

Qualitative paper

Effects of Participation in a Paralympic Military Sports Camp on Injured Service Members

Implications for Therapeutic Recreation

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Abstract

An increasing number of service members have sustained injuries during their service in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn resulting in varying disabilities. Many community-based adapted sports programs, including therapeutic recreation programs, provide recreation and sport opportunities for injured service members. However, there is paucity of literature documenting effects of community-based adaptive sport on injured service member participants. Previous literature on adapted recreation, sport, and physical activity programs have focused on civilian populations who have sustained traumatic injury and who are enrolled in rehabilitation programs. Using a phenomenological lens to guide the research, findings indicated themes that align with self-determination theory and social comparison theory. Implications for therapeutic recreation services including suggestions for development of sports camps for injured service members are provided.

Keywords: *Injured service members, recreation, sport, self-determination, social comparison*

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A lot of people who come and talk to us who think that they know just because maybe they have studied it or they have read it ... (but) until you can hear it from someone who has actually gone through it, it is an entirely different perspective when they actually know what is going on. —Eric¹

United States military personnel in Operation Iraqi Freedom (March 19, 2003 to August 31, 2010), Operation Enduring Freedom (beginning October 7, 2001), and Operation New Dawn (beginning September 1, 2010) have incurred over 44,000 injuries since the respective beginnings of the military operations (Department of Defense, 2011). Approximately 8,000 of these personnel will not return to duty due to severity of injuries. Injuries include spinal cord injury, sensory impairments, amputation of limbs, and other physical disabilities. Many service members are young, physically fit, athletic, and competitive.

Organizations (e.g., non-profit, community-based, rehabilitation organizations, governmental agencies, warrior transition units (WTU), and veterans administration hospitals) provide recreational and competitive physical activities for service members with physical disabilities and many individuals are participating due to robust recruitment as well as their interest in physical activity. In spite of these opportunities and increasing number of participants, there is a paucity of evidence-based research to document effects of recreation, sport and physical activity (RS) on service members with physical disabilities.

Voluminous data support findings associated with beneficial physiological and psychological changes for

individuals without disabilities who participate in RS (Berkey, Rockett, Gillman, & Colditz, 2003; Harrell et al., 2003; HP2010; McMurray, et al., 2002; Moore et al., 2003; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, & Rex, 2003; Raudsepp, Lublick, & Hannus, 2002). However, for individuals with physical disabilities, effects of participation in RS are not well understood and merit further study; especially for service members who have recently completed rehabilitation programs, who are in transition between rehabilitation and community living, and those who live in community settings.

Findings from several studies suggest that adults with physical disabilities who participate in sports and exercise programs can increase and maintain their physical performance including (a) muscle strength, (b) aerobic fitness, (c) physical function, (d) increased HDL-C, (e) decreased BMI, and (f) preservation of transfer independence (Cress et al., 1999; Dallmeijer & van der Woude, 2001; Manns & Chadd, 1999; Manns, McCubbin, & Williams, 2005; Nyland et al., 2000; Schmid et al., 1998). Physical activity is associated with positive changes in mood and quality of life. People with disabilities have reported that physical activity promotes a sense of empowerment, contributes to a sense of freedom, alters perceptions of being “disabled,” as well as possesses

¹ All participants in this study were given pseudonyms.

mediating effects on disability identity (Axelson, 1996; Blinde & McCallister, 1999; Goodwin, Thurmeier, & Gustafson, 2004; Tasiemski, Kennedy, Gardner, & Blaikley, 2004).

This study sought to examine these concepts through the voices of injured service members (ages 20 to 40) who participated in a three-day U.S. Paralympic Military Sport Camp (USPMSC) to increase understanding about community-based sport, recreation and physical activity for service members with physical disabilities.

Theoretical Foundation

Sports offer individuals the occasion to play, to express intrinsic motivation, as well as provide potential space to renew self-esteem that may be lost in other areas of life (e.g., work). To support this, Deci and Ryan (1985) state, "Sports provide an excellent opportunity to be self-determining, get competence feedback, and to have social involvements" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 313-314).

Self-determination theory.

Deci and Ryan (1985) assert "self-determination refers to the experience of freedom in initiating one's behavior" (p. 31). Components that contribute to the experience of self-determination are needs for competence (Harter, 1978; White, 1963), relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Reis, 1994) and autonomy (deCharms, 1968; Deci, 1975).

Self-determination is a central premise of this study; however, it is not within the scope of this study to review all extant literature related to self-determination theory. Although self-determination theory has not been exhaustively examined within paradigms of sports, sport experience,

and physical activity, especially as related to disability sports, there are elements of self-determination theory (e.g., motivation, locus of causality, autonomy, support systems, interpersonal relations, goal orientations, feedback, self-management, identity) that have been examined and are relevant within the context of this study (Brunet & Sabiston, 2011; Lewis & Sutton, 2011; McLachlan & Hagger, 2011; Mouratidis, Lens, & Vansteenkiste, 2010; Ng, Lonsdale, & Hodge, 2011; Silva, et al., 2010; Smith, Ntoumanis, Duda, & Vansteenkiste, 2011; Tessier, Sarrazin, & Ntoumanis, 2010).

Experience of sports. Deci and Ryan (1985) described inner experiences of athletes within the context of the "experience of sports" as contrasted with "sports as an activity." They identified three inner states, or regulatory processes, associated potentially with participation in sports. The processes for the experience of sports indicated that they are (a) intrinsically motivated; (b) internally informational; and (c) internally controlling. Characteristics of intrinsic motivation include spontaneity, flexibility, direct experience of a participant's engagement with the environment, and an absence of self-consciousness. Features of internally informational processes involve self-determination through self-consciousness and/or self-focus. Internally controlling processes involve intrapersonal pressure to reach a designated outcome. Comparing experience of sports described by Deci and Ryan (1985) with the lived experiences of our participants provided an opportunity to explore aspects of the USPMSC that potentially activated the regulatory processes

associated with the experience of self-determination.

Phenomenology. Using a framework guided by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and phenomenology (Husserl, 1970), the researchers presented participant stories through their voices. Phenomenology examines the study of an experience from the viewpoint of the individual and as a research design seeks to describe rather than explicate (Husserl, 1970; Lester, 1999). The perspective of the researcher is one without bias or presumptions, and use of phenomenological research methods provides a context for understanding subjective experiences of research participants. Medved and Brockmeier (2004) suggested in the telling of self-stories “people give meaning to their experiences within the flow and continuously changing contexts of life” (p. 747).

Literature Review

There is limited qualitative research related to the lived experiences of physically active, competitive individuals who have sustained physically disabling injuries (e.g., injured service members). Sparkes and Smith (2005) examined the life stories of 14 men who sustained spinal cord injuries and found three primary narratives and various metaphors among their life stories. Narratives included (a) “Yesterday I was able bodied, today I’m disabled, but tomorrow I’ll be able bodied again” (p. 82) with the idea that the men would continue their fight to become “cured” from the spinal cord injury and maintain a concrete hope they would walk again; (b) prior to their accidents,

participants were happy and life was good and following their accidents, life was shattered, chaotic, and static; and (c) living in quest of meaning. Other metaphors included in the theme of “living in quest” were of being on a new journey, of being reborn, and making advancements in their lives. Participants’ stories described a specific time during their lives; however, the study did not address how participants re-entered their worlds through various activities or what means they used to adjust to their new bodies and ways of perceiving the world.

In a study that specifically addressed the role of social support during different phases of life, Rees, Smith, and Sparkes (2003) revealed core themes specifically related to social support apparent in the life stories of six men who experienced spinal cord injury. The following four types of supports were identified (a) emotional; (b) esteem; (c) informational; and (d) tangible. Each type of support was found to have various functions over the course of disability. For these men, social support was necessary and especially crucial when considering quality of life.

Sporner and colleagues (2009) examined characteristics of 132 individuals who participated in a competitive wheelchair sports event and winter sports clinic. Findings for community participation, quality of life and self-esteem indicated that participants had higher scores related to mobility, social integration, quality of life, and self-esteem. Participants had lower scores for physical independence and occupation than the comparison group. In a similar study, Cordova and colleagues (1998) examined effects of participation in a sports clinic on self-

concept and leisure satisfaction of 44 adult service members with disabilities. Findings indicated overall increases in self-concept, with significant change in the self-satisfaction component of self-concept.

In a qualitative study that incorporated in-depth, semi-structured interviews to understand the lived experiences of the participants and the significance of participating in sport at a disability sport camp, Ashton-Shaeffer, Gibson, Autry, and Hanson (2001) examined the meaning of sport to 15 adults with physical disabilities following their participation in camp. A grounded theory approach with constant comparison analysis revealed themes that incorporated Foucault's concepts of surveillance and resistance (Foucault, 1977; 1979; 1980) within a poststructural feminist framework. Interviews with participants were conducted six months following the camp to allow for recall and reflection. Findings supported the transformative and liberalizing power of sport. Overall, the study shed light on the meaning of sports for people with disabilities, especially the "significance of sport within a social context" (Andrews, 1993, p. 149).

Summary. Overall findings from limited existing literature associated with research related to the lived experiences of physically active, competitive individuals who sustain physically disabling injuries indicated that self-determination theory is one potential conceptual framework within which to place the current study. In addition, the literature supported using a phenomenological lens to examine the lived experiences of individuals with physical disabilities who participated in disability sport

camp. Furthermore, there is related potential for positive outcomes from injured service members' participation in disability sport camps. This study examined these concepts through the perspectives of injured service members who participated in a military sports camp sponsored by the U.S. Paralympics division of the U.S. Olympic Committee to increase understanding about community-based sport, recreation and physical activity.

Method

This study incorporated qualitative design consisting of in-depth interviews with injured service members who are currently or have in the past participated in recreation, sport and physical activity (RS) during and after a U.S. Paralympic Military Sport Camp (USPMSC) Sports that were offered at the camp include cycling, strength and conditioning, archery, volleyball, swimming, track and field, and rowing.

Setting

Data were collected at a USPMSC that occurred in the western region of the United States. The three-day camp offered approximately 25 Paralympic sporting events. Participants in the camp were approximately 50 injured service members. Approximately 35 military and nonmilitary Paralympians and Paralympic coaches assisted with leading events.

Participants

Of the 50 injured service members who participated in the camp, 10 volunteered for the interview. Their ages, gender, type of injuries, time elapsed since injuries, and experiences

participating in RS following their injuries are presented in Table 1. Participant selection was based on criterion sampling procedures. The criteria for this study required that participants (a) have a physical disability; (b) are between the age of 18 and 55; and (c) are members of the armed services. One researcher

conducted interviews by inviting participants to be interviewed for the study at their convenience during the camp. All 50 camp participants met the criteria; however, only 10 elected to participate in the interview. Participant injuries were self-reported; therefore, participants may have had additional injuries unknown to the researchers.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Characteristics

Participant Pseudonym	Age Category/gender	Injury	Time since Injury	Time Involved in Recreation or Sport since Injury
Sam	30-40; male	Bilateral BKA; Burns on face and arms	More than one year	3 weeks
John	20-30; male	TBI, seizure, bulging L4-L5 discs with nerve damage	6 months	Second involvement in sports
Omar	20-30; male	Gun shot wound	15 months	First involvement in sports
Bruce	20-30; male	Left AKA	13 months	Unknown
Steve	20-30; male	T10 complete SCI	20 months	Unknown
Chris	20-30; male	Left AKA	More than three years	Four months
Luke	20-30; male	Bilateral AKA	One year	11 months
Sandra	20-30; female	Bilateral amputation BKA	Three months	Three days
Eric	20-30; male	Left BKA	14 months	One year
Adam	20-30; male	TBI, spinal injury	4 1/2 years	One year

Note. BKA = below knee amputation; AKA = above knee amputation; TBI = traumatic brain injury; SCI = spinal cord injury

Design

A phenomenological, qualitative research design was used. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants. Researchers documented rich, descriptive data related to effects of participation in the USPMSC.

Interviews. Following approval by a university IRB and representatives of the U.S. Paralympic committee, interviews were conducted with 10

participants who participated in events at the USPMSC. Participants reflected on their experiences at the USPMSC as well as their recent RS participation. Interview questions were used to collect data to facilitate researchers' understanding of the lived experiences of service members during their RS participation at the USPMSC and/or in other contexts (See Table 2 for interview questions).

Table 2

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Questions

How long have you been involved in sports and recreation since your injury?

How has your involvement in sport and recreation affected your life since your injury?

How did you find out about the camp, sport, and recreation or how did you get involved?

What aspects of your life are better or worse since you have been participating in sport and recreation?

What sports and recreation have you played before or what is your previous involvement?

How has participation in sport and recreation influenced relationships in your life?

How has participation influenced your motivation for other things?

What is the most valuable aspect regarding your participation in sport and recreation since your injury?

What are some things that help you participate in sport and recreation (e.g., accessibility, transportation, equipment, attitudes/knowledge of staff)?

What could be improved at the camp?

If you could speak with newly injured service members who are just entering rehabilitation, what would you tell them about participation in sports and recreation?

Is there anything else you would like to add or anything you think it is important for us to know about changes in your life since your injury?

Analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed into electronic text files. Using peer review and examination (Merriam, 2009), three researchers read transcripts and compared them to audio files to correct mistakes in transcription and clarify unintelligible words and phrases. Following completion of transcription review, researchers independently read interviews to gain a better understanding of the data and identify common responses and themes across participants. Researchers independently developed themes reflecting their understanding of the data. Researchers then compared emergent themes with one another. After common themes were identified and agreed upon, themes were again compared among researchers and linked with theories that potentially provided insight into the emergent themes.

Results

Themes emerged through data analysis related to RS as well as participation in the USPMSC. Themes included (a) perceptions of disability and normalization; (b) finding motivation (through participation and through social comparison); (c) experiencing a sense of relatedness and social connection; (d) establishing a connection with previous interests (e) improved health, fitness, and general well-being; (f) improved sense of competence; and (g) increased autonomy. In addition, participants provided suggestions for ways to develop similar RS camps.

Perceptions of Disability and Normalization

The primary emergent theme describing lived experiences of participants was that of service members' change in perception of themselves since their injury. Participants reported that involvement in RS facilitated their ability to see beyond their physical injuries. Participants reported improvements in their self-acceptance and an expansion of what they value in their lives:

It has actually made me a better person. It has opened my mind, you know, I can look above my injuries. I'll never get over what I have, but, it makes me not think about my injuries as much when I'm out here doing these things. I think it is mostly a change in myself. It is the way I perceive myself. I'm not negative about myself anymore, so I don't have to be negative towards everyone around me, which just makes things so much easier. —Adam

Well there definitely are some dramatic changes, but no, I'm still the same person just I get around a little differently. That is the only difference I can really think of. —Luke

Sources of Motivation

The second most common theme describing the service members' lived experiences was that participation in RS led to increased motivation and a sustained competitive drive. Data indicated dual conduits to their experiences of motivation: (a) motivation through participation in RS; and (b) motivation through

comparison of themselves to other injured service members with differing skills and abilities. Although involvement in RS seemed to motivate further engagement in RS, participant statements revealed that motivation also reached beyond participation only.

Motivation through participation.

I was really self-motivated from the beginning so it was not like once I took sports it just shot it back up. It [participation in the camp] gives me something to shoot for now and maybe make the team for the 2012 games. —Eric

Motivation is better knowing you can still strive to be perfect at something ... it does not matter what your condition is, there is a way that you can still carry on with yourself in that sport. Now I see my potential in so many other things that I never thought that I would ever have the chance to even do. Because of these sports, it is just very motivating, if nobody is motivated out of it then they need to be kicked in the butt ... you need to wake the hell up, you know, this is here for you, nobody else but for you. —Sam

Motivation through social comparison.

I'm not that motivated when I'm at home. When I'm around other people that have worse injuries than I have, you know, there's nothing but motivation. —John

Just seeing the other individuals out here that are worse off than I am, seeing that they are happy doing what they're doing, I should be happy with what I have and that I can still be out there and do the things I can. —Adam

In contrast to using RS as a motivator, Chris reported that RS was an end unto itself rather than a means to an end.

My kids, I wanted to be able to run around the yard with the kids and ... play tag with them if they wanted to But it was my kids and my family that really made me want to change my lifestyle.

Relatedness and Social Connections

Participants described how their lived experiences were related to social connections with other injured service members as well as with their families and how these relationships were strengthened as a result of their participation in RS after their injury.

My relationship with my wife and my kids has been outstanding ever since I started doing something productive with myself. I wake up in the morning feeling a hundred times better ... it has brought my family so much closer than we were. —Adam

It's also a positive effect on my personal relationships. My relationship has gotten better with my wife because

I'm not, like, "Help me, I can't do anything," you know so, there's a positive change for all relationships. —Chris

Participants described connections they had with one another, especially feelings of having shared some of the same experiences (e.g., serving in the military, becoming injured, progressing through rehabilitation). They employed these connections as a means to motivate each other to continue being active after injury.

Making friends was definitely one thing ... it's people that you would like to keep in touch with, see how they are progressing and you know, there are times that a lot of us are gonna be down or depressed. Everybody goes through it. But you keep in touch with them and help push them along and ... give them motivation. It means a lot coming from people who are just like them than someone who does not understand. So this is one great organization, just to get all of us to become friends like a big family. And everyone feels more comfortable with each other 'cause we have all been there in the same situations. —Sam

Connection with Previous Interests

Participants reported that involvement in RS facilitated their return to participation in pre-morbid interests or introduced them to new pursuits. In some cases, competitiveness of adapted sports helped with motivation to participate in the sport even when the

sport had been adapted to compensate for their impairment.

Well I've always been athletic; growing up, I was always outside playing, but I never knew I could have the chance of being at the paralympics camp going on. I never thought in my life that I would ever have a chance to go to an Olympic competition. It's opened my eyes to a whole new world that nobody knows unless you are in that situation You know, it's a great thing, it puts you out there in the world again, it puts you out there to do sports that you loved to do when you were so called "normal," you know, when you had legs or when you had arms or whatever. You can still do these things. You know there is no reason to give up just because you got injured. —Sam

So you just want to work toward doing as much as you can it's like, "So what, it has to be adaptive?" It's not a big deal, you're still doing it. Skiing is skiing, snowboarding is snowboarding, surfing is surfing. Whatever, if it's adaptive or not, it's all the same. —Chris

Health, Fitness, and General Well-being

In addition to reported psychological and social benefits, participants conveyed improvements that participation had on their physical and emotional health, physical fitness, and effects on general well-being. Some reported the direct physiological benefits of their participation in RS

(e.g., improved cardiorespiratory fitness). In addition, participation in RS promoted other healthy behaviors (e.g., smoking cessation, weight loss, exercising for fitness).

Just in the last few months, it's been a very positive change. Becoming healthy is probably the most important thing ... quitting smoking, which I did in July and just getting the cardio fitness back up. Getting my heart and lungs and everything back to where they need to be so that I don't have to leave my kids stuck young. —Chris

It is a great way to exercise, of course, sports is. Some good can come out of it or ends up to be a good way to stay in shape. —Sandra

Most valuable ... is just bettering myself, attitude, and physical wise in recreation. —Adam

Competence

Participant involvement in RS had an effect on sense of competence and skill building. For some, RS was an avenue to build skills while others used it as a way to test their skills.

It does not matter what your disability is, there is always a way that you can improve and push yourself Hopefully I can see how good I am at rowing cause that is another event that I would like to pursue. —Sam

The fact that we can still do it. The fact that we are still able to come out and compete. —Luke

Just knowing that I am able to do the same things that I use to do before, it's always a good thing, A good feeling. Well for me ... I guess it is the whole, just knowing that I can. —Eric

We find something, we try it, we find out we can do it and then we like it You get more active and you want to do what you can do. —Chris

Autonomy

Expressions of autonomy were not as prevalent as other themes in the interviews. This topic may have been limited due to the nature of the interview questions. However, Chris described importance of the freedom of choice and the effect increased choice had on his motivation.

I ran for PT (physical training) tests because I had to. But now that I can't, I really want to It's something you want to do as opposed to something that you have to do.

Discussion

Findings from this study broaden current understanding of injured service members' experiences at USPMSC and through RS. Findings suggested that participants obtained benefits from their experiences at the USPMSC. Prevalent outcomes included (a) positive change in perception of their disability (i.e., focus on ability and maximizing potential); (b) increased motivation to participate in RS; (c) increased social support; (d) increased skills and knowledge necessary to participate in future RS pursuits; (e)

improved health and general well-being; (f) increased competence; and (g) improved autonomy.

Self-Determination Theory and Experience of Sports Participation

Concepts of self-determination theory were present in the findings (i.e., relatedness, competence, autonomy). Participants experienced relatedness with other participants in two ways: (a) shared experiences of traumatic injury, and (b) shared experiences through the military. In addition, family relationships improved. Competence and autonomy were also evident but there was less evidence in the data related to autonomy. There are two potential explanations of the limited evidence of autonomy. Many of the service members were strongly encouraged, if not required, by their commanding officers to attend the camp. Second, many service members had limited opportunities for participation in adaptive sports prior to the camp. Therefore, the service members may have had less knowledge of the sports available to them compared to more experienced participants thus limiting their development of autonomy. Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determined experience of sport were present in that participants desired to better their skills and try new RS activities because they enjoyed the activities and wanted to be able to continue RS after the camp (i.e., intrinsic motivation). While some participants were motivated by their peers and families and friends, participants were mostly motivated by their own desires to improve skills, abilities, and knowledge of RS. Participants noted difficulty and challenges associated with participating in adapted forms

of RS, but they remained motivated to continue their efforts in RS at the camp (i.e., internally informational). Internal pressure to be competitive in the events was also evident. The participants were able to compare their skills to peers skills and appropriately adjust their motivation to remain competitive in the events (i.e., internally controlling).

Social Comparison Theory

One unexpected finding was a theoretical link with social comparison theory revealed during data analysis. Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) provided additional insight into emergent themes. Social comparison theory posits that one evaluates his or her own abilities or opinions through comparison of other people's abilities or opinions. The service members often spoke of comparing themselves to other injured service members who had more severe injuries than themselves. Comparing these differences in abilities seemed to motivate them to continue their participation in RS at both the USPMSC and beyond the camp. Within these two contexts, participants evaluated their abilities as more competent than their counterparts who were more impaired by their injuries. Therefore, participants felt fortunate to be able to participate in the USPMSC and other forms of RS which lead to increased motivation to continue to be involved in RS. In addition, participants compared themselves to similarly-abled service members which elicited a "competition-like atmosphere" to the activities. The notion of skill attainment and competition between service members, therefore, created a theoretical connection between social comparison theory and self-determination theory.

Implications for Practice

Discovery of Sport and Recreation after Injury

Data indicated participants discovered the USPMSC and RS through rehabilitation programs within VA and WTU. Recreation Therapists (RTs) who work with injured service members are encouraged to provide RS programs and/or seek out opportunities for their participants to become involved in community-based RS camps and clinics.

Positive Aspects of Camp

Participants indicated that staff who facilitated aspects of the camp had a notable impact on their experiences. Participants identified staff characteristics that facilitated positive experiences such as those who: (a) had specific and expert knowledge of RS activities; (b) shared participants' competitive drive; (c) had positive attitudes towards participants; (d) pushed participants to overcome challenges and encouraged success; and (e) were injured service members or Paralympians who shared some of their experiences.

During interviews, participants shared how they became aware of a sport or activity that they previously were not aware of or did not think they had the ability in which to participate. However, after being introduced to activity or modifications to an activity, it became an activity they wished to pursue. While an established program may have a consistent menu of activities, it may be helpful to consider offering weekend clinics or one-day introductory events that offer an array of sports and activities outside of those traditionally offered through the

program with the purpose of exposing participants to new or modified opportunities.

Limitations and Suggestions for Research

The study findings are limited to injured service members who attended a USPMSC in the western region of the US and findings cannot be generalized across all injured service members who have participated in RS and related camps. Understanding social comparison theory in additional contexts within rehabilitation research also warrants further investigation. Future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social comparison plays a role in motivating participants during rehabilitation as well as leading an active lifestyle after rehabilitation. In addition, future research could better address the relationship between autonomy as a motivating factor behind participation in RS camps.

Conclusions

It was clear that participation in the USPMSC and RS was sparked following discharge from inpatient rehabilitation programs to VA and WTU programs. Service members were introduced to adaptive RS and Paralympic camps through their therapists (including RT), doctors, and rehabilitation officers. This is an encouraging finding that provides evidence that the efforts of rehabilitation professionals within VA and WTU programs have been effective in the transition between rehabilitation and continuing an active lifestyle after rehabilitation. The lived experiences reported by participants supported

that involvement in RS facilitated positive changes related to their perception of their disability, overall improved motivation, and an increase in experiences of self-determination.

Therefore, involvement in USPMSC and similar RS programs can potentially promote improved quality of life for injured service members and their families.

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