Social construction of children with ASD and sport: A grounded theory approach

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In Canada, autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is one of the most common developmental disabilities in children (Autism Ontario, 2018). About 1 in 66 Canadian children and youth (ages 5-17) are diagnosed with ASD (Government of Canada, 2018). Compared to ‘typically developed’ peers, children with ASD are more overweight and obese (Hill, Zuckerman, & Fombonne, 2015), more sedentary (Aytur et al., 2018), and more likely to suffer comorbidities, such as sleep disorders (Chen, 2015), ADHD (Leitner, 2014), and anxiety and depression (Strang et al., 2012). Children with ASD also experience lower participation rates in sports compared to ‘typically developed’ peers. While ASD may create specific challenges with regards to sports participation, sport participation could open up new possibilities for children diagnosed on the spectrum. However, very little is known about children with ASD and sport. Beyond the known benefits of sport, why sport may not be applicable for children with ASD, or the specific challenges to sport for children with ASD, warrants further study. Furthermore, it is important to be mindful of the potential negative impacts of sport for children with ASD. Thus, this proposed study intends to explore how the social construction(s) of sport and of children with ASD impacts sports participation and opportunities, using grounded theory. This presentation identifies several gaps in the literature, introduces social constructivism as a theoretical framework, and discusses the study methodology including strategies for recruitment, participants, and data collection and analysis.