adopts the values of mainstream sport, as established in the previous chapter, and that an increase in accusations is an unavoidable consequence. The team's professional ethos has led to an improvement in performance levels but, to such an extent, that particular players are accused of cheating the system. It is a contradictory position where those who excel appear to be 'too able' for their designated category thus drawing negative attention upon a player's impairment

Rumour and gossip relating to classification is used in a number of different ways within the team and demonstrates that it can be both a self serving and group serving process (Kniffin and Wilson 2005). On an individual level, gossip is used as a form of self-preservation. Whether it be the pressure of being out-performed by a teammate in the same sight category or the

embarrassment of being out-performed by a teammate in a lower sight category, accusations are an effective way of deflecting attention away from one's own shortcomings. Clive feels there is a simple reason for the existence of such gossip:

Unfortunately, blind cricket is riddled with jealous people and there are people who will, anyone who does anything good: "Oh he can see". Well how about he is just a really good cricketer and he understands what he is doing.

However, it is more than mere jealousy. On a group level, gossip is used to maintain and reinforce the team's corporeal norms and values. The physical and social expectations upon each classification are established and consequently embodied by the players. The sight classification system is so engrained within the team structure that, as will be discussed in the next section, an individual's classification is their identity. As discussed earlier, Rohan is frustrated when he cannot see the ball whilst fielding on the boundary: "I think, because I'm a B3, I should be able to field on the boundary and I should be able to see the ball". Jatin shares a similar sentiment when discussing his teammates cheating the classification system: "I know my capacity and I play like a B1". These quotes demonstrate how both players have internalised their classification and how it dictates their own embodied expectations. Rumour and gossip is used when these socially constructed expectations are breached. For the partially sighted accusers, their dominance within the social structure is reinforced and, for the blind accusers, the physical expectations upon their sight category remain fixed. Whether it is individually motivated or for the 'benefit' of the group, rumour and gossip serves to maintain the institutionally enforced bodily 'status-quo' of this visually impaired cricket team.

“You will class yourself as an international cricketer... then you've got to help your teammate out to go to the buffet”: An Examination of the 'B1' and 'Partials' Relationship

Being classified into bodily categories has wider implications that go beyond targeting the players' level of sight. During the monthly training weekends, it became clear that the team environment is essentially split into two categories of 'B1s' and 'Partials', which consists of the B2 and B3 classified players. These categories, based upon levels of sight, create two distinct social groups. This section examines how these defined groups influence relationships both on and off the pitch from the differing perspective of both the blind and partially sighted players.

Social Relationships on the Pitch

During participant observation, the existence of two social groups was not immediately obvious. Yet, as the training weekends progressed and I became more involved with the coaching sessions, the disparity between the blind and the partially sighted players became obvious:

This idea of difference is reinforced when the group is split into Partials and B1s for coaching. Ross has set up four nets on one side of the hall for the partially sighted players with specific playing aims for each net (pressure bowling, batting with a bowling machine etc.). He asks me just to monitor the nets and only step in if the players begin to lose focus on their task, but, his aim is to let the players run the session themselves. I think this demonstrates that Ross trusts the partial players and allows them to be independent in their game development. Just after Ross gives me my instructions, Cookie commandeers me to work with the B1s in the other half of the indoor school so I go over to the B1s who are gathered by the chairs chatting. I tell Jatin, Kamran and Will that I will be working with them which is met by a cheeky Kamran comment and smile. I guide all three players together in a 'conga line' over to where we will be running the drills as Cookie brings over some additional equipment and Lara, an additional coach. Whereas the partials are displaying their independence on the other side of the hall, the B1s are being given one to one support. The coaching staff must see this as the best

way for the B1s to practice their individual skills, however, it seems to continue the theme of separation.

At the time, I felt this separate practice was necessary but, on reflection, the B1s could definitely have been included in the partials' drills. I think the motives for dividing the players in training is due to Ross wanting to run an intense and fast paced session that the B1s may not be able to keep up with. Both of the coaches, prior to the VI team, had little or no disability cricket coaching experience. Cookie always works with the B1s and Ross with the partially sighted members of the team. Their mantra of treating the VI team like any other cricket team is admirable but this sometimes seems to be at the cost of the B1 players. At points during the morning, it feels like Cookie's role is to babysit the B1s whilst the partials do the 'proper' cricket. 11th October 2014

Whilst the partially sighted players are independently running their own session, the blind players are provided with copious amounts of support. Until I step back from my role as support coach and interrogate the separation of players, it seems like the 'natural' thing to do. I, like the rest of the coaching staff, had internalised that these two groups are inherently different and should be treated accordingly. These established 'differences' relate to the players' physical abilities and also to their independence and the required level of support. Although certain drills do allow for both B1 and 'Partials' to train alongside each other, these usually take the form of match practice which reinforces the players' categorical differences.

Whilst separate practice can be interpreted as a way of reinforcing the blind players' limited abilities, it is not an issue of contention amongst the players. Brett explains that the B1 players' role is distinct from the partially sighted players:

The way we play the game is different and we should be coached differently and, as I've said to Ross, I think there should be a pot of money available for B1 players because we train very differently.

He recognises B1 classified players train in a different way and, for certain aspects of the game, this is necessary. The reliance on auditory stimuli when

batting, bowling and fielding means that effective training needs to take place in a controllable environment as unwanted background noise disrupts practice. A different approach to particular key skills is also required:

Our role within the game is very different to what a partial would do. Fielding positions, all those can be filled by partials but we field in very specific places so sometimes I think it is necessary. (Oliver)

Oliver describes his B1 fielding position close to the batsman and how he has to quickly drop to the ground and spread his body to act as a barrier. He covers a wider distance creating a better opportunity to stop the ball. This goalkeeping-style of fielding relies heavily upon the wicket-keeper's directions, as established in Chapter Four, and places the B1 directly in the firing line with some even resorting to wearing a helmet on the field. The partially sighted players do not adopt this technique but approach fielding in the same way as a sighted cricket player and use similar coaching drills. Much like any sporting activity with specific positions or roles, the B1 players utilise different skills so, at certain times, they need specialised and separate coaching.

An alternative approach to coaching is also required. As identified in the field-note extract, the B2 and B3 coaching session uses the same drills and also the same delivery style as sighted cricket. This delivery style relies heavily upon visual demonstration thus making it inaccessible for the B1 players. Adopting an approach that does not rely on visual demonstration is a challenge and especially for this coaching team who had worked exclusively in sighted cricket prior to visually impaired cricket. By the end of this study, the coaches had begun to make a conscious effort to create innovative drills for all players but, due to their reliance on traditionally 'sighted' drills, they appeared to retreat to their 'comfort zone' of a sighted cricketing approach.

Integral to their coaching approach is a clear focus upon the players' health and fitness. However, many of the B1 players cannot independently access

their local cricket facilities or undertake gym sessions and so opportunities to practice may be restricted to either domestic or international training only. Although individual fitness training plans are created for all players, the issues for B1 players attempting to maintain personal fitness are twofold. Firstly, an accessible gym is needed and, secondly, to undertake the exercises correctly, they must employ a personal trainer or gym buddy to receive guidance and feedback on their skill execution. Not all B1 players are motivated to improve their physical fitness but, for those who are, they may struggle to complete a gym session that their partially sighted peers would accomplish with ease. Terry recognises that there needs to be a greater consideration upon how B1 players can train both more independently and more effectively:

There is so much that the B1s still need in terms of going forward. If there was an area that needed professionalising, it is what is delivered for the B1s in terms of how their training is delivered to them. The only... a way of knowing that they know they are getting bespoke training is by having separate training weekends which would be appalling because they have to be a part of the team.

Terry admits that separate training weekends would be 'appalling' for team unity, yet sees the potential benefits for the B1 players' development. His sentiment reflects the necessary balance between integrating players of all sight classifications within the collective 'team' whilst acknowledging the players' varied approaches to playing cricket. In the field-note extract that started this section, I clearly underestimated the differing roles of the blind and partially sighted players, especially in the field, and how separate training can be a positive for all players. However, when these different approaches prioritise partially sighted players' development, segregated training becomes problematic. Thomas claims that B1 player development is slower in comparison to their partially sighted peers because the coaches rely heavily on visual directions and feedback. Consequently, the B1 players' performances stagnate whilst the partially sighted players continue to improve therefore resulting in an increasing gulf between the two groups.

Whilst discussing the potential issues of having both blind and partially sighted people in the game, Thomas explains the difficulty of retaining B1 players and the supposedly reduced impact they have during a game:

Obviously, our game is based on having at least four B1s but trying to keep four B1s even interested in the game, let alone wanting to play the game, is quite difficult because it is all solely based around the partial element of the game. So all the partials will do all the bowling, most of the bowling, they will score most of the runs.

According to Thomas, visually impaired cricket is “solely based around the partial element of the game”. This statement is clearly incorrect. At least 40% of the overs must be delivered by a B1 bowler and there must be one B1 batsman in every cycle of three within the batting order (1-3, 4-6 7-9) (BCEW 2016). Thomas does not literally mean that the blind players have no role in the game, he is making a value judgement on their contribution in comparison to the partially sighted players. Jatin describes the impact of this attitude on his own confidence and the level of respect that he is afforded within the team:

I mean it's changed a little bit now but B1s, I always used to think that B1s are always sort of carried, not carried, but just there to make up the numbers. Like we are not going to score like the way the partials score their runs, so sometimes we hog the strike obviously so sometimes they try to run you out purposefully. I've noticed that. Things like that are not very nice.

To 'hog the strike' is when a player faces a number of consecutive deliveries without hitting a single thus restricting their batting partner's opportunity to face any deliveries. A B1 classified player retaining the strike for long periods is to be expected, especially if they are facing a partially sighted bowler. Yet Jatin feels under constant scrutiny when wasting valuable deliveries that could be used by a partially sighted batsman. Despite Jatin's concerns, Rohan, Terry, and John all recognise the key role that a high quality B1 player can have upon a result. Due to receiving double runs, a B1 player who scores regularly and bowls consistently is an integral part of the team. When discussing the challenges of having B1 players and partially sighted players

on the same team, John talks about segregation but also the respect that blind players deserve:

If you are looking at it as a team and you are looking at it as the overall performance of a team, you could say the team performance would be better if there weren't any B1s in there. But, if you are looking at it in that context of a blind sport, you could say that actually the best player on the team is a B1 because of their limitations and what they do within those limitations.

Much like John's call for 'contextual relativism' when viewing visually impaired cricket in the previous chapter, the problem with his admirable sentiment is that "the context of blind sport" is absent. In this elite context, it is the end result that is important thus the best players on the team are those who can perform to the highest level and not those who admirably achieve despite their 'limitations'. Predominantly, B1 players are not celebrated as the best players on the team because their performances are always unfavourably compared to their teammates with higher sight levels.

As John admits, if the focus is fully on performance, which it invariably is, then the team would improve if all players were partially sighted. This attitude further increases the imbalance of power and reinforces the inferior position of the blind players. Xander is aware of this prevailing attitude amongst the partially sighted players:

I think if you ask some guys to be truthful and be completely honest, would they prefer to play in a game where there were no B1s? I think they would. I think they would prefer to be involved in a game which was partially sighted people only.

Without the B1 players, visually impaired cricket would be even closer to emulating sighted cricket. For those players classified in the highest sight categories and who have recent experience of playing sighted cricket, the presence of blind players invalidates the elite nature of the team and reinforces that this a disabled team. Xander's awareness of this underlying attitude is clearly a chastening experience and serves to reinforce his 'reduced' abilities and the blind players' marginal position.

Despite my earlier encouragements to integrate the blind and partially sighted players during training, it was through these integrated training drills that the unequal power dynamic is most obvious. During the training weekends, the warm up and cool down are always an integrated activity, yet these activities reveal an underlying feature of the relationship between the two groups:

The warm-up is a quick series of dynamic stretches. A partial player takes responsibility for guiding a B1 during the warm-up which always seems to be done with little fuss and the help given does not appear to be an act of duty but one of genuine support. During the static stretches with the team gathered in a circle surrounding Gary, who is giving directions, the partials are very hands on with their support by moving the body parts of the B1s into the correct stretching position if the verbal descriptions are interpreted incorrectly.

At certain points within the warm up, and during the training weekend as a whole, it feels to me that there is a discrepancy in the power dynamic. Not in a malicious way that targets the B1s but an underlying attitude of B1s being a burden, in certain situations, where the partials go out of their way to support them. This is only evident in sighs or the rolling of eyes when a B1 needs to be re-positioned in a stretching exercise or can't find their batting gloves. However, the continual repetition of these acts at training weekends, domestic games or even in another country on tour ingrains a hierarchical order within the team where partials feel they have the power in the relationship. 11th October 2014

Whilst supporting a teammate during a warm-up may not seem like a significant hardship, the continual repetition of these acts significantly reinforces the discrepancies in power between the B1 players and the Partial. It is important to acknowledge that many partially sighted players offer assistance, when needed, to their B1 teammates without any fuss. Yet, it is the fact that such support must be offered by a peer who is supposedly of an equal standing within the group. This phenomenon has also been examined in the context of the relationship between visually impaired walkers and sighted guides in a visually impaired walking group (Macpherson 2009a, 2011) and sighted/blind tandem cycling (Hammer 2015a)

Whilst both of these intercorporeal experiences were “power ridden and full of norms of practice” (Macpherson 2009a p. 1047), the disparity of power between guide and guidee is more significant in the context of visually impaired cricket. Sighted volunteer guides attend the walks with the intention of providing guidance but this is not the case in visually impaired cricket. The interaction is between teammates with ostensibly the same role: to play cricket. Guiding a teammate to a particular position on the pitch, for example, creates a level of reliance that, consciously or unconsciously, impacts upon the team’s social dynamics. This intercorporeal act is an integral factor within the players' identity formation.

Within tandem cycling, the sighted cyclist is seated in the front seat and is responsible for the direction taken. There are clearly defined roles that the sighted cyclists and visually impaired cyclists adopt and there is a level of situational dependency upon the sighted participants, such as locating the toilet in an unfamiliar place. Hammer (2015a p. 517) argues that social dependency is unifying and the “cyclists to learn from their differences as members of a shared community, fostering communal relations of intimacy and trust, while initiating critical self-reflexive knowledge and an awareness of a spectrum of bodily experiences and social identities.” Yet, in the context of visually impaired cricket, the 'differences' between the partially sighted and blind players are exacerbated through the provision of guidance and elevates the partially sighted players' social value. Conversely, the blind players' reliance on their peers reduces their social position within the group. The blind/sighted binary, that this thesis challenges, clearly does not capture the complex reality of being visually impaired or the possibility that the 'blind can lead the blind'.

The reliance placed upon the partially sighted players is necessary for the environment to work efficiently:

“You know they are relying on you and like in any team sport, you'd like to think everybody has got your back but you literally do have to have their back. If you haven't got their back, they are going to either

get hurt or left alone or they are going to disrupt things, it's not their fault, but they need that support. You've just got to provide it. (Clive)

Whilst reflecting upon the need for support, Clive phrases his response in patronising way. His blind teammates are people with jobs, families and responsibilities outside of cricket yet, he views them as needing protection by those with a greater level of sight. Support in team sports is important but this patronising attitude disempowers the B1 players and renders them as burdens who need to be cared for in this fast paced, elite environment.

As Oliver mentioned earlier, the B1 players take up particular positions on the pitch close to the batsman so they are able to hear the action. At the end of each over, as the bowling changes end, all fielders swap positions which requires the B1 players to be vocally or physically guided by their partially sighted teammates.

Thomas explains his personal approach when guiding a teammate and the importance of not disrupting the flow of the game:

We try to eliminate having to mother B1s on the field because the pressure of matches can get to everybody and partials are focusing on their own game. So it can be a lot more difficult to continually look after the B1s so we try and work it that B1s know exactly where they are going, here there and everywhere, partials just get out the way and don't collide with B1s. There are occasions where we just say "Right, so and so is at third man, there is a B1 at short third man" and at the end of the over, you literally just pick them up on your way. None of this waiting around for them, it is literally pick them by the arm, you drag them, you pull them, you stand there and carry on with the delivery.

Thomas' description of guiding the B1 players to their fielding positions is troubling. For certain partially sighted players, the B1 players are proverbial chess pieces to be picked up and repositioned according to their tactics. His dehumanising attitude fully positions the partially sighted players as holding the power in the social relationship. He makes the point that the partially

sighted players are trying to eliminate 'mothering' the blind players yet, his approach to guidance reduces these individuals to moveable objects. Much like the medical approach to disability that reduces the disabled body to an 'object' (Edwards and Imrie 2003; Hughes 2000), the blind players are stripped of their agency and thoroughly disembodied due to their impairment. However, to some extent, Thomas' comments are understandable. Dealing with the individual pressures of performing at an elite level whilst simultaneously being required to guide your teammates around the pitch is frustrating. Consequently, this balancing act significantly affects the intercorporeal relationships both on and off the pitch.

Social Relationships off the Pitch

The division that exists between the blind and the partially sighted players, established through training drills and interactions on the pitch, continues in multiple social situations away from the action. On a number of occasions, the B1 players had their lunch break scheduled at a different time from their partially sighted teammates and, during one weekend, even had a timetabled slot for 'B1 quiet time'. Whilst this may strengthen the bond within each of the social groups, separation, as Terry alluded to earlier, does not improve team unity. The notion that one set of players need a quiet time in this professional environment only serves to infantilise them. The reason given by the coaching staff is to allow the B1 players to have some time for reflection, which is important, however, an equivalent session was not scheduled for the partially sighted players. Perhaps the auditory intensity of training indoors means that a period of quiet is beneficial for the B1 players. Yet, not offering an equivalent opportunity to the partially sighted players reinforces the B1 players' supposed fragility.

As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the blind players rely on their partially sighted teammates to guide them to the crease when batting or to a particular position on the pitch when fielding. These levels of reliance are also maintained during the squad's social activities. The nature of travelling

around the country and staying in unfamiliar hotels means all players take some time to adjust to a new environment and become accustomed to a facility's layout. Whilst the blind players have proficient spatial awareness of familiar environments, such as their homes or a local supermarket, the negotiation of an 'alien' environment requires peer guidance.

The partially sighted players share a number of frustrations with the act of providing assistance. A key issue is their contradictory position. Striving for a high level of performance, through a strict diet and fitness regime, is juxtaposed by having to simultaneously provide assistance. Many players are irritated by their dual role:

You will class yourself as an international cricketer, if you want, and you are taking yourself seriously and then you've got to help your teammate out to go to the buffet and get his food or get him into his fielding position. You have to be very selfless, as such, so it can be an annoyance especially if the pressure is on you and stuff like that. But at the same time, the flip side, it builds a team bond that when the times are tough then you can get through that. (Clive)

When in a high pressure situation, guiding a fellow teammate can be an annoyance. Despite attempting to put a positive spin on the situation, Clive reinforces the notion that the B1 players are a negative hindrance on and off the pitch. The meticulous approach, both physical and mental, to each match cannot be fully accomplished whilst this dual role exists. Marcus discusses the potential impact of being responsible for his blind teammates and also particular blind players' attitudes:

I think some players, as I've said, are dependent on others which can inflict on, not in all cases but in some instances, on a higher sighted player. Having that responsibility may inflict upon their preparations but I think some blind players are heavily dependent on others and expect things to be done for them. I don't think that this should be the case.

For Marcus, and others, the obligation to support B1 classified players is not an issue, it is when their assistance is taken for granted by those who

receive it. Thomas, whilst talking about past experiences, explains how this attitude manifests itself during training weekends and international tours:

In previous years, we have had players who literally want partials to... what's the word... serve them every step. So we always meet up in the bar at hotels so it is like they want to be mothered to the bar, they want their drink to be held for them when they are walking back from the bar, they then want their dinner handed to them as they sit down but actually you are thinking "this is stuff that you can do. You can hold your own plate, we can put the food on your plate but you can hold your own plate and you can walk with us".

His frustrations are based upon previous experience but they reveal a lack of empathy for his blind teammates and perhaps a lack of understanding of particular players' needs. Whilst they may be able to carry their own drink, it is difficult to balance a full glass in one hand with either a cane or a guide dog in the other, yet Thomas feels that certain players are over reliant and need to make more of an effort.

The majority of partially sighted players do offer assistance to their blind teammates and accept that it is a necessary aspect of being part of a visually impaired team. Nevertheless, even these players have grievances. Mick's frustrations occur because of the B1 players' occasional over-dependence as well as the lack of support from other partially sighted team members:

Mick: I think people only get pissed off if they're always the one taking the B1 and not because they don't want to but sometimes you want to be able to walk down to dinner on your own and get someone else to do it this time. I think we share that round pretty well and the only other time you get pissed off is when the B1 is not really helping themselves...you know, to a point.

Ben: What? Being over reliant?

Mick: Yeah. I think sometimes it can happen but not very often. But I think sometimes it has happened and a B1 is too reliant and you are just like "Well, you've got to do a little bit for yourself too mate" but as I say it is really rare...really rare.

Mick identifies two important issues. Firstly, going on tour or attending a training weekend can be a claustrophobic experience. The players are training, eating, and socialising with the same people for a number of days or weeks and it is understandable if an individual wants some independent time. However, if others are not willing to support a blind teammate, the act of providing support can become a burden rather than something freely offered. Secondly, if the B1 player is 'too reliant' upon the offered assistance, the burden further increases. The position of partially sighted players as care-givers and blind players as vulnerable people who need constant support reinforces the groups' unequal social order.

When I ask why certain players are over-reliant, Mick explains that there are a number of reasons:

Again, I think it all goes back to a couple of questions. How they grew up, what environment they were in, whether they were wrapped up or whatever and also, the stage that they lost their sight. It's all them questions rolled into one really. You get stuck with it and also the awareness of what they have got and whether they use it. Some people just get lazy and they can't be bothered anymore so it is easier, isn't it, to get people to do it for you. I think that is what it is.

He recognises that all individuals have differing experiences of being blind and partially sighted which impact upon their differing expectations of the support they receive. Although "really rare", a blind player may get so used to be being constantly cared for, whether by family or a partner, that they will happily rely on others rather than making a concerted effort to be independent.

A number of the blind players also share similar frustrations. Brett identifies that, for some blind players, receiving assistance is a necessary part of playing cricket. Yet, he resents the fact that he also has to seek out help:

So within the squad then, I'm annoyed at myself that I then have to interrupt someone else and say "Can you get this for me?" and so on. For some people, it is a really necessary part.

When discussing whether such reliance creates an attitude of B1 players as burdens, his response is “Yeah, definitely” and went on to explain that some partially sighted players resent the neediest players. Due to the players' fixed embodied expectations, Xander feels that he needs to justify his place in the team:

I think you do need to prove your worth. I think I know because I am in a unique position of having been able to see before and I think if somebody asked me back then would I prefer to... I used to really get annoyed with the B1 players and I used to think to myself “For God sake, can't you just do that! Why just didn't you do that?” but only now do I have the true understanding of how difficult it really is.

Xander's degenerative condition means that he has experienced being classified as both partially sighted and blind thus has a greater insight into the strains that are placed upon partially sighted players. In an attempt to avoid being a burden, he adopts an extreme attitude to receiving assistance:

I think I would rather fall over something or cause an upset. I would rather deal with the embarrassment of something strange happening rather than me having to constantly ask for assistance with something.

He is vehemently against asking for help and wants to remain as independent as possible. For Xander, retaining his pride by acting independently and not seeking help is more important than his own safety or wider social embarrassment. Having previously been in the position of a partially sighted player, he actively avoids fulfilling the B1 stereotype that was once the focus of his own frustrations.

However, an aggressive stance towards independence can also create a number of alternative problems. Being too proud to accept assistance can lead to the breakdown of relationships and negatively impact how the team functions. Terry understands why certain players want to remain independent, even though this is not always possible:

We are all so fiercely independent and the more you let people do things for you then the more you surrender your independence. I can totally understand why the B1s don't want people doing things for

them but, again, it is being reasonable and when you are doing a warmup, everyone needs to do it together and actually you need to grab hold of someone so you are in a line.

Earlier in this chapter, the warm-up was discussed as a task that needs the partially sighted players to provide assistance. As Terry alludes to, certain drills require running in unison from one set of cones to another and blind players have to be guided so they do not veer into their teammates and cause injury. No matter how 'fiercely' independence is fought for, the game of visually impaired cricket requires that blind players rely on their partially sighted teammates. This in itself is not an issue. The issue stems from how players interpret the act of offering and receiving such help. If the partially sighted players feel that providing help is a burden, the blind players who require assistance will be regarded negatively. If asking for help is a surrendering of ones' independence, those who seek support will be seen as weak and those providing such support will have authority.

When I ask if there is an attitude within the squad that values partially sighted players more highly, Sandy, a B1, acknowledges that he feels a sense of inferiority during social situations with his teammates:

Maybe... at times. I think it is more off the pitch than on. I am not saying it is a bad attitude but I think sometimes we are not a burden, that's not the right word, so I will say forgotten. Sometimes, socially, forgotten because the guys all spend more time together than with us. They get up and walk about in a group and sometimes we are left to fend for ourselves. But that is not, I'm not trying to pull anybody down, that is not done intentionally because if we do say "What about us then?", one of them comes and gets you. It is not an intentional thing.

Although Sandy thinks that their behaviour is unintentional, these instances demonstrate the partially sighted players' power and the ease in which B1 players can be socially isolated. The existence of cliques in team sport is not a new phenomenon (Martin et al 2015), however, the basis of these cliques is an individuals' sight classification. If one does not have the requisite level of sight, then one may be excluded. Whilst other social characteristics are

important to the groups' identity, such as their domestic team, the players' official classification is the most significant identifier.

Oliver feels that social separation is an occasional problem and explains the challenge that many blind people face when socialising in unfamiliar environments:

I think it is tricky to move around places because you don't know where you are going! But that in itself can be quite entertaining! I think being a B1 isn't a bad thing. I think you can always integrate yourself into whatever situation if you try and at the end of the day, if you don't try to integrate yourself with everyone else then there is bound to be that separation. You need to make the effort because other people aren't going to make the effort for you.

From Oliver's point of view, blind players need to be the ones who make the effort in social situations, otherwise divisions will be created. Nevertheless, he also recognises the underlying reality of socialising in this space. For instance, going out for dinner in an unfamiliar place, a regular occurrence when touring, requires a partially sighted player to lead the group. Even meeting in a hotel lobby can be difficult unless a blind player is guided or a partially sighted player is there to meet him.

Dave, a B2, explains that cliques exist as they would in sighted sport. However, he thinks that the blind players are at a social disadvantage:

You are going to get people going out for meals with just say a few of you from certain clubs and other people go elsewhere. But maybe where the issue might lie is because the B1 players here might not be aware of what's going... they are aware but, for instance, from people's body language and if someone walks past, you are not going to know what they are doing are you. It is kind of like knowing the environment.

As Sandy said earlier, it is easy for B1 classified players to be socially forgotten. If they are not made aware of the social plans, in person or via phone, they can be isolated and only able to access their immediate

surroundings. The same can be said regarding partially sighted players who are not 'in the loop' but blind players are particularly susceptible to such exclusion. It is not compulsory for partially sighted players to offer assistance to their teammates and, through observation, it was evident that a small minority of players rarely offer support, leaving it to the more considerate members of the squad. No reasons were given to justify the decision made by those who do not provide support, as no individual admitted to it. However, their motivations may range from wanting to fully concentrate on their own performance to feeling exploited by over-dependent teammates.

For a number of partially sighted players, their social role in this space is significantly different from everyday life. The impact this disjunction has on the social dynamic within the squad is clear:

Thomas: I started training when I was thirteen and then playing with twenty-five/thirty-year-old men and some of these being B1s who were wholly reliant on me guiding them where to go, telling them where stuff is, telling them what food they've got on the table, telling them what food there is. That is saying something because when I go out with my family, I have to get my dad to tell me what is on the table.

Ben: So the roles are reversed?

Thomas: The roles are completely reversed. So my dad has got full sight whereas I've got the limited sight but then someone with no sight is relying on the limited sight person to explain.

Perhaps for the first time his young adult life, Thomas had a number of responsibilities and he was relied upon to guide more senior members of the team. His personal confidence increased and he began to reassess his own impairment in comparison to his blind teammates. From being the partially sighted person in a group of sighted people, he was now one of the 'most sighted' members of a visually impaired group and was duly expected to assist those with less sight. His shifting position demonstrates the significance of social context when considering the visually impaired players' experiences. Thomas still relies upon his dad to read a menu when they eat

together in a restaurant, yet he adopts this task when dining with his blind peers. Central to this study's embodied approach is the socialised aspect of impairment. These interactions perfectly demonstrate why this approach is pertinent. Thomas' level of sight does not change; it is the expectations placed upon him that change. The sighted/blind binary is inaccurate and does not capture the complexity and fluidity of being visually impaired.

Underlying these exchanges are the embodied expectations and value attributed upon the participants' bodies. These expectations are both self-imposed and imposed by others. Thomas ranks his 'limited sight' in comparison to his dad's 'full sight' and his B1 teammates' 'no sight'. His responsibilities change depending on the situation and the presence of other people. Even though many blind players lead independent lives away from cricket, when in the physically demanding environment of elite sport, they are rendered as dependents. When reading a menu or selecting food at a buffet, blind squad members are totally reliant on their partially sighted peers and this places a high level of responsibility, and consequently, power in the hands of those with the highest levels of sight.

A 'Hierarchy of Sight'

This chapter has examined how the 'sporting bodies' of the blind and partially sighted players are organised and valorised through playing visually impaired cricket. By examining the role of sight classification upon creating specific social roles within the team, and also the culture of gossip and mistrust, it is clear that a 'hierarchy of sight' emerges where those players with the highest levels of sight are the most valued and have considerably more power. Within the team, value is based upon players' physical abilities and their potential contribution to success, yet, as evident throughout this chapter, these values pervade social relationships both on and off the pitch.

When I ask whether players with the highest levels of sight are more highly valued within the squad, Clive's response references an interesting idiom:

Well erm, yeah...what's the saying "In a blind man's world, the one eyed man is king" or whatever. So yeah if you've got someone that falls into a higher category, the chances are that they are going to be able to have more of an impact on the game: they might be able to take catches, get run outs, hit the ball sweetly, bowl a ball fast and accurately. They might get more attention than someone who is totally blind but I don't think it is a deliberate thing.

Clive explains how those in a higher sight category are more likely to make a telling contribution during a match thus their social 'value' is more significant. His choice of idiom "In a blind man's world, the one eyed man is king" encapsulates the hierarchical structure of the team. In the blind world of cricket, the partially sighted player is king.

Celebrating particular forms of the physical body and impairment is not just restricted to visually impaired cricket but is evident in a number of different disabled sporting disciplines (Howe 2011a; Howe 2013). The success stories from the London 2012 Paralympic Games were "the bodies that most resemble a normal sporting body (Storey); are cute (Simmonds); or which have been through the process of cyborgification (Grey-Thompson, Pistorius and Weir) that remain at the centre of the media gaze." (Howe 2013 p.140). A hierarchy of bodies within the disability sports community (Mastro et al 1996; Hardin 2007; Berger 2008, 2009) is created in which athletes who closely resemble the 'normalised' ideal of the sporting body, such as athletes with single limb amputations (Mastro et al 1996) are most valued. However, those disabled athletes who least resemble the dominant notion of the sporting body, such as visually impaired athletes and athletes with cerebral palsy, are at the bottom of the hierarchical structure.

Whilst these previous studies on disabled sporting hierarchies are useful, this study's emergent hierarchy of sight uniquely focuses on just one form of impairment. As discussed above, disabled bodies are ranked, by the athletes

themselves, by society, and by governing bodies. But these rankings have limited repercussions upon a team environment due the separate nature of disability sporting events. For example, an athlete with cerebral palsy does not compete with or against an amputee athlete. The emergence of an internal hierarchy within this visually impaired cricket squad is an interesting paradox. Cricket is purposefully adapted for visually impaired people, yet it is those who are the 'least' visually impaired who succeed. In a comparable way, the classification system has led to a decline in severely disabled athletes competing in the Paralympics which “helped to legitimate elite sport for the disabled. In other words- some bodies are worth watching and others are not” (Howe 2008b p. 510). This is what is happening within visually impaired cricket. Due to the ECB’s elite approach, those players who can emulate the performances of sighted cricketers are mostly highly regarded at the expense of those who cannot meet these expectations.

The players are aware of a hierarchal order. When I ask Kamran if he feels that those players with the highest levels of sight are more valued, his response is unequivocal:

Ben: So those with sight are more valued then?

Kamran: Yep, yeah... I feel like...

Ben: By everyone? By the coaches? In terms of this elite focus on performance?

Kamran: Yes, definitely.

Ben: In essence it leads to those with the greater sight being most revered.

Kamran: Yes, that is a fact.

I pose the same question to Rehan, a fellow B1 player:

I think that, definitely. I know sometimes I don't feel as valued even though people say "No, no you're important, you're important, you're important." In my opinion, the only reason I am important is because if you don't have B1s then their team is shit because they can't put out a team. Right?

There are a number of contributing factors to this 'hierarchy of sight'. The rules require that there must be B1, B2 and B3 classified players on the pitch at the same time. Whilst the quota system means that no singular classification type can numerically dominate a starting eleven, the blind players rely on their partially sighted teammates to provide assistance when negotiating the sporting space. These social roles are also replicated off the pitch in a multitude of social situations. Their reliance leads to the partially sighted players having a degree of power over their blind teammates which serves to reinforce the hierarchy.

Clive makes a number of interest points regarding a hierarchy within visually impaired cricket:

I know people that play totally blind football at international level, and what they are doing... they are quite empowered because they are all blind and they're in charge of their group. Of course, if you've got seven partials on the field and four B1s, they are outnumbered and they need that extra support. I guess there probably are situations and probably are times where you might almost... where they might almost become a side-show. It shouldn't do and it is shown that the best teams in the world, the B1s make a massive contribution. Without their contributions, they wouldn't win games so I don't think, as a team, we ignore it, we try and work to find out what works best for us. There is definitely, I would say hand on heart, there probably is a little bit of...maybe, I don't know if it is the right word, second class maybe. Maybe because they can't always grasp everything that is going on around them and sometimes they will miss out on things.

Blind football players have the same sight classification as blind cricket players. However, blind football is solely for B1 classified players. Due to the lack of partially sighted players, he feels they are empowered and have considerably more power than their cricket playing contemporaries. When on the pitch, the athletes wear blindfolds so all players have the same amount of

sight during the game. Yet, when playing cricket, blind players are guided by their partially sighted teammates and sometimes even dragged to their next fielding position as not to slow down the match. It is important to reiterate that this is a rare occurrence and some blind players are independent on the pitch but, by having blind and partially sighted players on the same team, disparities in power exist and are based upon how much an individual can see. As Clive admits, the blind players are viewed as second class members of the team.

Another contributing factor to this hierarchy is the focus on performance at the elite level. As established earlier in this chapter, the majority of training drills separate the blind and partially sighted players. Whilst this is apparently done in the best interests of both groups, it just leads to further separation and clearer demarcations between the classifications. Despite these classifications being medical categories, they are the basis of the athletes' identities and this has an impact that goes beyond the game of cricket.

When discussing whether a divide exists within the team, Xander explains that "if you look very carefully, generally, there seems to be some sort of thing where it is a sighted person putting blind people together." Through separate lunch breaks and 'quiet time', the blind players are being placed into the same social group, whether they want to or not. If they are being guided to lunch or dinner, unless they ask to be sat in a specific seat, they sit where they are put which is usually with the other blind players. Players can be socially forgotten by merely sitting them down at a separate table and removing them from the rest of the group. Whilst not necessarily malicious, it is something that the sighted management and support staff think is the 'natural' thing to do and leads to the legitimisation of these socially created categories.

A number of players suggest that the treatment of blind players has improved and is an active focus of English cricket development. Mick feels that

England are far more advanced than other countries in the treatment of blind players and values them as equals. John echoes the existence of a power imbalance but recognises the improvements in inclusivity:

Ben: Because of the nature of reliance at points in terms of guiding B1s around, both on and off the pitch, is there a bit of power imbalance sometimes?

John: There probably... yeah there are... yeah, they are always going to feel reliant aren't they and a bit less independent than others. I think we as a team have done a lot of work to overcome that. I've definitely seen over the time that I've been with the squad that actually it used to be Partial players and B1 players were treated very differently and very separately but it does feel like we are inclusive now. But, it is just the nature of having sight problems. They are going to be less independent and more reliant on support from others but I don't think anyone sees that as an issue to be honest.

Despite John's positivity and evidence for improvements, there are issues that have been discussed throughout this chapter. However big the effort made to make the team inclusive, the hierarchy of sight will continue to exist. As long as the game continues to be played with both blind and partially sighted players, those with the highest level of sight will always have the greatest influence due to the dominant ocularcentric understanding of both sport and society.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the role of official sight classification within visually impaired cricket and the social consequences of this medicalised process. In combination with the competitive ethos encouraged by the ECB and the coaching staff, classification has led to the emergence of a 'hierarchy of sight'. The team culture is founded upon this power structure. It dictates what form of 'sporting body' is most highly valued by the players and the coaches and also adorns those bodies with both power and influence. Due to the emulation of elite sighted cricket, those players with the highest levels of sight are more valued as they can reach a higher level of performance than

their blind teammates. The participants' bodies are the foundation of this social structure and strive to meet the embodied expectations attached to their institutionally enforced sight category.

Central to this hierarchy is the acceptance of a particular classification, whether that be B1, B2, or B3, as a social identifier. These categories signify the individuals' visual acuity, but in the context of visually impaired cricket, they represent a number of particular social and physical expectations. Corporeal expectations are embodied to such an extent that, when challenged through the performance of an opposition player or teammate, the dominant reaction is to accuse the individual of cheating. Gossip and rumour are a central aspect of all visually impaired cricket and plays a key role in internalising and maintaining the players' dominant notions of physicality. It also reinforces a medicalised notion of impairment and emphasises the limitations of those players classified as 'B1' or 'low' B2.

The role of classification is particularly significant in visually impaired cricket as players of all sight categories compete with and against each other. Due to the unique player composition and structure, visually impaired cricket is distinct from all other sighted and visually impaired team sports. The game's format necessitates a level of reliance, both on and off the pitch, where the blind players rely on their partially sighted teammates in a variety of situations. This relationship is central to the 'hierarchy of sight'. The tensions between the social groups 'B1' and 'Partials' emerge through intercorporeal interactions that patronise certain blind players and provide the partially sighted players with a sense of power. Whilst the partially sighted players do not purposefully treat the blind players with disregard, in most cases, it is the social structure and group demographic that imposes the power imbalance.

As Clive discussed earlier, the partials are recognised as international cricket players whilst simultaneously guiding their teammates to the toilet or helping them at the buffet. This contradictory position is clearly difficult to negotiate

and has a significant impact on reinforcing a separation between the blind and partially sighted players. The partially sighted players' 'role reversal' demonstrates the fluid and social aspect of impairment; it wasn't their visual perception that changed, it was the situation. Conversely, those blind players who lead independent lives outside of cricket are now seen as dependent and even disruptive presences. These interactions are far more complex than a fixed sighted/blind binary approach and visually impaired cricket reinforces this. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the players' social interactions, both on and off the pitch, have a significant impact upon the construction and negotiation of their identities.

Chapter Seven- “A team environment is a team environment, no matter what sort of sport it is.”: The Construction of Identity Through Visually Impaired Cricket

Introduction

Identity is central to our social world. It fundamentally sorts and categorises individuals, through a multitude of constructed signifiers, into groups with others who share such characteristics. As Jenkins (2008) simply puts it “(identity) is how we know who’s who and what’s what” (p. 13). A central aim of this thesis is to examine the role of visually impaired cricket in the construction of the participants' identities and this chapter investigates how the players' both negotiate and reject being identified as disabled and blind. This is the first study to analyse the visually impaired athletes' self-identification and to investigate the existence of a blind identity in sport and physical culture. Identity has been an underlying presence through the previous three discussion chapters. This chapter's purpose is to bring these arguments together to form a substantive argument regarding identity and visually impaired cricket, and more broadly, disability sport. This argument draws heavily upon the three components of this study's anti-essentialist embodied approach: an embodied understanding of impairment, breaking down binaries, and the role of agency and resistance.

It is important to recognise that identity is not a fixed entity but a process. Both Hall (2000), in preference to the term 'identity' and Jenkins (2008), alongside 'identity', use the noun 'identification' to recognise that “it is a process- identification- not a ‘thing’. It is not something that one can have, or not; it is something that one does” (Jenkins 2008 p. 5). For some individuals, it is a conscious decision to purposefully create a certain social identity yet, for many, the formation of identity is subconsciously constructed through a

number of key shared characteristics such as common origin, social interests, ideals, and beliefs. In this context, visually impaired cricket is the group's shared social interest. Whilst being visually impaired or disabled appears to be a shared facet of the players' identities, the process of identification is far more complex than it may seem.

As established through this study's theoretical approach to disability sport, it is also important to recognise how identity is an embodied process (Burkitt 1999; Shilling 2005). This is not to say that identity is a natural phenomenon where an individual is born with a formed, biological identity but recognises that, beneath the layers of discourse, there is a lived body. Burkitt (1999) argues that "The body image and self-image we develop is based on the sense of being embodied and the way in which this experience is mediated by culture" (p. 146). It is untenable to investigate both disabled identity and sporting identity, two forms of identity that are clearly associated with notions of physicality, without acknowledging embodied experiences of 'being' a disabled athlete.

Participating in a disability sport, such as visually impaired cricket, necessitates that an athlete is officially registered as disabled, yet particular players choose not to identify as disabled outside of this sporting space. Individuals constantly shape their own identity through personal narratives and the constant retelling of the 'disabled origin story' (Peers 2012b) that serves to reproduce dominant discourses. Peers, a former Paralympian, talks about constantly being asked for 'her story' by journalists, medical professionals and fellow athletes and consequently composing a narrative to explain her 'condition.' Dominant understandings are unconsciously being reproduced by the athletes: "We narrate our tragic disability origins, our athletic successes despite them, our heroic striving towards hyper-ability, our inspirational hope for full normalcy and our categorical difference from those who have not overcome" (2012b p. 186). However, she feels that athletes can choose to challenge the (re)production of disability by "inverting,

perverting, recreating, reimagining, resisting and recovering (from) stories of disability, and of disability sport” (2012b p. 186). Making a decision to either accept or reject a certain label, such as blind or disabled, demonstrates the fluidity of identity and also the potential agency that can be exerted through the process of identification.

However, despite the presentation of self appearing to be an individual pursuit, the presence of others underlies the identification process. Whether it is identifying as part of a collective group or being labelled as a certain form of identity by others, the role of external, intercorporeal influences are inescapable. Whilst recognising the potentially enabling nature of the identification, Weedon (2004) argues that “individuals and groups tend to fix the identity of others, often working within long-established binary modes of thinking that help sustain inequalities, exclusions and oppression (p. 154)”. Although identity is fluid, as discussed above, the essentialist binary modes of thinking that surround particular forms of identity, as established in this study's theoretical approach, can be fixed and cause these identities to be undesirable. These discourses are rooted in historical and cultural power struggles and serve to demarcate those that are different from the norm.

This chapter firstly examines the absence of disabled terminology within this social space. The blind and partially sighted players' experiences are discussed to gauge why they choose to identify as disabled and the motivations behind their decision making. Secondly, the role of language and visually impaired terminology upon identity is analysed and the extent to which stereotypical notions of blindness are significant in the sporting space. Alongside language the embodied reality of identifying or being identified as visually impaired is examined and how, due to social attitudes, certain players choose to 'pass' as sighted. Finally, the extent to which a collective identity exists within the team is investigated and the influence that humour and banter has in reinforcing the emergent 'hierarchy of sight'.

“I don't think of myself as disabled, which is weird, because I've got a disabled railcard!”: Disabled identity and Sport

This first section examines the blind and the partially sighted players' attitudes towards the term disability and whether they incorporate it as a positive facet of their identities. As will become clear, the majority of the interviewees choose to reject a disabled identity, yet, the institutional structure of visually impaired cricket, and more broadly, disability cricket means that this label is unavoidable.

During my third training weekend, I was struck by the fact that the words disabled and disability were absent. At this point in the research process, I had successfully built relationships with the players and had a good grasp of the team culture and these words were clearly missing from the shared lexicon. The following field-note excerpt records my initial thoughts on this subject:

Watching how professionally the players view their own game made me reflect on the term disability and its distinct lack of use in this environment. I feel much more aware when I use the term disability in the company of the players than I ever have before. This is especially the case when talking to 'partials' and I am almost embarrassed to use the term due to the negative connotations that may be attached to the word.

Sir Philip Craven, the president of the IPC (International Paralympic Committee), in his keynote address at the recent disability sport conference that I attended, referred to disability as the 'd word' and spends his professional life trying to avoid the term. If the most powerful person in disability sport views disability as a wholly negative term that impacts upon how sport is viewed by the general population, it is completely understandable that the cricket players see it in a similar way. The nature of disability cricket means that you have to identify yourself as disabled to be able to participate so some players may only accept the label of being disabled in order to play sport. The negativity and positivity of being a disabled person will be different for each individual depending on their sight category, age, educational background and the role that sport has played in their lives. 12th October 2014

Sir Philip Craven's rejection of disability reinforces the undesirability of this identity. In an interview with the BBC, Craven, a former Paralympic wheelchair basketball player, felt that the word needs to be removed from the lexicon (Rose 2012) due to the associated cultural connotations. My initial reflection on the impact of Craven's perspective still remains. The removal of the word disability would deter athletes from positively identifying as a disabled person which, in turn, further alienates disabled people who cannot, or choose not to, participate in sport or physical activity. Through their agentic personal experiences, disabled athletes can resist dominant notions of disability and blindness, a key theoretical component of this study, yet the players choose to exert their agency by rejecting disabled identity rather than challenging it.

Due to changing social attitudes and the emergence of disability as a political identity, the absence of 'disability' or 'disabled' is a significant phenomenon. Positively identifying as disabled is a relatively modern concept (Davis 2002). In comparison with established social identity movements, such as the fight for gender equality and the end to racial segregation, self-identification as a disabled person was not commonplace. However through approaches, such as the affirmative model of disability (Swain and French 2000), that reject the notion of disability as a personal tragedy, and greater political recognition (Calder 2011), being disabled is now celebrated as a valid and positive form of identity.

Oliver, a B1, recognises that stereotypical notions of disability still exist but feels that society is becoming more accepting of individuals who identify as disabled:

I think there are stereotypes. I don't know how accurate they are. Some of them probably are and then some of them are just ridiculous like the whole idea that all blind people must wear dark glasses. That is just not realistic, not in today's society anyway, and I think more and more, society as a whole is becoming a lot less judgmental and a lot

more willing to be open minded towards disability. Also, I think disabled people are finding more confidence to be able to share their experiences about being disabled so I think that is helping get rid of those stereotypes.

Despite being the youngest member of the squad, he talks maturely about being disabled and being able to share his positive experiences with others. Oliver discusses the development of visually impaired cricket and the growing public awareness of the Paralympic games and how these positive changes coincided with his childhood. When I ask whether he had been born at a good time, he said “Yeah I would agree. Even if I had been born ten years earlier, things would have been a lot different.” Oliver's openness when talking about his disabled identity may be due to his perception that the stigma surrounding disability has decreased and of growing up in a culture where disability and disability sport have gained mainstream attention. His positivity, perhaps even naivety, in the context of a substantial rise in hate crimes against disabled people (Mortimer 2015) and benefit cuts (Gentleman 2016) in the United Kingdom, is not shared by the majority of his teammates.

An important aspect of a positive disabled identity is challenging stereotypes through personal experience. As discussed in Chapter Four, the players' embodied performances demonstrate an alternative way of participating in elite sport that challenge 'Faster, Higher, Stronger' ableist stereotypes of the sporting body. By accepting the notion of 'difference in itself' (Overboe 1999), it is possible to understand difference as a positive characteristic. This is the idea that people are different: different bodily functions, different skin colour or different language but does not imply that there is an ideal norm for any of these attributes. Difference is an important lens “for destabilising ableism because it legitimates not sameness but human variation” (Loja et al 2013 p. 191). Conceptualising disability through the notion of 'difference in itself' (Overboe 1999) is an admirable concept, however, in the politics of identity, 'difference' is not the most desirable quality to possess and this is clearly evident amongst the players.

There are a multitude of reasons that impact upon identifying as disabled such as whether an impairment is acquired or congenital and the context or situation of the identity contestation (Galvin 2005). Both of these factors play an integral role in the players' identity negotiation. Sandy, B1 and the oldest squad member, acquired a visual impairment in his forties. From being independent and working full-time, he suddenly became unemployed and dependent on constant support. It was a struggle to adjust to life post-sight loss and Sandy is still reticent to identify as disabled:

Sandy: I think it is just a time thing of getting more used to it. Even now, if you are sitting round talking to people and they say "that blind guy", you don't actually understand they are talking about you. I don't class myself as disabled really. I can get to the same place as you get, perhaps I can't get the same enjoyment. If we are going to go somewhere, if I want to know anything, I would just ask you.

Ben: So would you avoid that label of being disabled then? Would you not identify with that?

Sandy: I don't like it but I am.

Whilst wanting to distance himself from a disabled identity, he begrudgingly accepts that he is disabled and recognises that it has taken some time for him to come to this point. His initial attempts to justify why he does not class himself as disabled were based around the notion of not being different. He argues that he could get to the same places as me and is not restricted in his movements, which is something he associates with disability. To be different is something to avoid rather than something to be celebrated. Hall (2000) discusses the role of difference and exclusion in the formation of identity: "Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference... identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside' (p. 17)." To be visually impaired or disabled is to be labelled as the binary opposite from those who are sighted or non-disabled. These constructions serve to render certain individuals outside of the 'norm'.

'Difference' is of particular significance within a group scenario, such as the cricket squad, where multiple identities are contested. Certain forms of identity are rejected, such as blind or disabled, because, through peer pressure and institutional expectations, they are presented as less 'desirable'. Sport and physical activity is a potential site for positive identity negotiation. However, the traditionally conservative structures, that exist in both disabled and non-disabled sport, constrain and alienate particular forms of identity.

Central to the rejection of a disabled identity is the experience of stigma (Arbour et al 2007; Barg et al 2010; Goffman 1963; Taub et al 1999). Goffman (1963) discusses how bodily characteristics are judged through visual signs in society. When an attribute disrupts 'normal' expectation, such as skin colour or an impairment, it becomes a stigma. Goffman calls these attributes "abominations of the body" (1963 (1990) p.14) and clearly demarcates these individuals as having a 'spoiled identity' which must be managed to meet social expectations. If the status of a disabled person is defined as 'Other', in binary contrast with the 'normate' (Garland-Thomson 1997), then an individual who self-identifies as disabled is labelled as inferior in comparison to the 'normal' members of society.

Despite negatively representing disabled people as deviant and abnormal, Goffman's work is still relevant to the examination of disabled and blind identity. He makes the analytical distinction between the 'discredited' body, an evident impairment which is obviously presented, and the 'discreditable' body, where such impairment is not immediately obvious, which is especially pertinent to this study. For the majority of partially sighted players, their visual impairments are not immediately obvious thus they have a greater freedom to bypass such stigma by 'passing as normal', a concept examined in more depth later in this chapter. Sport and physical activity have been frequently portrayed as effective strategies for 'stigma management' (Page et

al 2001; Taub et al 1999) and as a tool for 'normalisation' (Lundeberg et al 2011). A common theme throughout this thesis is certain players reinforcing their 'normality' through playing cricket and adopting the values of mainstream elite sport. Marcus, who in Chapter Four discusses how "there is no way of escaping" being a visually impaired team, rejects the personal label of being disabled by stressing that he is 'normal':

Ben: You mentioned a little bit about the term disability and you've just mentioned the term blind. Are those two terms that you try and avoid? Or you don't necessarily identify with?

Marcus: As I said, I wouldn't use... I wouldn't label myself as disabled because I think it is a word that... again, it is a misconception. As I say, I have been brought up to be normal and live a very normal life so I haven't been brought up as disabled so I'll continue to be like that.

Ben: Do you almost have to change, not change your identity, but if you are outside of sport, you wouldn't see yourself or your visual impairment as being like the "be all and end all" of your identity? But when it comes to playing in a disability cricket squad, you have to accept or identify as that.

Marcus: Yes, to some extent but I think within that team, we play as a normal team and we don't use our sight as an excuse because everyone within that team has a visual impairment. You can't use your sight condition over anybody else. So again, you may be labelled as a disability cricket team but obviously when you play cricket in that environment, you play sport like any other team would.

On a personal level, Marcus identifies as a 'normal' person who lives a very 'normal' life and this is in opposition to a disabled identity. When discussing the team as a whole, he reinforces that the team plays like a 'normal' team, which is a common motivation for playing disability sport (Taub et al 1999). Marcus interprets being labelled as a disability cricket team as a negative that differentiates the squad from mainstream teams. Once again, it is the 'abnormality' of disability that has made Marcus wary of a label that he feels undermines the players' hard work and high levels of performance.

However, a rejection of disabled identity is not uncommon. Many disabled people do not want to identify as disabled (Watson 2002) and choose to actively distance themselves from this label. The experience of acquiring a disability later in life has been portrayed as a 'biological disruption' (Bury 1982) and as a 'loss of self' (Charmaz 1983) thus a rejection of a disabled identity could be interpreted as an attempt to retain a previous way of being-in-the-world. Oliver and Barnes (2012) argue that many disabled people “deny, disregard or minimise the reality of their impairment” (p. 111) due to identifying with the non-disabled world. Whilst a non-disabled world does not exist, the dominant cultural and social discourses tend to value non-disabled people in a higher regard than those who identify, or are labelled, as disabled.

For many of the players, they may have only experienced the medicalised approach to disability and struggle to see the positive aspects of being disabled. When discussing disability as an apolitical identity, Mallett and Runswick-Cole (2014) note how some disabled people do not consider themselves disabled and that “it is possible to be ‘impaired’ but not consider yourself to be socially oppressed” (p. 94). Without the experience of being oppressed, there is no motivation or need to identify as part of a collective group who, despite the heterogeneous nature of disability, have one thing in common: fighting oppression.

As Terry frankly puts it: “I just think you are dealing with a group of blokes who don't really consider themselves disabled.” For the majority of the squad, the connotations that are attached to disability, such as fragility, helplessness and restriction, mean that the only conception of being disabled is wholly negative. As a scholar and disabled advocate, as established through my epistemological standpoint in Chapter Three, I have engaged and concur with approaches to disability theory that forward a positive identity (Galvin 2005; Overboe 1999; Swain and Cameron 1999; Swain and French 2000). I hoped, perhaps naively, that the players would also adopt a

positive attitude towards disability, however, this is not the case. The rejection of a disabled identity is not necessarily a purposeful act to distance themselves from other disabled people but merely so that they do not experience oppression. Unless an individual engages with disability political movements or academic literature, a positive and affirming disabled identity may not even seem like a viable possibility.

Whilst many players choose to reject a disabled identity, and have various reasons for doing so, participation in disability sport means that they must temporarily adopt an unwanted form of identity. In the context of Paralympic swimming, Le Clair (2012) recognises that, whatever the attitude of the individual, “disability identity must be formally and publicly recognised” (p. 1124). Rather than sport being a platform to positively 'come out' as disabled (Huang and Brittain 2006; Le Clair 2012), the visually impaired cricket players are actually being forcibly 'outed' through sport. Visually impaired cricket is one of the few situations where they are portrayed as disabled, whether they want to or not, which explains their reticence in adopting this term. The all-encompassing phrase 'disability cricket' is used to represent all four of the ECB's national squads (Physical disability, Learning disability, Deaf, and Visually impaired). For many players, rejecting a disabled identity is an important step in distancing themselves from these other teams

When I ask about disability identity, Rohan's response demonstrates the team's underlying attitude:

Ben: So coming into disability sport, as it is labelled, is that quite difficult to come in and be labelled as being disabled?

Rohan: Yeah. Well I don't think of myself as disabled which is weird because I've got a disabled railcard!

Ben: Getting the perks for it!

Rohan: Yeah so I guess I don't think of myself really as disabled and I don't really think of any of the guys in the squad as disabled.

John had a similar attitude to disability when he lost his sight. It was something that he avoided but, in the twelve years since his diagnosis, he has become more at ease with the term. However, he still does not incorporate disability into his identity. When I ask what it is like to use the terms 'disabled' and 'blind' in his life now, John's response is revealing:

I don't even use them because I just don't think about it. It's not something that ever enters my head anymore about being disabled or blind, I just don't think in that way anymore, it is just me. I'm not a disabled person, I'm not a blind person, I'm just a person and that is exactly how I feel about it.

After a period of avoidance and then acceptance of the terms, John is now at a point where he feels he does not have to be defined by them. Whereas Marcus's earlier rejection of a disabled identity was to assert his 'normality', John's rejection of being labelled as either a disabled person or a blind person is because he identifies as "just a person". He is comfortable with who he is and his impairment, but does not feel the need to identify as a disabled person.

Terry talks in some detail about his own social identity and the support that he receives from the Jewish community and his extended Irish family. He identifies strongly with these two communities with both being central to his identity. Yet, there is no such identification with being disabled:

Ben: Something like Jewish or Irish, you would have that as yours to cherish or something in your identity but disability is not the same?

Terry: No I don't think... I don't know why some people reject it or why I personally rejected it- more than any other feeling that it was suggested to you. I always feel that idea of disability defining you is an idea that has never come from me. It is an idea that has not been imposed by people but by society imposing on me. Therefore, you reject it because it is a thing I am not happy with.

This is the crux of the matter. Disabled identity, in the context of visually impaired cricket, is ascribed. Whether it be in the jargon of an ECB press release which homogenises all players into one identity or in the examination room of an optometrist, being seen as disabled is something that is decided by somebody else. It is not the same as having a valued cultural heritage which passes down traditions and knowledge. It is a form of identity that, for the majority of players, is inescapably loaded with negative connotations regarding their physicality and 'normality'. Being disabled is regarded as an individual and isolating experience. There is no specific 'disabled community' to draw comfort and support from or history of which to be proud. The group's self-identification is not built around disability but through playing cricket and a form of cricket that values those closest to 'normal'.

As long as the players continue to adopt negative stereotypes of disability, alongside the governing body's competitive expectations which values those with the most 'ability', a social space for a positive disabled identity cannot exist. For the ECB, disability is an important term as it represents all four national teams and the variety of people who participate in cricket. Yet, for many of the visually impaired players, it has very little relevance in their lives thus there is no motive in self-identifying as disabled.

“I'd not interacted with other visually impaired people before and I realised how normal I was”: Negotiation of a Blind Identity

As identified above, a disabled identity is undesirable. However, this is not a surprising discovery. The academic literature acknowledges that rejecting this form of identity is commonplace, especially in the context of sport (Hardin 2007; Watson 2002; Wickman 2007). For the players, one of the major issues with adopting a disabled identity is the broadness of the term and the association with other forms of disability cricket. Disability is an umbrella term that homogenises millions of people into one form of identity and is undesirable for those who class themselves as relatively 'able'. Rather

than using sport to challenge misconceptions about the disabled body, the players attempt to legitimise the 'seriousness' of visually impaired cricket by rejecting the disability label.

Thomas explains that the other ECB squads all play the same format as mainstream non-disabled cricket but, due to the adapted rules and equipment, visually impaired cricket is a different form of the game: "I see ourselves as different so we decide to build our own culture around the game that we play and, in a way, we see that as a way of being able to embrace our difference." This section interrogates what Thomas means by 'difference' and whether this is based around a visually impaired/partially sighted/blind identity. Whereas disability identity and sport has been thoroughly researched, there is a paucity of research into visually impaired identity. This following section examines the existence of a blind identity and how the players negotiate it. This discussion is organised in two sub-sections: firstly, the role of language and terminology in a visually impaired identity and, secondly, the embodied reality of identifying or being identified as visually impaired.

The Role of Language and Terminology in a Visually Impaired Identity

The negative social connotations and stigma attached to particular words or phrases, such as disability, can mean that they are rejected. If disability is rejected, it is important to analyse how else the players construct their own identities. This first sub-section analyses how the team culture is constructed and how identifiers such as blind and visually impaired are contested.

Using the 'correct' terminology is a complex, and sometimes fraught, process. It is especially problematic within a disabled context (Linton 1998; Corker 1999; Peers et al 2014) where accepted vernacular is constantly changing. Key terminology relating to visual impairment is used interchangeably by different institutions and also within the context of the

cricket team. When asked about the terminology used in the team, Clive discusses how he does not always know what to say:

Ben: It is difficult with language because lots of people use different terms: blind, visually impaired, using the word disability or not. It is a bit of minefield to be honest. It is difficult to know what to use sometimes.

Clive: I'm not bothered; you can pretty much call me what you want. I'm not bothered by stuff like that but, yeah when I meet VI people, blind people, visually impaired, whatever they want to be called, you do, even as a blind/partially sighted person myself, you are like what wording should I use? How should I approach their sight condition? Do I ask them about their sight condition? Should I say impairment? You start thinking about all of these things.

Even for an 'insider', like Clive, there is confusion when attempting to use the correct terminology and so, for 'outsiders', it is even more of a struggle. The terms blind and partially sighted have particular medical definitions (see Abbreviations and Definitions section) that relate to an individual's range of sight. Whereas, visually impaired is an accepted term that encompasses all forms of sight loss. The potential confusion lies in the interchangeable usage of these terms and the lack of consistency across different institutional bodies.

For example, the RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People), a leading charity for blind and partially sighted people in the United Kingdom, explain that over two million people in the UK have sight problems yet only 360,000 are registered as blind or partially sighted (2013 p. 3). In countries that legally classify levels of sight loss, only 10-20 percent of people classified have no visual perception at all (Kleege 2005). Despite this, the term blind is used to represent all forms of visual impairments in the RNIB and in both BBS (British Blind Sport) and BCEW (Blind Cricket England and Wales). Yet, the ECB uses the term visually impaired to represent the same group of individuals. Each institution uses the same medical definition for blind but uses the term in differing ways.

With the domestic and the international game being labelled differently, there is no clear consensus to terminology. Whilst not appearing to be a significant issue, a number of players have strongly held views on the subject:

Mick: I don't like using blind personally.

Ben: Why not?

Mick: I'm not bothered but personally I wouldn't because I am not! I'm registered blind but when you say to someone I am blind then why... how can you go and do that then? You know, using the bike machine and using the programs unless you've learnt and memorised that ...it is just what you said, it is too broad a term. We are visually impaired, Rehan is blind but he might be able to see a bit of light and... the ECB definitely prefer it. Some of the players do prefer it so I know that Terry will always say the England blind cricket team and he will always say that. Yet if I tell somebody, I'll say it is the England visually impaired cricket team as I think that is more understandable.

Mick does not like to use the term blind because, although he is registered as legally blind, he is partially sighted. He argues that blind should only be attributed to those with a level of sight that is medically certificated as blind yet, the use of visually impaired broadly reflects the variety of sight levels and conditions within the squad. Whilst beginning his answer with "I'm not bothered but...", he clearly is concerned about the use of 'blind'. Mick's avoidance of being labelled as blind is partly due to the public reaction and stigma attached to this term. Yet, the players and organisers do commonly refer to the game as 'blind cricket'. In a similar way to 'disability cricket', 'blind cricket' is more relatable term to the general public. Blindness has clear cultural connotations thus to market the game as 'blind cricket' creates a level of intrigue and raises public interest.

Rohan supports Mick's view and recognises the potentially negative connotations of being labelled as a blind sport:

Yeah I don't tend to say 'blind cricket', I tend to say 'visually impaired cricket' because I definitely don't consider myself to be blind. It might be a little bit offensive to blind people if someone thinks of me as blind

and especially if I think of myself as blind because I am not in the same boat as them... I guess I call it visually impaired cricket just because... sometimes it is easier to say blind cricket because people understand the same thing. Yeah, so I guess sometimes blind can have some bad connotations even when you are talking about blind cricket and people think you are just going along with people rolling the ball and stuff like that.

In the same way that 'disability' cricket is perceived to devalue the game, Rohan claims that prefixing cricket with blind reduces its legitimacy and creates unhelpful preconceptions. However, he recognises that it is sometimes easier to use blind. He does not consider himself to be blind and argues that it may even offend a blind person if he identifies in this way. Rohan distinguishes himself as different from blind people but, in a public context, he recognises the advantages in presenting the sport as 'blind cricket' to garner more interest and attract a wider audience.

To confuse this semantic discussion further, Rohan explains that being visually impaired and blind should be understood separately. He uses the term visually impaired instead of 'partially sighted', which, again, reinforces the lack of clarity of terminology in this area. Whatever term he decides to use, it is what he says that is of significance:

Obviously being visually impaired and being blind is almost two different things, like often visually impaired and blind people are lumped together because "Oh you've got sight problems so you know what it is like" but it's not. I am much more similar to you, in terms of the way I do things, as I am to a blind person.

By saying he shares more similarities with a sighted person than a blind person, Rohan reinforces the 'hierarchy of sight' and the distinct separation between the blind and the partially sighted players. This also demonstrates the constructed nature of the sighted/blind binary and the social value placed on specific impairments. An anti-essentialist approach is needed to capture the messy realities of being visually impaired and deconstruct the fixed notions of being 'blind' or being 'sighted'. Rohan attempts to conceptualise

his own sight, but because of set binary parameters, he finds it difficult to fully articulate.

The significance of terminology is accentuated through playing visually impaired cricket. As discussed in Chapter Four, Rohan acquired his impairment later in life and cricket was his first experience of being in a group of visually impaired people. Perhaps for the first time, cricket prompts an individual to negotiate the label of being blind. His definition of visually impaired and blind as “almost two different things”, which is inaccurate, raises a significant point concerning the team’s multiple identities. If the other partially sighted players share Rohan's opinion, blindness as an unwanted identity is reinforced and those players with the least amount of sight are further marginalised.

Whilst not wanting to offend his blind teammates, Rohan is wary of not being 'lumped' together with them due to the negative connotations surrounding blindness. Much like 'disability', the use of 'blindness' and 'visual impairment' is unavoidably entwined with historical and social meaning. The use of blind as a given negative has been built into our language (Bolt 2003) thus to be labelled or identify, as blind has a number of social consequences and stigma. Bolt (2003, 2004) examined the thirteen entries for the term blind in the Encarta World English Dictionary and found that only one entry pertains to the medical condition whilst the others vary from ignorance to concealment. Prior to losing his sight, Sandy had a preconceived idea of what it meant to be blind which was drawn from an inaccurate stereotype:

I thought if you were blind then you either had a dog or you either stayed in. I never gave it any other thought than that to be honest. If you went out then you held somebodies hand and if didn't, you stayed in on your own. That is what I thought blind meant.

As Sandy demonstrates, inherent negative meanings of blindness (Hull 1990; Kleege 1998; Michalko 1998,1999) and phrases such as a 'blind experiment' and 'blind alley' leads to connotations where “*Blind* means

darkness, dependence, destitution, despair. *Blind* means the beggar on the subway station” (Kleege 1998 p. 19). These meanings reflect what Jay (1994) terms an ocularcentric society where vision dominates how the world should be understood and interacted with. To be without vision in an ocularcentric society is to be ignorant (Hull 1990) and incapable of interacting or even functioning within it.

Historically, ancient Egyptians revered the blind for possessing capabilities to communicate with deities yet, in Biblical times, blindness represented the outcast who lacks the power of vision (Barasch 2001). Philosophers such as Locke, Molyneux, Diderot and Descartes utilised the 'hypothetical blind man' (Kleege 2005) in their attempts to show the importance of sight in understanding life itself. The 'hypothetical blind man' is the fall guy for these philosophers' musings where blindness is the absence of sight and also the absence of knowledge. The archetypal figure (Hull 1990) of the blind man “represented whatever the sighted author wanted to convey” (Paterson 2013). A sensorial hierarchy has emerged out of these historical writings (Paterson 2007) where vision is regarded as the most valuable sense that a human can possess.

Arguably more than any other disability, blindness has well established cultural connotations. As illustrated above, this has been the way for thousands of years. The negative use of 'blind' in our everyday language creates a number of unhelpful preconceptions. For the partially sighted players, especially those who acknowledge sharing more similarities with sighted people, they do not want to be 'tarred with the same brush' as their blind teammates. However, this is inescapable when participating in a sport and representing a team that is classified for the blind.

Within the team, a blind identity is negotiated through the creation of new terminology. Peers et al (2014) explain that this is a common occurrence:

Communities of adaptive, wheelchair, and Paralympic sport have also created terminology to describe their specific identities, embodiments, and capacities, which may or may not correspond to terms used in communities outside of sport or within other sport contexts. (p. 276)

The terms used within the cricket squad do not correspond with those outside of this sporting space: 'B1' replaces 'blind', 'Partials' replaces 'partially sighted', 'VI' replaces 'visually impaired' and disability is rarely used at all. Although appearing to be a shorthand for the sporting specific categories, these terms significantly avoid any disability-related terminology. Whilst not a conscious decision made by the management or the players, the adoption of new terminology creates an environment where potentially problematic terms such as blind and disabled are absent. Due to the absence of such terms, a dominant team identity is created without reference to disability or impairment.

To reach the widest audience possible, the game is labelled as either blind or visually impaired yet, within the squad, it is more advantageous to adopt sporting specific terminology:

I guess we don't use the word blind more because we are not too focused on it. Also, we do use the word B1 a lot, B1s, so I guess that is almost another word for blind. Yeah I guess maybe blind does still have a little bit...because it is quite harsh, a harsh word and it can have some very negative connotations to it. I don't think we use blind too much. Maybe a bit out of we don't want to be labelled as blind or certain people don't want to be labelled as blind. Also, there is not so much of a focus on, which is weird in a visually impaired sport, there is not much focus on the visual impairments. (Rohan)

Although Rohan claims that there is a lack of focus upon visual impairment and terminology, this is not the case. As established earlier in this section, it is clear that Rohan has set ideas about the meanings of blind and visually impaired and the negative impact of being labelled as blind. In the above quote, he also reinforces a contradictory mindset that is evident throughout this study. Rohan finds it "weird" that discussions surrounding visual

impairment are absent. It is not weird: it is the consequence of creating an environment that values those with the most sight.

Xander, a B1, is frustrated by the adoption of alternative terminology and his teammates' rejection of blindness:

I like people to use the word blind. I don't like any of the other bollocks associated with it. I don't like to be called disabled but I'm also happy if that's what people pick as a word. I just wish they would pick a word and stick to a word. I don't feel any negative connotations to words like being blind. I am... it might be difficult if, for example, you can see and somebody calls you blind. That's different but even so, I like the word blind. It is very... you are, you cannot see. I just like it when people say "I have trouble seeing" or "I can't see very well" or whatever. Just be honest and none of this like "Oh I'm visually impaired" or "I'm handi-able". What they do with this bollocks is they choose a word which is really annoying and really frustrating. The whole P.C aspect of it all, I wish people would just forget about that and just sort of be normal

Xander likes the definitive nature of the word blind and claims he does not feel any negativity associated with the term. He recognises a level of political correctness when avoiding stigmatised words but wants his teammates to be more honest about their sight instead of hiding behind modern terminology. Despite the "ups and downs", Oliver also chooses to embrace his blindness due to the positive experiences and opportunities he has been afforded. Mick also credits both his job and travel experiences to his sight:

If I didn't have my visual impairment, I could just be some normal guy working an office job like most of my mates and that is that. There is nothing wrong with that but I would rather be doing this!

For those who want to identify as blind or partially sighted, or whatever term they chose to use, their opportunities are limited. Identity is highly contested with very few players accepting 'visually impaired' as a form of identity, let alone a positive form of identity. The team identity collectively rejects the labels of disability and blindness and asserts their physical abilities through playing cricket. Whilst it is possible to incorporate disability in an active and physical identity, the majority of the individuals within the squad do not share

this point of view. As acknowledged earlier, the players do demonstrate a high level of agency in identity construction, nevertheless, rather than challenging the established meaning of particular terminology, the majority of players choose to wholly reject it.

The Embodied Realities of Identifying and Being Identified as Visually Impaired

Whilst the negative connotations attached to particular terminology impacts upon group identity, the team's mass rejection of blindness is not just rooted in linguistics alone. Alongside the impact of language upon identity formation, the embodied experience of being visually impaired or interacting with other visually impaired people affects the extent to which the players identify as blind or partially sighted. This section moves beyond the stereotypical preconceptions of blindness to examine the players' experiences of visual impairment in a number of contexts and the reasons behind the rejection of the blind label.

In an assessment of his peers, Mick identifies both the positive and negative impact of the family upon a visually impaired persons' development. A number of players (Terry, Brett, Mick, Marcus, Clive) explain how their parents' support and encouragement is central to their participation in cricket and also their wider independence. Yet, those who do not receive support or receive the 'wrong' kind of support can become overly dependent:

I think there are a lot of parents with visually impaired kids and disability in general that wrap them up in cotton wool. Then they never develop and that is why they might actually see loads but can't be independent whereas somebody who doesn't have any... it all starts there. (Mick)

He claims that it is the mind-set of becoming blind, rather than the level of sight, which is the barrier to living independently. By "wrapping them in cotton wool" to protect them from harm, an overly attentive family may inadvertently reduce independence in the outside world. As documented in

Chapter Six, when without such support, this can lead to players being apprehensive and overly reliant upon help.

Later in the interview, Mick brings up the impact of being labelled again:

Again, some of those guys can see a decent amount and it is those guys who are not using their sight correctly and almost, like, give up... "I'm blind so somebody else needs to do that for me". I'm, like, no they don't, they really don't but it's... some people have got the fight in them and some haven't. But they would rather label themselves, "No I'm blind so I am here. This is where I am." Whereas I don't agree with that.

Whether it is due to their upbringing, self-confidence or another factor, in Mick's opinion, certain individuals' self-identification as 'blind' is a way of giving up. He remarks that they can see a "decent amount" but choose to adopt their blindness as a defence mechanism. Many visually impaired players, especially those who acquire their impairment later in life, internalise the negative connotations of blindness. Once diagnosed, even if their level of sight surpasses their own expectations, their preconceptions of being blind or partially sighted become an embodied reality. In this context, to identify as blind is the figurative 'waving of a white flag' and an acceptance of a stereotyped blind identity.

'Blindies' and 'Blindys': The Fear and Loathing of Being Blind

In Chapter Five, the players' positive experiences of playing sport at boarding school, such as basic socialisation and confidence, were established. However, there is another aspect of segregated education that will now be examined. The social experience of living and learning around other visually impaired people was an enlightening one:

Well I'll tell you that first... when I went to boarding school... it sounds ridiculous but my eyes were opened up to a lot of things, excuse the pun. I'd not interacted with other visually impaired people before and I realised how normal I was when I went there. You've got guys who are poking their eyes and rocking around, it's a security thing or whatever, but the parents haven't stopped them doing it when they

were younger which is just nuts. I don't know...some of them were just a bit mad, a bit crazy and I was determined that I would never be perceived like that because I am not like that. (Mick)

Mick identifies rocking and fidgeting as common behaviours in young blind people. With little awareness of corporeal social conventions, many children have bodily ticks and do not understand the perceived 'inappropriateness' of acting in this way. Alongside these behaviours, learning disabilities are also common amongst visually impaired people. According to the Royal College of Ophthalmologist, adults with a learning disability are "ten times more likely to be blind or partially sighted than the general population" (Pilling 2014 p.1). Mick's initial experience was one of surprise at the reality of being visually impaired and, as acknowledged in the quote, he was determined not to end up like some of the people he met at school.

For Mick, sport was a way of demonstrating his 'normality' and distancing himself from those students who displayed these behaviours. The term 'normal' was frequently used during the interviews and is an underlying factor in the players' construction of identity. This study's theoretical approach emphasises the deconstruction of the able-bodied/disabled and sightedness/blindness binaries, yet, the players have clearly accepted these dichotomies as reality. Whether discussing disability or blindness, many players are striving to be recognised as 'normal'. For those players who attended specialist education, being 'normal' was not just about playing sport, it was about being able to live independently and function in everyday life. As will become clear, there was a genuine fear of not becoming like those individuals who, in Mick's words, were 'mad' and 'crazy'.

When examining the benefits of playing sport at school, I asked Brett if his early experiences positively changed his attitude towards his sight:

Brett: No the other way a little bit. You see people with more sight struggling more than you and you kind of think "What does the future hold?" because I was a young guy, you know ten/eleven, and you are seeing people in the sixth form who were struggling. So I was thinking

“I don't want to turn out like that”. Within the VI community, you kind of group people, you say there are ‘blindies’ and ‘blindys’. ‘Blindys’ just get on with it. The expectations on us are greater, we have careers and families and jobs and interests and hobbies and things. Then you get ‘blindies’ who are trying to get by and they are doing all of the sort of... stereotypical ‘blindie’ type things.”

Ben: So was it important for you to not fall into that?

Brett: Yeah, when I was younger, really important. Now I'm older, I understand that not everybody gets the same opportunities and everything like that.

Whereas Mick immediately felt different from those students who displayed blind mannerisms, Brett, as a blind person, worried that the older students' struggles would one day be his. Nevertheless, like Mick, he knew that he did not “want to turn out like that”. Brett makes a distinction between types of blind people: ‘blindies’ and ‘blindys’. These terms have a subtly different pronunciation which is difficult to communicate on the page as there is no previous written record of these terms. Brett is unsure of the spelling so an attempt has been made clearly differentiate between these two terms. He explains in a later correspondence that “essentially it is a them and us kind of thing” and that these were popular terms during his schooldays. Brett goes on to say that they not in common usage now because the majority of young visually impaired people now attend mainstream schools thus there is no need for such comparisons.

'Blindies' are a group of visually impaired people who are perceived to be fulfilling the blind stereotype whilst 'blindys' move away from that stereotype by having families, jobs and wider interests. As a young man, Brett felt it was of great importance to not become one of the 'blindies' and strive for a 'normal' life and meet the expectations that were placed upon him. However, this notion of blindness is not just based upon the meaning of particular terminology but is rooted in lived experience. Rather than merely being a

metaphor or a philosophical 'prop', the reality of blindness was shocking and something to be feared.

Both Mick and Brett, and perhaps the other individuals who attended specialist education, were taught to not be defined by their impairment. Through the attainment of 'normal' social goals and participation in activities such as cricket, they distanced themselves from the 'blindies' who were "just trying to get by". Whilst not all of the players attended specialist education, the creation of two distinct social groups, based upon sight levels and social attitudes towards sight, is clearly replicated. Again, this hierarchy values those individuals with the highest levels of sight and positions those with less sight at the bottom of the social ladder.

However, for Rehan, who lost his sight at the age of sixteen, his mainstream education meant that domestic cricket was the first time he had encountered visually impaired people. The reality of blindness came as a shock:

I went there thinking I would meet people that I could look up to and this will be really amazing and I went there and it was the opposite. I thought "Holy crap, I am really, really lucky that I have what I already have" because I'd lost my sight a few months ago and I get frustrated that I can't do, I don't know, cook a meal or like read a book so easily. I went there and met people who had visual impairments or had sight that were too scared to walk out of the house by themselves or some who had no sight and would struggle to make a cup of tea or something. I was like "Woah, maybe I am lucky that, even though I lost my sight, I don't have any other impairments so I am literally just dealing with sight and not dealing with so many other mental issues."

Whilst Rehan expected to find like-minded individuals who shared his interests, his experience was very different. He drew positives from the fact that things could have been much more severe and that he was lucky to be in his position. The frustrations of not being able to read a book or prepare a meal paled in comparison to those who found it difficult to leave the house. As Mick stated earlier, Rehan identifies how visually impaired people "usually have another impairment as well. Whether that is a mental impairment or

another physical impairment...sometimes, a visual impairment restricts you in life, in education whatever.” He came to domestic cricket with relatively high expectations but his opinion quickly changed:

I came here and I was like “Shit. I am at the top of the pecking order” like maybe not in a cricketing sense but in a more life sense. In terms of my aspirations would be similar to yours, not similar to someone else who is visually impaired whose aspirations would just be to live life. I want to be big. I want to get a good job. I want to go places, you know. In that sense, yeah, I was quite disappointed, very disappointed. Just shocked really, I was like “Wow, I am so lucky. So, so, so lucky”.

Despite his mainstream education, Rehan inadvertently repeats the rhetoric of Brett's distinction between the 'blindies' and the 'blindys' and places himself “at the top of the pecking order”. However, his 'pecking order' is not based on cricketing ability but on life skills and, again, being 'normal'. Although he is totally blind, Rehan feels that his social skills and intellect distinguish himself from the majority of his teammates whether they are partially sighted or not. Much like Rohan earlier, he also makes the point to explain his similarities with me, a sighted person, rather than a fellow blind person. Rehan still retains the friendship group he had prior to losing his sight and retains the same aspirations to do more than “just to live life”. However, as already established, the team's hierarchy is based around cricketing ability rather than social skills thus Rehan's personal interpretation of the 'pecking order' is inaccurate.

Passing, Public reactions and Fluidity of Identity

As noted in the Chapter Six, the players' classifications have a number of attached physical and social expectations that are integral to the 'hierarchy of sight'. Xander is conscious of avoiding the B1 stereotype. Whilst this can be achieved by meeting the 'normal' expectations of being employed, having a family and wider interests, he feels he should embody 'sighted' actions and mannerisms to not slip into 'blind mode':

Sometimes I catch myself doing slightly... like I am slipping into a blind mode which really annoys me. Earlier down in the hall, I was standing against the net but facing this way rather than facing the batter and was just standing there at the net. I thought to myself "You look blind. You look blind. You look like someone who is completely unaware of what is happening". It is something to sort of force yourself to turn around and look at the game. When you are talking to somebody try to address them. It has always been difficult for me because my eye condition, my eyes have always tried to turn to see the person so I've always looked above or down or whatever but at least I can address someone rather than saying "Hey John" talking to you like this or whatever which people generally tend to do. They have body behaviour of no awareness of what it is that they are doing. That kind of thing really annoys me, especially when I catch myself doing something really stupid like standing there like the world is just passing you by rather than trying to be involved and engaging.

From his description, 'blind mode' is the abandonment of being actively engaged in the world and is something that Xander forces himself to stop doing. Due to Xander's degenerative condition, he is conscious of retaining his sighted approach to body language and social norms. By embodying the actions of a sighted person, through attempted eye-contact or facing towards the batsman, Xander's intention is to avoid being seen as a stereotypical blind person. Although eye-contact does not improve his ability to communicate, these seemingly insignificant corporeal norms are integral to his display of 'normality'.

In the process of identity negotiation, some players attempt to 'pass' as a particular form of identity. Passing, in a disability context, "refers to the way people conceal social markers of impairment to avoid stigma and pass as 'normal'" (Brune and Wilson 2012 p.1). Passing through playing disability sport is a well examined phenomenon (Berger 2008; Rembis 2012; Wickman 2007) and takes a number different forms. One example is the adoption of an 'athlete-first' identity (Rembis 2012) in which a disabled person adopts an athletic narrative to 'mask' their impairment. John takes this very stance: "I kind of see myself as a cricketer before a visually impaired person." By passing as an athlete, the individual adopts an identity that they feel 'transcends' their impairment and represents their 'normality' through sport.

Passing as sighted is integral to many of the players' narratives. As briefly touched upon earlier, Goffman's conceptualisation of stigma differentiates between the discredited and the discreditable body and this distinction relies upon the visibility of impairment. For many partially sighted players, their visual impairment is not visibly apparent thus, depending on the social situation, they choose to conceal their impairment and pass as 'sighted'. The 'invisibility' of the players' impairments initially struck me on my first day with the squad. Prior to introducing myself, I spot a small group of six partially sighted players and one blind player waiting for a train at London Marylebone station. I am struck by the lack of 'clues' relating to their visual impairments. I record in my field notes: "this could lead the casual observer to assume that there is a single blind person surrounded by six sighted guides." I further develop this discussion in a later field note extract:

John is tall, well built and would not look out of place in a wine bar or in a high level sighted cricket team. As discussed in my earlier diary entry, it is not always easy to identify some of the players as visually impaired on first impressions. Whether this is because there are no visual clues to their sight impairment: no white cane, no guide dog, no glasses. It could also be they do not act that like the archetypal blind person that is so heavily discussed in the literature...These dominant preconceptions are deeply internalised within me; it is a constant battle to overtly challenge them. 27th September 2014

Integral to stigmatisation and passing is the social expectations affixed to impairment. Although neither of the examples above examine 'intentional' passing, other players do admit to using various techniques to pass as sighted and bypass the potential stigma of being visually impaired:

I would always act as if I could see everything so I'll try and look at people properly, I know I'm off a little bit every now and then, but I try to look at people dead straight. If I was in a pub or something and I know there is T.V on the top, because I can hear it then I will look at it and I'll be like I can see it, I'll be pretending to watch it. I will have all the mannerisms I can of someone who can see properly. Boarding school helped me be determined to do that because I didn't want to be labelled to be associated with that group. (Mick).

By 'passing' as sighted in the pub or during a conversation, Mick is, once again, making the conscious decision to distance himself from the blind people he encountered at boarding school. He also describes how, during his teenage years, he would position the cricket balls in his kitbag in such a way that they would not rattle and alert passers-by that he was a visually impaired cricketer.

Similarly, Terry does not always disclose his visual impairment. He coaches young people in pupil referral units and chooses not to discuss his sight until a trusting relationship with the pupils has been developed. He explains his decision:

People don't always need to know that I'm blind in the same way that people don't immediately go up and introduce themselves by saying "Hi, I am so and so and I've got really itchy feet" and I wouldn't go up to someone and say "Hi, my name is Terry, I am Jewish with mixed Irish Polish background as well." People don't need to know it and people don't have a right to know those things.

As Terry admits, he is under no obligation to discuss being visually impaired and thinks that, in certain contexts, it is beneficial to not mention it. However, to compare his sight to itchy feet underplays the significance of being visually impaired in his day to day life. Perhaps, his defensiveness reveals previously negative experiences of being open about his visual impairment. It certainly demonstrates the existence of social prejudices and discrimination that visually impaired people experience in a variety of situations. For the partially sighted players, the ease of 'passing' as a sighted person outweighs the potentially problematic and awkward process of 'coming out'.

The public's behaviour and lack of awareness towards blind and partially sighted people also plays a central role in identity rejection. Kamran describes the condescending and de-humanising attitudes he regularly experiences during social interactions:

It's talking to someone blind a bit louder than your average person because they are blind. The other is then directing your comments at

Ben rather than Kamran because Ben can see. It is! What else is it? Are you brighter than me, well you are, but what is it? If I'm with my brother, if I'm with Dad, anyone "What does he want to drink?" "What does he want?" I have a mouth! It is frustrating and that's what I meant about VI awareness.

Kamran is frustrated by the lack of general common sense and public awareness. Being blind does not impact his ability to listen and respond to a question, yet, conversation is not directed towards him. Whether this is due to lack of experience when interacting with visually impaired people or the fear of saying something offensive, in Kamran's opinion, there is no excuse for such naivety.

Xander identifies social anxiety as being at the root of this problem and this is evident in his interactions with the public:

People are so unnatural it is a joke sometimes. I think it is because that fear is built into them. They don't know how to approach you because they are worried and I think a lot of blind people add to that by being very aggressive and chip on their shoulder type thing. Even when I am feeling extremely frustrated, because it is so easy to snap and say "For fuck sake, just get out of my face. Leave me I am fine". I didn't get into central London by teleporting myself here. I obviously got myself here so there must be a way, I must be fine.

They have also probably got that whole aspect of the whole P.C thing and don't know how to approach you and "I don't mean to be like this and "I don't mean to be". I don't care what you mean to be like, just be yourself and say whatever it is that you want to say and if I get upset, it is probably because I would get upset anyway at you saying something ridiculous. Just be normal and it is so nice when people are just completely comfortable.

He admits that a small minority of blind people are overly aggressive when being offered help, yet the majority are appreciative when these offers are delivered in a 'normal' manner. The social anxiety of interacting with visually impaired people creates an unease of knowing what to do or what to say. When he challenges the fixed 'blind' expectations by independently navigating central London, the offers of help are even more patronising. Xander implores people to "just be normal" during social interactions.

This section has analysed the blind and partially sighted players' embodied experiences and how these forms of identity are contested. It is clear that there is no overarching group identity that positions visual impairment as a central tenet. Rather than blindness being a shared experience, the majority of the players believe that it is an individual and isolating experience.

An intrinsic element of rejecting blindness is the players' early interactions with other blind people. In specialist education, they were taught to properly 'use' their sight or risk ending up like their classmates who were "poking their eyes and rocking around." This is conceptualised through the distinction between 'blindies' and 'blindys'. Some players' initial experiences of domestic cricket were also negative and brought the realities of being blind into sharp focus. Consequently, the 'blind mode' of being is something to be avoided. To compound this negative attitude, when the players are recognised as being visually impaired, the public treat them with a mixture of fear and condescension.

Disability sport has been portrayed as a way of 'stigma management' (Taub et al 1999) and passing as an 'athlete-first' (Rembis 2011), yet visually impaired cricket brings their impairment into focus. Significantly, the act of playing cricket accentuates the players' impairments rather than mitigating it. This is especially pertinent for the partially sighted players who adopt various techniques to pass as 'sighted' in everyday life but choose to play a sport adapted for visually impaired people. The participants are not 'normalised' by sport, it endows them with an unwanted blind identity which, for many players, is only experienced whilst playing cricket.

“I think it was more like being in a sighted world... it was more practical, more tough”: The Construction of a Shared Team Identity

This final section analyses whether, despite the rejection of disabled and blind identity, a collective identity does exist amongst the cricket players and the form that it takes. The collective identity of the group does not celebrate being visually impaired and, in certain circumstances, rejects it entirely. Yet, it is cricket that is this group's social glue. In the absence of disability related terminology, sporting specific terms are used and the focus is on the players' performance on the pitch. The team's culture is not drawn from 'blind culture', if one does even exist, but shares many characteristics with sighted team sports.

John explains how the familiar team environment, which is similar to sighted cricket, is one of his main motivations for playing visually impaired cricket:

There wasn't much of a culture difference because as soon as you get in a team environment... a team environment is a team environment, no matter what sort of sport it is.

According to John: “a team environment is a team environment” with both visually impaired and sighted cricket sharing the same culture. Whilst discourses surrounding disability and visual impairment have been discussed, it is also necessary to consider how the participants interpret the notion of an 'athletic' identity. Perrier et al (2014) use narrative inquiry to examine the extent to which an individual self-identifies as an athlete and “why athletic identity may be lost or (re)developed after acquiring a physical disability” (p. 107). The authors categorise the participants into three conceptual groups: the non-athlete narrative, athlete as a future self and the present self as an athlete. John's response above demonstrates his belonging to the final group 'the present self as an athlete' who focus on their present behaviour and see no difference between non-disabled and disabled athletes.

In the study, Perrier et al (2014) recognise that the participants have a 'master narrative' of what is understood by the term 'athlete'. This is also evident amongst the visually impaired cricketers who choose to identify as 'athlete-first' (Rembis 2011) rather than blind or partially sighted people. The consequence of self-identifying as an athlete, especially for those who had played sport pre-sight loss, is the replication of the values and behaviours of a sighted cricket team.

Whilst certain aspects of the collective identity are specific to this group, it is evident that the group's dominant collective identity is entrenched in the hegemonic masculine attitude that pervades recreational and elite male sport (Connell 1995; Woodward 2006; Wellard 2009). Sparkes and Smith (2002), in the context of rugby union players who have experienced spinal cord injuries, argue that the men were "not willing or able to disinvest in certain masculinities and identities that they have worked so hard to establish" (p. 280). This attitude is also present within the visually impaired cricket team. The competitive, physical environment means that masculine identities continue to be constructed.

Sandy explains how his masculine identity was damaged when he lost his sight and how it altered the way he self-identified:

I don't know, is it a man thing? I was physically able for 47 years and I lived in a man's world. I worked for a demolition company. It was no give and take. I had quite a "If you can't do it, then go away" and if you can, then you are made welcome, sort of thing. I had quite a hard work life so then suddenly to be dependent, if that is the correct word, and needing assistance. To be registered disabled, it felt like a less manly term as in now, I understand it is not and at times you need help.

From living in a 'man's world', acquiring a visual impairment, in his opinion, undermined his masculinity. Sandy could not conceive of identifying as masculine whilst simultaneously requiring assistance. Whilst the rugby union

players in Sparkes and Smith's (2002) study had simultaneously lost their masculine and athletic identities, Sandy, through visually impaired cricket, began to restore his masculine identity:

Ben: And so to go from this manly world of the construction worker and to then have your identity changed. So sport helped in that? Being able to play cricket? Did that give you back some of that manliness?

Sandy: Not manliness I don't think. It just makes you more aware that you are not on your own and does make you feel part of a team... maybe it does give you a bit of your manliness back. A difficult question Ben.

Whilst unsure at first, Sandy admits that it may have given him his 'manliness' back. Kleiber and Hutchinson (1999) discuss how sportsmen with spinal cord injuries are at an intersection of two conflicting ideologies: hegemonic masculinity and stigma of disability. Post-injury physical activity allows the individuals to reaffirm their masculine identities. Wickman (2015) argues that the masculine ideals of physical strength and domination can be exhibited through participation which may, in turn, challenge the perceived weakness of disability. Sandy does benefit from the physical prowess of playing cricket, however, it is being part of a collective group that has restored his sense of masculinity. Prior to his sight loss, Sandy did not participate in any regular competitive sport yet, through the camaraderie of visually impaired cricket, he has found an environment that shares many similarities with the 'man's world' of demolition. Whilst playing cricket may have restored Sandy's masculine-self, this hegemonic masculine environment discourages a positive conception of being visually impaired.

The Role of 'Banter' in Constructing Identity

The masculine environment was evident throughout the period of participant observation and is encapsulated by the following field-note extract. It details some of the players' initial reactions to finding out that England cricketer

Jenny Gunn was coming to address the team about her World Cup experiences:

This piece of news is met by scoffs of derision from some of players especially those with more experience. Whether this is because of the fact that some players have been to more major tournaments than Jenny Gunn and are well aware of what to expect or whether it is due to the fact that she is a woman...the players joke about how they will distract her by getting a B1 to stand directly in front of her during her speech and start every question they ask with 'darling' or 'babe'. I think the players are intimidated by the idea of a woman entering 'their' environment and how their masculinity is challenged by the fact that women's cricket seems to be prized more highly than disability cricket. 28th September 2014

Recently, English international female cricketers have become centrally contracted, like their male counterparts, and are now professionals with a lucrative sponsorship deal with car manufacturer Kia (BBC 2014). As mentioned above, there may be some animosity from the male visually impaired cricketers who feel they are more deserving of professional contracts and the prestige that professional athletes receive. Yet, the use of the disparaging terms 'darling' and 'babe' demonstrates an attitude that goes beyond mere frustrations regarding central contracts. Certain players' attitudes are indicative of the re-emergence of 'lad culture' (Phipps and Young 2015) to be found in male sports teams, on university campuses and social media outlets.

An integral component of a masculine identity is 'banter' which is understood as a way of legitimising verbal abuse as light-hearted humour, yet serves to reinforce racist, misogynist, homophobic, and ableist discourses. Banter is a common feature of modern sport (Anderson et al 2016; Burdsey 2011; Macgrath et al 2015) and is commonly justified by the perpetrators as an equal and mutual exchange of humour that is specific to the players within the team. Burdsey's (2011) account of British Asian cricket players' experiences of racist banter within the changing room identifies that "jokes can underpin divisive and exclusionary aspects of sporting subcultures, and they represent a powerful and symbolic means by which minorities are

marginalised from dominant player collectives” (p. 273). However, the players who are on the receiving end of the comments dismiss a number of these incidents as something to expect in the changing room context. There has been no equivalent study that examines the role of banter within visually impaired sport thus this thesis attends to a significant gap in the current literature. The following discussion spotlights how joking and banter manifests itself in this visually impaired environment and its underlying impact upon identity construction.

Marcus identifies the integral role that banter plays in the creation of the team’s dominant culture:

Ben: Do you think there is a unique culture in blind, visually impaired sport that you've found is not there when you've played sighted sport?

Marcus: It's played with a different level of camaraderie really. The banter within is different to what it would be outside.

Ben: How is it different?

Marcus: I mean, in a nice way, it is sort of a mickey taking of sight but it is relation to what you are doing. It is meant not as a harmful, hard comment and I think everyone is aware of that because you are within that environment. All of you do have a sight condition and there are things that can be said that maybe in a mainstream sport, if that was said to you, you might be... that might seem harsh and as an offensive comment. But, I think within a visually impaired team...

Ben: So it is acceptable?

Marcus: It is acceptable.

He acknowledges how this behaviour is different from what is expected on the 'outside' and, if encountered whilst playing mainstream sport, could be interpreted as offensive. Marcus' defence of the 'mickey taking' is based on context. What is deemed as unacceptable in day-to-day life is welcomed amongst teammates. Bill backs up this comment by explaining that banter is

a mutual exchange between individuals who share the common experience of being visually impaired:

People give you stick because you didn't see it and then you give it some stick back and it's like yeah actually we can take the piss out of each other's sight. Whereas in like, say if you're outside and not playing sport, if someone takes the piss out of your sight, you'd be a bit angry at them.

Whilst such comments would cause offence 'outside' of this social space, banter is acceptable as it is delivered by somebody who, nominally, has the same form of impairment. Both players make it clear that the cricket team, whether domestic or international, is the only place where such jokes are commonplace and accepted. The use of banter further demonstrates John's earlier claim that "a team environment is a team environment" and the many similarities that visually impaired cricket shares with mainstream sport. Significantly, rather than a disabled sports team being a protective environment that allows players to be comfortable identifying as disabled, the reality is that the players are more susceptible to abuse and banter than in any other social space.

During conversation with a member of the ECB support team, a similar phenomenon exists within the England physically disabled team, which is pertinent to the visually impaired players' experiences:

In the England physical disability (PD) team, many of the players play mainstream cricket as well as representing their country. He talks about how they are protected in the non-disabled environment where the impact of their impairment is accounted for within the team so each player has a suitable role. For example, a player with one arm may need to field in a particular position to maximise their abilities and is treated much like any other non-disabled teammate. However, once they are back within a disabled cricket environment, their safety blanket is removed and their failings are scrutinised much more severely. This may also lead to the players being more aware of their impairment and any limitations that it may cause. Once in an environment, such as a visually impaired sports team where it may feel like a 'level playing field' due to the similar levels of sight loss, the social convention to avoid the 'sledging' of blind and partially sighted players is removed. 27th September 2014

The transition from mainstream cricket to disability cricket was a shock for some of the physically disabled players. Due to the removal of the social conventions that accommodated disabled players in mainstream sport, the players became open to criticism and, significantly, banter. It is an equivalent process for those visually impaired individuals who had previously played sighted cricket and even for those who had no prior experience of playing team sport. When impairment is the butt of the joke, it is understandable that the majority of players choose to reject a disabled or blind identity. Despite certain players' earlier comments regarding the distinction between blind and partially sighted players, when it comes to humour, everyone is 'fair game'.

However, from an 'outsider' perspective, it is difficult to judge the shared humour of a collective group. As established in the epistemological position and objectives, this study conducts social research that accurately represents participants' voices and positions them as the authoritative 'knowers' within the social space of visually impaired cricket. It is important to acknowledge their interpretation of team humour and banter whilst still retaining my critically analytical position as the researcher. The jokes and banter relating to visual impairment could be interpreted as a way of taking ownership of humour relating to their sight rather than being passive victims.

Shared humour is an integral part of many minority groups' identities and this is the case for visually impaired people (French 1999: Macpherson 2008) who, French (1999) argues, have a unique sense of humour. Mick believes that humour is a positive: "I think the great thing you will notice about a lot of the VI community, particularly in sport, is how much we take the mick out of each other and I'm not sure you get that with other disability groups to the extent that we do." Although joking frequently occurs amongst the 'community', Mick argues that it is most common in a sporting context. Terry feels that the visually impaired team's shared humour is also replicated in a variety of ways within the other disability cricket teams:

I'm sure there are plenty of guys with other sort of impairments who have their own jokes and culture of dealing with it. You hear stories about the PD team of people chucking their feet at each other. I'm sure it is absolutely hilarious and have a completely ridiculous time in the same way that I've played cricket with guys who think it is funny to take their fake eye out and put it in my beer and stuff like or leave it in your room or chuck it on the dance-floor. It is hilarious and I'm sure those guys must have loads of fun by like leaving their hands in the restaurant. That is a brilliant thing.

From finding a floating glass eye in your drink to using a prosthetic as a projectile, the traditional banter and high-jinx that is associated with masculine team environments is still evident but incorporates the unique aspects of each team. A similar process could also be taking place when it comes to the delivery of verbal jokes relating to the players' impairments. Apart from the sport itself, the one thing that all members of the team have in common is being visually impaired and, as discussed above, it is the most obvious characteristic to focus upon. When I ask if shared humour had originated from attending specialist education, Mick agrees and also acknowledges the simplicity of their banter:

Yeah I think so and it is a bit of sport thing innit. It is the banter and the easiest banter to do there, and the one that people would be most shocked at, is making fun of other people's sight conditions. I think it is done for effect to sort of...guys like you who wouldn't have been expecting that sort of thing. Coming into the VI environment and you've got people like me and Terry who are sort of saying "blind idiot" whatever. Well I don't know what you thought but some people have said to me "I can't believe you say that" but I think that makes people much more comfortable around the disability and to the point that they don't even notice the disability.

According to Mick, banter is to be expected in this sporting space and, in his opinion, the 'easiest' form of banter within the visually impaired cricket team is to focus on their impairments. Mick describes this humour as a 'natural' occurrence; banter is commonplace in team sport and all the players are visually impaired therefore it is the obvious joke to make. Despite recognising that it may be shocking for an outsider, Mick claims that banter has a positive function of making people feel more comfortable. However, he does not

make it clear whether he is referring to 'outsiders' or the players within the team when discussing the comforting nature of the banter. This is an important distinction to make.

If Mick is implying that the players may feel more comfortable, banter could be interpreted as a unifying social act that alleviates an individual's negativity towards their impairment by reinforcing that they are all 'in the same boat'. However, if it is used to placate the discomfort felt by outsiders amongst a group of visually impaired people, banter could be interpreted as tool that serves to reinforce the group's 'normality' and that the team culture is the same as any mainstream team. Mick claims this leads to "the point that they don't even notice the disability" but this is counter-intuitive. In fact, it is the banter that is a constant reminder of their impairment and their limitations. For those players who deliver the jokes, much like the use of gossip in Chapter Six, it is also a way of deflecting attention away from their own insecurities regarding their visual impairment.

Whereas Mick feels that the sporting subculture is a continuation of his educational experiences, Kamran describes something quite different:

Ben: So what was the change from say boarding school, how did the culture differ when you came into the international game?

Kamran: I think... I think it was more like being in a sighted world. It is difficult to explain, it was more practical, it was more tough...

Ben: Was it harsher?

Kamran: Yes, definitely harsher. Oh yeah. I had partial friends too but we were in a confined space that we were so used to it was, you know, I was part of a group, I say group loosely, who were friends and I took an active role. Suddenly, I've come somewhere where I am not taking an active role anymore, I am sitting in the back seat, being taken the piss out of and it wasn't going to go down well with me.

The description of his initial national team experiences as entering a 'sighted world' are very revealing. From the confined but safe physical and social space of boarding school, Kamran found himself in a harsh environment where he felt powerless to respond to the banter. His use of 'sighted world' reinforces how the team's collective identity, as discussed above, is built around a hegemonic masculine attitude that is present in many non-disabled sports teams and, according to Kamran, has little in common with his previous experiences. Due to the representative nature of the team, his 'tough' initial experience was to be expected as the expectations upon his physical capabilities will have increased. Yet, for Kamran, it was the 'harsh' team culture that was the most difficult part of the adjustment process.

Kamran's experience is common amongst the B1 classified players and continues to the present day. On several occasions during participant observation, certain blind players were more readily targeted by a small minority of partially sighted players. Kamran uses the phrase 'B1 bashing' to label this behaviour which ranges from having condiment packets thrown at him during dinner, being teased for his love life to receiving a 'wet willy' in his ear. Although portrayed as harmless high-jinx, the repetition of these acts reveals the significant role that humour plays in social space: to reinforce the power relations between partially sighted and blind players.

There is a fine line between banter and bullying, yet sometimes that line is non-existent. Rehan perceives that "the laughs and jokes and banter" at his expense have an ulterior motive which goes unchallenged:

Rehan: Like, I understand there is going to be laughs and jokes and banter and stuff but some of it becomes borderline bullying. Generally, things will be done to provoke a reaction so if you do it and nothing happens, it's fine, it's fine, it's fine but people keep pressing and pressing and pressing and pressing because they want the reaction. They want that reaction and for you to snap or flip.

Ben: And can they get away with it because they label it as banter or a bit of fun?

Rehan: Well they can get away with it because no one says anything.

Due to the blind players' marginal position within the squad, Rehan argues that banter continues without opposition as there is no collective or individual interrogation of this behaviour. Jatin, a fellow B1 player, shares Rehan's view. Whilst discussing the separation between blind and partially sighted people, he considers the motivation for banter and why particular players are targeted:

Jatin: You can get the message across by banter.

Ben: So is banter usually aimed at particular people/particular players?

Jatin: Oh yeah. Yeah the message always come across that if I, like for instance, have done something negative in the game or a little bit of bad spell, there is always, instead of encouraging and being as a team unit, there is always a sort of a...in one of the matches I had a shocking match in the World Cup and one of the players told me face to face in a sarky way of saying that "Every match you have bowled a shitty over" but that wasn't nice.

Ben: So is banter just a way of dressing up abuse?

Jatin: That is right, exactly. It's alright when they do the same sort of thing, have a bad spell, or have a bad period in the match. They don't seem to say anything?

Ben: So it is because you are a B1? Do you think?

Jatin: B1s are always more targeted, I would put it that way. Obviously we haven't got as much to offer as they have.

As Jatin articulates: "you can get the message across by banter". It is a way of disguising criticism or abuse in a socially acceptable manner. The B1 players are more regularly targeted, in comparison to their partially sighted teammates, because of the B1s' 'limited' skills. The partially sighted players'

frustrations stem from the majority of blind players not being able to match their level of performance and banter is the outlet for these frustrations. As discussed in Chapter Six, the 'hierarchy of sight' is clearly evident in Rehan's and Jatin's examples. Power, both on and off the pitch, is related to an individuals' official sight classification and this leads to those with the least amount of sight having the least amount of power. For a number of younger partially sighted players, being relied upon to support their blind teammates has fostered an attitude of superiority. Even if those committing the act claim that it is harmless, banter is one of the principle tools in maintaining the unequal social relationships between blind and partially sighted players.

Kamran, a B1, admits that even he will direct his banter towards his fellow blind players and describes his personal approach to integration:

Ben: Talking a bit about banter and treatment of certain players, do you think the B1s are always the fall guy?

Kamran: Yeah, yeah. Now I could be a B7 for all you care, all I am telling you is what I do when worst comes to worst. When I say worst comes to worst, it is when there is a social occasion and everyone is taking the piss out of, I'll take the piss out of a B1 first. So I'm being honest and saying that, that is what it is and mostly it will be me because I will put myself out there. So at the beginning of the session, the partials were playing football and the rest of the B1s are on the side, what do I do? I go and join in. Am I going to get the ball? Probably not. Am I going to miss? Am I going to look like an idiot? Probably yes. But that is the only way I know, the only way I know how to be involved. What you encourage is the piss take as well and I actually think sometimes they have that inner respect for me. They feel like I've got the balls to actually come and bother with us whereas the other B1s might not.

As a form of self-preservation, Kamran uses humour to pre-emptively target other blind players in social situations. Due to the social hierarchy, he "takes the piss out of a B1 first" instead of making jokes about his partially sighted teammates. To combat the social separation of blind and partially sighted players, Kamran encourages "the piss take" by being outgoing and involving himself in social activities. He is prepared to 'play the fool' to gain the respect

of his peers. The fact that Kamran feels he has to put himself in a position of insecurity to be socially accepted demonstrates both the collective dominance of the 'partials' and his need for acceptance. He later admits that, as a team, inclusivity is something they are not good at and "that's why I run after everyone. That's why I hang around with the partials, because I have to." Kamran believes that to integrate, he must initially accept his role as the recipient of banter and actively make an effort to socialise with the team.

To function in the 'sighted world' of the cricket team requires a change in behaviour. One that copes with the harsh reality of masculine humour and is able to verbally self-defend through banter. However, the consequence of this hegemonic masculine environment is that visual impairment is viewed as a weakness and the source of the majority of jokes. Terry feels it is important to make the effort to integrate blind individuals into the team culture and involve them in all aspects including the shared humour:

Ben: Is it important to keep them involved in the banter?

Terry: Definitely, definitely otherwise they will just become victims of bullying which in any team, any group of males, the overriding possibility is that you will pick on the weakest member of the group.

Terry claims that banter serves to integrate the blind players and prevents them from becoming victims of bullying. However, as noted by a number of blind players, banter soon morphs into the bullying that Terry is trying to avoid. From his description, this behaviour is to be expected in a sports team with the 'weakest member of the group', who he implies are the blind players, being picked on. In a misguided attempt to foster togetherness, banter continues to reinforce the power relations and, significantly, the forms of identity that are most highly valued.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the players construct, negotiate and reject forms of identity and whether a collective identity exists within the squad. Although self-identification of disabled athletes has been frequently analysed (Sparkes and Smith 2002; Hardin 2007; Wickman 2007; Perrier et al 2014), this is the first study to explicitly focus upon visually impaired athletes and the team culture of an elite visually impaired sport.

Underlying this identity debate is the relationship between disabled sport and the body. Significantly, rather than visually impaired cricket being a way to manage 'stigma' or pass as 'normal', it actually accentuates the impairments that many players are attempting to dissociate from. For the blind players, playing cricket reveals their physical 'shortcomings' in comparison to their partially sighted teammates or opponents. For the partially sighted players who use sport to demonstrate their 'normality', cricket is one of the few social situations where they are 'outed' as disabled or blind. The players do not actively choose to 'come out', their identities are institutionally ascribed through playing sport. A collective team identity does exist, however, it is not formed around notions of disability or blindness, but through the act of playing visually impaired cricket. Whilst not a surprise, due to the professionalised and competitive ethos established in previous chapters, this hegemonic masculine identity constructed what Kamran referred to as a harsh and unforgiving 'sighted world'.

Emulating a mainstream approach to elite sport has further consequences in the identification process. The 'hierarchy of sight', in which the highest performing players are most valued, has stifled any conception of a positive disabled or blind identity due to the majority of players striving for 'normality'. Disability and blindness are either absent, rejected, or the butt of the joke. The binaries of able-bodied/disabled and sightedness/blindness, which this study rejects, are reinforced and remain a corporeal 'reality'. Despite claims that the shared humour is harmless, banter serves to reinforce the negativity

of impairment and the group's power dynamic by targeting those with lower levels of sight.

Identifying as disabled is not an affirmative statement but a physical facet of their character ascribed by playing representative disability cricket. The dominant discourses of disability as a negative, individual medical condition is prevalent amongst those players who chose to either wholly reject the label or begrudgingly accept that it is something they have to 'deal' with. Yet, any notion of positively identifying as disabled is as absent as the word itself. Yet, this is to be expected. Whilst disability is broadly used to describe the four ECB national squads, the team is principally recognised as playing a visually impaired game rather than a disabled game thus identifying as disabled, for the majority of players, is irrelevant.

Despite playing visually impaired cricket, the terminology relating to visual impairment is highly contested by the individuals within the team and has a significant impact upon their self-identification. Through both the rejection of terms laden with social significance and the adoption of new sporting-specific terminology, the dominant group identity that emerges is one that is based around cricket participation rather than a shared form of impairment or a 'blind culture'. For those who had been educated at a specialist school, or had experienced negative public reactions, the rejection of blindness or being visually impaired is also due to a level of fear: fear of being discriminated against in social situations and fear of being labelled as 'abnormal'. Multiple strategies are adopted in rejecting a stereotypical blind identity such as passing as 'sighted' in public situations and dissociating from those blind people with 'unwanted' social behaviours.

As acknowledged earlier, the players do demonstrate agency when negotiating identity, however, it was used to reject disability and blindness rather than challenge the set understandings of these terms. Although it is a team for blind and partially sighted people, the dominant group identity that

has been constructed is one that rejects visual impairment as a central facet of identity. By adopting the hegemonic masculine values and behaviours of elite sighted sport, the very raison d'etre of the team has become a negative and a form of identity to reject.

Chapter Eight - The Close of Play: Concluding Thoughts

Introduction

Through an embodied approach to disability sport, this thesis has investigated the England Visually Impaired Cricket Team and their lived experiences of playing visually impaired cricket. As discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the ECB marketing strapline for visually impaired cricket is 'Cricket. But not as you know it'. This was also the underlying principle of this study: what is academically significant about this previously unexamined research 'site'? The purpose of this final chapter is not to re-summarise the content of the previous chapters but it is to assert the key findings of this thesis and present how these findings make significant contributions to knowledge regarding 'sporting bodies', the sensorial sporting experience, and the construction of identity through disability sport.

The main body of this chapter is split into three sections. Firstly, the methodological contributions to knowledge are discussed. Secondly, the embodied approach to disability sport, the theoretical framework of this study, is re-examined to demonstrate the salience of this approach. Finally, building upon the methodological and theoretical frameworks, the significant and original empirical contributions of this thesis are then established.

Methodological Contribution to Knowledge

Due to the paucity of sensorial research in disability sport or, more broadly, team sport, there was a lack of methodological precedent for eliciting participants' multi-sensory experiences of sport. To meet this study's objectives, two major considerations were made: firstly, how can these experiences be elicited and, secondly, how can this method be made

accessible for the blind and partially sighted participants. Drawing upon sensory anthropology and sociology, the resulting innovative 'soundscape elicitation' method was utilised within semi-structured interviews. The purpose of this method was to prompt a recollection of sensory experience and, for the majority of participants, it was integral to their articulation of sensorial experience and led to the creation of new knowledge regarding perception and the 'sporting body'. Those players who did not find 'soundscape elicitation' helpful made a number of valid points regarding the methodology, as discussed in Chapter Three, that I would implement when using this approach in the future.

The fleeting and fast-paced nature of visually impaired cricket was captured during a training match by positioning four microphones around the pitch and the resulting composed 'soundscapes' aided the players' recollections during semi-structured interviews. As Pink (2009) notes, examining the sensorial experience of sport is challenging because these activities are “difficult to interrupt when they are in progress, yet which are so embodied that it is also problematic to disengage the discussion of them from the practice of them” (p. 111). My methodological approach addresses these challenges by encouraging participants' reflections upon their experiences without interrupting the act of participation which elicited articulate and in-depth responses. By using an iPod and Bluetooth over-ear headphones, 'soundscape elicitation' was an immersive experience for the participants and provided them with an auditory 'object' to refer to during the interview.

The purpose of elicitation, whether auditory, visual, or another form of sensory mode, is to trigger recollection of multi-sensory experience rather than just examine a singular mode of perception. Although auditory perception is integral when playing visually impaired cricket, the soundscapes also elicited reflections of haptic, kinaesthetic, and visual experience. Rather than just relying on visual methods to elicit responses when researching sensorial experience, the soundscapes provided a viable

and accessible alternative that can be utilised in a variety of contexts. Whilst auto-ethnographic approaches dominate this growing field of research, this approach is a significant methodological contribution that demonstrates the possibilities of documenting participants' sensorial sporting experiences beyond an autoethnography.

Theoretical Contribution to Knowledge

As referenced in the title and aims of this thesis, an embodied approach to disability sport that engages with phenomenology, sociology, and disability studies theory has been constructed. In the theoretical 'blueprint' of Chapter Two, the key components of this approach were established and demonstrated the significance of this approach for future disability sport research. 'Lived experience' and 'embodiment' are concepts increasingly adopted in sport and physical activity research, yet are commonly used in the wrong context. Taking an embodied approach is not just researching about bodies, it is researching experiences *through* the lived body. This is an important distinction to make when conducting research that examines subjects' lived experiences. As discussed in Chapter Two, my frustrations lay with the inadequate theorisation of embodied disability sporting experience and this framework addresses this glaring theoretical gap.

This framework's first component is *Reviving the Body: an embodied understanding of impairment*. Central to an embodied approach is recognising the corporeality of impairment and of the body whilst reinforcing the role of social discourse and interactions in the construction of both impairment and identity. Impairments are not fixed entities but change depending on the context or situation. This understanding underpinned many of this thesis' significant discussions. At the foundation of the 'hierarchy of sight', one of the key empirical findings, is an embodied understanding of disability. Whilst the physicality of impairment was an integral factor in the players' level of participation, it was the valorisation of these impairments that had a lasting impact within this social space. The players' embodiment

of their classification was a clear example of this. Once medically defined as 'B1', 'B2', or 'B3', the social and physical expectations were internalised by the players. The physical parameters set by medical professionals, the ECB and the coaching staff became central to the players' identities and how they constructed their own physical capabilities. Visually impaired cricket did facilitate some players experiencing a 're-conceptualisation of self', however, the institutional parameters of the game also served to enforce set and unattainable corporeal expectations.

It is of the utmost importance, when conceptualising disability sport, that the lived body is the vantage point of perception but also how these social expectations and stereotypes are ascribed and enacted by the participants. Acknowledgment of the corporeality of impairment does not equate with a medicalised approach, as suggested by certain social model theorists, in fact it demonstrates that even the 'biological reality' of impairment is a socialised phenomenon. Both disability and sport and physical culture are inextricably connected to the 'body'. This study's approach recognises this and provides a theoretical framing of how these embodied experiences can be examined.

The second component is *Breaking Down Binaries: able-bodied/disabled and sightedness/blindness*. Despite many of the participants internalising these binaries and accepting them as reality, this further demonstrated the need to break down these established ways of conceptualising disability and blindness. For many players, they assumed visually impaired cricket was a way of proving their 'normality' and rejecting disability was an integral part of this process. Whilst the able-bodied/disabled binary had been deeply engrained within the squad, it was not necessarily important that the players did not challenge this binary. This theoretical approach is a 'blueprint' for how social researchers should conceptualise disability sport rather than an expectation of how the players understand disability. The social construction of able-bodied/disabled needs to be recognised by the researcher to

contextualise notions of 'normality', the emulation of 'non-disabled' mainstream sport, and the fluidity of being disabled.

The context of visually impaired cricket clearly demonstrates the need to breakdown the sightedness/blindness binary. To participate in blind cricket does not mean you are blind. To be registered as blind does not equate with zero visual perception. Even 'B1' classified players may have some light perception. Being 'sighted' and being blind are not two distinct states of being, which is suggested by the sighted/blind binary, it is far more complex than that. For those players with the highest levels of sight, they even passed as 'sighted' in particular social situations such as work or in the pub. Much like disability, being visually impaired is a fluid identity. The greatest example of the redundancy of this dichotomous way of thinking is visually impaired cricket itself. Despite being a sport for the visually impaired, the most valued players are those who have the highest levels of visual perception.

The final component of this theoretical approach is *Agency and Resistance: The Personal Embodied Experiences of Disabled People*. The voices of visually impaired people have been traditionally marginalised in social research and this thesis has provided the participants with a platform to share their experiences and opinions on the social issues within this social space. My epistemological standpoint, as established in Chapter Three, inherently values the participants' testimonies and acknowledges them as the authoritative 'knowers' within this social space. This standpoint was integral to this study's impact upon developing future professional practice. As discussed in Chapter Three, the 'Key Findings and Recommendations' report written for the ECB shared the players' varied opinions regarding the organisation of visually impaired cricket and this was well received by Ian Martin, head of disability cricket.

Also, recognising the multifaceted experiences of 'being' visually impaired demonstrated the inaccuracies of a fixed 'sighted/blind' binary. The players

exerted agency whilst constructing 'sense-making' strategies to negotiate the cricketing space. Perception is an active, social experience in which the players resisted the dominant notion of the sporting body. Agency was also demonstrated through the construction of identity, however, not in the way that this study's theoretical approach had anticipated. The majority of players exerted their agency through the rejection of disability and blind identities rather than resisting the dominant understanding of these forms of identity. Whilst their embodied participation in visually impaired cricket did inadvertently resist dominant discourses and the idealised notion of the sporting body, this was not a collective statement of resistance. Again, much like the breaking down of binaries, disability sport can still be conceptualised as a tool of resistance that provides the participants with a high level of social agency even if the players themselves do not recognise this.

Empirical Contributions to Knowledge

Building upon the methodological and theoretical contributions of this thesis, this final section emphasises this thesis' empirical contributions to knowledge. An underlying theme is the relationship between disability sport and the body and the multifaceted ways this embodied relationship is contested in this sporting space. Drawing upon the traditionally marginalised voices and experiences of blind and partially sighted participants, the varied and enlightening embodied experiences of the players have revealed a fascinating, and previously unexamined, sporting sub-culture. From the embodied experience of participation to the construction of identity within the 'sighted world' of elite cricket, this thesis makes a number of important insights into the high performance culture of modern disability sport.

In writing these final substantive comments, I once again find myself drawn back to the ECB's strapline: 'Cricket. But not as you know it' and I feel prompted to ask: is this an accurate statement? Of course, it depends on what one already 'knows' about cricket, but the phrase asserts that visually impaired cricket is somewhat different from the mainstream, sighted version.

To a certain extent, this is correct: underarm bowling, a predominance of sweep shots, and, most significantly, the presence of blind and partially sighted players. However, this is juxtaposed by players wearing the same kit, stepping onto the same hallowed turf, and adopting the same high performance ethos as their sighted peers. The dual aspect of this social space that is simultaneously elite, organisationally and attitudinally, yet still 'different' is problematic. The players' embodied experiences, the construction of identity, and valorisation of their 'sporting bodies' are all mediated through the lens of mainstream, 'legitimate' sport. Rather than the underlying crux of this thesis being 'Cricket. But not as you know it', it is the opposite that applies. In many significant ways, elite visually impaired cricket is 'Cricket. As you know it'.

Whilst the close relationship with mainstream cricket was inescapable, the players' lived experiences of playing visually impaired cricket did exhibit an alternative and fascinating way of participating in sport and physical activity. A key contribution, and aim, of this thesis was the detailed articulation of how the participants conceptualised and negotiated the visually impaired cricketing space. Whilst the participants had been diagnosed as having a 'sensory impairment', their experiences revealed something greater than mere sensory compensation and challenged the dominant discourses of blindness and disability as a burdensome physical weakness.

Whilst the negotiation of space for blind and partially sighted people has been discussed through multiple academic disciplines, this is the first study to conceptualise visually impaired 'sporting space'. The lack of physical landmarks in visually impaired cricket and the fast-paced nature of the game led to the creation a number of unique spatial strategies. The formation of embodied cognitive maps created through repetition and experience were commonplace. Yet, within visually impaired cricket, these maps were based around the movements of teammates and the opposition, between the

constructed 'fielding positions', rather than depending on fixed, stable objects.

The embodied 'sense-making' strategies embedded within the sport, such as the ball-bearings within the ball, and strategies that were individually and collectively created by the players, such as 'auditory knowledge', demonstrates an ontological shift in how sport and physical activity can be engaged in without a reliance on visual perception. Another significant aspect of the players' multi-sensory experiences was the intercorporeal, socialised aspect of perception. The embodied cognitive maps were 'brought to life' by the auditory and haptic interactions of teammates, the umpire, and even, the oppositions' vocal 'sledging'. Alongside the already physically demanding position behind the stumps, the wicket-keeper's 'running commentary' for all players acted as an additional sensorial stimulus. Through active and performative modes of perception, the players demonstrated high levels of agency when negotiating the sporting space.

Despite the players' multi-sensory experiences that utilised auditory, haptic and kinaesthetic modes, visual perception was clearly the most highly valued by the partially sighted players. A number of interviewees acknowledged that other sensory modes were 'fallbacks' for when they could not see what was going on. Whilst it is understandable that partially sighted players used their residual vision, it was the ocularcentric valuation of visual perception that was significant. The players' interpretation of vision as the most important sensory mode was the starting point for the 'hierarchy of sight', a conceptual notion constant throughout this thesis. Whilst their embodied participation did challenge dominant conceptions of blindness, disability, and sport, many of the players felt it was important to reinforce that they could participate like their sighted contemporaries.

The emulation of mainstream cricket continued to be an underlying theme in Chapter Five's debate on the empowering potential of visually impaired

cricket. The players' initial experiences of finding recreational cricket, whether at school or a local club, were clearly empowering. The confidence and social skills gained through visually impaired sport, in comparison to certain players' experiences of sight loss, demonstrated their empowerment. An embodied 'reconceptualisation of self' significantly showed the potential of disability sport in challenging internalised understanding of impairment and physical capabilities. Participation in visually impaired cricket provided an embodied outlet for the blind and partially sighted individuals to experience previously undiscovered bodily mastery.

Yet, these early experiences also revealed the disempowering impact of visually impaired cricket. Being a 'big fish in a small pond' at boarding school was recognised as a positive benefit of participation. Yet, it was also the beginning of the players distancing themselves from other blind and partially sighted people who could not or chose not to play sport. There was no shared 'blind culture', just the culture of competitive sport that valorises individual bodies by their sporting prowess.

The current professionalised environment, that emulates mainstream international cricket, provided the players with access to high quality coaching, facilities, and equipment. Due to this evolution, expectations to be competitive and win major trophies had been raised. For the partially sighted players, especially those at the top end of their 'B2' and 'B3' categories, this environment was empowering. Those players could meet high expectations through technical skills but also because of their high levels of sight. Whereas, for those 'low partials' or 'B1' classified players, the more competitive the game becomes, the more disempowering and marginalising it will be. Whilst John encourages a 'contextual relativism' when watching visually impaired cricket in Chapter Five, within this professionalised environment, there was no such approach. Visually impaired cricket can be empowering, celebrate the abilities of blind and partially sighted people, and challenge stereotypes. However, significantly, the institutional organisation of

the game means that the empowering potential of visually impaired cricket is inhibited and empowers those with the highest levels of sight.

Central to the marginalisation of the blind players is the classification system, which was the focus of Chapter Six. Whilst this has been previously analysed in the context of other disability sports, this is the first study to examine the social consequences of official classification within a visually impaired team sport. So embodied was the classification system that the categories of 'B1', 'B2', and 'B3' have become social identifiers with set corporeal and social expectations. When these expectations were breached, some players were accused of cheating the system. This endemic culture of gossip and rumour served to maintain the institutionally enforced 'status quo' that reinforced the medicalised and 'fixed' nature of impairment.

Unlike goalball and five-a-side football, blind and partially sighted people participate together in visually impaired cricket. The blind players are required to wear blackout shades, but despite this, they are under constant scrutiny because of the potential benefits of being registered as 'B1' such as double runs. Partially sighted players were also accused of having too much sight to play cricket, by their blind teammates, in an act of retaliation. Classification has created an attitude of self-preservation. The categories are so engrained amongst the players, that alongside increased competition for positions, the institutional structures remain unchallenged.

The unique player composition and rules of visually impaired cricket had a significant impact upon social relationships and led to the creation of a 'hierarchy of sight'. For many of the partially sighted players, their social roles were completely reversed. From being the recipient of support from a sighted person, they were now relied upon to guide their blind teammates during games and also in other social settings such as hotels or train stations. Whilst guidance is a necessary part of the game, having such support from a peer, rather than a designated guide, had two significant consequences.

Firstly, the act of asking for guidance from a teammate can be socially embarrassing and seen as a surrendering of independence. Secondly, the dual expectations of being an international cricket player whilst guiding a teammate led to the blind players being seen as a burden. Both of these factors further reinforced the separation of the blind and partially sighted players and the existence of a 'hierarchy of sight'.

In light of what had been discussed regarding embodied participation, professionalisation, and classification, Chapter Seven examined the impact of elite visually impaired cricket in the construction of the players' identities. The collective identity of the squad members was one that rejected disability, and blindness as positive facets and adopted the hegemonic masculinity of sighted, male sports teams. An integral aspect of enforcing this form of identity was banter that targeted the players' impairment. Due to all players being visually impaired, this social space was harsh and unforgiving as everyone was 'fair game' when it came to abuse; the social conventions had been removed.

In the adoption of a shared identity, there was very little space for a disabled or blind identity. Disability was rejected as it was something institutionally ascribed. To play visually impaired cricket, the players must identify as disabled, but only temporarily. In the words of Terry: "I just think you are dealing with a group of blokes who don't really consider themselves disabled." The negotiation of blindness or visual impairment was a more complex process. Whilst the negative connotations surrounding the language and terminology relating to blindness were inescapable, the embodied realities of identifying or being identified as visually impaired were also significant. To distance themselves from 'undesirable' forms of blindness, as conceptualised through the 'blindie' and 'blindy' distinction, certain partially sighted players chose to 'pass' as sighted to avoid the negative social consequences. Whilst a number of players claimed their 'normality' by playing visually impaired cricket, due to the institutionally enforced structures

of the game, it actually accentuated their impairment. Despite the creation of various 'passing' strategies in everyday life, cricket is one of the few social situations that 'outs' them as visually impaired.

The players did demonstrate social agency when constructing identity but, once again, it was those with the highest levels of sight. They did not challenge the stereotypes of disability and blindness but chose to form a shared identity that emulated those found in mainstream sport. As well as this, specific terminology was adopted that led to an avoidance of language relating to disability or blindness. Significantly, those who are the 'least' visually impaired are more likely to excel in visually impaired cricket and consequently having sight was something to desire. As acknowledged in the conclusion to Chapter Seven, the *raison d'être* of the team, the purposeful creation of a sport for the visually impaired, is now a space that portrays being visually impaired as an undesirable and negative form of identity.

Visually impaired cricket, and more broadly, disability sport are social spaces for embodied contestation. I had expected and even hoped that the participants would challenge dominant notions of disability, blindness and sport through the embodied act of playing cricket. As established above, in many ways, they do challenge these dominant notions but, when asked to articulate these experiences, the majority contested their visually impaired status by emphasising their visual abilities. Due to the institutional expectations placed upon the players, they were constantly striving to both justify and demonstrate their 'eliteness', a concept which evidently equated with having sight.

Although playing an adapted sport organised by a mainstream governing body did legitimise the 'seriousness' of the game, which is what many of the players craved, it also enforced a high performance ethos that very few players could meet. The body culture of elite, non-disabled sport is a problematic value system to emulate for disability cricket and especially in a

format where there is such a range of impairment. Whilst less of an issue in events where athletes have ostensibly the same or similar impairments i.e. the T44 100 metres race or blind football, where all participants wear blindfolds, visually impaired cricket is different.

The composition of visually impaired cricket is inherently unequal and this is further exacerbated by an elite value system: as Clive previously stated “In a blind man's world, the one eyed man is king”. As long as the ECB continues to persist with an elite approach to visually impaired cricket, those players who are 'most' disabled will continue to be marginalised. It is those players with most amount of sight, thus closest to a 'normal' cricket player, who thrive in this social space. This is 'Cricket. As we know it'.

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Appendices

Appendix One- Research Agreement



Lords Cricket Ground

20th May 2014

To whom it may concern

This is a letter to confirm the verbal agreement made between Ben Powis , doctoral student at the University of Brighton and myself, Ian Martin, Head of Disability Cricket at The England and Wales Cricket Board.

The England and Wales Cricket Board will provide Ben Powis with access to research the England Visually Impaired Squad for his doctoral thesis titled 'Disability sport as embodied resistance: experiences of blind and partially sighted cricket players.' The research will primarily take place during the monthly England Visually Impaired team training weekends and access to these sessions will be granted to the researcher.

The researcher will:

- a) ensure that the nature of this project will be explained to the players
- b) informed consent of all the participants will be obtained, and no one will be coerced to take part. Additionally it will be made clear that any individual may choose not to participate in interviews at any point.

The research will primarily take place during the monthly England Visually Impaired team training weekends and access to these sessions will be granted to the researcher. As per previous discussions, The England and Wales Cricket Board will provide travel expenses (based on train travel using a 16-25 railcard) and accommodation at the monthly training weekends throughout the research process. In exchange, Mr Powis will endeavour to investigate areas of relevance to the ECB, contributing to a wider understanding of particular issues within Visual Impaired cricket. The exact focus will be identified through discussions with myself and Ross Hunter, England VI coach. The results of this investigation will be presented in an appropriate manner of the ECBs choosing such as a written report (of around 10-15 pages with executive summary) or oral presentation that will be produced at the end of the research process.

Yours Sincerely

Ian Martin

Head of Disability Cricket

07824 600325

England and Wales Cricket Board



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