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## **Disability and sport as a tool to redefine social identity. The Content Analysis of some statements by disabled people**

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**Abstract.** The aim of the present work is to underline that the participation in sport activities may be linked to identity formation and to the process of redefinition of identity, following events that led to physical disabilities. Sport can be a tool capable of helping people with supervening disability to rebuild their identity. In addition, it may contribute to the modification of the common place which considers the disabled persons as an unfit person. In seeking to prove these assumptions, this study, by applying the Content Analysis, has qualitatively investigated, through analysis of some open ended interviews, conducted from journalist to disabled people who practice sports, the most meaningful aspects of participation in adaptive sports and if this participation can help the process of redefining of the identity or its negotiation and can help to bring out the resilient capacity of the subject.

**Keywords.** Content Analysis, Social Identity, Social Construction of Identity, Resilience, Sport and Disability

### **Introduction**

The present study intends to emphasize that the participation in sport activities may be linked to identity formation and, in particular, to the process of identity modification, specifically, following events that led to physical disabilities. Following traumatic events, the subject finds himself in an initial situation of loss of identity. Losing one's identity or not seeing it socially recognized involves losing the reference points, the ability to position oneself on the social map and move towards a specific goal with one's own projects. Sport can represent a tool capable of helping the subject to rebuild his identity. Through sports people have the possibility to increase self-esteem and the opportunity of manifesting their individual identities as well as that of evaluating the identities of those around them. In addition, they being able to accept own body crossing the line that supervening disability may can in fact.

Ferreira et al. (Ferreira, Gaspar, Campos and Senra, 2011), referring to those with a disability who have undertaken sports, say that sport helps develop a «maior capacidade de suportar tensões e frustrações (...), uma elevada contribuição na construção da personalidade individual, através da modelação de atitudes e comportamentos, e ainda no desenvolvimento de níveis elevados de auto-estima e de autoconfiança» (Ferreira, Gaspar, Campos and Senra, 2011: p. 56). Furthermore, it can be one of the means by which a disabled person can succeed in denying the commonplace of the disabled person as an "unable" person. Luongo and Malafarina define sportsman differently "diplomats of integration" (2007: p. 65) considering that, given their

sporting activity, interacting daily with others, they force society to measure itself against its contradictions. Furthermore, in comparison, they can manage to make the disabled person assess for the person he is and not for the sensations that his disability can cause.

It is important to emphasize that the identity of the “disabled” is a typed identity, that is a simplified stereotyped identity. The typing process has been described very clearly by the theory of social representations (ex: Moscovici, 1988) regarding the way in which people give meaning to new phenomena with respect to their own experience. Trough processes that allow to make familiar what is unknown and that, following which, the unknow object is treated as a concrete reality, a new social phenomenon is made understandable and communicable (Nencini, 2010: p. 3). This phenomenon, therefore, becomes real and anticipatory respect to future interactions.

The social construction of the identity of the disabled, goes to shape constraints that often appear particularly concrete, institutionalized, with the result of appearing as “factual data” that limit and condition the alternative possibilities of the subject. The social definition of disability often highlights a process of a priori selection of disability as a preponderant aspect of an individual, within that whole which instead constitute his identity.

Thus, the disabled individual is channelled mainly within a single social role, that of the disabled, through the process of stereotyping (simplified) disabled identity, composed of elements built socially and consistent with each other and with the socio-cultural context.

In this way, typed identities are formed, identities against which a disabled person very often finds himself wanting and having to laboriously deconstruct to achieve a representation of disability that is not socially available, which is that of common sense, which often resides in socially legitimate figures and contexts. The concept of “common sense” refers to all that, in a social community, is taken for granted by its members and referable to ordinary knowledge and which allows to put in brackets the doubt that things can be different from how they seem and how they were typed, within the process of creating shared meanings, which then become objective factualities.

A reconnaissance of the literature on the concept of identity and that of resilience was conducted as well as the analysis of interviews carried out by journalist to paralympic athletes and not.

In seeking to prove the assumption that the participation in sport activities may be linked to identity formation and, in particular, to the process of identity modification, in particular, following events that led to physical disabilities, honestly the current theory lacked research empirically identifying the meanings individuals associated with their participation in adaptive sports and/or recreation program on the outcomes related their involvement in such activities.

So, the purpose of this study is to qualitatively investigate, through analyse of some open ended interviews, the most meaningful aspects of participation in adaptive sports and if this participation can help the process of redefining of the identity or its negotiation and can help to bring out the resilient capacity of the subject. The process of redefinig of identity originates above all in the difficulty, for those who have become disabled, of adhering to the objectified forms of common sense. According to Simmel (Magnante, 2018: p. 47), it is only through a certain measure of superficiality that the individual can try to maintain a balance. It is precisely when, instead, common sense is problematized, that the identity balance that allows each one, some more less, to live in adherence, although always precarious, to given forms, comes to break.

A traumatic event, in terms of self/identity construction, emerged as important in the (re)production of self-related experiences within and outside of one’s life.

As already mentioned, I will proceed to a survey of the literature on the concept of the development of identity, on the reality as a social construction and on that of resilience of the

subject, to understand how a person define and structure own experiences relative to self and identity development.

In the notes below, will be from time to time, where it is deemed necessary, specified the correlation of theoretical concepts expressed with the process of re/construction of the identity of those who found themselves in the condition of disabled, after accidental events.

The aim of the study is precisely to underline that sport can be a means by which the process of changing identity or its renegotiation can take place positively, after an event following which you are necessarily faced with a “change of life”. This will be specified in the section dedicated to the analysis of interviews conducted by journalist to some sportsman with disabilities who have occurred. The person with disability occurring as a result of illness or accident is necessarily faced with a different reality from the one in which he previously moved.

It is clear that the consequences, especially the immediate ones, on every aspect of life, are harmful. What I want to emphasize is the influence that these fatal events have on the process of identity building of an individual. If this process of construction and recognition tends to fade or to freeze, the subjects experience a crisis as a result of which even social relations become problematic.

It is to be specified that, being the identity, while preserving its central nucleus, a continuous result of interaction with the specific relational environment and a process of attribution of meaning related to the context, the person who has become disabled is even more in the situation of re-identity building and negotiation of meaning.(Colombo, 2012: pp. 15-16). Furthermore, individuals who are denied their identity suffer real damage since the failure to recognize their specificity creates damage in relation to their self-esteem and self-confidence, which are those indispensable conditions for acting independently (Taylor, 1993, 1998).

Sport can be a useful means both to support the process of renegotiation of individual identity and to attempt to modify that form of social representation of the disabled person deriving from the process of stereotyping of identities.

Generally, the representation of the disabled person precedes his social action considering that it is carried out by a reading of the bodily attributes (Ferrucci, 2004: p. 19). These are the ones that give rise to those processes of typing and attribution of meaning on which the institutionalization and legitimization of reality in daily life are based.

The relationship between the attribute and the stereotype that produces discredit towards the bearer is a particular kind of relationship that Goffmann (1963; trad.it. 1983: p. 5) defines *stigma*. In this way, he conceptualizes disability as a stigmatized social identity that influences in different ways the order of intersubject relationships; the disabled subject is faced with a script already written for him by society and functional to it. Reactions to the social tendency to consider the status of disabled the dominant one can be either passive acceptance or reaction through the accentuation of self capable and not self disabled (Ferrucci, 2004: p. 45).

In this respect, I would like to emphasize the following. If you accept that in any environment there is both a certain autonomy and constrain, you can say that social representations have two roles.

The first of these is their ability to create models through the conventionalization of objects, people and events, giving them a precise form, assigning them a category shared by a group of people

(Farr and Moscovici, 1984: p. 27). Secondly, the representations are prescriptive, that is, they impose themselves on us with great force (Farr and Moscovici, 1984: pp. 29-30). The representations are clearly not created by isolated individuals, but in interaction through

communication and cooperation, and always within such dynamics, give rise to news representations and the old disappear<sup>1</sup>.

## 1. The social identity

The identity of an individual consists of that set of representations of everything related to one's existence, narratively organized, representations that, in agreement with Thomas and Znaniecki (1918- 1920), are socially acquired and shared and guide people's thinking and behavior. And the origin of any representation can only be relational since a meaning emerges from the interaction of two or more social actors (Blumer, 1969) and the meaning, in order to be represented, and therefore narrated, shared as such, must be interacted. Which means that any dimension of self-attributed meaning derives from a symbolic pre-interaction that generated and made it available. Consequently, the identity of each individual is the result of social construction that involves the social actors that are part of the life context of each<sup>2</sup>.

One of the areas of development of the concept of identity that is referred to here is related to the reflections within the social theory of the Self of George Herbert Mead as they have been interpreted and taken up in the context of Symbolic Interactionism. Mead's assumption relating to Self, as a social experience, is important for understanding how relevant social relationships are in the process of building identity, relationship in which the meanings of situations are negotiated, and therefore constructed<sup>3</sup>.

Mead attempted to move away from this and consider the self as a social experience (Mead, 1934). He argues that the communication is the key component in the development of self. The self is therefore, a process that accomplished in and through interaction, as opposed to an innate and separate structure residing solely within the mind (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). The self, for Mead, is the result of the objectification that the individual works of himself (Marcarino, 1988: pp. 29-30; Crespi, 1985: p. 240). In this way, it is built, first of all through social relationships and develops by organizing the particular individual attitudes, but also the social attitudes of the "*generalized Other*". Therefore, the image that the individual has of himself is the product of his experience and the forms of symbolic mediation that are part of this. The Self, the central nucleus of personality, characterizes each subject who redefines himself through his own experience (conscious and aware of being endowed with personal identity). The Self emerges from the ways in which the subject imagines that others perceive and judge him: it too is of social origin and is created and modified for the duration of life by interactive processes<sup>4</sup>.

These thoughts were further developed by Blumer (1969) into a more formal perspective which he called Symbolic Interactionism.

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<sup>1</sup> This is relevant in relation to the actions of the disabled person aimed to modifying the usual representations around the disability dimension.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to the renegotiation of the identity of those who, following a nefarious event have become disabled, in the process of social construction following which the identity of an individual is formed, the disabled person must also renegotiate the social meanings built around to the identity of disabled person, identity built on the basis of an a priori selection of variables that make the dimension of disability as preponderant.

<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in the condition of disability, the one who has suffered, is in the condition of having to build, through negotiation, new meanings even in areas where they were more or less structured.

<sup>4</sup> This aspect is important in order to better understand how the Self of the disabled people can be redefined precisely as a consequence of the perception that he has of how others judge him with respect to his new condition, in the awareness that the identity of "disabled" is a typed identity.

Blumer was the first to formulate Mead's ideas into a cohesive theory with specific methodological implications for study (Carter and Fuller, 2015: p. 2). Blumer emphasized how the *Self* emerges from an interactive process of joint action<sup>5</sup> and acting unit (Denzin, 1992: p.5). Blumer says that humans are engaged in mind action, which means that they are constantly engaged in mindful action where they manipulate symbols and negotiate the meanings of situation Mead 1934).

He (1969) posited that Symbolic Interactionism is based on three simple premises:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them;
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows;
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer, 1969:p. 2)<sup>6 7</sup>.

The possibility of a merger of perspective of the self and the others with whom one interacts, is given only by a shared meanings of the objects and symbols to which individuals respond in interaction.« In using language, individuals communicate the same meanings to themselves as to others. The self is, thus, both individual and social in character. It works to control meanings to sustain itself, but many of those meanings, including the meanings of the self, are shared and form the basis of interaction with others and ultimately social structure» (Stets and Burke, 2003: p. 4)<sup>8</sup>.

The issue of recognition of identities also with respect to the social dimension of each recognition process is also analyzed by Goffman within the interactionist framework. From Goffman's analysis I am interested to emphasize the recognition as a process that recalls the fundamental interactionist premises according to which the meaning of things is not contained in things nor does it depend on the psychological elements of the person, but it is a social product derived from social interaction (Blumer, 1969: pp. 34 ss.). From this it follows, in the Goffmanian perspective, that the interacting actors proceed to define the situation on the basis of socially inherited cognitive schemes and with margins of autonomy proper to the order of the interaction. Therefore, the subject evaluates the emerging signals in a given situation, acts through a negotiation of the starting cognitive outcome and, through interaction, contributes to the definition of the situation<sup>9</sup>. Unlike Blumer who emphasized the active role of the actor who

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<sup>5</sup> This conception of identity emphasizes how much the relation with the other in the construction of identity has. It is evident that, after a inauspicious event, the reconstruction of identity is closely connected with the new gaze that others have towards the new condition, which is that of disability, of the individual who suffered and lives.

<sup>6</sup> These premises are important to understand the process through which the redefinition of identity unfolds after a traumatic event that leads to physical disability, considering that the subject who has undergone it negotiates new and therefore different meanings with respect to its changed living conditions. Process which necessarily involves a redefinition of identity and which, as Blumer points out, involves a constant reinterpretation of meanings among individuals. In this regard, it seems important to me to underline what Strauss says, namely that the transformation of identity connecting turning-point experiences to personal and group history (Strauss, 1959: p. 11). The reinterpretation of meanings is a process in which the individual, in the new condition of disability, finds himself. It is significant to highlight the aspect related to the attempt to create a different meaning as regards the concept of disabled person that emerges from commonplaces.

<sup>7</sup> The stereotyped image of the disabled person as incapacitated, as incapable as someone who has to resign himself to a limited life, is the basis of the "sport-handicap" dissonance. This image is widespread and often the disabled person adapts to it by inhibiting a priori any motivation to take a different path.

<sup>8</sup> From this exhibition we can understand the complexity of the process of re/ building identity within the effort to reconstruct shared meanings.

<sup>9</sup> The disabled person who does not passively accept the socially constructed identity of the disabled person reacts precisely against the cognitive starting point according to which the disabled person is simply a disabled person. Sport can help modify the socially constructed and accepted construct in relation to disability.

interacts with himself through a form of communication internalized and manages the meanings even by transforming and modifying them, Goffman reduces the degree of freedom in the processes of signification. But what is relevant is still the possibility of negotiation that an individual possesses.

Socially constructed identities are, about Goffman, identities located because they are emerging from the temporal and spatial context in which interacting people experience each other and so define themselves, that is they are set up through the negotiation process that starts from the presentation of the self and aims at recognition. Both for Goffman and for Mead the vision of the self that the individual receives from the outside is decisive, considering that the individual sees himself, conceives and represents himself, also through the opinions of his social group (Leone, 2013: p. 24)<sup>10</sup>.

Among sociologists writing in the symbolic interactionism perspective, Sheldon Stricker, belonging to the Indiana School of symbolic interactionist thought, define identity as a cognitive scheme, consisting of information and meanings with which people define situations (Stricker and Burke, 2000: p. 284). The Author underlines, in accordance with the symbolic interactionism perspective, that the persons acting in the context of social structure also name themselves and create internalized meanings and expectations with regard to their own behavior. These expectations and meanings form the guiding basis for social behavior and along with the probing interchanges among actors shape and reshape the content of interaction, as well as the categories, names and meanings that are used<sup>11</sup>.

## **2. Resilience as an individual resource**

The term Resilience implies a positive dynamic, an ability to move forward following a traumatic event and is not limited to a resistance, but allows a construction, indeed the reconstruction of a life path (Pérez, 2010: p. 8).

As Franca Cantoni states (Cantoni, 2014, scenario XIX) the resilient individual is the one who, following a crisis resulting from inauspicious events, therefore from events of disorder and destabilization, finds the strength to re-emerge, not stopping to accept them passively.

This individual is able to transform the bond into a resource, constantly trying to improve his situation, feed, develop and consolidate his sense of self-efficacy.

It fights external, social and relational conditioning, in the awareness that it is up to him to change the situation and that he has the ability and the power to do it through the development of a new attitude towards overcoming his own limitations, as well as social and cultural ones, transforming into stimulus what until then had been nefarious, conceiving the crisis situation as a push towards a path of restructuring and important change.

Obviously, on the new path, the possibility of failing is also taken into account, a possibility that however does not prevent the subject from taking it.

Regarding the concept of resilience, it seems to me salient in relation to this dimension, to underline its congruence with what Baumann defines as “human weapons”: courage, tenacity

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<sup>10</sup> Through sport, the active disabled person projects a certain definition of the situation in which, explicitly or implicitly, he claims to be a certain type of person and makes a kind of request to others to recognize him, evaluate him and treat him in a different way. from the socially constructed and accepted one. There is the renunciation of the disabled person to be what appears on the basis of socially shared stereotypes

<sup>11</sup> The process of identity re-construction, in fact, involves negotiating the meanings that emerge from social interaction.

and hope, which according to the Polish philosopher and sociologist, are weapons that, to a certain extent, all they own, but only a few use them

Rutter (1985: pp. 598-611) argues the importance of variables such as family support, friendly relationships as support to be able to face the crisis positively, but it is the person who plays the active role, with his ability to face the stressful events deriving from the trauma, and to reorganize his life in a different but positive way, in front of all the difficulties that this entails. Masten indicated the existence of three macro-areas relating to the so-called protection factors, which are related within the process of contrasting the negative effects of adverse life circumstances: individual characteristics, family environment and the wider social context (Masten, 1999: p. 51). With regard to the individual, the protection factors consist mainly in the sense of personal trust, in openness to social relationships, in the ability to solve problems and make decisions, to set goals and be able to achieve them, and the awareness and trust that your achievements depend on your efforts.

Furthermore, in order for a person to develop resilience it is important that he has at least one positive reference figure both inside and outside his family and that he has the opportunity to have experiences that increase his self-esteem and self-efficacy in the social context, a context that one would like to promote social well-being by promoting participation and solidarity

The synthesis, developed by Le Bureau Catholique International de l'Enfance in Geneva, is interesting to describe the characteristic path of a resilient individual, using the metaphor of *casita*. The *casita* is a figurative e concise representation of some stages which, according to the sociologist Vanistendael, «deserve to be brought to the attention of those who wish to build or strengthen a process of resilience» (Malaguti, 2003: pp. 71-72). For Vanisteandel, resilience is the ability to succeed, in an acceptable way, in spite of a stress or adversity which normally entails the serious risk of a negative outlet (Pileri, 2015: p. 9). It has two fundamental components, which are, the resistance to difficulties, necessary for maintaining the balance and integrity of the person, and the ability to rebuild themselves positively. Vanisteandel, taking up the model of the *casita*, proposes the various stages necessary for the process of construction or reconstruction of resilience, using, in fact, the metaphor of a house.

On the ground, there is the satisfaction of primary needs, the foundations, they are the place of total acceptance of the person, in terms of relationships of trust, in the garden, lies the coherence and sense of one's life path, in terms of planning and goals, on the first floor, there are self-esteem, skills and humor (the latter as an aspect capable of reducing tension by discovering the ironic dimension capable of defusing; and, finally, in the barn, there are other experiences of life. These are, for the Belgian sociologist, the fundamental factors for a resilient personality structure. It should be specified that the plans of the *casita* are not to be considered static, but the arrangement may be different depending on the case. However, Vanisteandel believes that the networks of informal relationships are very important for the maintenance of the entire structure. In this regard, however, it should be stressed that the subject must be able to identify the support contexts to correctly understand their potential.

Siebert points out that people often, following a traumatic event that has obviously changed their prospects for life, have a tendency towards a victim reaction. The initial shock which is obviously inevitable often leads those affected to close in on themselves and not find the strength to get up and move forward. And it is precisely here that resilience comes into play. He defines the resilience in the way that follows: «resiliency means being able to bounce back from life developments that may feel totally overwhelming at first. They allow themselves to feel grief, anger, loss and confusion when hurt and distressed, but they don't let it become a permanent feeling state. An unexpected outcome is that they not only heal, they often bounce back stronger than before» (Siebert, 2005: p. 5).

Emiliani (1995) presents resilience as a skill that develops within the relational dimension and is enhanced and strengthened by all experiences capable of promoting a feeling of personal efficacy and self-enhancement.

### **3. Interviews analysis**

As mentioned above, a corpus of interviews, conducted by journalists to people engaged in sports activities and who, as a result of fatal events, reported disabilities, was analysed.

The method of case analysis used was Content Analysis that is a method of analysing written, verbal or visual communication messages. Central to the value of Content analysis as a research methodology is the recognition of the relevance of language in human cognition (Sapir, 1944: pp 93-116). The key assumption is that the analysis of texts lets the researcher understand other people's cognitive schemas (Duriau, Reger and Pfarrer, 2007: p. 6). It can be a useful technique for allowing us to discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention, to determine the psychological state of persons or groups, to identify the various characteristics of a person and so on (Weber, 1990: p. 9). In addition, Content analysis assumes that groups of words or a whole sentence disclose latent themes and that, for instance, co-occurrences of keywords can be interpreted as reflecting association between the underlying concepts (Huff, 1990; Weber, 1990).

Through Content analysis it is possible to distil words or whole sentences into fewer content related categories. It is a method that may be used with either qualitative or quantitative data and it may be used in an inductive or deductive way. Which of these is used is determined by the purpose of the study. Both inductive and deductive analysis processes are represented the main phases: preparation, organizing and reporting.

There are no systematic rules for data analysis; the key feature of all Content analysis is that the many words or sentences of the text are classified into much smaller content categories (Elo and Kyngas, 2007: p. 109).

The preparation phase starts with selecting the sampling unit that, in this research work, consist of a corpus of interviews collected on the web. The sampling method was non-probability and the purposive sampling. The purposive sampling is a type of sampling in which the sampling units are chosen not in a probabilistic way, but on the basis of one or some of their characteristics (Corbetta, 1999: p. 349). Moreover, it means sampling in a deliberate way, with some purpose or focus in mind (Punch, 2005: p. 187). The sample units that have been chosen are interviews performed by journalists to disabled people engaged in sports and in whom disability occurred following an accident. Therefore, the cases were chosen based on their status on this property. The criterion on the basis of which it was decided to stop the case detection was the saturation, on the basis of which the process of collection case ends when the new ones do not add anything new to the cognitive process (Delli Zotti, 2004: pp. 147-148). The analysis of data, was mainly conducted using an inductive approach. From the analysis of interviews and after the open coding, that means that notes and headings are written in the text while reading, themes emerged that refer to the theories presented in my work. So, the categories were established prior to the analysis based upon some theory. To be clear, the categories were created after analyzing the texts, with references to the theories presented.

Therefore, this process includes open coding, creating categories. The written material was read again to link words or sentences to the created categories. An instance of themes was expressed in a phrase a sentence or an entire document.

After reading texts, was generated a list of categories from the theory taken in consideration, was grouped under higher order headings and were codified the data according to the categories.

The purpose of creating categories is to provide a means of describing the phenomenon to increase understanding (Cavanagh, 1997: pp., 5-16). When formulating categories by inductive content analysis, the researcher comes to a decision, through interpretation, as to which things to put in the same categories (Dey, 1993).

Analysis of data was led utilizing line by line coding, by identifying elements according with core categories. Subcategories with similar events and incidents are grouped together as categories and categories are grouped as main categories (Dey 1993; Robson 1993: pp. 351 ss.) Central to the value of content analysis as a research methodology is the recognition of the relevance of language in human cognition (Sapir, 1944: pp. 93-116). The key assumption is that the analysis of texts lets the researcher understand other people's cognitive schemas (Duriu, Reger and Pfarrer, 2007: p. 6). In addition, content analysis assumes that groups of words or a whole sentence disclose latent themes and that, for instance, co-occurrences of keywords can be interpreted as reflecting association between the underlying concepts (Huff, 1990; Weber, 1990).

Main categories were created from the analysis of data and after identifying relationships between them and theoretical models taken into consideration. For each generic category will report the authentic part of content that was coded into the content category. The unit of texts classified in the same category have a similar meaning. According to Chadwick et al., (Chadwick, Bahar & Albrecht, 1984: pp. 239-257), categories are mutually exclusive so that a word, a paragraph or a theme belongs in one and only one category. The reported parts of interviews are those relating to the considerations of individual subjects regarding the effects deriving from having practiced and practicing a sport. In reference to the Resilience Theory were created generic categories that will be listed below, within a table, and that was grouped as main category that I called "Resilienza".

GENERIC CATEGORIES	PARTS OF INTERVIEWS
<b>Resilience as aspect that sport helps bring out</b>	<p>-“I can say, based on my experience in sport, that every person, if he tries hard, discovers that he is capable of things that amaze her first: with willpower, with optimism you can get everywhere. Each of us has this strength inside, we just have to pull it out”.</p> <p>-“Through sport I find the strength and courage to get back into the game”.</p> <p>-“Sport has opened up a world of possibilities to me”.</p> <p>-“Sport is the thing that puts you at stake”.</p> <p>-“Sport has allowed me to develop qualities, such as attention and strength, quality that I probably had set aside or hidden. Qualities that perhaps, following the accident, I had suffocated, perhaps for fear of not being able to do many things anymore”.</p>

**Trasformation  
of a constraint  
into a resource**

-“I have turned adversity into positive”.

-“Trough sport I have learned how diversity can transform itself from limit to potential”.

-“Trough sport, I managed to turn my weakness into a strenght. Sport gave me the courage and tenacity to set goals that I never thought I could achieve”.

-“(…) make your disability a an important and valid resource to compete and win, both in sport and in life. Even as disabledpeople can win”.

**Development  
and  
consolidation of  
self-esteem and  
self-efficacy in  
the social  
contest**

“Starting to spend time in the gymand experiencing the athletic gesture is already a big part of improving your self-esteem and your existence”

“Trough sport I managed to overcome my problems and increase my self-esteem and my confidence in my abilities”.

In reference to the Identity Theory, were created generic categories that will be listed below, within a table, and that was grouped as main category that I called “Reconstruction of identity and renegotiation of meaning”

GENERIC CATEGORIES	PARTS OF INTERVIEWS
<p><b>Awareness of the new condition and process of redefining one’s identity; reconstruction of a life path</b></p>	<p>-“I wrote my life story again”.</p> <p>-“Sport offered me a second chance”</p> <p>-“Sport creates a new within us”</p> <p>-“Sport is an excellent starting point to redefine yourself”.</p> <p>-“Sport allowed me, after the dramatic impact with my new condition, to give space to myself and importance to my body”</p> <p>-“Trough sport, you can slowly build new goals and understand if you can aim for certain goals, despite the disability”.</p> <p>-“I was able to get my life moving again thanks to sport. I rearranged myself despite the disability”.</p> <p>-“Trough sport I learned to recognize my body”</p>

**Renegotiation  
of meanings  
within the  
social  
interaction**

-“With our participation in competitive sports, people begin to understand our commitment and the spirit we put into it. It begins to understand that we are people and not "disabled". We do not feel disabled and there are no discounts in our way of experiencing sport”.

-“The Paralympics were an opportunity to rethink the world of disability, eradicating the “disabled = loser or suffering” equation, reversing this perspective”.

-“Sport is one of the professional context in which it is more evident that men and women with physical and/or motor characteristics different from the norm, can achieve commendable results”

“(Sport) is an area in which those with disability can demonstrate that they have the resources and skills to make them competitive, achieving successes as much as those with disabilities are not. The sport sector has managed to make this paradigm shift in the evaluation of what deserves to be recognized and valued”.

**Renegotiation  
of meanings  
within the  
social  
interaction**

-“Sports competitions were an opportunity to show, in practice and not only in theory, the urgency to abandon the exclusive use of the medical health model in the approach to diversity. That demonstrated how reductive it can be to judge the adequacy of bodies by taking as single reference what medicine establishes as «normal» and, consequently, what common sense establishes to be «beautiful».

-“Sport helps to change the stereotype of disabled person as one who is not capable and whose physical qualities are forever compromised. Through sport, overcoming the difficulties of the physical impairment due to harmful events, it is shown that the disabled person can”.

**Conclusions**

Results indicate that the participation in sports activities is an opportunity to get back into the game, to find the strength and courage that every one, probably, has but would never have let out. The people interviewed declare that they have transformed the bond, the disability, into a resource and to have made it an opportunity.

It also emerges that the sport and recreation participation conduce to structure the identity negotiating process (redefining stigmatized identities through adaptive sports and facilities the renegotiation of identity and the expression of identity alternatives. Redefining the individuals' mental representation of their personal and social characteristics. People also declare that, through sports, managed to have the potential to bring them about an opportunity for identity crisis as a

process of discovering or rediscovering the self. Taking on a sport also meant succeeding in the process of balancing between an individual's view of themselves and new information which is not entirely consistent with that self-view.

Participation in sport has also helped partially change the social construction of the relationship between disability, negative labels and stereotypes that arises as society perceives an individual's functional composition falling below an accepted standard, leading to perceptions of inferiority and exclusion

Sport is an area in which those with disability can demonstrate that they have resources and skills to make them competitive much as those with disabilities are not.

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