

OLYMPIC EFFORT: RHETORICS OF DISABILITY, SPORT, AND RESISTANCE IN
THE 2012 LONDON OLYMPIC NARRATIVES

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the Department of Communication and Information Science in the
Graduate School of The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2014

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ABSTRACT

The 2012 Summer Olympic Games, held in London, England, stand as an international media spectacle from which cultural, political, and social narratives emerge within the athletic struggles of the event's competitors. Central to these narratives are the social constructions of the normative body, a concept that props up certain types of bodies as normal, natural, or ideal, while subjugating other types of bodies. Especially in athletic competition, where performance and ability are measured and ballyhooed, the ableist notions that some bodies are normal and some are abnormal construct hegemonic norms with worldwide reverberations. However, the participation of particular athletes in the qualification for, competition during, and commercial advertisements directly following 2012 Summer Olympic Games produced rhetorical space to challenge normative constructions. This critical cultural rhetorical dissertation examines how bodies of particular athletes within the 2012 Summer Olympics can act as spaces of resistance to hegemonic norms. By analyzing the narratives surrounding Keelin Godsey and Caster Semenya during qualification, Oscar Pistorius during competition, and Nike's *Jogger* commercial directly after the games, this dissertation stretches a critical disability studies lens in order to draw theoretical and political implications.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the friends, family, and mentors who guided me through this arduous, yet rewarding process. Most especially, I dedicate this project to my wife Rachel, whose constant love and support made all of this possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the support of my friends, family, and my dissertation committee, this project would have festered into a grueling death march. Thank you Richard MocarSKI and Adam Sharples for your emotional support, scholastic input, and ever-present friendship. Together, we are the elephants in the Alps. I would also like to thank my family, especially my wife Rachel Butler. With the constant support and flexibility of my wife and children, I was able to apply great attention when needed, as well as have welcome distraction when blocked. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee. Dr. Meredith Bagley, Dr. Andy Billings, and Dr. Nirmala Erevelles are exceptional scholars and teachers, but also reserved the time and patience to be incredibly insightful mentors for this project. Thank you for your time, energy, and scholastic ingenuity. Also, I'd like to thank Dr. Kim Bissell, whose willingness to release me, her research student, to ask questions and seek answers outside her methodology of expertise created the genesis for this project, a love of research in me, and a great respect for her as a teacher of research methods. I count you as a close friend and mentor. Thank you for all that you have done. Finally, I'd like to thank Dr. Jason Black for his dedication as my advisor. Your tolerance of my persistent office disturbances and invasion into vacation time, amazing classroom cultivation, and attentive tugs towards critical cultural and rhetorical scholarship have helped me harness techniques and talents of which I am proud. Thank you for all your time, be it working carefully through so many drafts of this project or just chatting after class. You have been an amazing advisor.

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Chapter 1- Introduction

When South African sprinter Oscar Pistorius burst from the blocks in the men's 400 meter and qualified for the 2012 Olympic semi-final, he ran past some of the fastest men on earth. What made Pistorius' race remarkable, inspirational, and controversial, was that Pistorius, as a double amputee, ran without lower legs, and instead sprinted while precariously balanced on carbon fiber stilts. Some questioned if it was fair that he competed with other Olympic athletes. For instance, former Olympic Track and Field champion Michael Johnson called Pistorius' participation "unfair to the able-bodied competitors" (Longman, 2013). Others were inspired by his performance. Bryshon Nellum, a member of the United States Track and Field team, remarked, "It's amazing. If something like that happens to you and you lose both legs, some people would give up. For him to continue to run, it's unbelievable" (Longman, 2013). Most importantly, as Longman (2013) asserts, Pistorius' Olympic race "continu[ed] to blur the lines between abled and disabled". Discourse forwarding norms that construct hegemonic hierarchies based on the form and function of bodies is know as ableism, and creates a significant amount of oppression. Disability scholars (Lindemann, 2010; Longmore, 2003; Garland-Thompson, 2011; McRuer & Mollow, 2012; Promis, Erelles, & Mathews, 2001; Coopman, 2003) argue that the cultural articulation of "normal" bodies segregate, regulate, and demean people whose bodies are deemed disabled, while elevating particular bodies as most enviable. Pistorius' performance during the 2012 London Summer Olympic Games (LSOG) highlights one of the many challenges to society's perceptions of able-bodiedness – created in the construction, mediation, and reaction to

athletes' bodies. His competition is one, but not the only, narrative to offer a challenge to notions of ability.

The Olympics, a premier celebratory spectacle of the abilities of these pinnacle bodies, is also home to an amazing amount of diversity, including instances of bodies that compete while challenging normative constructions of bodies. This study explores mediated coverage of bodies focusing on social constructions of disability within the context of athletics while expanding the critical disability theoretical lens. Given that athletic competition stands as a public measure of ability, situations like those embedded in the LSOG could create spaces to call into question the social construction of disability in a number of ways, and, this is part of the impetus for the project outlined herein. First, mediated communication featuring people with non-normative bodies is extremely rare and mostly negative (Tanner, Green, & Burns, 2011). The inclusion of athletes with non-normative bodies in the premier athletic competition calls for close scholarly attention in order to understand the social and theoretical ramifications of the event. Second, competition between athletes with non-normative bodies and those with normative bodies offers a unique chance to examine how media outlets characterize comparisons in ability, which is a driving force in the systematic exclusion of people with disabilities.

Continuing the connections made by West (2010), McRuer and Mollow (2012), and Bissell and Parrott (2013) I contend that the hegemonic influence of normative body constructions subjugates a multitude of bodies, not just the most visibly different bodies, and this study increases the exposure of the ableist mindset within culture.

This study focuses on discourse surrounding and within direct athletic competition during the 2012 London Summer Olympic Games (LSOG). Competition,

and the coverage of that competition, provides space to re-enforce or challenge hegemonic constructions of disability. Direct athletic competition, for the purpose of this study, would be described as events in which athletes who identify, or would be identified culturally, as having a non-normative body, compete with athletes with normative bodies. Normative, within this study, refers to social or cultural beliefs as to what is natural or normal. Concepts of normality center around a belief in an ideal construction, be it race, gender, sexuality, attitude, belief, or physical make-up, that is supposedly shared and enacted by all those claiming to be normal (Lindemann, 2008). Normative constructions are usually represented as binaries, such as normal/abnormal or able-bodied/disabled, and, though they are abstract, fluid constructions, the binaries are regularly justified, propagated, and policed. As Nakayama and Krizek (1995) posit, by understanding normativity as social discourse, scholars can “seek understanding of the ways that this rhetorical construction makes itself visible and invisible, eluding analysis yet exerting influence over everyday life” (p. 293). Normative constructions are based in discourse, and preserved through hegemonic power structures (Ono & Sloop, 1992). Thus, when this project references a non-normative body construction, I am referring to a body that, either through form or function, would be socially, culturally, or politically classified as not normal, disabled, or starkly different from most other bodies within a shared context.

Within this framework, this project examines the utility of critical disability theory within examinations of mediated representations of athletes with non-normative bodies. This project asks: “How do the narratives within the 2012 London Summer Olympic games construct, maintain, or resist hegemonic ableist notions?” Moreover, this

project is interested in the theoretical usefulness of a critical disability lens for communication scholars, as they engage in analysis of bodies as spaces of resistance. Thus, I engage in a critical cultural rhetorical analysis of the mediated messages from three case studies, each from different stages of the 2012 LSOG: Olympic qualification, Olympic competition, and the mediated messages following and in reference to the Olympics. Each of these case studies focuses on athletes whose narrative is, in part, based on their non-normative body in athletic competition with normative bodies. Thus, these related representations provide instances in which the application of a critical disability studies lens can expand the theoretical usefulness of critical theory investigating the body and sport. From these case studies, I argue that the bodies of athletes can provide a space from which to construct narratives that resist social constructions, but these narratives, as they become more mediated and less personal expressions of identity, may disrupt the resistive qualities the bodies create. As normative, hegemonic constructions consist of subtle, fluid cultural, political, and social barriers to empowerment, narratives of resistance to those power structures call for close textual analysis.

Chapter one of this dissertation provides a research query and argument statements for the project. It also provides an outline of the dissertation, as well as a justification for the elements of the project. Chapter two of this dissertation will cover the theoretical and contextual background of sport, culture, and disability as they pertain to the narratives within the summer 2012 Olympic cycle. Chapter three discusses the methodological and critical approach of the project, including an overview of the trajectory of critical cultural rhetorical research, a justification for this approach, and an

explanation as to how narrative analysis produces interpretive space across multiple types of discourse. Chapters four, five, and six consist of the case studies. Each of these studies approaches particular athletic bodies as spaces of resistance to normative and ableist conceptions. By examining bodies within different phases of the Summer Olympic master narrative, the qualification stage (chapter four), the competition stage (chapter five), and the post Olympics lessons stage (chapter six), this project focuses on how narratives are constructed in relation to normative conceptions of the body. Chapter seven posits some implications, both political and theoretical, regarding the propagation of bodies as resistive to notions of normalcy within the contexts of athletics. From there I offer some conclusions and emphasize directions for future scholarship.

Chapter 2- Theoretical and Contextual Background

Before the case studies can be presented, I need to lay the groundwork as to why the 2012 LSOG offer an important site for critical examination, as well as to provide an overview of relevant disability studies. I begin with a discussion of athletics and social construction. Next, I outline disability studies as a field of scholarship and then discuss the link between disability studies and sport. Discussions of the body as a space of resistance follow, and the chapter ends with how I plan on stretching the disability studies lens in each case study. These theoretical and contextual areas provide critical entry points for this analysis through a discussion of the use of the body as a site of resistance to hegemony.

Athletics and Social Constructions

The community of sport is a powerful site for the construction of identities (Mea^n & Kassing, 2008; Cherney, 2003; Cherney & Lindemann, 2009). Sport represents a significant global, economic and cultural force (Dunning, 1999; Sklair, 1991; Sklair, 1991) (Mea^n & Kassing, 2008), linked to ideologies and identities, and can act as a key site for the reinforcement or resistance to normative social constructions such as masculinity and heterosexuality (Dworkin & Messer, 1999; Hall M. A., 1988; Messer, 1988; Mea^n & Kassing, 2008). Oates and Durham (2004) remind readers that humans have been studying athletic bodies for many centuries. In many cases, feats of strength, speed, and ability have historically been used to construct identities that stretch beyond a single individual. Examples abound, and include early athletic competitions hosted in the United States, such as those arranged following the Louisiana Purchase. The Anthropology Games of August 1904 challenged young men of various ethnic

backgrounds within the expanding United States to athletic competition. A major focus of the event was to gather 'scientific' information relating to human performance and presumed racial hierarchies (Oates & Durham, 2004). Dr. W. J. McGee, head of the Exposition's Department of Anthropology and renowned anthropologist, concluded that the games "demonstrated what anthropologists have long known, that the White man leads the races of the world, both physically and mentally . . . in all-round development no primitive people can rank in the same class with the Missouri boy" (McGee, 1904). The influence of historians and scientists certainly contributes to the use of sport to legitimate a number of popular identities, be they cultural, racial, and/or sexual. However, the link between sporting abilities of particular bodies as proof-positive of hierarchical legitimacy is most apparent in the context of disability and eugenics.

Grue (2011) reminds readers that physical bodies are intertwined with the sociopolitical dynamics of a culture. If, then, sport is trumpeted as a means to legitimate social hierarchies, people with non-normative bodies are the most vulnerable to disenfranchisement. Magnet (2013) argues that physical impairments offered an easy access point for eugenic medical practices, including sterilization and institutionalization. From this perspective, families made up of fit, athletic people were perceived as less likely to have children with impairments (Steinberg, 1997).

The legitimating force of organized sport was even the impetus for the creation of the Paralympic games. The combination of physical injuries, advances in medicine, and negative social attitudes towards individuals with physical impairments directly following World War II propelled Dr. Ludwig Guttmann, the newly appointed Director of the National Spinal Injuries Unit at the Ministry of Pensions Hospital in Stoke

Mandeville, England to establish sporting events as a means of rehabilitating spine cord patients (Brittain, 2012). More than just a physical treatment, early Paralympic competition offered Guttman an opportunity to address conditions like depression from the social isolation that clung to these patients. By publically displaying a patient's athletic functionality, Guttman challenged for the reintegration of a discarded population (Brittain, 2012).

Within these pockets of organized sport, social ordering is still highly visible. Attempting to create both fair and equitable competition while remaining open to as many athletes as possible, the Paralympics, and competitions like it, struggle with how to classify the ability of athletes (Thomas & Smith, 2009). Relying on complicated medical assessments that group athletes based on the similarity of impairments, sport designed for disabled populations carry an inherent ability hierarchy that subjugates members. With emphasis placed on the medically classified impairments of individuals, it is suitable to question whether such exposure deconstructs normative notions of ability, or entrenches dominant hierarchical views of an ableist mindset. Essentially, sport is a field that produces hierarchies, like ableism, based on the constructions and functions of bodies.

One of the more interesting spaces to explore how social hierarchies interact within sport occurs when athletes with non-normative bodies, classified as disabled enough for participation within the Paralympics, decide to test themselves against athletes described as able-bodied (Steadward, 1996). Across sporting communities, the mainstreaming of athletes with physical impairments into international, high profile events like the Olympics, shakes conceptions of ability and physicality. Kicking off what Thomas and Smith (2009) call “a growing tendency over the last half century (p.128)”,

Karoly Takacs' gold medal performance in archery at both the 1948 and 1952 Olympic games secured space for Paralympic athletes to compete against able-bodied compatriots (DePauw & Garvon, 2005). Athletes in wheelchairs, lacking hearing or vision, and amputees have all competed with various levels of success. The presence of athletes with non-normative bodies measuring ability through competition creates space in which questions about normative constructions can be raised. However, even when a range of options may appear available to athletes in contemporary sport organizations, the act of situating athletes within those spaces can become ableist in nature.

Even while contemporary athletics still operate as sites of racial, gender, and ability construction that empower one type of person over another, the growth of organized sport around the world, in terms of participation, coverage, and popularity makes sport one of the most prominent, pervasive, and important cultural institutions (McGarry, 2010). Advertising endorsements and multi-media platforms amplify the athlete even outside the sporting arena, providing normative markers well beyond athletics (Mocarski & Billings, in press). Thus, with an ever-expanding emphasis on athletics within society, athletes become role models for cultural norms (Lavelle, 2010).

The Olympic games, one of the best-known organizations of this historical obsession, provides excellent opportunities for a multitude of critical examinations. First, the diversity of athletes, in background, religion, race, ethnicity, bodies, country of origin, and gender provides intersecting identities that enrich the narrative of the games. The use of athlete's Olympic Village, where all the athletes live during the games, the opening ceremonies, which includes the parade of athletes from each country, and the games themselves, as well as the coverage of the games, emphasizes the diversity of the athletes,

points out the longevity of our cultural curiosity with the athletic body. As Billings and Angelini (2007) explain, “even non-sports fans crave the Olympic experience” (p. 95). The Olympics are a uniquely worldwide event (Butler & Bissell, *The Best I Can Be*, 2013). Participation in and viewership of the Olympic games engages individuals across the globe beyond the viewership of other popular world-wide sporting events like the World Cup. Worldwide, Nielsen Media Research reported that more than 219.4 million viewers watched the 2012 LSOG over the course of its coverage, and NBC’s primetime broadcasts counted more than 31.1 million viewers, which made it the most-watched non-U.S. Olympics in 36 years (Huffington Post, 2012). The 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games had previously been the most-watched event in television history, with just over 211 million viewers that tuned in over the 16 days of the Games (Fitzgerald, 2008). The level of viewership around a single mediated event begs close scholarly attention.

Sport offers an excellent entry point for critical scholars on a number of issues. As Mocarski and Billings (in press) assert, “sport is a cultural discourse accessible to all with the ability to reify existing normative narratives by reinforcing the governing rules of these discourses through invisible means. However, well-hidden discourse comes into conflict with groups that the discourse marginalizes” (p. 3). The narratives and discourse within sport, particularly those that disenfranchise, are an excellent focus for critical scholarship. However, Anderson (2009), Birrell and McDonald (2000), and Hall (1988) assert that, up until fairly recently, sports scholarship has been lacking a critical theoretical edge. Sports scholarship from the 1960s to the late 1980s, even scholarship that raised issues of normative roles and discourse, many times lacked critical theoretical understandings surrounding issues of gender, race, and ability. Critical scholarship in

sport plays the important role of interpreting sports practices, traditions, and phenomenon in regards to the historical, political, and social contexts.

But even as critical scholars wade into sports as an arena for scholarship, they must keep in mind that organized sport in America, and around the world, holds additional and unique barriers to critique. As Oates and Durham (2004) remind readers, “strategies of measurement and quantification of the human body for the purposes of ranking and classification have long been deployed to maintain various social hierarchies”. Enumeration in sports, or the propensity to keep and champion numerical records as indicators, can easily mask underlying social issues, including the justification of racial, gender, sexualities, and physical stereotypes.

Winning and losing, the binary that drives sport, also acts as a social shield from criticism. Thus, winning in sport is paramount, and can justify significant cultural disenfranchisement. As an incredibly contemporary example (though there are many throughout the mid to late 20th century), take the coming out of John Amaechi, a gay National Basketball Association (NBA) player, whose sexuality moved him back into conversations within sports circles after his retirement. As Hardin et al. (2009) explain, few commentators would condemn Amaechi for being gay. Instead, his record as a basketball player was routinely and roundly attacked, while other more positive markers, like longevity in the league and experience on Olympic teams, were ignored. Hardin et al. (2009) state, “columnists most commonly marginalized Amaechi by criticizing his performance and record as a basketball player. Writers repeatedly referred to Amaechi as a ‘basketball footnote;’ an ‘NBA nobody;’ ‘at most, a functional NBA player;’ a ‘second-string player;’ a ‘scrub;’ a ‘has-been;’ a ‘major disappointment;’ and a ‘fringe player’ “

(Hardin, 2009). Thus, discrediting his ability to win reduced the need to critically examine Amaechi as a figure within a power structure that regularly worked to disenfranchise him (Hardin, Kuehn, Jones, Genovese, & Balaji, 2009). Critical scholarship becomes important in instances like these because while compelling evidence may exist, proving the intent and effects of public discourse aimed at Amaechi's career is nearly impossible. Instead, interpretation of events by critical scholars highlight patterns of discourse that may empower certain peoples while disenfranchising others. Using the parameters of sport, like wins and losses, to enforce social constructions of what is normal or abnormal highlights these situations of hegemony.

When the discourse surrounding sport empowers or disenfranchises individuals, cultures, or communities, scholars can use critical theory to deconstruct the discourse to confront particular hegemonic forms, functions, and patterns. Scholarship deconstructing hegemony is often times based in cultural fields, such as gender, race, and nationality, attuned to the distribution of power. Often overlapping, critical scholarship studies the articulation, enforcement, and maintenance of power structures. Disability studies acts as one such field of study, providing a lens through which to approach deconstructions of hegemonic forms. In the following section, I will outline the field of disability studies, draw links between social constructions of sport and disability, and identify a critical theoretical entry point for the deconstruction of hegemonic forms through specific bodies acting in resistance.

Disability Studies

Academic scholarship on disabilities follows two popular trajectories, as a medical condition and as a social condition (Thomas & Smith, 2009; Coopman, 2003). Medical conceptualizations of impairment, and the disability that stems from it, produce a context in which disability is a condition that can be solved, cured, or treated. The medical model of disability has several drawbacks, such as focusing exclusively on personal limitations, presenting impairment as a sole cause of disability, and enhancing the growing power of medical professionals to define what are what are not perceived to be medical problems (Thomas & Smith, 2009). The social model of disability, as a rebuttal to the medical model, acknowledges the social and environmental barriers that exclude people with perceived impairments (Shakespeare & Watson, 1997). Disability studies, as a field of study, stems directly from the tension between these two models.

Disability studies represents the formal academic establishment, organization of scholarship, and activism addressing the social, cultural, and political nature of the ascribed category, disability (Linton, 1998). Disability studies includes scholars from a wide range of disciplines, converging on the topic of disability as a social phenomenon. As Linton (1998) explains, “the social, political, and cultural analysis undertaken by disability studies form a prism through which one can gain a broader understanding of society and human experience, and the significance of human variation” (p. 117). Approaching disability studies from the discourse that enables the construction of disability makes for fertile ground for communication scholars, as disability studies centers on constructions of normativity through discourse. Examining discourse through disability studies provides necessary critical analysis as to how and in what areas theory

centered in disability perspectives can be advantageous for knowledge development while attending to the meaning making aspects that occur in metaphor, symbolic, and media representations of disability (Linton, 1998). Take, for example, Barounis' (2009) analysis of the visual rhetoric within the films *Murderball* and *Brokeback Mountain*. By examining the narrative aspects of the films, one a documentary on wheelchair rugby and the other a fictional account of two gay cowboys, Barounis conceptualizes theoretical overlaps between disability studies and queer theory, while deconstructing popular portrayals of non-normative bodies in American cinema. Critical application of disability studies, particularly from a rhetorical perspective, adds important depth to this broad field.

Critical studies of disability focus on social constructions that establish hierarchies of social ordering or hegemony (Garland-Thompson, 2005). Disability studies asserts that specific physical forms are heralded as normal, correct, natural, and ideal (Lunsford, 2005). Promoting these specific forms is known as an ableist mindset, as it elevates a specific type of bodily form as able and deviations from that form as disabled. While the binary of the able-bodied and the disabled is oftentimes justified through links with specific physical impairments or medical diagnosis, disability studies recognizes the role that social discourse plays in who get stuck with which label, as well of the ramifications of those labels. As Lindblom and Dunn (2003) state, the major assertion of disability studies is that "people's views of people with disability are disabled. Disability Studies has taken 'disability' out of the category of 'physical defect' and put it into the category of 'socially constructed unfairness'" (p. 169). Essentially, the social construction of disability, and the discourse that props up those social constructions, is skewed. Disability studies aims to re-center discourse around the power that stems from

those social constructions, like who is labeled “disabled” and why, rather than associating “disability” with a physical impairment. The distinction between the power of the labeled and the labelers helps highlight instances of transgression from and the policing of the boundaries of social constructions like disability.

All bodies are fluid forms, differing from person to person, over time, and within different contexts. Even individual bodies change drastically over time in form, appearance, and capabilities. But hegemonic constructions create, through discourse, the arbitrary binaries of normal and abnormal or able and disabled. As these constructed labels are based on abstractions, they are oftentimes justified, policed, and articulated within social discourse. Able-bodiedness, like other hegemonic forces, police transgressions from normative boundaries by centering the construction of bodies around normalcy, thus subjugating deviations from those norms. As Lunsford (2005) asserts:

There are collective labels: the disabled, the deaf, the blind.

Insults: cripple, retard. Euphemisms: differently abled,

handicapable. Pejorative terms: handicapped, wheelchair-

bound, victims of paralysis. Plato’s terms: deformed, lunatic.

Each of the labels Lunsford recalls act to differentiate specific bodies from the norm, elevating the hegemonic construction of able-bodiedness above those saddled with non-normative bodily forms. Plato’s terms, in particular, highlight the detrimental nature of the extremely demeaning labels.

There are those deemed “appropriate”: people with

disabilities, people who use wheelchairs. And then there are

no words for those who do not talk about disabilities. There

is only silence. (p. 330)

Lunsford stresses that even well-meaning labels or even the lack of discourse can have significant ramifications. Society's discourse, or lack of discourse, constructs and regulates which bodies to idealize and which to demonize, oftentimes in rhetoric that may pass as innocuous or justified through science. Just as opportunities for critical discourse of power within sport may be hidden within the enumeration of records, ableist notions of the normal body may be authenticated through the adoption of legitimating scientific justifications.

Disability Studies Links to Sport

Critical studies of disability and sport each depend on hegemonic forms attempting to maintain themselves through socially accepted and legitimated cultural discourse over time. As discussed above, sport often justifies outcomes and identities of participants, and repeats the process to ensure legitimacy. Much like sport, scholars like Garland-Thompson (2011) assert that the ablest social constructions of disability manifest in a number of ways, but depend on the repetition of discourse. "Like queer studies and feminist studies before it, studies of able-bodiedness focus on communication trends that establish hierarchies of social ordering" (p. 14). Social ordering is the construction of hegemonic power structures, in which those with power negotiate, through the promotion of discourse, the maintenance of those power structures. Chin-Ju and Brittain (2006) assert "claiming identities for ourselves and attributing particular identities to others is essentially a matter of power" (p. 353). Crucial to the promotion and justification of this discourse, be it in sport or disability, is the dependence of those with social credibility reifying the hegemonic constructions, which can come in the form of those with social,

political, or cultural power. Just as anthropologists and sports commentators lend credibility to assertions of the dominance of whiteness or the condemnation of gayness, the social construction of disability maintains hegemonic power structures through reliance on elements of social authentication. For instance, social reliance on medical doctors as the authorities as to “proper” human physical characteristics produces one specific ideology, as well as the social power of individuals within a profession, over others.

According to Garland-Thomson (2011), one significant element of able-bodiedness is the link between a disabled person and injury or diagnosis. These constructions are based in a medical model, in which the opinions of medical practitioners seep into social constructions of ability. Essentially, those deemed medical experts have cultural legitimacy that crosses the bounds of their profession, and their judgments can be tenaciously entrenched in a culture. Brittain (2004) asserts that the medical model is a persistent and negative construction of disability. Speaking directly to the medical model in the United Kingdom, Brittain (2004) writes:

the power of the medical profession to define the discourse for disability, the legitimization of this discourse by other groups and institutions within society, economic arguments, fear of difference and lack of understanding, and the use of societal norms combined with a marginalization by members of society of any person or group that does not conform to those norms.

For Brittain, the medical profession has the cultural legitimacy to center discourse

surrounding the body and its capabilities to diagnosis, impairment, and injury. The use of these scientific, and thus, rarely questioned, labels steers social understandings of the body towards the harmful binaries that reify hegemonic power structures. Brittain (2004) continues:

Some or all of these factors may interact to inform individuals' perceptions of people with disabilities and, as such, may form the basis for how they act toward a person with a disability and what they might say when discussing people with disabilities. (p. 435)

Relying on scientific methods to justify socially constructed binaries shields the normative binaries from critique in the same way that normative narratives in sport are shielded by the reliance on statistics, records, and measurements. Critical disabilities lenses attempt to critique the reliance, perpetuation, and negotiation of these normative constructions, particularly in the face of scientific pretense.

The most prevalent example of the influence of the medical model comes within the mediated discourse surrounding disability and sport. Just as sports broadcasters relay social constructions of gender, race, and sexuality to audiences, mediated sport broadcasts of disability reify hegemonic constructions of disability that stem from the medical model. Examining coverage of the 1996 Paralympic games, Schell and Duncan (1999) found that though commentators critiqued some social constructions of disabled athletes, descriptions of athletes as broken were still present. In most cases, mediated representations tend to highlight human frailty through a medial expert lens that disassociates the disabled body from forms of normative constructions of bodies, even

when those bodies challenge those ideologies through competition (Corrigan, Paton, Holt, & Hardin, 2003), because mediated representations of the impaired athletes are typically shown only in isolation from the public or those athletes deemed able-bodied (Butler & Bissell, *The Best I Can Be*, 2013), it almost becomes easier to see the disabled athletes as broken, different, or deviating from the normative standard of what exemplifies an athlete. In other cases, broadcasters frame athletes as overcoming their specific impairment, producing a supercrip narrative that tokenizes the achievements of the athlete while disregarding the context of the competition (Hardin & Hardin, B., 2004).

While mediated representations of sport and disability share a dependence on cultural authentication to justify social constructions, the combination of contexts also creates unique opportunities to critique these hegemonic structures. Direct athletic competition can challenge the abstractness of normative constructions of able-bodiedness because constructions of disability, either in the media or within social discourse, are representative relationships between the body and its environment (Garland-Thompson, 2011). Longmore (2003) reminds readers that contexts of ability and disability significantly alter the presentations of individuals. In regard to context, sporting events place discussions of ability at the forefront, making them ripe for theoretical, as well as practical, discourse on disability. Since media representations of disability within sport, including coverage and the events themselves, are carefully constructed environments, emphasizing the situational relationship between the body, ability, and the scene can readily reinforce normative constructions (Nelson, 2000). When Maas and Hasbrook (2001) explore disability discourse within the Professional Golf Association tour, ability, access, and identity of the athlete situated in a mediated format that has to negotiate

social constructions based on contextual performance measures. Isolating the body, and the mediated version of that body, as a resistive force as it navigates the environment, provides needed discursive space for analysis. Identifying instances of resistive bodies within competition with normative bodies creates opportunities for comparisons to be drawn, and better highlight differences in discourse surrounding the athlete's bodies.

Bodies as Resistance

As athletes compete for Olympic glory, viewers around the world are bombarded with images of those professed to have the most admirable bodies. The bodies of Olympic athletes are measured, tested, weighed, and timed, as well as ogled. Strength, speed, weight, and power are measure in splits, stones, and meters, and the celebrated with the hanging of a medal around the necks of those most successful. As the pinnacle embodiment of athleticism, the Olympic bodies are pivotal in maintaining normative constructions of ability, gender, masculinity, and race. The international attention to these athletes fuels individuals to strive for these same bodies. As Judith Butler reminds readers, "Embodiment is not thinkable without a relation to a norm or set of norms" (2004, p. 28). Thus, the bodies of athletes participating within the Olympic narrative become sites of social knowledge. Particularly from the perspective of rhetoric, as Patterson and Corning (1997) argue, critical scholarship should "read the body as the site of cultural inscription, self-regulation, and resistance" (p.7). The hegemonic construction of the able bodiedness is strengthened through the promotion of particular Olympic bodies.

Simi Linton (1998) argues that the work of Michel Foucault plays a central role in the creation of disability studies theory. A major reason for his influence is revolves around his assertions that bodies are "invested with relations of power and domination"

(Foucault, 1977, p. 26). Foucault (1977) sees peoples' utterances as formed by underlying rules of discourse, actions proscribed and authorized by relations of power, and even conceptions of self dictated by technologies of subjectivity. All of social construction, then, is bound by a web of control, such as the idea of the panopticon, which influence knowledge, beliefs, and conceptions of self, as well as culture and community. As Biesecker (1992) reminds readers, for Foucault, power establishes relations that enable social understanding. This social understanding is based in the naming and organizing of subjects. The relations of power influence not only how we think, act, feel, and react, but also the manner in which we do these things. Thus, the power that empowers some while oppressing others can come from the smallest examples of discourse. The omnipresent conceptualization of these micro physics of power led many to criticize Foucault of cryptonormativism, or that normative structures of power were so powerful that they could not be challenged. Foucault counters these arguments by asserting that power is only recognizable by the friction that resistance causes (Phillips, 2002). As Phillips (2002) argues, "Resistance, then, cannot be generated within these relations of intelligibility but emanates from gaps within the lines of intelligibility. These gaps become the spaces from which resistant acts emerge to disturb relations of power" (p. 331). Resistance highlights instances of power because resistance is nearly everywhere that power exists, and it is the push and pull between them that illustrate power in action. Otherwise, humans are acting in situations of obedience.

Scholars such as Judith Butler (1993) and Susan Bordo (2003) emphasize that bodily identities are inextricable from discourse. As bodies represent interpretations, performances, and negotiations between strictly policed social constructions through

discourse, they represent possibilities for resistance arising from that discourse (Oates & Durham, 2004). DeLuca (1999) explains that the body may serve “as a pivotal resource for the crucial practice of public argument” (p. 10). Understanding the body as a possible site of resistance creates opportunities to deconstruct, examine, and critique elements of hegemonic forces. As Oates and Durham (2004) explain:

Butler and Bordo expand Foucault’s argument while applying it to feminist concerns. For all three, bodily discursions are occasions for the exercise of power. If, following Bordo, Butler and Foucault, we conceive of the body as a product of discursive practices, we can identify a distinct trend in that discourse: one that ‘scientizes’ and ‘statisticizes’ the body in ways that are intended to mark it, make it productive and otherwise colonize it (2004, p. 305).

Within the process of adopting the scientific qualities, such as enumeration through measurement, statistics, and predictions, bodies of athletes become a site resistance. That is, the construction and ability of the bodies operate as avenues through which to examine the social pressures that come along with normative constructions.

Reading bodies as rhetorical situations can offer the opportunity to challenge normative constructions, but the fluidity of the body, the narratives around it, and the interpretation of the audience further complicate this form of resistance. Butterworth (2008) reminds readers that “embodiment arguments do not always or necessarily lead to progressive outcomes” (p. 261). While bodies may hold potential to challenge normative constructions, the rhetoric of those bodies leads to narratives that situation and

contextualize the resistant act. Thus, bodies as resistive acts are arguments present within their social contexts. In essence, “to treat the body as a mode of argumentation, then, is to engage the rhetorical effects produced by the presence of bodies” (Butterworth, 2008, p. 262). Not only can the presence of a particular body exceed expected discourses but it may also carry argumentative weight regardless of the subject’s intent (Butterworth, 2008). As Blair (1999) reminds us, “Rhetoric is not rhetoric until it is...given presence” (p. 18). Considering bodies as rhetorical arguments, then, allows for resistive qualities to stretch the confines of discourse (DeLuca, 1999) and recognizes that “the potentiality is present for the body...to enact political change” (McKerrow, 1993).

Stretching the Disability Lens

Phaedra Pezzullo (2003) asserts that bodies can create opportunities for cultural implications when they “expose our physical, emotional, and political scars” (p. 356). When athletes with bodies that resist normative constructions participate in competitions, their bodies become a contextualized focal point. Thus, the resistance of the body becomes discourse that highlights the negotiation of the normative construction, typically through mediated narratives. Through disability studies, there appears a useful theoretical base through which communication scholars can investigate those media accounts of athletes’ bodies as they trouble normative constructions. For communication scholars interested in sport, bodies, or critical cultural and rhetorical approaches, the use of critical disability in this study has clear advantages. First, it offers scholars an additional lens with which to engage in a variety of texts, not just traditional constructions of disability. Second, it provides a way to analyze the surge in non-normative bodies within mainstream media. As more and more commercials, films, and

productions utilize non-normative bodies for symbolic, meaning shaping purposes, this study offers a range of deconstruction options. Third, stretching the critical disability lens provides additional layers to intersectionality deconstructions involving athletes. Understanding athletics as a function of ableism, even without traditional disability discourse, is crucial in projects that attempt to analyze intersections of identity in hegemonic structures.

This analysis contends that the rhetoric of particular bodies produce arguments within the Olympic narrative, while highlighting the intersectionality of identities within those narratives. Olympians and their bodies, which are under more than the usual amount of public scrutiny, hold exceptions to normative constructions. Some of these exceptions, like speed or strength, are heralded, while others, like being transgendered, double amputee, or overweight, are scrutinized. Just like the diversity of bodies within the Olympic athletes themselves, the case studies in this analysis center on bodies that should not be lumped into a singular identity category, like “disabled”. The use of a critical disability lens by communication scholars calls for theoretical stretching that provides richer analysis of the narratives within each case study. Due to the various fields of study that have contributed to disability studies, as well as the relationship between medical and social models of disability and the discourse that gives power to each, critical analysis of the discourse within and surrounding non-normative bodies offers the best avenue to strengthen and grow current disability studies theory (Grue, 2011). Keeping in mind that intersecting identities construct various discourse dynamics, each case study will stretch the critical disability lens using overlapping theoretical approaches, including queer theory, masculinity, and weight stigmatization, as they

present themselves within the narratives. This study does not attempt to divvy up and deconstruct every element of identity and power within an artifact, but instead isolates specific intersections to deepen the theoretical approach to athletic bodies as resistance.

The first case study examines the links between queer theory and disability studies in the context of qualifying for the 2012 LSOG. Queer theory critiques, examines, and attempts to disrupt normative social constructions of gender, sex, and sexuality. Within the first case study, the analysis will follow the work of West, (2010) and McRuer and Mollow (2012) from the connections between queer theory and disability theory towards the identity and access issues that surrounds intersections of athlete, sex, and disability. Queer bodies, like those bodies labeled disabled, are what disability studies scholar DeLuca (1999) calls “ a pivotal resource for the crucial practice of public argument“ (p. 10). Disability studies scholars (Sandahl, 2003) and queer theorists (Achter, 2010) acknowledge the authentic tone of narratives of the body as lived experiences that lend credibility to a body’s rhetorical function. Thus, as queer bodies resist normative categories within the qualification process, the critical disability lens helps break down conflicting narratives that arise within the discourse. For instance, sex classification, and the separation of male and female athletes at the Olympics, has long been an imperfect system. The 2012 LSOG had two high profile instances of sex classification controversy, Keelin Godsey, a transgendered hammer thrower, and sprinter Caster Semenya, who was subjected to an unprecedented genetic probe to determine her sex classification. Both athletes used media to speak about their bodies, while their bodies themselves actively challenged the Olympic qualification categories. Overlapping queer theory and a critical disability lens of analysis produces an entry point for discussing the narratives produced.

The second case study links disability studies with the masculinity elements that come with media portrayals of particular athletes. Expanding the work of scholars like Garland-Thompson (2005), Trujillo (1999) and Lindemann (2010), the theoretical links between feminism, masculinity, athletics, and disability studies help unpack how hegemonic constructions of athletic masculinity are packaged within media narratives about Olympians with non-normative bodies. Disability Studies scholars (Achter, 2010; Garland-Thompson, 2005; Lindemann, 2010; Lindemann, 2008) recognize links between levels of perceived masculinity and the non-normative body. In addition, athletes with non-normative bodies must also contend with dominant narratives of hyper masculinity associated with Olympic level athletes. Thus, the narratives produced surrounding these athletes, and, in particular, the role of masculinity within these narratives, begs critical analysis using a disability lens. Using as my artifact the National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) video biography of Oscar Pistorius, as he became the first double amputee sprinter to qualify for the semifinals of the men's 400 meter, I examine how the narrative elements of Pistorius' masculinity are framed for audiences, complicating the resistive nature of his body and performance.

The final case study links the disability studies lens with theories of fat studies. Just as disability studies has long fought the medical model of understanding bodies, as well as the social and political repercussions of that model, the same critical theoretical approach should be useful in addressing the social and political plight of those suffering against weigh stigma (Solovay, 2000). Following the theoretical trajectory of Herdon (2002) and Bissell and Parrott (2013), the critical disability lens is used to examine narratives of non-normative bodies within the context of athletics produced just after the

2012 LSOG. As with the previous case studies, body narratives within athletic endeavors complicate the hegemonic normative constructions and offer a point of critical access. In the case study media portrayals within the Nike *Find Your Greatness* advertisements, which link the Olympics, disability athletes, and weight issues, provide an artifact in which the critical disability lens is stretched to examine mediated non-normative bodies.

Chapter 3- Methodological/Critical Approach

Employing critical cultural rhetorical analysis allows for the scholarly engagement of particular bodies within the Olympic narrative acting as resistive forces to normative constructions of ability and athlete. Critical cultural rhetorical analysis is an investigative approach to public persuasive discourse combining the scholastic practices of cultural studies and rhetorical studies, typically focused on elements of power. The combination of critical rhetorical and critical cultural approaches affords the benefits of two rich scholarly traditions. Rosteck (1999) explains that rhetorical and cultural studies have slippery histories that simultaneously inform and complicate their combination as a field of critical study. The following chapter will discuss rhetorical and cultural studies traditions, the convergence of critical rhetoric and critical cultural studies, and narrative analysis.

Rhetorical and Cultural Studies Traditions

From a typical, traditional communication standpoint, rhetorical studies is a discipline that is interested in the crafting, studying, and deployment of public persuasive messages that have lasting effects on an audience. While rhetoric has received significant scholarly attention at least as early as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, the field's most recent theoretical and methodological approaches stem from the ideological turn, a series of articles published in the *Central States Speech Journal* during 1983-84 (Borchers, 2006). Though centuries of scholars had addressed the effectiveness of public discourse, Phillip Wander's (1983) approach to rhetoric within these articles challenged traditional

approaches to the study of rhetoric and to what degree rhetorical theorists should concern themselves with questions of ideology. As Cloud (1994) explains, Wander and others argue that rhetoricians should view discourse as an agency of economic and political power in order to understand how that power is mediated, reinforced, perpetuated, and challenged. Following innovative rhetorical scholars like Edwin Black (1970), who questioned the traditional formulaic approach to discourse in rhetorical theory, and Lloyd Bitzer (1968), who articulated the contextual aspects of discourse within the rhetorical situation, Wander's writings set the stage for rhetoricians to assume an activist role through the analysis of discourse (Burghardt, 2010). For McKerrow (1989), rhetoric and rhetorical theory could be used to address public communication as it challenges or maintains social, political, or cultural power. McKerrow's critical rhetoric offers a method for addressing instances of power reverberating in discourse, while shifting the focus of rhetoric towards a postmodern, relativistic vantage point, as opposed to attempting to solidify universal concepts of reason (Burghardt, 2010).

A great deal of contemporary rhetorical criticism involves looking beneath the surface of a piece of discourse in order to address instances of social, political, or cultural power (Borchers, 2006). Campbell (1972) describes rhetorical methods of criticism as biased critiques of fluid texts. Campbell argues that such bias is not a bad thing, as our biases give us unique perspectives on situations of rhetoric that allow for rich and contextualized understandings. Further, these understandings should be shared in order to continue the construction of social reality and cultural truths. Rhetorical methods of analysis allow for more depth of description, contextual examination, and interpretative freedom. Hart and Daughton (2005) assert that these three elements provide a depth of

analysis that is unique to a particular instance of discourse. By dealing in specific instances of discourse, rhetorical methods allow for the opportunity to offer insight as to how a rhetorical artifact is situated in the flow of history, identified from other, similar instances, and how it can strike an audience member. In many cases, rhetorical methods of analysis are opportunities to search out unique instances of discourse instead of categorizing patterns. Thus, rhetorical analysis can be a methodological approach to theory and scholarship, as it is not bound to the status quo or replicability. Brummett (1994) explains that critical rhetorical studies “examines what power is or what it has been understood to be, and how power is created, maintained, shared, lost, and seized” (p. 76). As the relationship of power and environment is regulated through communication, discourse is central to critical rhetorical studies. For scholars, it offers the opportunity to examine the tiniest spaces of resistance, which are too quickly washed away in the tidal pulls of structural power.

An excellent example comes from Antonio Gramsci’s work on hegemony. For Gramsci, hegemony is the subtle control of one group over another by asserting a particular ideology as paramount (Borchers, 2006). Hegemonic ideas can be structural, like laws, or abstract idea, passed along through cultural narratives and values. Hegemony’s subtlety and fluidity make it a powerful social, political, and cultural element of discursive power. Contemporary critical rhetorical analysis attempts to reveal and disrupt hegemonic instances as they present themselves in discourse. By revealing elements of power, scholars can show patterns of control, opportunities for resistance, and the role that rhetorician, audiences, and scholars play in the processes of power.

Thus, critical rhetorical scholars address discursive choices and the potential consequences of that communication (Borchers, 2006).

Cultural studies, as a field of organized scholarship, is much younger than rhetorical studies, in part because scholarly endeavors to explain culture spans nearly every academic discipline. For this reason, During (1993) claims that cultural studies should be described as the anti-discipline. As a collaborative effort from intellectuals from many different fields, cultural studies addresses issues of culture and power in all their complexities. While Sparks (1996) argues that “it is extremely difficult to define cultural studies with any degree of precision”, the works of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams in the 1950s, and the subsequent formation of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964, gives the field a jumping off point from which to explore how cultures are created and maintained through the texts they create and encountered (Borchers, 2006). Culture, for cultural studies critics like Fiske (1996), is a “way of living within an industrial society that encompasses the meanings of that social experience” (p. 115). These meanings are relativistic and contextual, according to Stuart Hall (1996), as representations produce meanings that are only applicable within the event. Since the environment within which the representation occurs is necessary to understand the meaning, concepts of culture become essential in understanding meaning generation. Labeling and classifying the texts encountered is, according to Hall (1996) an innately human process. When value is placed on specific practices, texts, or beliefs within an environment, the meaning that groups place on these aspects create patterned social responses. Over time, these patterns become identifiable as culture. Essentially,

being a member of a culture happens when individuals name, classify, and interpret what they encounter in similar ways.

Wrapped within these cultural formations, Hall (1996) argues political agendas work to establish structures of power, and the goal of cultural studies is to illustrate the political aspects of culture. Cultural studies is ideologically oriented and heavily influenced by Marxism (Borchers, 2006). Cultural studies assumes that inequities exist within cultures, many times along socio-economic, gender, race, ethnicity, and ability lines. Thus, cultural studies is interested in how meaning is generated in a culture, especially in context of the social, political, and historical power structures present.

As individuals begin to form cultural similarities, language and discourse play an essential role in both. Discourse, in the eyes of Hall, forms the meaning that cultures rely on, as well as providing the overlapping cultural maps through with social, political, and historical structures can create, maintain, and transfer power (Borchers, 2006). Thus, examinations of discourse and power can have methodological overlaps between rhetorical and cultural studies. As the rhetorical and cultural studies fields begin to intersect, they carry with them their historical baggage, which stretches both fields and provides a delineation point from critical cultural rhetorical analysis and traditional rhetorical or cultural analysis.

Undertaking Critical Cultural Rhetorical Analysis

Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci (1991) assert that scholarship focused on contextualism, the sensitivity to discourse's environment and users, that can be found in approaches like those in contemporary rhetorical and cultural studies, invites a particular type of criticism. The complexity of artifacts, particularly normative discourses of power

and resistance, represent rhetoric that “requires more than a glance; it demands engagement” (Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991, p. 297). As this project examines how the narratives within the 2012 LSOG construct, maintain, or resist hegemonic ableist notions, engagement with the artifacts involves utilizing macro level approaches through the application of critical lens and more focused analysis to specific narratives throughout the Olympic process. A critical cultural rhetorical approach prompts this type of multi-layered engagement, as Burghardt (2010) describes, because critical cultural rhetorical criticism “identifies multiple, competing realities, rather than absolute truths” while addressing “the construction of identity and how power is assigned an exercise in society” (p. 633). Inherently, identifying multiple realities in discourse acknowledges that texts can be interpreted differently from person to person. Claims within this project, as well as the conclusions reached through careful analysis, represent a single interpretation as to how elements of power are compounded or resisted within particular narratives. This preferred reading of rhetorical artifacts offer an interpretation that might otherwise go unread by viewing audiences, and thus adds to the discourse deconstructing similar narratives.

Thus, in this project, I engage in three separate case studies in a critical cultural rhetorical style of analysis to explore bodies from the 2012 Summer Olympic qualification, Olympic competition in London and Olympic themed advertisements directly after the 2012 LSOG. Having three separate case studies allows for examinations of different types of bodies in resistance to normative constructions of Olympic bodies while accounting for the narrative shifts that take place to explain away, police, or highlight the critiques of normative able-bodiedness through the course of an

Olympic season. Rhetorical analysis of each of these artifacts within the cultural context surrounding social constructions in and around the 2012 LSOG highlights that while each of these texts are separate events, they layer upon one another to shape narratives about culture, sport, and disability.

This methodological/critical approach was chosen for this project for a few key reasons. First, this approach allows for a depth of analysis of specific artifacts that inform our understandings of a pivotal discursive moment, in this case, the 2012 LSOG, within larger contexts of social, historical and ideological constructions. For traditional rhetorical scholars, the context is immediate, and helps ground the text in the situations in which it is presented and present audiences. This hypervalorization is drastically different for the cultural studies approach, which attempts to stick the text in a flow of history. This approach has also been critiqued by Condit (1999) as historicization, which reduces the span of history by situating the text by social flows and movements, instead of by event or person (Rosteck, 1999). Thus, critical, cultural, rhetorical approaches to context attempt to provide a balance between these two, using context to both describe the immediate situation but also ground the situation in the flow of history.

Second, a critical cultural rhetorical methodology allows for overlapping critical theoretical lenses, which become essential in understanding issues of identity and access for athletes whose bodies resist normative constructions. Contemporary critical cultural rhetorical analysis focuses on the topics such as race, gender, class, power, hegemony and culture, and explores situations in which these topics reveal themselves or are constructed and resisted. As a theoretical approach, critical cultural rhetorical scholarship provides a lens through which to view the world, individuals, and culture, as

well as the forces that affect them. Critical cultural rhetorical analysis relies on analysis of primary discourse as a tool to understand how cultures construct reality and how that reality affects individuals, communities, and cultures. As Rosteck (1999) explains, critical cultural rhetorical analysis relies on a definition of rhetoric as a public expression that reifies, constructs, or challenges social constructions of reality. From this perspective, Nakayama and Krizek's (1995) deconstruction of whiteness, as an example, shows how discourse produces normative constructions that can be challenge through critical cultural and rhetorical critique. Relying on critical cultural rhetorical analysis, as a postmodern approach, studies like Nakayama and Krizek's highlight near invisible forces that shape social, cultural, and political discourses by offering an interpretation of the artifact within a context to illustrate, and as a process of, knowledge and social truth (Burgchardt, 2010).

Third, a critical cultural rhetorical approach considers artifacts of resistance and power as fluid, shifting, and not necessarily oppositional forces. As McKerrow (1989) reminds readers, "the analysis of the discourse of power focuses on the normalization of language intended to maintain the status quo" (p. 99). That normalizing discourse is not only far reaching, entrenched, and subtle, but also shifting to maintain the power held within current contexts. By employing a critical cultural rhetorical methodology, one can more clearly engage in interpretation of texts that would be impractical to measure within other methodological approaches. Cloud's (1996) examination of narratives surrounding Oprah Winfrey, involving race, class, and gender, highlights the fluidity of hegemonic power structures to adjust to resistive artifacts. With multiple, sometimes oppositional currents of power surrounding an artifact, Cloud's use of critical cultural rhetorical

approach allows for examination of hegemony within multiple and layered narratives. Within my own project, which includes a multitude of narratives that may hold emancipatory or restrictive tendencies from several hegemonic constructions, the ability to conceptualize the fluidity of power structures is necessary for drawing implications from analysis.

Another important aspect of a text within the critical cultural rhetorical methodology involves the role of power and resistance as overlapping with regard to the role of the critic. While neo-Aristotelian rhetorical scholars certainly believed in a closed text, from which a careful scholar could glean one holy reading, most contemporary rhetorical scholars treat texts as open for multiple interpretations, much like their cultural studies counterparts. However, the underlying assumptions of these positions are still relevant and inform a critical cultural rhetorical approach. Rhetorical scholars assert that readings are in competition, and that these readings vie to replace each other as the dominant reading. Cultural scholars see the different readings happening in a far less confrontational way, adding elements that may work together or be at odds, depending on the circumstances. A critical cultural rhetorical approach allows for the possibility of a dominant reading while searching for ways that such a reading participate in the hegemonic elements of power and resistance.

Understanding power as shifting and fluid also informs the role of the critic as they engage in cultural rhetorical analysis. Within a critical cultural rhetorical investigation, the analysis becomes a particular type of interpretation of the artifact, creating space to expand and encourage discourse rather than define text. A critical cultural rhetorical critic's own sensibilities combined with a contextual understanding of

the texts/rhetoric empower the critic as an intervener into or social actor within the presence, meanings, and import of rhetoric under investigation. For this analysis, the employment of a disability lens within the identities of athletes whose bodies are sites of resistance to a multitude of hegemonic forces, such as gender and sex binaries, masculinity, and weight bias calls for a methodology that recognizes the positives and negatives of privileging one theoretical interpretation over another.

Narrative Analysis

While critical cultural rhetorical analysis acts as the macro level approach towards the resistive bodies in the 2012 LSOG, narrative analysis acts as our methodological tool for investigating the contours, dimensions, and general “unfolding” of each individual case. McClure (2009) argues that narrative and the narrative paradigm offer the richest methodological approach to contemporary rhetorical criticism. Walter Fisher (1984), who offered up the narrative paradigm as a direct challenge to the rational world paradigm, refocused communication analysis of discourse around the narrative. The narrative paradigm, according to Fisher (1984), is an overarching construction of discourse acknowledging that humans are, at their core, storytelling creatures. Fisher insisted that all discourse is, at least in part, the telling, retelling, or interpreting of stories, and that “the human communication should be viewed as historical as well as situational, as stories competing with other stories” in order to make rhetorical arguments (Fisher, 1984, p. 3). These stories informed cultural, community, and individual values, morals, beliefs, and attitudes, and were used to embed these communication elements into the discourse of others (Fisher, 1989). Cloud’s narrative analysis of Oprah Winfrey reminds readers that “ideological constructions of race and power in texts like biographies of Oprah

Winfrey correspond to and legitimate ongoing oppression by holding up representations of the black elite as proof that the system is just and that racism is a thing of the past” (Cloud, 1996, p. 132). Narratives pass along rhetorical arguments that shape the beliefs, attitudes, and values for the social cultures present.

Narrative analysis represents one way for critical communication scholars to conceptualize narrative as a symbolic process of discourse while placing emphasis on cultural contexts in which the narratives are constructed and absorbed (Butler & Bissell, *The Best I Can Be*, 2013). This is helpful to contemporary scholarship for a number of reasons. First, narrative analysis provides for the analysis of new and old narratives, including the viability and persuasive possibilities, by looking at elements like inter-animation, consistency, and the production of values reflected in the culture, along with the more subtle elements accessed through logics of terminologies. The variations, contradictions, or adherence to existing narratives plays a critical part in examinations of hegemony, as social constructions can be challenged (McClure, 2009).

Second, narrative analysis accounts for the pre-existing narratives through allusion, allegory, and metaphor, which offers a critical standpoint for understanding the stretching and reshaping of narratives as they evolve. Thus, narrative analysis opens critical space for the auditors of polysemic, polyvalent, and multivalent narratives (McClure, 2009). This space, articulated by McKerrow (1989) as “the potential for...interpretation” (p.107) that is necessary for critical rhetoric, is crucial for providing an opportunity for resistive reading of popular narratives (Ceccarelli, 1998). As this analysis involves bodies in resistance and the mediated portrayal of those bodies,

narrative analysis provides for a flexible application of critical disability lens on multifaceted communication artifacts.

Third, narrative analysis provides scholars a means to address cultural practices in which narratives play a major role in the construction of values, community, and knowledge. Fisher (1984) was correct that humans use narratives, and, as a symbolic process of association, narrative analysis provides a method in which to examine these situations. The symbolic process of association becomes even more important when considering emerging media representations of non-normative bodies in commercials, movies, and other forms of media. Borrowing from literary scholars, narrative prosthesis, an analysis method that focuses on constructed fictional characters and their relationship to the norm based on their bodies, becomes a useful form of narratives analysis in highlighting symbolic carryover of ableist notions. Hegemonic normative constructions of the body relies on cultural discourses that offer confirmation to the definitions, naming, and policing practices that come with able bodied empowerment. Narrative analysis is ideally suited for investigating the cultural production, distribution, and resistance to these social constructs.

Narrative analysis is particularly productive within critical cultural rhetorical analysis because it allows for the insertion of specific critical lenses. Investigating hegemonic normative constructions, particularly those within innocuous or scientifically justified rhetoric, calls for highlighting patterned discourses of power. Interpreting discourse as a narrative reveals these patterns for critique. Cultural narratives often rely on repetition of characters, situations, or structures to help pass along the cultural values, lessons, and normative constructions (Butler, MocarSKI, Emmons, & Smallwood, 2013).

Narrative analysis, then, deconstructs the overlapping qualities of a particular artifact's narrative structure, characters, and style with the cultural, social, or individual norms, values, and goals.

For this project, gathering narratives consisted of identifying isolated media stories or collections of stories that centered on the bodies of athletes that challenged normative constructions within Olympic athleticism. While narratives are fluid, compounding and complex forms of discourse, selecting a narrative for analysis meant identifying the parameters of the narrative in order to encapsulate as many facets of the story as were forwarded. In some cases, a single media construction told a story, and that story was forwarded in multiple mediums. Supporting media that offered no alterations provided impetus to focus the analysis on the original narrative construct. If, however, a narrative was altered or challenged as new voices emerged, those elements were included in the analysis.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this particular critical approach to the discourse. The first is that isolating the critique to specific instances of narrative provides only small examples to significant, fluid, and often times innocuous rhetorics of ableist oppression. For instance, this project examines physical constructions of the bodies as they resist normative concepts of the physical athletes. Concepts of disability reach individuals whose bodies, be they physically, mentally, and emotionally non-normative, feel oppression. However, critical cultural rhetorical analysis of narratives involving the physicality of athletes may not grasp the totality of innocuous ableist discourse involving the mental and emotional normative constructions present. Instead, this focus attempts to

situated specific rhetoric into the contextualization of oppression based on one type of ableist discourse.

Another limitation to this approach is that some critical lens of analysis are chosen to interpret the discourse that emerges, while other important perspectives may be left out. The intersectionality of identities, for example, offers the opportunity to apply critical race theory or the supercrip model to narratives within the games. However, I have chosen to utilize other critical lens more often, because either the narratives forwarded other dominate perspectives or because I felt that a different lens offered more space for theoretical expansion for communication scholars interested in bodies and sport. These choices should add to the conversations of intersecting identities, and are not the definitive word or master reading of the artifacts.

Finally, this approach to the discourse within the 2012 LSOG does not include all of the discourse within and surrounding the games. It prioritizes specific situations that are ripe for interpretation. My hope is that these interpretations of focused narratives create the theoretical links that will prove helpful in broader studies involving swathes of discourse.

Chapter 4- Olympic Qualification Case Study

Qualifying as an Olympic Body

Leading up to the 2012 London Summer Olympic Games (LSOG), two storylines emerged in which athletes' sex classification became a central part of their mediated narrative. Keelin Godsey, an American hammer thrower, and Caster Semenya, a South African sprinter, each became the object of speculation and discussion involving the bodily makeup of an Olympic female athlete. Local, national, and international media outlets like *Sports Illustrated*, National Public Radio, and the *New York Times* ran stories on these athletes, raising questions like: in a system that segregates athletic competition by sex for reasons of fairness, where do transgender and intersex athletes fit?

Godsey competed in the hammer throw for the Bates College women's Track and Field team for four years from 2002 until 2006. In the process, Godsey became a four-time Division III All-American and two-time National Champion. Between the 2005 and 2006 season, Godsey came out to teammates, the school, and fans as transgender and changed his name from Kelly to Keelin. In order to stay eligible to compete in the women's hammer throw, Godsey postponed hormone and surgical gender alignment options, choosing to identify socially as a male but remain, as he describes, "biologically female" (Torre, 2012). When Pablo Torre from *Sports Illustrated* writes about Godsey before the Olympic Trials, he places Godsey squarely within the historical, political, and personal conflicts within the Olympic Trials (NPR Staff, 2012). Torre points out that Godsey is not the first transgender athlete, and that individual cases on the professional, amateur, and youth levels have generated renewed discourse involving rules, classification, and inclusion. But for transgender athletes, access to athletics runs parallel

to personal identification. In an interview with NPR's Michael Martin, "For Keelin, it's a question of identity. Keelin's identity was formed as a women's sports athlete, before Keelin came out as transgender male. And the reality is, for a lot of college athletes who are transgender, they have scholarships, they have spots on their teams in elite sports, and they're physically that gender — physically female, for example, in Keelin's case. And really, that's enough for a governing body. Or, it should be enough" (NPR, 2012).

Godsey participated in the U.S. Track and Field Olympic Qualification Trials in Oregon in the run-up to the 2012 LSOG, and though he threw a personal best, Godsey failed to qualify in the women's hammer throw, placing fifth while the top three qualified for London. For the media, just as for Godsey, the focus came back to identity. In a story for the *New York Times*, Sam Borden reminds readers of the tension between athletics and Godsey's gender identity:

Asked afterward what he saw for the future of his athletic career, Godsey hesitated. For nearly eight years, he said, he had looked at the end of this Olympic cycle as the end of his career; he had indicated, too, that he would then begin the medical part of his gender transition, making it impossible for him to continue competing as a female. But faced with that reality, Godsey hedged. "I don't know yet," he said. "I'm trying to make a lot of decisions right now." (Borden, 2012).

Despite missing the 2012 LSOG, Godsey's identity and access to the Olympic narrative, particularly in attempting to qualify for the games, positions his body as a space of resistance to normative constructions.

As an 18 year old sprinter, Caster Semenya clocked the fastest 800 meter of the year at the African Junior Championships in 2009, a record she would break just a few months later at one of the most important races in the world (Hunter, 2010). At the 2009 Track and Field World Championship in Berlin, Semenya, a young sprinter from South Africa competing in her first senior championship event, crushed a talented field of sprinters in the women's 800 to win the gold medal. Directly after the race, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), the sport's governing body, confirmed that, based on the athlete's physical "ambiguity", Semenya would be tested to clarify her sex classification (Hunter, 2010). Told by race officials that she was undergoing a standard drug test for performance enhancers, Semenya was blindsided when news of the sex classification testing leaked to the press.

The results of the tests were never released, though controversy, conjecture, and speculation swirled. Major news outlets worldwide covered the controversy, with articles like "Could the Women's 800-meter World Champ, Caster Semenya, Be a Man?" (Adams, 2009) from *Time Magazine*, while documentary crews descended to capture the story. Political patrons, coaches, and Semenya's family members spoke out against the tests, raising the profile of the struggle to international levels and making Semenya a household name (Hunter, 2010). As Semenya's mother stated in an interview, "If you go [to] my home village and ask any of my neighbors, they would tell you that Mokgadi [Caster] is a girl. They know because they helped raise her" (Adams, 2009). Despite urgings from the IAAF that no insult was intended and that the tests simply represented a "medical issue" (Adams, 2009), the cultural clash over Semenya's access to the 2012 LSOG and her identity within the qualification campaign produces a situation in which

competing narratives over what qualities make up a female sprinter's body become an integral part of qualifying for the Olympics.

Semenya would go on to qualify for, and win a silver medal in, the 2012 LSOG, but her body made her place along side other female racers a point of extreme tension. In order to qualify for the 2012 LSOG, Semenya's body, and the sex it could represent, faced both scientific and social scrutiny. Thus, narratives regarding Semenya's body provide a rhetorical text in which to examine tensions between hegemonic constructions and bodies that resist those constructions.

Disability Lens Queered

The makeup of these athletes' bodies, and the subsequent levels of acceptable athletic performance, provides a theoretical entry point for disability studies and athletic competition. Queer theorist and disabilities scholars like West (2010) and McRuer and Mollow (2012) point out clear practical and theoretical links existing between the politics of sex and disability. Lindemann (2010) urges scholars to recognize disability and sexuality as critical in assessing the benefits of sports, not only in being therapeutic, but in shaping cultural attitudes and social constructions around ability, masculinity, and sexuality (Lindemann, 2010). In the cases of Godsey and Semenya, the perception of athletes as being transgender and intersex and shapes the narratives surrounding their access to the Olympics and their personal, public identities.

The attention to and speculation about the bodies, sex, and the appropriate capabilities of Semenya and Godsey reflect theoretical links between disabilities studies and queer theory. As Wilkerson (2012) describes, "like members of the disability rights movement, intersex and transgender activity have illuminated the hierarchal social

construction of personhood” (p. 183). The pressures to classify and order bodies, and therefore offer access, be it literal or symbolic, to some and not to others, highlights the struggles between social constructions and self determination. These struggles are the central concern of disability scholarship and activism (Wilkerson, 2012). Experiences resulting from having bodies that differ from normative expectations highlight the theoretical linkage between the disabled and trans and intersex persons, particularly within issues of access and identity. As West (2010) explains, “[o]ne of the most exciting and productive sites for queer coalitional politics may be, ironically enough, the linkage between the everyday concerns of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transpeople (LGBTQ+), and people with disabilities” (p. 156). These everyday issues highlight spaces in which normative constructions of body rub against the individual (and sometimes community) concerns of access and identity.

Access is a core issue to both disability theory and activism as well as to that of the intersex¹ and transgender² communities (McRuer & Mollow, 2012). While access can be measured as the tangible accessibility to a place, like the Olympics, it also represents the sense of belonging that is negotiated with hegemonic normality. Legal battles, rule changes, and sex testing not only provide obstacles to access for athletes but create an environment in which normalcy is policed. Take, for example, the struggle of former Yale tennis captain and ophthalmologist Richard Raskind, arguably America’s first famous transgender athlete, who underwent surgery in 1975 and became Renée

¹ According to the Intersex Society of North America, “Intersex” is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

² Parents, Family, Friends of Lesbian and Gays (PFLAG) defines transgender as a broad term describing the state of a person’s gender identity which does not necessarily match his/her assigned gender at birth.

Richards. Richards won New York Supreme Court battle in 1977 that ensured her access to the U.S. Open as a female (Torre, 2012). The year Godsey came out as transgender at Bates College, 2005, professional golfer Lana Lawless had sex reassignment surgery to become a woman. In 2010 the Ladies Professional Golfing Association (LPGA) denied Lawless' application to compete in qualifying tournaments, citing its "female at birth" bylaw (Torre, 2012). Much like Richards, Lawless sued the LPGA, gaining access only after significant legal and social strife. In these cases, as with Donna Rose, the first transgender, postoperative female to take the mat in the women's division of the U.S. Open wrestling national championships, or Jonny Saelua, the first openly transgender athlete to take the field in World Cup play as central defender back on American Samoa's men's soccer team, sporting organizations and league governing bodies are having to re-examine their access to athletes (Torre, 2012). As a result, those seeking access must either pass as neither disabled nor queer or feel the repercussions of having their physical and symbolic access challenged.

Identity acts as another key issue that provides theoretical and practical linkage between disability and intersex and transgender communities. As historian Paul Longmore (2003) explains, one of the most important developments from disability activism and theory is the production of the politics of identity. The disability identity is brought into sharp focus thanks to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the interpretation of ADA by the US courts. In 94% of federal ADA Title One decisions, employers won, mostly due to the courts not recognizing the plaintiffs as disabled and a later decision that ruled that disabled people do not constitute a protected class, or minority. Groups and individuals who identify under the umbrella of the Lesbian, Gay,

Bi-sexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ+)³ community, and many who fall outside this identity but still struggle with issues of gender, sexuality, and the body, have experienced a long history of activism challenging political and social elements of identity (McRuer & Mollow, 2012). As Siebers (2012) explains, "The emergence in recent decades of people who define their identities based on sexual preferences and practices is transforming the landscape of minority politics. Sexual minorities are fighting for the rights and privileges accorded to majority populations from many legal and political fronts (p. 38)". Thus, establishing theoretical space to claim identity that links individual expressions and experience, politics, and mediated representations must remain flexible enough to accommodate post identity notions, while providing active challenges to oppressive normative constructions.

When people with disabilities form coalitions with members of the LGBTQ+ community on everyday issues, like trying to find safe and assessable restrooms, the linkage between practical oppression opens opportunities for theoretical expansion (West, 2010). Judith Butler (1993) expands this type of critical queerness as "that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes" (p. 288). Essentially, critical queerness argues that queerness is used to illuminate queer as a category of identity and site of cultural agency that remains fluid enough to enable theoretical, political, and social resistance. Thus, the pairing of critical queer theory with disability theory promotes situations of deconstructing bodies as sites of oppression.

³ LGBTQ+ is an attempt to recognize that many variations of sexuality, gender, and body construction are not represented within the acronym LGBTQ, but still deserve support and recognition within the struggle for political rights and social acceptance.

The obstacles faced by the disability, intersex, and transgender communities represent, on a theoretical level, opportunities to understand the oppressive nature of power through a disability lens. As Wilkerson explains:

Intersex perspectives have emerged out of struggles with the medicalization of non-normative bodies and sexualities, a concern that has been important for the transgender movement and, in some ways, for transsexuals as well. These movements have much to offer disability theorizing of sexual agency, agency in medical contexts, and agency under oppression. At the same time, disability theory, particularly through notions of interdependence, can advance intersex and trans projects of theorizing agency, as well as ongoing work in philosophy and feminist theory on embodied agency (p. 184).

To these areas, scholars should to add the context of athletic competition. The theoretical links between the two perspectives, from the roots of the critical movements that have struggled against the medicalization of the body and the body as a site of resistance, as Foucault (1977) and Butler (1993) have argued, create socially acceptable borders of capability of what a body should be able to do, athletically. Examining this struggle through direct athletic competition brings to the forefront the struggle for self-determination for athletes with non-normative bodies.

The Bodies and The Narratives

In order to reach 2012 LSOG, Godsey and Semenya each had to qualify, and in

their qualification attempts I see opportunity to gain critical perspective into how to use the disability lens regarding access and identity when examining the construction of narratives. Thus, analysis for this twin case study focuses on the narratives produced as the bodies of the two athletes act as points of potential resistance. In both cases, the rhetorical text under examination includes the co-mingling of multiple media fragments, including interviews, news stories, documentary films, official press releases, and live coverage of the qualification struggles of Godsey and Semenya. Despite the multimodality of the coverage involving the bodies of these two athletes, consistent, overarching narratives concerning Godsey and Semenya emerge. Godsey and Semenya faced distinctly different challenges in both access to the Olympics and their identity as athletes, including their ages, nationalities, and race; however, each was challenged on the grounds that their bodies may not be socially acceptable in their athletic contexts, and therefore resistive to these normative constructions. As the narratives surrounding those struggles manifest, they offer opportunities to examine how discourse can challenge hegemonic constructions or be absorbed within the constructions.

For Godsey, qualifying for the summer games involves more than throwing a hammer in the Track and Field trials held in Oregon. Specifically, negotiations of access and identity play directly into Godsey's qualification narrative. Godsey's access to the athletic stage of the Olympic games is a tangible one, as well as symbolic. In order to participate in the sport in which Godsey excels as an athlete, Godsey had to maintain status as a female, despite openly identifying as transgender. Since no Olympic category exists for the transsexual, intersex, transgender, or transitioning individuals, access to the games is limited to those who can pass for either a male or a female. Gender, the social

expression of sex, and sex, the biological classification based on reproductive organs, are often referred to as the binaries of male or female. A product of medical influence on culture, many worldwide sporting organizations rely on sex to separate athletes, as the prevailing thought is that external sex organs would provide quick and easy testing. Likewise, the Olympics has, for decades, adhered to the biological binary as a means to create a discernable delineation between athletes in order to provide athletes competition with others having similar athletic thresholds. Having transgender athletes troubles the simplicity of this binary, on multiple levels. Thus, a narrative emerges as Godsey navigates access during the trials.

With regard to Godsey's ability to access Olympic qualification trials, the production surrounding the trials forwarded a narrative of the traditional sex binary. This narrative was constructed through the structures of the qualification trials, through which Godsey must pass in order to participate. Godsey, therefore, achieved access to the qualification process by passing as a female. Although Godsey has expressed plans to take part in hormone treatments to transition to a male body, plans for those treatments were put on hold until after the Olympics. Thus, in a pre-transition state, Godsey's body retained normative female body traits, including a vagina and acceptable levels of estrogen and testosterone. In terms of physical access, Godsey, under IOC rules, could not participate in hormone therapy or surgery that would alter what they consider to be normal hormone levels or genitalia. Godsey's body, and its physical links to biological sex, became an important character within the narrative of access. By placing operations or hormone therapies as procedures that would tip the scales in the decision as to whether or not Godsey could throw as a female, the IOC perpetuated medical myths of normalcy.

The IOC essentially granted access to Godsey's physical form because it was "naturally" female.

Another important piece of discourse surrounding the narrative of access for Godsey involved the reliance on sex binaries in the structural aspects of the event. Information published for athletes, spectators, and press regarding facilities, schedules, and competitors relied heavily on the sex binary of men and women. For instance, USA Track and Field, the governing body of the "National Governing Body for track and field, long-distance running and race walking in the United States" (<http://www.usatf.org/About.aspx>) posts results, competition information, and athlete bios for prominent competitors. Archived stories of Kelly Godsey appear within the site, but stories of the arguably more successful Keelin Godsey are absent. When accessing competitors' bios from the USA Track and Field website, Godsey, despite being a member of Team USA for the Pan American games in 2011 and being a 2 time national champion, does not have a bio. The official website for the 2012 U.S Olympic Team Trails (<http://tracktown12.gotracktownusa.com>) lists the top nine competitors, including Godsey, in the "Women's Hammer Throw" and provides a short paragraph with some details about the top nine. The page cues readers with the word "women" seven times within the small amount of text, more than in any other description of track and field events found within the website, and includes gender specific pronouns with regularity. When the paragraph gets to Godsey, it states, "Godsey has a bitter taste in her mouth after placing third last year, but she did not make the team because she did not have the A standard" (USA Track and Field, 2012). Using "her" and "she" to describe Godsey, despite the athlete's expressed preference for the use of male pronouns, becomes text as

to how the Olympic qualification narrative tells the story of Godsey. The presence of bios, information, and narratives featuring athletes that more neatly fit sex binaries excludes the transgender character of Godsey, leaving only room for a Godsey who can pass as female to participate in Olympic Qualifying.

Not only was discourse challenging the sex binary removed from the Olympic qualification narrative, the structure of the event forced participating athletes to willingly align. The promotion of biological sex delineations found in naturally occurring females was a story told through Godsey's negotiation of the physical structures at the trials, including having the proper locker room accommodations. The athlete's trials manual, issued to all competing athletes, details, to the minute, the schedule of the athletes and physical placement of the athletes by sport and sex classification. The manual outlines who is allowed to be where and when, including shuttles from housing, changing rooms, warm ups, competition, drug testing, and media interviews. The manual even dictates a mandatory "flow" schedule, which directs athletes along a proscribed path while in the facilities. In addition to having strict schedule and facility requirements, an athlete's movements were monitored and chaperoned. As the manual described, "No athlete may leave the field of play except with an official through the designated athlete exit path" (US Track and Field, 2012). The designated exit path for the women's hammer throw included a women's changing area. Being able to access appropriate restrooms, changing rooms, and showers is a potential health and safety concern for all athletes but particularly transgender ones (West, 2010). During the qualification trials, Godsey had access to the facilities assigned to his competition sex, not his social gender, re-enforcing narratives of biological sex as a proper discerning factor in social, political, and cultural

contexts.

Godsey's character, within the narratives coming from the Olympic qualification trials, must pass for female in order to give the narrative the fidelity it needs to align with dominate social narratives involving athletes and the Olympics' reliance on sex binaries. The relationship between the character created within the Olympic trials and overarching social narratives comes into focus when viewed along side Godsey's coming out narrative while throwing for Bates College. Coming out between his junior and senior competition seasons, the narrative of access forwarded from Bates College contrasts starkly from the one from the Olympic trials. At Bates, coaches, administrators, athletes, and Godsey negotiated school and NCAA policy as well as interpersonal relationships between other students, athletes, and fans, while supporting Godsey's identity. Bates College, without an official policy regarding transgender athletes in place, sought multiple avenues to support the transgender Godsey. The school hosted town hall meetings on campus for students, arranged mediated discussions with teammates, and created information and diversity training programs for coaches. For much of Godsey's story, the school provided opportunities for Godsey to explain himself. In an interview with *Bates Magazine*, published on campus and online, Godsey was interviewed about his upcoming season and his transition to a male gender. Godsey told a story of where his athletic identity and transgender identity overlapped while in competition:

I am there to compete and score points for the team and to cheer on my teammates. I do not think about how I identify myself, and I sure can't control how anyone thinks about me. At the indoor nationals, a runner from Wisconsin-La

Crosse called me by the correct name and asked me how my meet was going. We talked track, yet by calling me “Keelin,” he acknowledged who I am. It felt good. (Burns, 2006)

Acknowledgement of gender, allowing Godsey to speak about the contexts of transformation, and promoting such stories beyond the campus were steps to create an environment of access at Bates. These steps produced a narrative about a transgender student, and how he fit within the college structure.

Consulting the NCAA and the National Center for Drug Free Sport, as well as with fellow New England Small College Athletic Conference institutions, for guidance and support, the college released to inquiring media an 11-point FAQ document on Godsey's decision and its potential impact. "Keelin and I also gave team members every opportunity to come and talk to us about the situation," stated Bates track coach Jennifer Hartshorn, "but it really ended up being a non-issue for our team." Focusing the narrative around the team, Godsey's narrative incorporates important elements specific to athletics. Not only did this tactic ensure physical access to competition, it also allowed for the environment in which normative constructions could be deconstructed on both policy and interpersonal levels, thus providing access past socially constructed and policed barriers. In light of the story of Godsey the Bates athlete, the Olympic qualification narrative of access surrounding Godsey pressed the culturally dominant binary between men and women in athletic competition.

In addition to the narratives of access surrounding Godsey at the Olympic trials, personal narratives of identity surfaced within the context of Olympic Qualification.

Godsey's identity relied on the discourse within the performative aspects of his body, as well as media expression of personal identity. Sporting a short, spikey, faux hawk haircut, Godsey's appearance was far more masculine than his pony-tailed competitors. Training with and throwing beside competitors with more socially feminine physical attributes, like painted figure nails, Godsey's body marked divergence from the narrative of access pushed within Olympic qualifying.

Entering into the Olympic trials for the 2012 LSOG, Godsey had already changed his name to Keelin from Kelly and identified as a transgender male. Based on the rules set in place, Godsey was listed officially as Kelly, as is printed on his birth certificate, despite the fact that he goes by Keelin. Answering to Keelin, introducing himself as Keelin, and responding to reporters as Keelin places emphasis on the relationship between the body and identity, creating a narrative that continued within mediated contexts. In an exclusive interview with freelance reporter Ann Schatz, the first question asked begins with, "You identify as male, you compete as a female" and led Godsey to introduce himself and talk about his identity (Godsey, 2012). The combination of name, gender identity, and Olympic sex classification to begin the interview made the personal narrative of identity much different from the access narrative from the trials.

During qualification, Godsey seemed to recognize how these shifting categories continue to complicate his identity. As Godsey described in an interview after the Olympic qualifying trials, "I'm a gender fucker right now" (Godsey, 2012). Not only did Godsey's body create tension by challenging strict gender binaries, it even produced friction within Godsey's trans community. He states, "People from the trans community tell me I'm trying to get the best of both worlds. I'm not getting the best of any world"

(Godsey, 2012). Like many transgender individuals, pressure existed for Godsey to begin the process of physically transitioning his body with surgical and hormonal processes. Here, the narrative of identity centered on the body, producing discourse as to how Godsey's competitive body resisted cultural norms. As Godsey explains, "It's hard. It's a decision I have to make every day. But it's the competition. Track and field is my life. Track and field saved my life" (Godsey, 2012). Identification as an athlete remained a central component that layers within Godsey's gender narrative. Telling the personal narrative of Godsey's journey towards a gender identity, and how that identity rubbed against athletics, created discursive space to challenge the simplicity of the Olympic qualification narrative that relies on the sex binary.

Godsey's narrative of identity also challenged abstractions within the culture of sport, which are regularly used to police sex binaries. The International Olympic Committee, along with USA Track and Field, regularly cite fairness as a justification for separating athletes by sex. Godsey's narrative of identity, as a transgender athlete, placed an emphasis on fair participation. "For me to be in a fair competition, I have to compete as a female," he says in the release. "I could not compete versus men" (Godsey, 2012). By understanding Godsey's identity narrative through a disability lens, the sporting body creates more space for resistance for Godsey but becomes the point of pressure for Semenya.

For Semenya, access and identity narratives also revolved around the construction of her body and the capabilities within the context of athletic competition. Semenya's qualification for the 2012 LSOG consisted of official and unofficial media releases, press conferences, and journalistic and popular speculation as to whether or not, and how,

Semenya should have access to the 2012 LSOG. Within this narrative of access, cultural legitimacy was constructed through the governing body and reliance on medical models of female normalcy.

The narrative of Semenya's access to qualify for the Olympics centered on how she differed from other female athletes. While Semenya's race, nationality, and class could have all been factors as to why she was targeted, her exclusion still conflicts with congeniality narratives within the Olympic program, the acceptance of other athletes provides competitive legitimacy for those seeking access to the Olympics. So when popular Russian Track star Mariya Savinova told reporters that Semenya is "not a woman. She's a man. Just look at her" (Hunter, 2010), race officials took notice. Directly following her win in the women's 800 meter at the 2009 world championships in Berlin, Semenya was selected for gender testing due to her impressive victory and masculine features, including muscular definition and deep voice. Her victory, according to media sources, immediately raised the suspicions of those involved in the sport. Under conditions of anonymity, prominent athletes speculated to media outlets that Semenya would be stripped of her accolades and banned from Olympic competition. Access, according to the athletes within media reports, should be reserved for women, stating "For me, she's not a woman. She is a man" (Ellison, 2012). Other athletes addressed Semenya's access even more harshly, telling reporters "These kind of people should not run with us" (Clarey, 2009). The "us" versus "those people" tone of the narrative surrounding Semenya's access places significant doubt as to how the sporting community should rectify this disruption, which sets up the legitimacy of the scientific community to speak to Semenya's access.

The narrative surrounding Semenya's access gained legitimacy on the authority of the scientific community. In the past, the IOC relied on a nude parade of athletes, a visual check of the external genitalia, to determine the sex of an athlete, but has recently shifted to more internal techniques in order to catch people they consider to be the less obvious interlopers (Ellison, 2012). Many of the media reports related the Semenya case to instances of men "pretending" to be women to garner physical advantages, leading testers to be more thorough (Curley, 2012). Thus, physical explanations as to Semenya's bodily structure and ability were central to her narrative of access. Numerous news outlets related stories of leaked medical examinations, including DNA testing, which called Semenya a hermaphrodite (Curley, 2012). An oft cited article from the September 11, 2009 Australian Daily Telegraph claimed that "Semenya had no womb or ovaries" and "two undescended testes" (Curley, 2012). Many speculated in interviews and news reports that Semenya would undergo hormone therapy and surgery to meet medically determined and IOC accepted normative bodily constructions for females. An article from CNN claimed that "the IAAF advised Semenya to get surgery" in order to compete at the Olympics, and, in the following paragraph, described how Semenya was later cleared to compete, hinting that she followed those medical recommendations (Curley, 2012).

Central to the normative constructions of bodily performance within Semenya's narrative was a reliance on the scientific interpretations of the medical community. "There's no simple test to determine gender, so what we're left with is an imperfect system," says Dr. Eric Vilain, a UCLA medical geneticist who served as a medical adviser to the IOC on its new policy for testing female athletes for "hyperandrogenism" --

meaning producing too many male hormones (Curley, 2012). In accordance with these medical interpretations of normality, the IOC regulations state: "the performance of male and female athletes may differ mainly due to the fact that men produce significantly more androgenic hormones than women and, therefore, are under stronger influence of such hormones." Essentially, women who were found to have abnormally high levels of androgens may have an unfair advantage, according to the regulations. Vilain said it would be "extraordinarily difficult" for women to reach the male range threshold for testosterone, which was not spelled out by the IOC because of differing lab testing methods (Clarey, 2009). Media from around the world reported information from "a source closely involved with the Semenya examinations IAAF testing," which revealed Semenya's body produced three times the testosterone level of other females (Curley, 2012). For the IOC, tests like these can be interpreted to provide tangible and measurable barriers to access for any athlete, male or female, who falls outside of the medically determined normative ranges, despite the fact that Olympic competition is intended to isolate the most athletically gifted people in the world. Thus, Semenya's body, which held Olympic athletic potential, was deemed so masculine that it was subjected to invasive gender testing before she can be granted access to Olympic qualification.

Along with the media narrative of access surrounding Semenya's competitive body, a narrative of identity surfaced. Like with Godsey, Semenya's narrative of identity is more of an individual expression of self through a mediated form. For the most part, Semenya either refused to address specific questions and interviews regarding the gender testing and results or, based on other systems of hegemonic oppression, such as her race, nationality, or class, lacked a media platform from which to express her identity narrative

as Godsey did. Either way, most media outlets framed her silence as shame, creating an environment in which bodies resistant to abstract gender binaries could remain taboo, shameful, and medically fixable. Calling the accusations against Semenya “humiliating”, and describing Semenya’s actions as “retreating” until she could emerge later as a legitimate female, Semenya made a stark break from media isolation after being reinstated just before the Olympics (Ellison, 2012).

In an exclusive interview and makeover featured in the September 2009 edition of *You Magazine* in South Africa that included landing on the cover, Semenya's womanhood was trumpeted. The four-page spread included side-by-side images of Semenya on the track and in dresses during the photo shoot, as well as quotations from the track star expressing her desires to dress and act within the boundaries of the normative constructions of female. For instance, Semenya stated, "I'd like to dress up more often and wear dresses but I never get the chance. I'd also like to learn to do my own makeup." Under the specter of ongoing gender testing, during which Semenya regularly expressed her identity as female, these makeovers constructed identity in light of her brewing gender conflicts. The extent to which the article emphasizes sending is in the movie is summed up best on the cover which states, "Wow, look at Caster now!" Transgression, followed by alteration, plagued Semenya’s qualification process, but became the driving narrative. Unlike Godsey, whose narrative of identity challenge the normative constructions of female athlete, Semenya’s narrative of identity became a journey to become female enough, both scientifically and popularly, to qualify for the Olympics. When chosen as the flag bearer for the South African team, Semenya was called “our girl” by the country’s Olympic committee and coaches, emphasizing the

struggle and accomplishment of achieving female sex classification.

Conclusions

Attempting to glean conclusions from the sex classification narratives surrounding Godsey and Semenya situates constructions of the body within a critical disability lens, even while other critical identities may bubble up within the narratives. In particular, Cooky, Dycus, and Dworkin (2013) argue that Semenya's race, class, and nationality play a significant role in the media's framing of her participation within Olympic qualifying. Likewise, Godsey's whiteness, education, and nationality certainly play a role, along with gender identification, in the narrative as it is constructed and presented. The purpose of this case study, as is the benefit of this particular type of analysis, is to focus on the deployment of specific narratives as they relate to the body and sex classification, within the minutia of intersecting hegemonic forces, in order to understand the usefulness of such analysis in context. As Crenshaw (1997) posits, rhetorical criticism that examines the intersection of specific identities opens space for scholars to recognize the multidimensional nature of hegemonic forces as well as the complex nature of oppression they generate. Through the following observations, narrative constructions of the body can be combined, in the future, with other studies involving the intersectionality of critical identities.

Narratives for both Keelin Godsey and Caster Semenya, dealing with access and identity within Olympic qualifying, relied on the athletes' bodies as spaces for resistance or the articulation of hegemonic norms. Both Godsey and Semenya's bodies became the focus of intense scrutiny, policing, and discourse. Their position as world class athletes created layers of identity and access through which their narratives illustrate larger social

constructions. Examining the narratives of Godsey and Semenya through a disability lens the narratives highlight normative constructions and allow for the isolation of reliance on zero-sum binaries, scientific bias, and social policing. By examining the Olympic qualification process of Semenya and Godsey through the disabilities lens multiple theoretical implications become apparent.

First, the critical disability lens highlights non-normative bodies acting as spaces of resistance, and, thus, challenge ableist notions even outside of what is socially constructed to be a disabled body. The application of a disability critique is theoretically and methodologically helpful in understanding the access and identity issues of transgender and potentially intersex athletes, yet neither athlete has referred to himself or herself, or identify as, disabled. The case study demonstrates how bodies without the traditional socially recognized markers of disability, like the use of a hearing aid or wheel chair, can utilize this critical lens to understand the relationship of the body in multiple, sometimes conflicting, identity constructions. For instance, Godsey remains quite outspoken about the construction of his body and how that works within the rules of sport. His articulation of being biologically female, stalling transitional hormone and surgical treatments, and his personal appearance, name, and gender identity muddles multiple socially constructed identities that use the physical body as point of reference. As Godsey told journalist Anna Schatz after the Olympic trials, “track and field is everything to me...being a hammer thrower became such more of an identity than being transgender person” (Godsey, 2012). When Godsey portrays his body in resistance to multiple identity patterns, including those in the sporting, disability, and transgender community, he queers our understanding of multiple identity markers. Queering cultural critical and

rhetorical lenses is particularly important in order to expand understandings of intersecting critical identities, and produces opportunities for social and theoretical resistance.

Unlike Godsey, Semenya's struggle during qualification with the identity and the access her body was granted was complicated by media speculation and athlete's silence on the issue. Directly after her win in Berlin, sportscasters calling the event broke the news to the viewing audiences that Semenya would be forced to undergo gender testing (Too Fast to be a Woman?, 2011). Reporters asked the 18 year old, just off the track having won the world championships, if she "was born a man?" (Too Fast to be a Woman?, 2011). In what the media deemed to be coaches and officials attempting to protect the 18-year-old from public scrutiny over her sex, Semenya granted a few interviews, and never publicly answered questions as to the specifics of her testing, the results of those tests, and her qualification for the 2012 Summer Olympics. At one point during the qualification process, a BBC crew, filming a documentary about Semenya, obtained access for an interview through Semenya's lawyers. The video eventually provides an interview with Semenya herself, in which she comments, "There is nothing I can say, I'm a lady" (Too Fast to be a Woman?, 2011). Compared to Godsey, Semenya's relative silence alters the resistive qualities her body presents. In particular, individuals rely on personal narratives within discourses of identity to authenticate experiences of disempowerment and to help critique hegemonic normative constructions. Semenya's publicly mediated controversy and subsequent magazine makeovers create important questions as to the effectiveness and ability for bodies to act as spaces of resistance when placed in relation to framed media messages. The second case study will examine this

question in detail. Oscar Pistorius, another sprinter from South Africa, was featured in an NBC documentary that aired between Pistorius' Olympic quarterfinal and semifinal 400m. As a double amputee, Pistorius' body, and the media narrative surrounding it, becomes a rhetorical text for understanding resistive bodies within concentrated media narratives.

Chapter 5- Olympic Competition Case Study

The Olympic Body of Oscar Pistorius

On February 14th, 2013, authorities in South Africa arrested Oscar Pistorius for the alleged murder of his girlfriend (Polgreen, 2013). Unlike other tragic stories of violence, this one involved an athlete whose unlikely success, and fall from grace, has been dramatically framed by the media. Pistorius was, after the Olympics, a national icon, rising from obscurity to international fame on carbon fiber legs (Polgreen, 2013). As a sprinter from The Republic of South Africa, Pistorius qualified in the 400-meter and the 4 x 400-meter relay despite running on prosthetic lower legs. Barred from the Beijing Summer Olympic Games four years earlier, Pistorius won an appeal that his carbon fiber cheetah blades did not give him a significant advantage over other athletes. In summer of 2012, Pistorius became the first double amputee to participate in the Olympic Games. Most importantly, his participation opened significant discursive space about normative constructions of ability, masculinity, and the framing of disability within athletics. The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) had exclusive coverage of the London Olympic Games. As a part of their primetime broadcast, NBC aired a documentary vignette entitled “Oscar Pistorius' Unique, Inspiring Journey To London”. Actively framing the construction of Pistorius for audiences, NBC’s in-depth interview interweaves Pistorius’ story with the traditional Olympic narrative.

The Pistorius’ participation in the 2012 London Olympic Games breaks starkly from Olympic tradition. Favoring exceptional speed, strength, and skill embodied in normative constructions of capability, the Olympics, more than any other sporting event, hold claim to the highest ideal of able-bodiedness. Ignoring structural inequalities in

training, sponsorship, coverage, and qualification, the Olympic myth posits that the most capable, natural athlete will prevail (Angelini & Billings, 2010).

Though other great athletes have challenged the Olympic myth of able-bodiedness (Wallechinsky & Loucky, 2012), Pistorius offers a unique transgression because of his success in the Paralympics and his use of prosthetics (Ponnampalam, 2012). Within the Paralympic Games, Pistorius is legendary. Beginning with the 2000 Athens summer games, Pistorius had never raced at any world championship. Yet, as an inexperienced, teenage runner, Pistorius broke multiple world records and earned multiple gold medals (Ponnampalam, 2012). While dominating competition in the Paralympic games, Pistorius changed his focus to competing in able-bodied events. Against runners without prosthetics, Pistorius' times qualified him for the 2008 Beijing summer Olympic games, but having earned much of his success against Paralympic competition, Pistorius was viewed as a disabled athlete running against able-bodied competitors.

Pistorius' use of prosthetics visually disrupts the Olympic myth. While other athletes whose bodies disrupted normative claims of able-bodiedness competed and medaled in various Olympic Games, these athletes did so without prosthetics necessary for participation. Most recently, Terence Parkin, another South African, competed in the 2000 Sydney Games and the 2004 Athens games, winning a silver medal in the men's 200-meter breast-stroke (Wallechinsky & Loucky, 2012). Identifying as a person without hearing, Parkin competed without visible markers of disability, symbolized by a prosthetic, nor was a prosthetic necessary for his participation. Thus, though his body still would not fit oppressive, normative constructions of "normal", Pistorius' transgression challenges these normative claims differently. Pistorius' use of prosthetics

is viewed as giving him an advantage. Simply put, if you took away his prosthetics, he would not be an Olympic sprinter argue the naysayers. Based on this logic, Pistorius was banned from the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games.

Feminism, Disability, and Sporting Masculinity

Feminist disability studies address communication through a lens that takes into account society's masculine and able-bodied fixations, which create disenfranchising normative standards. Wendell (1996) argues within western philosophy lies the concept that the mind and the body are separate, and one is often a hindrance to the other. The prevailing western view is that the mind must control the body, and this control helps justify hierarchies of certain bodies over others (Hall K. , 2011). This extends to the notions that women's bodies are underdeveloped, compared to men, because they are "penis poor" (Piercy, 1969) and that fit, controllable bodies are preferable to those labeled disabled (Hall K. , 2011). Feminist disability studies "makes the body, bodily variety, and normalization central to analyses of all forms of oppression" (Hall K. , 2011). The oppression Hall (2011) addresses stems from flawed cultural narratives, which feminist disability studies theory attempts to debunk. As Garland-Thomson (2005) articulates, "the informing premise of feminist disability theory is that disability, like femaleness, is not a natural state of corporeal inferiority, inadequacy, excess, or a stroke of misfortune. Rather, disability is a culturally fabricated narrative of the body, similar to what we understand as the fictions of race and gender" (2005, p. 17). Cultural narratives can create justifications for oppression through abstract and ambiguous reasons. These narratives can be retold or challenged with new narratives about how we view the body, and include how we use words like "disability" in scholarship.

Garland-Thomson (2005) breaks the ability/disability binary into four aspects. First, it is a system for examining, interpreting, and disciplining bodies based on variations with an ideal. The ideal is contextual and constructed through normative ideologies on masculinity, gender, and ability. Second, the relationship is between the body and its environment. Within this aspect, ability is scripted within the contemporary and historical context of the rhetorical situation. Third, it is a set of practices that classify the body as able or disabled. Structured or symbolic labeling practices mask the abstractness of binary constructions. Fourth, it is a way of describing the instability of bodily forms, particularly in regard to a human's fragility. When the context or structure fails to reduce the troubled nature of these binaries, instability of the human form highlights a catalyst, such as an injury, or tipping point, such as licensure to park in a handicap spot, at which point ability becomes disability.

Within the application of feminist disability studies comes the role of masculinity in perpetuating or reducing the oppressive dynamics of normative constructions. Hargreaves (1986) provides a conceptual definition of masculinity within sport by noting, "In sport, 'masculine' identity incorporates images of strength, aggression and muscularity, and it implies at the same time an opposite 'feminine' subjectivity associated with passivity, relative weakness, gentleness and grace" (p. 112). The use of the body and physicality became benchmarks in later research for defining if a sport was considered masculine or feminine. Via extension, discussion of disability is comparable to discussions of female athletes because of the specific attempt to emphasize feminine characteristics and traits and de-emphasize masculine ones. Koivula (1999) noted

characteristics such as danger, risk, violence, speed, and strength defined masculine sports, while females were expected to display beauty, passiveness, emotion, and grace.

Along these lines, Klomsten, Marsh, and Skaalvik (2005) note that “the female body continues to be identified as an object; girls and women are also socialized to use their bodies to please others and to compare their appearance to that of the dominant feminine ideal” (p. 626). In the same way that female athletes are objectified via discussions of their bodies as objects rather than subjects, Pistorius is arguably also objectified through the discussion of his prosthetic legs rather than talking about him as a whole athlete. By constructing a narrative of particular athletes that emphasizes femininity, media constructions can focus on attributes that legitimate overarching social constructions. Attractiveness, emotionality, femininity, and sexuality are a few traditional markers of gender representation and through an emphasis on these attributes via media coverage of disabled athletes, the effect on viewers could be that athletes are noted for these characteristics over their athleticism (Knight & Giuliano, 2001). Narrative analysis acts as a means to examine the stories constructed to explain the presence of Pistorius with the 2012 LSOG, as well as the ways in which those narratives maintain or resist the power balance in the venue of sport.

Situations of hyper-masculine behavior, such as military environments, highlight opportunities to address narratives of normative articulations (Erevelles, 1996). For instance, within the context of war, wounded soldiers provide opportunities for transgression from masculine archetypes and expose the flaws in normative paradigms. These rhetorical opportunities are not unique to war. As Trujillo (1991) asserts, “perhaps no single American institution has influenced our sense of masculinity more than sport”(p.

292). While athletic competitions are often heralded as natural displays of abilities and a site for social inclusion and reducing marginalization, these hopeful aspirations are typically unrealistic (Allday, 2009). By traditions and modern mediated gatekeeping, masculinity has become interwoven into the fabric of manhood, athleticism, and righteousness that is seldom questioned (Smith & Bissell, 2012). As Carter and Williams (2012) suggest, “because of the media’s routine emphasis on representations of young, fit and healthy bodies, sport’s perceived role is often conflicted and contradictory on matters of disability” (p.212). Trujillo (1991) identifies five portrayals of masculinity within mediated events that center around athletic power, patriarchy, heterosexuality, occupational success, and a pioneering spirit. Lindemann (2008) notes that many male athletes use their sports participation to regain elements of masculinity lost within their identities of disability. Pistorius, encompassing the overtly masculine identity of male athlete, despite a body that functions in opposition to normative constructions, opens a similar space for such a discursive moment.

The Olympic semifinal race in the men’s 400 meter in which Pistorius races along side runners with more normative physical attributes produces the opportunity to challenge normative, hegemonic constructions. Just before this race was broadcast, the documentary narrative about Pistorius aired, providing audiences with a story that justified Pistorius’ place within the Olympics. Within the context of the race, the documentary vignette plays as a nonfiction account of Pistorius’ journey, but rhetoricians Hendrix and Wood (1973) remind readers that both fictional and nonfictional films serve a “persuasive purpose” (p. 105). Foss (2007) argues that critical rhetorical scholarship examining documentary film is important for understanding public discourse within these

mediums in particular, as they present as cultural and social barometers of history. Likewise, Borda (2005) posits that documentary “functions as a rhetorical device to capture a dramatic sense of the past” within the context of “a critical historical moment” (p. 159). The narrative of Pistorius’ Olympic body, as it pertains to his place within the Olympic men’s 400 meter, solidifies the discourse within the context for viewers.

Narrative Analysis of Pistorius and His Athletic Body

Between the 2012 Olympic quarterfinals and semifinals in the men’s 400 meter sprint, NBC aired an in-depth interview entitled, *Oscar Pistorius’ Unique, Inspiring Journey To London*. The documentary constructs a distinct narrative of Pistorius, and, in particular, how his body matches up with the contextualized ideal. Garland-Thomson (2005) highlights that a normative construction of disability is a system for examining, interpreting, and disciplining bodies based on variations with an ideal. Within the context of men’s Olympic-level sprinting, the ideal presented as natural or normative is the hyper-masculine athlete. Using Trujillo’s (1991) tenets of masculinity as a guide, this narrative analysis examines the construction of Pistorius within the NBC documentary.

Trujillo’s (1991) first tenet of masculinity involves physical strength and power. Within the context of the Olympic games, narratives of athletic achievements are often saturated with masculine elements of power and strength within the bodies of athletes. Pistorius’ narrative within the NBC piece, on the other hand, contextualizes Pistorius’ athletic career with a distinct lack of strength by focusing on his physical limitations within athletic arenas. NBC devotes a significant amount of time in the documentary discussing how Pistorius began his sprinting career. Two important pieces of the narrative isolate and emphasize the lack of masculinity. The first is Pistorius’ failed

attempts at masculinized athletics and the second is his relationship to running. Pistorius describes himself as “always athletic” within the video, but the voiceover offers more details. As a young “boy” in prep school, Pistorius played rugby, described within the video as “the ultimate test of South African manhood”. The visuals accompanying the commentary show first a crowded school hallway, peering down at young, uniform adorned boys. The next shot shows larger, fitter young men clashing on a rugby pitch. Great emphasis is placed on the maturation between the two, both with the use of descriptors “boy” and “man” and within the visuals. Participation in rugby symbolizes proof of masculinity as a coming-of-age ritual, as well as the strength and power that is expected to accompany manhood.

According to the documentary, if rugby is a test of manhood, Pistorius fails. Describing Pistorius’ attempts to play, the voice over announcer says, “Inevitably, he’s injured”. The qualifier “inevitably” lets the audience know that Pistorius’ injury should be expected. Since no other players are described as regularly injured, the audience is left to assume that Pistorius’ lack of strength and power, due to the physical make up of his legs, put him at risk of injury and greatly reduced his chances to achieve sporting “manhood”.

Second, it was Pistorius’ injury that prompted a turn to running as an athletic alternative. The narrative reveals that part of Pistorius’ therapy during his recovery included adopting a running regiment. As reported in the video, Pistorius’ coach had him training not to re-enter rugby, as Pistorius believed, but to begin a track career. When the interviewer confronted the coach with, “did you lie to him?” he answered yes, “but it was a good lie”. Up until this point, Pistorius’ success as a sprinter has not been mentioned,

and his rugby injury provides the context for the statement. Pistorius' coach is framed as leading the injured Pistorius to a safer sport. Essentially, the coach believes that Pistorius lacks the physical strength and power to withstand the sport of rugby. Thus, the video constructs the narrative that Pistorius lacks a critical component of masculinity.

The second frame of masculinity, according to Trujillo (1991), involves a pioneering spirit. No doubt, the appearance of a sprinter without feet should provide ample opportunity for a narrative celebrating a pioneering spirit. However, the NBC documentary de-emphasizes Pistorius' ability to overcome physical and environmental obstacles. In fact, the documentary focuses on Pistorius' inability to fend for himself. The documentary opens with a visual shot from within Pistorius' backyard. The space itself seems smallish within the shot, as the viewer can see both the house on one side of the screen and a large concrete wall on the other. In the center of the yard, Pistorius and the interviewer are playing with his dogs. The interviewer, rubbing the belly of the larger of the two dogs, asks, "and this is the head of security?" The question, particularly within the confines of the walled garden, insinuates that Pistorius needs protection and that he is not in charge of that protection. Without the security of the walls and the dog, the audience can deduce that Pistorius would be in danger, limiting his pioneering masculinity. Furthermore, the submissive position of the "head of security" reduces Pistorius' status as able to fend for himself. By remarking that a friendly, prone dog is more capable of protective qualities than Pistorius himself, the athlete is framed as lacking the pioneering qualities of masculinity.

The video continues inside Pistorius' home, in a scene that works to bookend the back story of Pistorius' athletic pursuits. Though presumably other rooms exist, NBC

only shows Pistorius in his kitchen, where he is mixing and drinking a vegetable-blended smoothie. Framing the interview with Pistorius in his kitchen significantly detracts from any pioneering masculinity. The kitchen, within the home, within the walls of the property, creates layers of insulation that are established early in the documentary and revisited at the end. Despite the opportunities to construct the narrative of Pistorius within the backdrops of South African political and social pioneering histories, or even within a narrative framed as a story of African pioneering spirit through nature or exploration, the interview frames Pistorius as insulated and tied to the home. This placement of Pistorius within the kitchen associates him within a traditionally female space. This problematic association of space and femininity is emphasized and justified in the interview through the actions of Pistorius while in the kitchen. Under the watchful eye of the interviewer, Pistorius prepares, serves, and consumes a green vegetable smoothie. As opposed to grilling a steak, the grassy slurpie constructs a narrative that frames Pistorius as feminine through associations of food preparation and healthy, calorie conscious choices.

The third trait of masculinity Trujillo (1991) looks for is heterosexuality. Within the documentary, there are no references to girlfriends, wives, or children. Pistorius presumably lives alone. Other than the interviewer, Pistorius is never pictured with a woman, with the exception of his mother. However, the interview does present a person who seems to find Pistorius attractive. MIT professor Dr. Hugh Herr, who testifies at Pistorius' appeal hearing, was interviewed for the piece. As a well-groomed, articulate, high-voiced, male academic, the professor does not strike audience members as particularly masculine. To conclude the video, Herr pays Pistorius what should be the

ultimate compliment. Prompted with the question, “so Oscar isn’t broken?” Dr. Herr replies, “He's not broken. He's perfect.” Herr’s inflection and tone are affectionate, even loving. The lack of female companions and expressed admiration from Dr. Herr implies a narrative of the feminized Pistorius. Within the NBC narrative, Pistorius was not a heterosexual being, but was the potential object of homosexual gaze.

Similar to the lack of heterosexual relationships within the NBC narrative of Pistorius, there is a significant lack of patriarchal figures. The NBC interview leaves out any references to paternal figures in Pistorius’ early life and further omits representations of Pistorius as a patriarch. Instead, audiences are presented with the stories of his mother as a matriarch. Early in the interview, Pistorius’ mother is referenced as a central piece of inspiration with regard to the attitude Pistorius should take toward his prosthetics. As the story is told, a picture shows Pistorius as a young boy and his mother wrapping him in a towel. Omission of Pistorius’ father, and the lack of evidence of Pistorius as a patriarch himself, frames Pistorius as decisively not masculine.

Trujillo asserts that success, either in employment or sport, can work to produce a masculine narrative (Trujillo, 1991). The NBC documentary constructed a narrative of Pistorius’ success within frames of physical immaturity and limited competition. The film showed Pistorius running against both disabled and able-bodied athletes, but focused stories of Pistorius’ success within the context of disability by highlighting his Paralympic successes. In fact, the film highlights Pistorius’ first Paralympic games in Athens. Most notable from these games, according to the film, is how youthful Pistorius seems. Still shots focus on Pistorius’ braces, his long hair, and his unpracticed and wild gait. The interviewer describes the pictures of Pistorius in the Athens games as “so

pretty”. Obviously, this is not the most masculine way to describe a world-class athlete. The video clip of Pistorius running in Athens was just as unflattering. In it, Pistorius was shown lining up in the blocks for the semifinal heat of the 200 meter race. When the starting gun goes off, everyone started running except Pistorius. After looking around and seeing he is the last one left in the blocks, Pistorius began to run, and still won the heat. By paying close attention to the time in the bottom of the screen, a viewer is able to deduce that Pistorius, despite his terrible start, was still able to set a new world record. The interviewer, however, points out that Pistorius almost screwed up his first Paralympic games, and, perhaps, his career. Later, the film shows the juvenile Pistorius standing on the podium at the Paralympics receiving his gold medal. Here, within the context of success, the film reminds viewers that Pistorius was participating in the Paralympic games.

Next, the film dramatically shifted to Pistorius against able-bodied competitors. During those clips, a more mature Pistorius was shown with competition but never winning. When running against able-bodied athletes, Pistorius was shown in the middle of the pack but he was never shown crossing the finish line. Articulating Pistorius’ narrative in such a way isolates his success to a immature Pistorius and only against Paralympic competition. The narrative spotlighted within the NBC documentary of Pistorius lacks the masculinity associated with success.

By not meeting any of Trujillo’s elements of masculinity, the NBC narrative limits the resistive potential of Pistorius’ body to challenge normative relationships between a body and its environment, classification as either disabled or able, and the instability of the human form. Each of these classifications construct explanations of

how the disabled body of Pistorius differs from the “natural” body of an Olympic, as opposed to Paralympic, sprinter. Garland-Thomson (2005) argues that the relationship between the body in question and its environment present comparison through which arbitrary binaries can be justified. Within the NBC piece, the Pistorius narrative centers on his road to the London Olympics. This focus on the Olympics, as opposed to Pistorius’ planned participation in the London Paralympics two weeks later, contextualizes the narrative within the environment in which normative constructions of ability can be compared with Pistorius. In the Olympics, Pistorius represents the first double amputee to compete. His lower legs, more than any other identifying element, isolate Pistorius from his Olympic competition. To emphasize this isolation, Pistorius was shown putting on his running prostheses twice within the documentary, and both times he was pictured alone. When the film showed Pistorius training, he is training alone. When he races, the scene was shot from far enough away to show the lower legs of the athletes, drawing a clear distinction between Pistorius and his Olympic competition. Multiple shots of Pistorius just before competition start zoomed in at his legs and the legs of his competitors, and then slowly panned upward. Pistorius’ body, in relationship to his environment, constructs his disability.

Constructing a narrative of Pistorius’ body as de-masculinized and disabled within the 2012 SLOG, the NBC documentary emphasizes popular Olympic narratives that help encompass Pistorius’ body in ways that re-enforce hegemonic norms of the body. Specifically, the NBC video protects hegemonic constructions of athletic masculinity, tokenizes Pistorius, and emphasizes participation as victory enough for particular bodies. First, the narrative of Pistorius protects hegemonic constructions, such

as the celebrated athletic masculinity found within men's Olympic sports, by divorcing these constructions from Pistorius' body. When the NBC narrative down plays Pistorius' masculinity, the resistive elements of Pistorius' body are reduced. As Pistorius' body acts as a space to challenge that many different bodies can be athletic and masculine, including the body of a double amputee, construction of his narrative plays a significant role in drawing connections between Pistorius' body and masculinity. Absent such connections, Pistorius' body is more likely to be interpreted, through the NBC narrative, as existing outside of masculine realms. Essentially, by depicting Pistorius within his walled home, making smoothies in his kitchen or hugging little children at charity events, Pistorius' body lacks the masculinity to be challenging to other, normatively masculine, Olympic bodies.

Second, the NBC narrative of Pistorius tokenizes his achievements, which isolates the success of the individual as representative of social acceptance and a lack of cultural and political hurdles. As Cloud (1996) reminds readers, that there is a tendency for those who recognize social inequities, such as racism, sexism, and, I would add, ableism, to prop up media examples from disenfranchised groups. Especially when representation of these groups is mostly absent from social discourse, it is tempting to use every example as evidence that challenges normative identity constructions and binaries. However, the production of some narratives, and certainly ones, like the NBC documentary, that forward a specific version of Pistorius and his athletic body, isolate the success of individuals as proof that, with the proper effort, access to cultural, social, and political equality is achievable. For instance, when the NBC documentary described Pistorius' legal battle to be allowed in the Olympics, the process seemed uncomplicated and

straightforward. Pistorius was pictured once, seated and smiling in a chair in front of photojournalists, as the voiceover explains, “After being banned from competition in the Beijing Olympics, Pistorius won his appeal to the IOC”. This short explanation, accompanied by the visual of the victorious and relatively untroubled Pistorius, simplifies the nearly seven year battle to gain access to qualify for the Olympics, including two different rounds of grueling physical tests, testimony from industry and academic experts, and constant reliance on legal services. Moreover, the film isolated the access issues to the 2012 Olympics, ignoring the original battle with the IOC for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, barriers encountered at meets like the world championships and other Olympic standard qualifying meets, and the social and cultural obstacles surrounding Pistorius’ participation in able-bodied events. By simplifying the issue of access, the narrative instead focuses on Pistorius’ struggle to ready his body for Olympic participation. Thus, the onus is shifted to the efforts of the individual participant, as opposed to the numerous, rigid structural, political, and social barriers to access.

Third, the NBC narrative emphasizes participation as a victory, which downplays the destructive elements of athletic hierarchies as blatantly ableist. Much of the resistive potential within the participation of Pistorius’ body at the 2012 LSOG stems from Pistorius’ success on the track. When Pistorius’ double amputee body is more athletically successful than normative bodies, his non-normative body challenges hegemonic constructions about ability. Unfortunately, when the NBC narrative downplays the masculinity associated with Pistorius’ body, it reduces the expectation of athletic success in the context of the Olympics. Within the narrative itself, the interviewer never mentions aspirations of Olympic success, such as winning medals, placing in the final

heat, or reaching the finals. In fact, questions of Pistorius' own goals are never asked, either to Pistorius or his coach. Instead, the narrative focuses on "what does it mean to be the first double amputee in the Olympics?", to which Pistorius responds "It's exciting, but I'm here to compete". Leading the narrative towards the victory of participation, and away from the normative Olympic achievements, like the medals, is also evident in the placement of the documentary within Olympic coverage. The video aired during primetime just before the semifinal of the men's 400 meter sprint. The previous day, during primetime coverage, Pistorius qualified from the quarterfinals by placing 2nd in his heat. Pistorius' run to the semifinals prompted the release of the clip, but also marked the end of Pistorius' success. As the video footage held only pre-Olympic content, NBC strategically released the segment before the last race they expected Pistorius to run. Thus, the film's tone and content, particularly the de-masculinization of the sprinter, places the body of Pistorius into an environment in which he will inevitably lose.

The narrative of participation as victory trickled beyond the NBC documentary and into the interpretation of events on the track by the commentators. Directly after Pistorius' quarterfinal heat, the sprinter who won the heat approached Pistorius, who qualified in second place, and asked to exchange race numbers. A practice common in international soccer, but nearly absent in Olympic track competition, the commentators merely remarked "you don't often see that". However, after the NBC documentary and the semifinal race, in which Pistorius failed to qualify for the finals, the commentators retold the story from the day before, and described it as "another example" of how extraordinary it was for Pistorius "to have gotten this far", and remarking that, for Pistorius, "just reaching the semifinals is a great victory". By shifting the narrative to the

victory of participation, the narrative of Pistorius within the NBC documentary reduces the resistive potential within the success of his body at the Olympics.

Conclusions

The NBC video presents a narrative of Pistorius' non-normative body that fits the resistive act of his competition into the context of the 2012 LSOG. Linking a feminist disability lens to the analysis helps isolate elements in which the resistive nature of the Pistorius' competitive body may be at odds with the normative Olympic narrative, such as masculinity. If the stories about Olympic male runners make them seem masculine, where does Pistorius, and the NBC narrative de-emphasizing masculinity, fit? In this way, the critical disability lens of narrative analysis offers opportunities to examine mediated constructions as they label, categorize, and sort space for non-normative bodies.

Garland-Thomson approaches disability is as a set of practices that classify the body as able or disabled (Garland-Thompson, 2005). As constructed, the NBC documentary reduces the resistive opportunity of Pistorius' body offering a narrative that conflicts with personal identity constructs outside the video. For instance, Pistorius has been known for making comments about disability and ability, such as "you are made able by your abilities", but despite published other places, these sayings don't make the NBC documentary. Instead, the video reduces the opportunity for political, social, and cultural empowerment by shying away from the most politically charged terms, such as disabled. In a clever piece of editing, Pistorius is cued to do the same. Prompted with "What did your mother say about your condition?", Pistorius says, early in the interview, "My mother would say 'your brother puts on his shoes and you put on your legs and that's the last I want to hear about disability' ". Despite avoiding the term disability, and,

therefore, the social and political ramifications of Pistorius' participation in the Olympics, the film does not shy away from other terms to associate with Pistorius. The film's interviewer, while talking to MIT professor Dr. Herr, discusses Pistorius as "a freak". Herr concedes that the term "freak" might not have been the best word, and though he himself had used the term in the past, it was meant as a complement. Despite these clarifications, "freak", particularly in the context of a non-normative body, rings as derogatory. This trend continues with the interviewer cataloguing the multiple other labels associated with Pistorius. At one point, the camera focuses on Pistorius' prosthetics as he walks down the track, while the narrator's voice uses descriptions such as bionic, cyborg, and kangaroo. Using non-human descriptions of Pistorius in reference to his body help to differentiate him from the normative construction.

Pistorius, Dr. Herr, and the NBC interviewer all talk about the prosthetics within the documentary, but their word choices are quite different. Pistorius refers to the prosthetics as either his legs or prosthetics. Herr, himself a user of prosthetic legs and a researcher in prosthetics, calls Pistorius' prosthetics "just a piece of carbon". On numerous occasions, the interviewer calls the prosthetics "cheetah blades". While this may be the manufacturer's name for the model, the combination of an animal and a tool more closely resembles previous labels emphasized by the film like "kangaroo" and "cyborg". When Pistorius calls his prosthetics "legs," he seems more like an able bodied human than if he is compared to an animal or robot. Thus, while the vignette refrains from using "disabled" as a descriptor, it highlights other labels that emphasis Pistorius' disability.

Disability, according to Garland-Thomson (2011) also functions as a way of describing the instability of bodily forms, particularly in regards to human's fragility. Disability emphasizes the fluid and temporal nature of human's bodies. The NBC documentary uses discussions of injury and teachable moments with children to construct disability as instability. As described earlier in this analysis, Pistorius' rugby injury, described by the NBC documentary as inevitable, provides a situation through which disability highlights human fragility because it acts as a space of comparison. When Pistorius talks about his rugby injury, he laughs about the situation. According to Pistorius, injury for him usually meant mashing his prosthetic back into the correct shape or sending away for a new one. In this case, however, his knee, not his prosthetic, was badly damaged, and rendered him immobile. Apparently, a few of the fathers watching the rugby game, having tossed back some cold ones, were yelling at Pistorius to "walk it off". It was only when his injury forced him to remove his prosthetic that the idea of walking off the injury became ridiculous, and a sense of awkward silence is described. In this case, Pistorius' rugby injury, the exposure of this body, and the attention of the crowd, work not to point out underlying ableist clichés and attitudes, but to de-politize the narrative of disability and sport.

Through the telling of Pistorius' failed attempt at rugby and his coach's ultimate deception in getting him involved in the sport, the vignette reminds the viewers of the chain of events that sparked Pistorius' running career. The narrator, accompanied by videos of a young Pistorius jogging, asserts that running began as a rehabilitation practice. In fact, Pistorius was led to believe that his coach was encouraging him to run in order to rehab for rugby. Running, particularly on his signature prosthetics, as the video captures,

becomes symbolic of Pistorius' representation as disabled. Since Pistorius began running and even racing as a form of injury rehabilitation, his future endeavors on the track become representative of his efforts to rehab his broken body. Therefore, no matter how successful a sprinter he becomes, his running remains a symbol of his injury, and thus, his disability.

Like any rich rhetorical text, discourse that challenges hegemonic norms do appear in the documentary. For the most part, these moments happen when Pistorius tells a longer personal narrative of identity. In one particular scene, Pistorius is shown interacting with children at a sports festival while he tells a story about his experience with the children. During a water break, Pistorius tells how he showed off his prosthetic legs to the children, who began pinching the legs to understand their relationship to his body. Pistorius then tells how he is surprised when, suddenly, a young child begins pinching his arm to "see if it was real". Questioning Pistorius' realness, especially in a playful, innocent way, stresses the fluidity of human form and the constructions used to police disabled forms. The length of these personal narratives may limit the editing flexibility of the producers, opening opportunities for self-expression to seep through. Within the next case study, I will be examining mediated constructions of disability directly following the Olympics that completely lack that personal identity narrative, to see how such mediated constructions may differ in their resistive qualities.

Chapter 6- Post Olympic Messages Case Study

Fat, Bodies, and Post Olympic Messages

When Leisel Jones, eight-time Olympic medalist and reigning world champion swimmer in the 100-meter breaststroke, made waves in the pool during the 2012 LSOG, it was not because of her swimming. Instead multiple publications, including her hometown newspaper, *The Melbourne Herald Sun*, commented that Jones, “appears heavier than at previous meets” (Blatchford, 2012). Before and after pictures of Jones in her swimsuit and online polls of readers created a firestorm of controversy as to whether the weight of this Olympic athlete was appropriate for her event. As with other Olympic bodies, normative constructions of even the most decorated Olympians highlight the strict policing that accompanies athletics. It is no wonder then that just after the Olympic Games, weight, and weight stigma, became the focal points of a particular mediated construction. Continuing analysis of narratives featuring athletic bodies that resist normative constructions, media linking obesity, the Olympics, and athletics

During the 2012 LSOG, athletic apparel giant Nike launched a new advertising campaign entitled *Find Your Greatness*. Nike marketers have said of the campaign that the inspiration is to “inspire anyone who wants to achieve their own moment of greatness in sport” (Nike Inc, 2012). Nike launched this campaign just prior to the time when the world would focus on the Olympics, and it quickly became the #1 viral video of the summer (Binns, 2012). Themes and description within these Nike commercials profess to be attempting to create space for athletes that contrast with the celebration of greatness within the Olympics opens opportunities to deconstruct normative assumptions within competition.

The first of the Nike *Find Your Greatness* commercials establishes links to the 2012 LSOG. The film begins by focusing on London, the scene for the 2012 summer games, as a space that shares its name with other places around the world that host amazing, albeit less popular, athletes. London, Nigeria; East London, South Africa; London, Ohio; Little London, Jamaica; and London, Canada are all featured in the commercial, while viewers catch glimpses of athletes hard at work. Unlike the heavily marketed Olympians like Michael Phelps, Usain Bolt, and Kerry Walsh, the athletes within the Nike commercials are complete unknowns. Regardless of the location of the scene, the film's voiceover reminds viewers that greatness is not just reserved for the "superstar athlete", like the Olympians, "but is inherently a part of what we can all aspire to and achieve" (Nike Inc, 2012). Claiming the community of athletes, the pronoun "we" draws a distinction between the Olympians in the 2012 LSOG and common individuals striving for moments of personal athletic greatness. Further illustrating these distinctions, the campaign the series of commercials offers a unique glimpse into an attempt to create construct a mediated athletic body of resistance.

The Nike *Find Your Greatest* campaign included television commercials aired in United States and online in releases from YouTube. These commercials were constructed in strikingly similar fashion, involving video of individuals participating in athletics while the same voiceover reads a monologue regarding the topic of greatness. Despite the consistency and format, there is a significant amount of diversity within each video. The athletes range in age from toddler to late middle-age, are different races, nationalities, and religions, and pursue a wide range of athletic endeavors including juggling, baseball, running, rugby, and an assortment of daredevil stunts. For instance, in the Nike

commercial *Find Your Greatness – Basketball*, a young man performs tricks involving juggling, dribbling, and catching four basketballs. The voiceover explains that sometimes, greatness is about having fun. The commercials also feature a number of athletes who would be commonly referred to as disabled, including a wheelchair racer and the young man playing baseball with only one hand. One stark difference between these videos and the others is that greatness becomes framed with the monologue as the overcoming of individual physical limitations. With that in mind, I engage narrative analysis of the most popular and controversial of the Nike *Find Your Greatest* campaigns-- the video entitled *Jogger*. The most pirated ad during the month of August, 2012, the video features an obese 12-year-old boy jogging.

Jogger

The one-minute *Jogger* video starts off with a scenic shot of the countryside, as a single camera moves slowly backwards down a country road. Lovely shades of purple, orange, and pink fill the shot as the sun sets behind a non-descript country field and rural road within a desolate, almost vacant landscape in the foreground. Within seconds, a runner appears far off, jogging slowly down the center of the road toward the audience. The voice over starts by telling the viewers that we've come to believe that greatness is a gift, reserved for a chosen few. It is at this point in the video when the viewer can see that the runner is not only a child, but an overweight boy. The speaker tells us that greatness is thought to be reserved only for "prodigies or superstars" and was simply unattainable for most of us. During this time, the runner gets closer to the camera, and the audience sees more about his gait, his stride, and his body (Nike Inc, 2012). As the speaker tell us to forget the notion that greatness is unattainable for most and disavow the

notion that greatness is not some rare DNA strand, we begin to see more of the runner as he lumbers along the paved road. The audience hears his feet as they shuffle along the concrete and see that his feet barely come off of the ground. As the image of the jogger seems to be struggling just a little to make it down the road, the viewers are told that “greatness is no more unique to us than breathing” and that “we are all capable of it, all of us” (Nike Inc, 2012). As the speaker tells us that we are all capable of greatness, we see a tighter image of the 12-year-old jogger in the video, and we hear his labored breathing as he struggles to make his way down the road.

Theoretical Linkage Between Narrative, Disability and Fat Studies

Academic scholarship examining issues of media portrayals and weight represent a robust understanding of the frequency and potential effects of such narratives. Crucial to this approach is understanding how narratives of disability have historically been formed in popular media, the influence of fat studies to the theoretical landscape, and the overlapping elements of disability and fat studies.

It is seemingly impossible to escape messages from the media, and the messages media outlets disseminate shape the way we perceive the world and other people. The mass media are considered to be the most potent and pervasive communicators of socio-cultural standards in America simply because media are so entrenched in our everyday lives (Heinberg, 1996). Accordingly, it is important to examine media as a driving component in the development of narratives involving non-normative bodies. Mitchell and Snyder (2011) forward a narrative analysis approach, which they call the narrative prosthesis, that works to analyze portrayals of disability within literature and film. According to the authors, the narrative prosthesis acts as a mechanism through which to

trouble representations of non-normative bodies within popular narratives by challenging character making tropes “as a symbolic vehicle for meaning making and cultural take, and as an option in the narrative negotiation of disabled subjectivity” (2011, p. 1). As popular media narratives center on a trope of disability, analysis of that narrative should focus on the prosthesis qualities inherit within the narrative and the social, political, and cultural contexts within which the narrative operates.

Just as a physical prosthesis is an attempt to replace a missing human piece, or normalize a non-normative bodily form, a narrative prosthesis lens focuses on how media constructed bodies become normalized within their narratives, and the lessons that come from that process (Fink, 2013). The narrative prosthesis analysis to media narratives approaches bodies within the context of tension between the medical and social models of disability. Mitchell and Snyder explain, “in a literal sense, a prosthesis seeks to accomplish an allusion. Anybody deemed lacking, unfunctional, or inappropriately functional needs compensation, and prosthesis helps to affect this and yet the prothesizing of a body or a rhetorical figure carries with it ideological assumptions about what is aberrant” (2011, p. 6). Judging a body to be mechanically dysfunctional is representative of hegemonic power structures, which benefit from the legitimizing force of the medical model approach to disability and popular narratives, within which disability typically represents a symbol for a character’s other incompleteness or imperfections. In most cases, the narrative prosthesis highlights the shortcomings of the normalizing process, just as a physical prosthesis does not completely relieve a user from the stigmatization that accompanies disability (Mitchell and Snyder, 2011). From the narrative prosthesis prospective, prothesizing a body within a media narrative highlights

the ableist notions within character tropes, the perpetuation of hegemonic power from the medical model, and the social, political and cultural ramifications of such narratives.

For my purposes, narrative prosthesis works best as a methodological approach when the narrative features fictional characters, constructed without autobiographical personal narratives. According to Meleo-Erwin (2012), members of stigmatized groups rely on personal narratives to create community resistance to popular narratives that can shame, disenfranchise, or isolate individuals. Within the most edited, scripted, media constructed environments, the symbolic elements of the forwarded disability narrative can be scrutinized within the contexts of social narratives relevant to the construct, without the buffering qualities of personal narratives. Just as a physical prosthesis attempts to remove unsightly difference in bodily construction from view, yet fails to completely normalize the character, the narrative prosthesis approach works best in instances where the bodies of media characters are prosthesised in an attempt to make them seem more normal, yet rely on contextual incongruity.

As media narratives place non-normative bodies within social and cultural contexts, issues of weight, and what classifies as normal weight, become increasingly important areas of critical scholarship. Fat studies, an interdisciplinary field of critical scholarship, challenges the causal relationship between fat and poor health, negative cultural attitudes towards fat people, and the oppression of fat individuals (Maor, 2012). Central to oppression and stigmatization of fat individuals are cultural expectations that weight maintenance is both an individual's responsibility and direct, causal reflection of an individual's health (Jones, 2012). This combination creates social, cultural, and political environments in which immense amounts of pressure can be put upon

individuals to seek normalized bodies. Many times, narratives emerge, like that of the “obesity epidemic”, which ignore environmental causes in place of individual ones. When the fault for possessing a non-normative body falls on the individual, cultural pressure to alter that body becomes immense. Teens classified as obese are 60% more likely to be bullied, face discrimination from teachers, including “receive lower grades, are denied letters of recommendation, and are regarded as possessing fewer leadership abilities than thin students” (Jones, 2012). Adults labeled over weight or obese are often passed over for jobs, promotions, and leadership positions because they are perceived to have less will power, be less responsible, and less healthy (Jones, 2012). This creates an environment in which blatant oppression of those with certain bodies can take place, particularly within the media.

As Bissell and Parrott (2013) point out, the ubiquitous construction of the media means audiences are bombarded with messages about what characteristics and groups should be sanctioned or shunned, what we should think about, how we should behave toward others, and what we believe about other people and groups. With regard to weight bias, content analyses suggest that media content often endorses the “thin ideal,” providing audience members inaccurate, often unattainable, and potentially harmful models for the preferred body shape and size. Add to the over-representation of the thin ideal in a mediated context the representation of overweight in a stereotypical fashion, and viewers are left with perceptions about overweight individuals that might be negative.

Studies of the representation of overweight characters in primetime programming have found that overweight characters are subjected to negative remarks, both self-imposed and other-generated, more often than thin characters in situation comedies

(Fouts & Burggraf, 2000; Fouts & Burggraf, 1999). Overweight characters are more likely to be shown eating, and less likely to be in a serious romantic relationship than thin characters (Greenberg, Eastin, Hofschire, Lachlan, & Brownell, 2003). “Mainstream society perceives its view of fat as a positive influence that seeks healthier lives for fat people” (Jones, 2012, p. 1998). Thus, without critique, the oppression of specific bodies goes unchecked.

Like many critical theoretical perspectives, fat studies stems from social, cultural, and political histories of oppression, and combine elements of activism and social movements with academic scholarship. As Jones (2012) explains, “The fat acceptance movement seeks to end the discrimination, stigma, and shame based on fatness. In response to fat acceptance, anti-obesity activists have claimed that discrimination against fat bodies is desirable because it shames people into better health” (2012, p. 1997). Thus, hegemonic forces that create political barriers, like discrimination, and cultural obstacles, like shame, require a combination of academic and social critique.

Like disability, fatness is a normative construction regarding the body. And, like disability, people are disenfranchised based on the policing of these social abstract rules on what should be a “normal” body. In that way, based on these similarities, understanding media narratives involving non-normative athletic bodies, a critical disability lens is useful because it helps us recognize those normative social constructions centering on bodies and capability.

From this perspective, issues of weight, particularly identity and access issues of those labeled fat, obese, or over weight, fall well into bounds of critical disability studies

scholarship. Aphramor (2009) argues that fatness, through the disability studies lens, reveals forms of oppression that both reveals the usefulness of the perspective while opening avenues for theoretical extensions of contemporary disability studies. Within the popular and medical literature, fatness is discussed as either a biological or medical condition, which masks the social stigmatization and cultural constructions of normative bodyweight. As discussed earlier, disability studies attempts to deconstruct the medicalization of bodies in terms of normative constructions of ability. Scholars use this technique to also examine issues of fat embodiment narratives (Herndon, 2002), weight discrimination in the courtroom (Jones, 2012), and cultural stigmas around weight and obesity in media (Bissell & Parrott, 2013). These perspectives center on normative social constructions of bodyweight in the discourse rendered when these abstractions create friction with individuals and cultures.

As Aphramor (2009) posits, critical theories within disability studies offer the ability to deconstruct these culturally embedded values about fat people as a group. “[F]or weight in particular, dominant definitions of impairment and disability or entangled in cultural debates about medicalization, group and individual autonomy, cultural decisions and consequences of pathologizing certain bodies” (Aphramor, 2009, p. 123) which perpetuates stigmatization of individuals. As Solovay (2000) explains, the conflict between those who choose to see issues of weight as disability and those who discredit any attempt to do so stems from the belief that weight constitutes a problem with an impaired individual (Solovay, 2000, p. 135). Building on this scholarship, this analysis utilizes the critical disability lens concerning weight within the context of athletic ability portrayed in the Nike *Find Your Greatness* commercial.

Narrative Analysis of the Jogger

The Nike *Find Your Greatness* commercial entitled *Jogger* represents a media construction of a non-normative body. The jogger, through his body shape and weight, provides a space to challenge assumptions of bodies and abilities, or to re-enforce hegemonic constructions. This analysis examines the narrative construction in regards to both the critical disabilities lens and other representations of non-normative bodies within athletic competitions highlighted by the Nike commercials through using the narrative prosthesis approach. In the case of the *Jogger*, the symbolic prosthesis, which attempts to normalize the body of a character while simultaneously highlighting the difference in bodily construction, is the jogger's weight.

For the jogger, athletic ability, and therefore the greatness that comes from achieving it (according to the commercial), is measured against the expectations of what a heavy body can do. Nike uses a few different elements to construct a narrative in which the journey, with the intent to improve oneself despite physical impairments, epitomizes greatness. First, the Nike jogger commercial asserts that weight is a physical impairment which can be overcome, leading to greatness. This responsibility falls on the individual, the jogger.

One way that responsibility falls on the individual, and drawing attention to the narrative's prosthesis, is by emphasizing the peaceful, easy environment surrounding the jogger. The rural setting for *Jogger* is referenced within the first Nike *Find Your Greatness* commercial as London, Ohio. Though the setting shares a name with the site of the Olympics, the environment seems purposefully contrasting. Starkly different from the pressures of racing world-class athletes in front of millions of fans and ever-present

media coverage, jogging around rural Ohio is far more tranquil. *Jogger* takes the peaceful setting concept a step further, layering the narrative in comparisons to other *Find Your Greatness* commercials. Unlike many of the other commercials in the campaign, in which people are in competition with each other or attempting a feat that requires great skill, the jogger is attempting a task that many athletes would consider quite easy, mostly thanks to the setting. The scene that is constructed emphasizes the environment in which the jog is taking place. The camera is aimed directly at a country road and appears completely flat. There are no adverse environmental conditions, such as wind, rain, or snow. In fact, the conditions seem ideal. A beautiful sunset in the background and crickets chirping along the side of the road produce what appears to be idyllic running conditions. This is in stark contrast to another Nike *Find Your Greatness* commercial which features an ultra distance runner. In that commercial, a runner speeds across what appears to be a frozen tundra, with large, jagged, ice covered mountains in the background. By constructing the most comforting and forgiving running scene in *Jogger*, the commercial places the narrative prosthesis, the jogger's body and weight, as the major hurdle between the character and athletic greatness.

The ultra runner *Find Your Greatness* commercial provides another significant difference with the *Jogger* commercial, the depiction of speed. Within the ultra runner commercial, the camera is fixed and the jogger runs across the screen from left to right. This gives the impression that the runner is going quickly, as they appear in the shot for a brief moment. For the jogger, however, the camera slowly moves backwards as the runner struggles to catch up. This keeps the jogger within the shot longer, emphasizing the slow pace. The combination of scene and camera angle creates, for the jogger,

environment in which the speed of the runner is based on the ability of the jogger's body, not the conditions.

Without the jogger's personal narrative, the narrative prosthesis, the runner's body, plays a significant role in the hegemonic construction of the body. As a runner moves closer to the camera, the audience receives both visual and audio cues the body of the jogger creates a physical limitation. First, the jogger is completely drenched in sweat. Wearing a white T-shirt, which clings to his body, the audience sees the moist outline of the child's protruding belly. Particularly in the context of other Nike greatness commercials featuring runners, the clothing of the athletes bear significance. Nike's *Find Your Greatness* commercial entitled *Marathon* focuses solely on a marathon runner dressed as a potted flower during a race. Unlike the jogger, whose sweat makes him seem uncomfortable with the athletic endeavor, the flower marathoner appears completely controlled and comfortable, breezing through a water station without breaking stride, all while dressed as a potted perennial. Unlike the character in *Marathon*, the jogging character's clothing emphasizes his body and struggle.

Audio cues also emphasize the runner's struggle, as well as frame the narrative for the audience. Narrator Tom Hardy's monologue, whose major roles in the *Dark Knight Rises*, *Inception*, and *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* help make his voice familiar, begins his monologue 10 seconds into the clip, and is preceded by only the sound of crickets. As a runner gets closer to the camera, the audience can hear multiple sounds that reference the runner's significant weight. Approximately 30 seconds into the commercial, the sound of the jogger's shuffling feet can be heard. At this point in the clip, the sound of the fireflies is much louder than the sound of feet shuffling in the background. As

Hardy tells the audience that greatness is not a rare DNA strand, the sound of shuffling feet gets louder. If not looking at the video, it is possible the listener still might not know what is going on, but as Hardy tells us that we are all capable of greatness, the sound of the jogger's shuffling feet becomes all the more clear. We know at this point that feet are moving along a mostly smooth surface. When Hardy pauses after telling listeners that all of us are capable of greatness, the audience can hear the sound of the jogger's breathing in and out. At this point, there is only about 5 seconds left in the video clip, but the sound of the fireflies decreases while the sound of the jogger's breathing increases. If the audio is isolated, the listener will only know that there is someone breathing hard in the clip. One might interpret that the heavy breathing equates to hard work, which could also equate to greatness, but the sound of feet shuffling offers a different perspective. The audio emphasizes the struggle.

The text of the monologue also cues the audience to specific elements of the narrative prosthesis. The monologue's opening lines reference the inaccuracy of the concept that greatness is reserved for chosen few. The audience is told forget the idea the greatness is only for prodigies and superstars. The monologue is read while the jogger is slowly making his way toward the camera, given the impression that the jogger is neither a prodigy or superstar and not the chosen few who we typically associate with athletic greatness. This combination cues the audience to look for athletic flaws, like the jogger's tendency to drift to the right of the shot, unable to run in a straight line, the sound of his feet, barely lifted from the pavement, or his halted gait. The monologue emphasizes this situation again when Hardy reads the line, "greatness is no more unique to us than

breathing”. By this point, the jogger has become close enough to the camera so that the audience can hear his breathing, which is labored.

Not only does the monologue reference the visual and audio cues that the weight becomes an athletic impairment to ability, they also work to isolate weight as an individual medical issue. The lines, “greatness is not some rare DNA strand” makes the medicalization of athletics a focal point of the video. For the audience, the separation of athletic ability and genetics places the burden of athletic ability on the shoulders of the individual. In the case of the jogger, as the commercial also does an excellent job of situating weight as an athletic impairment, the individual is responsible for both individual greatness as well as the athletic burden of his size.

The last line of the monologue states, “we are all capable of greatness. All of us.” Emphasizing here the potential for greatness draws attention again to the jogger’s significant weight, highlighting for the audience, the potential transformations that simple exercise routines, like the jogging takes place within the commercial, could have for an obese adolescent. The character’s narrative prosthesis, his fatness, is responsible for both his non-normative body and the attention the audience should play in urging the normalization of that body. Thus, by the end of the commercial, the audience may be left wondering whether the greatness being referenced in the monologue is the jogging that is taking place, or the potential for transformation that the jogging represents. In either case, the weight of the jogger is framed as an athletic ability impairment as well as an individual’s responsibility.

Within the Nike *Jogger* narrative, responsibility for fatness, as the narrative prosthesis, becomes a significant symbol when paired with the isolation of the jogging

character. Jogging along an empty country road, with empty fields on each side, the jogger is isolated. Another important element of this isolation is the lack of personal narrative to accompany the jogger. With only the narrators voice telling the narrative, the jogger has no personal narrative frame the body as a resistive force. As a result, the jogger's body becomes the focus of the narrative without the jogger's voice.

The scene itself also works to impress upon the audience the individual struggle of the jogger. Alone on a rural country road, with no fans, training partners, or even music and earbuds, the jogger is framed as completely alone. The jogger is moving toward the camera, yet the camera remains perpetually out of reach, which creates the sensation that the jogger is struggling to reconnect with the audience. By the end of the commercial, the jogger is still yards away, giving the impression that he may never reach the rest of us. This is emphasized by the last line of the monologue, "we are all capable of greatness. All of us". By placing "all" in the potential greatness category, and repeating "all" to emphasize the attempt to be inclusive, the last two lines highlight the isolation of the jogger faces while having a non-normative body.

Conclusions

Hardin and Hardin (2003) assert that media creations can further social change regarding normative constructions of disability, and empower those with disability, while calling for scholars "concerned with disability, media, and social change will see it fitting to explore the progress and potential of sport media and society" (2003, p.258).

Mediated constructions of athletes with non-normative bodies have the potential to have a significant influence on social beliefs, attitudes, and articulations involving conceptions of the normal human body. Use of a critical disability lens produces a critique of weight

issues as a social construction regarding normative bodies in athletics. Our case study of Nike's *Find Your Greatness* commercial *Jogger* raises important questions about the authenticity of the media construction versus a personal narrative and the potential longevity of popular public media.

In many situations, individual narratives have been used to authenticate the experiences of disenfranchised groups. There are, of course, negotiations between individual experiences, identities, and discourse as a communication becomes public. As I concluded with Oscar Pistorius, sometimes the personal narrative in the constructed media narrative seem to conflict. In the case of Nike's jogger, the commercial feels nearly completely a media creation. While the person in embodying the jogger may indeed face scrutiny over their body and their athletic identity outside the mediated commercial, the character of the jogger within the commercial is rendered nearly voiceless. Instead, as the jogger struggles to jog and breathe, the narrator's voice replaces any personal narrative from the character about the situation, identity, experience. This is not to say that the experience of commercial feels overtly constructed and lacking authenticity. The landscape, background sounds, and simple camerawork give the impression of a less constructed situation. Not only does the setting feel authentic, the perceived struggles of the jogging character represent preexisting notions involving weight and athletic capability. In attempting to create an authentic feeling construction involving non-normative bodies within athletic endeavors, Nike's *find your greatness – jogger* commercial emphasizes one significant hurdle in producing and distributing this type of mediated content: the relationship between ordinary and extraordinary.

In the construction of the Nike *Find Your Greatness* campaign, athletes are framed as either accomplishing extraordinary feats of athleticism or ordinary feats made more difficult by physical, political, or mental limitations. Similar Nike greatness depictions of a child working up the courage to jump off a high dive and a women's soccer team dressed in accordance with Islamic traditions are similar to Nike's jogger, whose greatness seems to be about accomplishing a relatively easy exercise made more complicated by an individual or cultural impairment. As commercial media depictions in the past have been critiqued in both popular and academic work (Hardin, Kuehn, Jones, Genovese, & Balaji, 2009; Bissell & Butler, 2013) as lacking diversity, the inclusion of diverse body constructions in ordinary athletic situations could be positive. On one hand, representations of a non-normative body are important in countering notions that only specific bodies are normal or worth celebrating. But if these bodies are portrayed as extraordinary when their athletic accomplishments are less skillful, coordinated, strong, or fast, the representation may do more harm than good.

Media attention to Leisel Jones' weight during the 2012 LSOG highlights the interesting interplay between weight, the body, and athletics. Within the Nike *Jogger* commercial, narratives of ability and responsibility associated with particular bodies spring board off Olympic constructions and continue harmful, normative constructions. With this case study, as the previous case studies in mind, I begin examining overarching implications.

Chapter 7- Implications

The three case studies in this project accessed a critical disability lens to examine athletic bodies that challenged normative constructions in the qualification phase of the 2012 LSOG, in the competition of the 2012 LSOG, and in the advertisements that aired during and after the 2012 LSOG. Significant implications of this analysis arose within these investigations, lending insight to the research question: “How do the narratives within the 2012 London Summer Olympic games construct, maintain, or resist hegemonic ableist notions?”. My analysis indicates that the bodies of athletes can provide a space from which to construct narratives that resist social constructions, but these narratives, as they become more mediated and less personal expressions of identity, may disrupt the resistive qualities the bodies create. This analysis can expand the theoretical utility of a critical disability lens, while pointing to significant political implications as well. The following chapter first examines the resistive qualities found in the narratives about athletes’ bodies within the case studies. Second, the chapter discusses theoretical implications for the critical disability lens. Third, the following chapter investigates the political implications for resistive movements involving non-normative bodies and athletics.

Narratives of Resistance

Across the case studies, narratives regarding the identities of specific athletes and their access to sport culture centered on the make up of their body. Examining the identity and access narratives of Keelin Godsey and Caster Semenya as they attempted to qualify both on the track, and as women, for the 2012 LSOG, provided an expanded disability lens through which to understand athletic bodies as spaces of resistance. The

scrutiny, testing, and classification, both by Olympic officials, the public, and the media, created space in which the bodies of Semenya and Godsey could challenge hegemonic constructions. For Godsey and Semenya, the make-up of their bodies was a more significant hurdle than their competition with other athletes. Similarly, Pistorius' body, while in competition, opened spaces of resistance to normative constructions of Olympians and athletes. NBC's narrative of Pistorius, de-emphasizing the masculine characteristics, raise important questions about the sustainability of resistant acts the more mediated they become. Within the Nike commercial *Jogger*, a narrative of obesity, devoid of an identity narrative, issues of access are again focused on the non-normative body.

Central to each narrative, and the resistive opportunities associated with the non-normative body, is the interplay between the narratives of access and identity. The use of the identity narratives offer the most opportunity to resist the hegemonic constructions of the normal athletic body, which, within the case studies, are upheld by narratives of access. During qualification, Godsey's personal narratives involving his identity, such as his interviews, his dress and hairstyle, and even his name, conflict sharply with the access narratives found in USA Track and Field results, bios, and procedures. The same can be said for Pistorius, whose most significant resistance opportunities within the NBC documentary come from embedded narratives segments about his body and his identity.

Narratives of access within these case studies reflected hegemonic normative constructions of the body, isolating athletes with non-normative bodies by relying on popular, medical classifications, like sex classification binaries. Within the case of Semenya, the dependence of media narratives, as well as sport governing bodies, on

medical interpretations of the normal female body, illustrate clearly cultural, political, and social pressures that police normative constructions. NBC's narrative of Pistorius is similarly disenfranchising. By constructing a narrative that deemphasizes Pistorius' masculine attributes, the narrative provides cultural access barriers to the legitimacy of Pistorius as a world-class athlete. In the case of the *Jogger*, access to athletic greatness is framed as a narrative of personal responsibility, which isolates fat individuals and stimulates social pressure to stigmatize these non-normative bodies. The resulting media narratives provide a fixed rhetorical point from which the resistive, non-normative bodies of these athletes can challenge with narratives of identity.

In the context of how the narratives within the 2012 LSOG construct, maintain, or resist hegemonic ableist notions, we must consider the role and the extent to which the narratives consist of media constructions, as opposed to bodies in competition. Watching Pistorius, Godsey, Semenya, or the jogging character in live athletic competition, as opposed to the more mediated versions examined in this case study, may provide space in which their bodies act as spaces to generate resistance to normative notions of the athletic body. However, while the athletes' bodies may have been the genesis of their media coverage, the majority of exposure to these bodies by the public is concentrated in specific media narratives. As the rhetorical artifacts become more mediated, the role of personal narratives of identity offer the best opportunity for resistance to hegemonic normative constructions of the body.

The post Olympic messages regarding access to athletic greatness and the role of the body within the *Jogger* commercial highlight the resistive shortcomings of access narratives without identity narratives. Within all the case studies, more mediated

messages lead to more narratives that bolstered hegemonic notions, but that does not always have to be the case. In fact, the *Jogger* provides a media-constructed character whose athletic narrative could easily challenge normative notions of ability and body construction. Though the Nike commercial fails to embrace these resistive opportunities in the case of the *Jogger*, it is possible to promote the resistive qualities of non-normative bodies within mediated constructions. However, even within highly mediated messages that create such a body, the lack of personal narratives of identity creates a catch-22. If the mediated message is devoid of personal narratives of identity, but constructs a character whose body challenges normative constructions, the message can be edited and shake to best deconstruct hegemonic notions. However, the heavily mediated construction may then lack the authentic feel that gives personal narratives their rhetorical power. Essentially, by isolating the opportunity for resistance to the most perfectly resistant body, media constructed narratives create resistive token characters, with which individuals struggling against stigmatization cannot identify, but are compared to by the governing social, political, and cultural forces. Thus, narratives of identity, even within highly mediated constructions, prove useful in resisting hegemonic constructions of the body in athletics.

Normative Theoretical Constructions and Disability Research

Much of this manuscript has accessed normative social constructions of the body to understand the resistive space created by particular athletic bodies. My approach to normative is to consider this concept as an expression of social constructions that is fluid, shifting, and adaptive. I consider normative constructions to be the offshoots of the friction generated between power and resistance. As Phillips (2002) explains, “This

friction, then, represents the limits of both power and resistance—the point of tension that changes both the strategies of power and the efforts of resistance” (2002, p. 335) . As hegemonic constructions are many times reified by academics, it is important to understand how this project’s use of the disabilities lens troubles standard scholastic practice.

It should come as little surprise, based on previous scholarship, that fields like queer theory and disability studies are regularly stretched beyond their previous utility. As Sandahl (2003) reminds readers, “identity-based theories that have grown out of other interdisciplinary fields, such as gender studies and critical race studies” (2003, p. 25). The growth of these theories continues as scholars are presented with new spaces of resistance. In this analysis of Godsey’s and Semenya’s quest to qualify for the Olympic Games, my use of the disabilities lens adopted elements of queer theory in order to disrupt normative conceptions of sexual binaries and the abilities attributed to men versus women. This analysis continues the trajectory of scholars like West (2010), McRuer and Mollow (2012), Sandahl (2003), and Warner (1999) interested in understanding how parallel identity struggles act as theoretical, political, and social movements.

Identity construction is often times enriched by the simultaneous co-mingling of multiple identities, called intersectionality. The temptation to separate a singular identity to explain hegemonic forces disregards the utility of intersecting identities in opposition to hegemony. First, normative constructions are strengthened by simplistic conceptions, like binaries. Thus, multiple intersecting identities are essential in highlighting the abstract nature of hegemonic constructions. Take, for example, Godsey’s discussion of identity, in which he articulates conflicts between his transgender identity and his identity

as a women's hammer thrower. By showing different identities, each can be a piece of the resistive qualities represented in Godsey's athletic body but also at odds with each other. Second, intersecting identities often times force articulations either by the individual or by social forces benefiting from the hegemonic power structures. Semenya's struggle to qualify as a woman in the eyes of the IOC is a perfect example. By publicizing attempts to standardize acceptance of normal female hormone levels in athletic bodies, the abstract nature of the categorization is highlighted. These articulations are far more susceptible to deconstruction because, once articulated, they are far less fluid conceptions.

That is not to say that these hegemonic constructions are suddenly defeated in the face of well deconstructed intersecting critical identities. Many times this deconstruction of hegemonic norms relies on individuals or groups to identify, essentially outing themselves, as members of the disenfranchised, neglected, or oppressed group. In what Sandahl (2003) calls *cripping*, or the personal identifying moment, the coming out, within disability, identifying as a person who feels the burdens of an ableist culture is essential in recognizing the personal effects of hegemonic constructions. But while personal narratives can provide personalized and relatable accounts, they are also at risk of being reconfigured, overshadowed, or deployed to tokenize or further marginalize populations. Thus, as these case studies show, theoretical *cripping*, or critiquing particular situations through a disability lens without the presence of an individual identifying as disabled, produces significant scholarly space for avenues of deconstruction.

This analysis highlights the usefulness of theoretically *cripping* contexts in which bodies act as spaces of resistance. For disability studies, and critical cultural work

utilizing a disabilities lens, this analysis supports the usefulness of multiple critical theoretical approaches in analysis. The analysis of the body as a space of resistance offers disability scholars opportunities to explore conceptions of identity, ability, and the relationship between social and medical hegemony within a multitude of contexts. This theoretical stretching is important to help multiple identity groups utilize parallel strategies in deconstructing and challenging social, political, and academic performance while opening space for new conceptualizations of hegemonic identities.

Athletics as culture, Athlete as Identity

One of the most interesting contexts for disabilities lens and artifacts is that of athletics, particularly as a critical hegemonic or disempowered identity. Each of these case studies highlighted athletics and the identity as athlete as central to the construction of ability. Yet athletics holds unique qualities that can significantly enrich critical analysis of bodies in resistance to norms. First, the identity of athlete should be understood as a critical identity, much like a race, gender, or able-bodiedness. The identity of athlete can be claimed and denied, and holds visible, physical and social cues as to the perceived accuracy of such identity claims. The ability to call oneself an athlete, much like the ability to assert one's whiteness, wealth, or heterosexuality, lays claim to significant hegemony. Particularly in cultures that hold athletics in high regard, the social, economic, and political power that accompanies the ability to identify as athlete is generated on pseudo scientific articulations of the abstract nature of skill, athletics, and bodily capabilities.

Like many other critical identities, the particular abstractions and benefits of claiming the identity of athlete is highly contextual. A horse racing jockey and a

defensive lineman in football are expected to have significantly different skill sets, shapes, and abilities. Similarly, both are rewarded differently based on the social standings and articulated worth. Thus, athletic culture involves individual identity and social acceptance and rewards which creates opportunities for rich critical cultural scholarship. And while many scholars have explored the intersections of critical identities involving, but not limited to, race, gender, sexuality in the context of sport, a critical disability studies lens offers a theoretical entry point that utilizes the critical identity of athlete as an important intersecting identity.

The critical identity of athlete differs significantly from other cultural identities because it is infused with a significant amount of ageism and social perceptions that involve the physical capabilities of aging bodies. As individuals attempt to identify and to be identified as athletes, for the purpose of personal gains and/or individual self-realization, they are forced to conceptualize this identity as one that changes as the body ages. This makes the identity of athlete a fluid one, and the shifts over time call for constant individual and social reconstruction. The disability lens, particularly within the deconstruction of athletic identities, offers an avenue to explore this process.

Recognizing “athlete” as a critical identity also has significant theoretical implications. By focusing on the relationship between an individual’s body, her/his construction and ability, in relation to hegemonic social forces surrounding particular identities, critical disability theory is not limited to those socially recognized as disabled. By essentially crippling athletic contexts, highlighting elements of ableism in much the same way that queering situations can illuminate heteronormative patterns, this theoretical approach reveals additional political, social, and individual contexts of intermingling

identities. Discussions of empowerment and disenfranchisement through individual bodies can be understood as a rich subculture whose norms and discourse should be accounted for in multi-layered critical analysis in the future.

Another important aspect of this analysis asks how direct competition, as opposed to athletic endeavors between only similarly categorized bodies, open spaces for resistive movements or reify the normative constructs through the scientification of results. These case studies focus on the individual narratives that shape the 2012 LSOG. The strict attention paid to these athlete's bodies create isolated instances of resistance, and allow, and I have demonstrated, entry points for theoretical discussions on disability, sexuality, and weight. And while the athletic endeavors of Godsey, Semenya, Pistorius, and other athletes remain a worthy focal point for scholarship, the space created through the competition should also be discussed on political level.

Individual Struggles and Social Protests

There are a number of factors that limit the successful political, cultural, and social protest embodied by the inclusion of these athletes. Focusing the deconstruction of normative capabilities and constructions of the body within the context of athletics makes the critique, on a social level, susceptible to the hegemonic structures of the activity. In other words, the athlete must not only possess a body that challenges normative constructions, but must also be capable of winning at the highest level. If the athlete is unsuccessful, normative social constructions can be re-scripted and reinforced through the enumerative qualities of sports cultures.

Second, relying on individual athletes to provide bodies as spaces of resistance isolates the athletes as outliers. While this may call attention to hegemonic normality, it

also creates a number of difficulties for political, social, and cultural activism. First, reliance on an individual may give way to tokenism, or other explanatory tactics, that remove the individual resistant body from a disenfranchised populations they are meant to represent and re-center hegemonic constructions as normal. Another risk of relying on individual athletes to challenge social, political, and cultural norms stems from and reliance on that individual's continued popularity and success. While I have already outlined the identity of athlete as a particularly fluid critical identity, that alters as individuals age, I must also consider that popular athletics overlaps in other political and social spaces. The case of Pistorius is an excellent example. An incredibly popular athlete through the conclusion of the 2012 LSOG, Pistorius signed multiple advertising contracts with companies like Nike and Oakley. That popularity, however, was extremely short-lived. Arrested in February, 2013, for allegedly murdering his longtime girlfriend, Pistorius' popularity, and his ability to challenge social and political notions of disability, disappeared.

If reliance on individuals to provide athletic bodies that challenge social and political norms creates a number of risks, scholars and activists should consider a few alternatives. The first of these alternatives involves a move away from individuals. A more effective means for athletes to challenge the social and political notions of disability through athletic bodies may come from groups and teams. Teams offer the opportunity for a multitude of bodies to contribute and compete while highlighting a reliance on individual skill sets, body constructions, and attitudes. Particularly in sports where diversity in capability and body construction is preferred, teams may provide space to challenge north of instructions on the political and social level. This diversity does not

have to be limited to participants on a single team. Groups of athletes who support political or social protests through their athletic competition and body constructions create diverse and widespread spaces of deconstruction. Such protests could already be brewing within future worldwide athletic competitions. The 2014 World Cup in Brazil, which faces widespread social protest, creates cultural conflicts for fans and players. Opportunities for the individual athletes to group social and political protests together create spaces in which their competitive bodies lend credence to their views.

Another alternative to relying on individuals as the flag bearers for social and political protest can be mediated constructions. The construction and depiction of media constructions representing well-thought-out, positive, non-normative bodies, particularly those within athletic endeavors, can act as political and social deconstructions. By using a media-constructed character, the benefits of a positive message can be far-reaching, long-lasting, without relying on an individual's success and popularity. In the past, representations of non-normative bodies have been few and mostly negative. However, following the lead of the narrative generated during the qualification, competition, and directly after the 2012 LSOG, more media constructions featuring athletic non-normative bodies are finding their way into prime time. For instance, a widely aired Guinness beer commercial, featured on popular programming like ESPN in the fall of 2013, featured an intimate look at athletes playing basketball in wheelchairs. Similarly, 2014 Super Bowl featured a commercial with Seahawks running back Derrick Coleman, who identifies as hearing impaired. The commercial featured a media recreation of Coleman's journey through football, from pee-wee through college and into the pros, as he describes the people who told him he would never make it. The commercial ends with a visual of

Coleman in the Super Bowl, and the line, “but I didn’t listen”. While this commercial, and others like it, begs close scholarly attention, they may represent a significantly powerful avenue for creating social and political protest by utilizing mediated competition between diverse athletic bodies.

Conclusion

Socially constructed ideals regarding gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability represent opportunities for individual and group identities to resist hegemonic notions on what is “normal”. The influx of primetime athletes with non-normative bodies will continue to produce artifacts and patterns of discourse to critically examine, and just as they physically compete against others, their bodies and representation compete against and within hegemonic constructs. As Schell and Rodriguez (2001) assert, the mainstream media will contribute to “dominant ideologies that depict sport as primarily a male and nondisabled domain” (p. 127). Even as athletes like Pistorius and Semenya made headlines during the 2012 LSOG, other stories of athletes with similar challenges prevail. Melissa Stockwell, who underwent an above the knee amputation following the explosion of a roadside bomb while serving in the U.S. army, set world records in the 100 m butterfly and 100 m freestyle during the 2008 Paralympic Games, and Jason Lester, who has a paralyzed right arm, was named the ESPY winner for “Best male Athlete with a Disability” for his successes in Ironman competition and ultra-distance races. As more stories are told, discourse on disability, particularly in the context of sport, can be grappled within both more empirical and cultural ways. Diverse and multi-methodological research in this area will only add to our understanding and knowledge in the area of media, disability, and sport.

Even with the diversification of the pool of athletes in places like the Olympics, dominant constructions, such as the medical model, will be difficult to change. Even as research measures, critiques, and deconstructs bodies that resist hegemonic norms, political and social forces will continue to constrain individuals whose bodies, be they judged as too large, too ambiguous, or too crippled, deviate from the norm. As West (2010) articulates, issues of identity are inherently woven into the fabric of rights and regulation. Opportunities abound across campuses and communities to participate in resistance to the normative blanket of embracing normalcy. Instead, I urge instead participation in crippling, queering, and opportunities of alliance that recognize and reduce ableist notions in social and political contexts. As hegemonic constructions disenfranchise individuals, a responsibility falls on individuals with privilege, who may not feel that same disenfranchisement, to embrace social, political, and scholarly opportunities to empower others.

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