1B: Andrea Bundon, The University of British Columbia
“Declassified: Athletes’ Stories About Disability Identities and the Paralympic Classification System”

The International Paralympic Committee defines ‘classification’ as the system used to determine an athlete’s eligibility to compete in a para-sport and that also groups athletes for competition. The IPC and other para-sport stakeholders have spent considerable resources and energies developing a classification system intended to “minimise the impact of impairments on sport performance and to ensure the success of an athlete is determined by skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus.” However, little attention has been paid to the psycho-social effects that classification may have on individual athletes and specifically the potential consequences of labelling an athlete ‘unclassifiable’ or ‘declassified.’ In this paper, I draw on interviews with elite athletes to examine the role that being classified/declassified had in the formulation of their identities as athletes and as disabled people. In these accounts, the athletes tell stories of how, through their participation in para-sport and the process of being classified, they came to adopt various identities and how these identities were subsequently challenged and disrupted when they were declassified. I further discuss how the Paralympic Movement’s refusal to engage with the politics of disability or disabled identities has left sports organizations, athlete service providers and the athletes themselves ill equipped to cope with the issue of declassification.

1B: Yu-Hsien Tseng, Athletic Department, National Taiwan University
“Examining the Media Coverage of Female Paralympic Athletes in Taiwan’s Major Newspapers”

While there was increasing research on sport, media and disability in western countries, sport media and disability was rarely mentioned in Taiwan. The history of Taiwanese disabled athletes who participated in the Paralympics dated to 1996 when they received glory for winning medals; however, little attention was paid to them, similar to the situation of female athletes in Taiwan. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the media representation of female Paralympic athletes, and to explore the gendered and disabled discourse in the content of Taiwan’s four major newspapers. This study employed discourse analysis of the newspaper coverage of the 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012 Paralympic Games. It was found that male athletes received more coverage than female athletes; however, with the higher athletic performance accomplished and more medals won by female paralympians, the coverage increased. Also, the media tended to represent “supercrip” images, and emphasized emotion and failure as the strategy to construct the stereotype of being a disabled feminine athlete.

1B: Brynn Adamson, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
“Dynamic Roles of Physical Activity for Individuals with Multiple Sclerosis”

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic disease resulting in a wide range of impairments and disabilities. These impairments and disabilities fluctuate in the case of relapsing-remitting MS. Relapses are periods of increased impairment and disability. Physical activity (PA) is an important component of the management of MS symptoms, as well as an important daily concern of individuals with MS. We sought to understand the experiences of individuals with MS who had a recent relapse related to engagement in exercise and PA, as these are recommended to improve symptoms and prevent increased disability. Qualitative interviews with 15 individuals with MS revealed that exercise and PA occupy several roles related to MS relapses. These include: prevention of relapses/new symptoms, cause of relapses, remission preventer, remission promoter, mode of physical empowerment, source of fear (e.g. I may fall if I try to be too active), an activity limited/impacted by the relapse, and a benchmark for a return to normalcy. The roles that exercise/PA take inform the negotiation of disability identity for individuals with MS. Because of this,
exercise/PA should be promoted carefully in this population as they occupy many important and sometimes conflicting roles in the life of the individual with MS.

1B: Natalie Campbell, St Mary’s University, London
“The Practicalities and Problems of ‘Doing’ the Sociology of Sport: A Case Study of Adaptive Crossfit in the UK”

In fitting with the conference theme of public engagement, this session will look to present the journey of creating, developing and implementing a community project for people with physical disabilities in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, London. The notion of Adapted Crossfit is well known in the USA, with a number of boxes, gyms and competitions hosting adaptive classes and opportunities for inclusion. However, this alternative consideration of disability strength training is yet to be successfully developed in the UK. At the time of the conference, the project will have been active for 3 months (with the launch coinciding with the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games in September) and will have been developed through a coach education workshop, participation opportunities, media attention and class launches – and who knows what developments will have been made! During this session I will take the audience through the experienced resistance, practicalities and success of setting up a community outreach project in my local area, highlighting that ‘doing’ publicly engaged sociology of sport is not always the idealised and welcoming practice we would hope.