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RADICAL SOCIALIZATION? ANALYSIS OF THE SECONDARY SOCIALIZATION PROCESS IN THE TABLE TENNIS ENVIRONMENT

Abstract. The article is devoted to the analysis of the secondary socialization process in the table tennis environment. Sports communities represent a specific case study in this context because the secondary socialization processes occurring in them seem more radical. The sports environment is characterized by highly specific features and values conveyed, and interest in this phenomenon may be heightened because sports are a relatively less studied area in terms of their socialization impact on individuals. The main goal of the text is to analyse the specificity of the table tennis environment as a secondary socialization environment. More specific goals include issues related to the specific bonds and relationships formed in such an environment, the specific communication system (slang and characteristic meanings), and the impact of the sports environment on the relations of table tennis players with the world outside of sports. The qualitative analysis allowed for discovering unique patterns that characterize the socialization process in the sports environment. Among these patterns is the blurring of boundaries between values acquired in the sports environment and the external world, as the respondents transferred sports principles to everyday life practices. The totality of socialization in the sports environment also influences the formation of a specific “socialization bubble” and problems in establishing relationships with people not belonging to the sports world: the sports environment became, for many respondents, a reality in itself, generating bonds, rules, and communication patterns for its participants.

Keywords: secondary socialization, the social dimension of sports, values in sports, table tennis players, qualitative study.

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SOCJALIZACJA RADYKALNA? ANALIZA PROCESU SOCJALIZACJI WTÓRNEJ W ŚRODOWISKU TENISA STOŁOWEGO

Abstrakt. Artykuł został poświęcony analizie procesu socjalizacji wtórnej w środowisku tenisa stołowego. Sportowe zbiorowości stanowią specyficzne studium przypadku w tym kontekście, bowiem procesy socjalizacji wtórnej zachodzące w nich zdają się mieć charakter bardziej radykalny. Środowisko sportowe charakteryzuje się wysoce specyficznymi cechami oraz przekazywanymi wartościami, a zainteresowanie tym fenomenem może potęgować fakt, iż sport jest obszarem relatywnie słabiej przebadanym pod kątem socjalizacyjnego wpływu na jednostkę. Głównym celem tekstu jest zatem analiza specyfiki środowiska tenisa stołowego jako środowiska socjalizacji wtórnej. Celami bardziej szczegółowymi są kwestie dotyczące specyficznych więzi i relacji wytwarzających się w takim środowisku, specyficznego systemu komunikacyjnego (slangu i charakterystycznych znaczeń) oraz wpływu środowiska sportowego na relacje tenisistów ze światem poza sportowym. Przeprowadzona analiza jakościowa pozwoliła odkryć wyjątkowe wzory, które cechują proces socjalizacji w środowisku sportowym. Wśród tych wzorów należy wskazać zamazywanie się granic między wartościami nabytymi w środowisku sportowym a światem zewnętrznym, badani przenosili bowiem pryncypia sportowe do praktyk życia codziennego. Totalność socjalizacji w środowisku sportowym wpływa także na wytwarzanie się specyficznej „bańki” socjalizacyjnej, oraz problemy w nawiązywaniu relacji z osobami nie należącymi do świata sportu: środowisko sportowe stawało się dla wielu badanych rzeczywistością samą w sobie, generującą więzi, zasady i wzorce komunikacyjne jego uczestników.

Słowa kluczowe: socjalizacja wtórna, społeczny wymiar sportu, wartości w sporcie, tenisiści stołowi, badanie jakościowe.

1. Introduction

The process of socializing an individual, associated with the concept of socialization, is a fundamental element of every person's life in society. Learned values shape us as socially active individuals and prepare us to cope appropriately in later stages by developing in us the ability of human agency. At its core, the socialization process is a complex process of becoming, by a human being, a social being, a member of a given society functioning in a given cultural environment. The socialization process can lead to understanding and defining who we are and help us define the surrounding environment – which is responsible for shaping our social identity, among other things, by defining our roles, obligations towards the social environment, shaping meanings and communication systems through which we interpret social interactions. The understanding of the world by people and their reflexivity about the processes occurring in it have their source in how, in what environment, and by which social actors certain content was instilled in us. Symbolic interactionism, a rigorous theoretical framework, inspires deeper analysis of topics related to socialization. This theory provides a significant understanding of what underlies socialization processes and finds mechanisms responsible for them. According to this concept, the formation of personality, as well as the entire

area associated with the socialization process, is the result of continuous interaction between the individual and society, during which components that make disposition and identity traits are acquired. Its premises also state that the social environment in which an individual moves consists of symbols that are widespread in a given area, exerting a specific influence on the group.

It is worth noting that the socialization process is thoroughly and exhaustively described in the works of sociologists, both in the context of the first stages of socialization when primary socialization plays a decisive role, and at the level of subsequent stages of social functioning when secondary socialization into specific social roles comes into play (Berger, Luckmann 2010). Secondary socialization concerns broader social processes not limited to the immediate family, peer group, or neighborhood circle; it concerns social roles that increase during the life of an individual. The socialization process is difficult to consider complete because individuals acquire new social competencies and learn the responsibilities associated with newly acquired social roles. One such role is the role of an athlete, which can significantly determine or even monopolize identity. It is difficult to unequivocally set a boundary between primary and secondary socialization in the case of the role of an athlete because becoming an athlete sometimes begins very early, e.g., when a small child learns in a sports school. The sports environment can, therefore, be a space for acquiring certain “self-evident” group norms from an early age (Tillman 2005), which determine the interactions of an individual with both other athletes and the outside world. The purpose of our text is to look at how some aspects of socialization in the environment of athletes appear, using the example of table tennis players. More specific goals are issues related to the specific bonds and relationships formed in such an environment, the specific communication system (slang and characteristic meanings), and the impact of the sports environment on the relationships of table tennis players with the world outside of sports.

2. Dimensions of socialization in the environment of athletes

Socialization to sports and within sports is an important topic when it comes to studying the behaviours, attitudes, and identities of people practicing sports. The literature on the subject is quite extensive and concerns various aspects. In the classic work, William H. Sewell (1963) distinguished socialization to sports, socialization within sports, and the process of ending a sports career – the process of desocialization. The desocialization process is also currently described in research using terms such as “sport transition” or “sport retirement” (Válková 2017). As one might guess, the topic of socialization in sports primarily concerns how children and adolescents are socialized into sports (also in the context of gender or race, see Green et al. 2022). Existing research also shows how practicing sports contributes to shaping identity (Rymarczyk, Lenartowicz 2017), which is one of the key subjects of research in sociology.

The topic of socialization within sports seems to be somewhat less popular in the literature – hence our article fills the existing gap (especially since it concerns a rather niche sport about which there are relatively few studies. Exceptions on Polish ground (Lenartowicz, Ciok 2020; Ciok, Lenartowicz 2020). Socialization within sports can, however, be considered on the basis of micro-processes such as the internalization of risk culture in sports (Miller et al. 2022), confrontation with the gendered character of sports (Jakubowska 2014), acquiring competencies related to specific organizational cultures in sports (Benson et al. 2016), as well as issues related to functioning in team games (Leo et al. 2020).

Practicing sports can cause the monopolization of an individual's life in relation to other social roles, especially when it has a methodical nature based on the training program of a given discipline. Then, the role of an athlete can be “total” even in relation to such roles as the role of a student. Such a multidimensional socialization influence means that in the process of socialization of an athlete, various categories such as psychological-emotional traits, social norms, and ethical values come to the fore. In the first case, we are talking about highly engaging cognitive processes such as perception of the world, attitudes, motivations, emotional feelings, or general traits shaping the personality of athletes and their internal disposition, which then affects their practices both in the sports environment and outside it. Personality traits include fighting spirit, ambition, commitment, perseverance and patience as essential values in the pursuit of success. These traits affect the ability to concentrate and focus on goals (Hill et al. 2021). Developing such psychological attributes causes athletes to gain more faith in meeting challenges, enjoy participating in sports more, see their own progress more clearly, and feel greater control over their actions (Stavrou et al. 2015). However, it should be remembered that a strong orientation towards achieving goals, subordinating other attributes in the individual's personality, can also lead to negative consequences such as burnout or depression (Newman et al. 2016).

Sports are an arena for the internalization of important ethical values on which sports competition is generally based. Ethical values serve as a guide or information for athletes on what is good and what is bad – how a professional athlete should behave and how not to, so that the competition takes place in the spirit of sports rivalry. Ethical values have the character of the “generalized other” because they are universal and supra-local. Therefore, some of these values go beyond the arenas of sports, becoming an inspiration for behaviors in social interactions and situations unrelated to sports (Dziubiński 2011).

Among the most common ethical values that extend far beyond sports is the principle of fair play, associated with honest competition. It involves adhering to established rules of the game and engaging in “clean” competition, excluding prohibited or socially unacceptable methods that lead a player to victory. The principle of fair play has a universal, generalized character, and for the rules to be transparent and internalized by the majority, they should be precisely defined and

fully understood by the players of a given discipline (Loland 2001). In table tennis, as well as in other disciplines where a net is present during a match, being honest and honorable is particularly important. During competition, it may happen that the ball hits the net and then lands in the opponent's court. This is a perfectly valid play, but the ball returns to the playing field in an unpredictable manner, meaning it is difficult to predict the characteristics of such a play, such as the speed or spin of the ball. It is commonly accepted in sports that players apologize to their opponent after such a play by raising their hand or giving a verbal apology. Other values mentioned as important in the socialization of athletes include solidarity, personalism, and justice (Kowalczyk 2012), as well as respect towards the opponent, coach, fans, and also towards oneself and one's body. Representing opposing values (e.g., breaking rules through doping and unfair tactics) is subject to formal penalties and social ostracism.

Sport has many social aspects that directly influence the process of socialization. Throughout an athlete's career, many social actors appear, often playing the role of significant others for them. By forming bonds with others in the sports environment, we learn the norms that prevail there. The fundamental social value that athletes internalize in the sports environment is competition. As Józef Lipiec mentioned: "Even the opponent with whom one has to fight turns out to be a member of the same community of principles and goals" (2012: 19). In the sports environment, it is important to internalize the concept of competition so that it aligns with the traditional premises of the idea of sport and does not involve mindless fighting between two opposing sides without adopting any ethical rules and norms. An appropriate approach to competition not only positively affects the perception or media coverage of the given games but also the personality of the athlete and the internal principles they follow in life. Socialization in sports also instils a trait that can have enormous significance in the job market during relationship building or creating innovative projects in various areas. This trait is cooperation, which has significant social importance and is strongly correlated with other people's actions. Cooperation in sports may be associated only with team sports: "Team sports significantly expand the area of socialization by one additional, extremely important factor, namely the experience of building, consolidating, and optimally utilizing the synergy of the collective" (Lipiec 2012: 19). In such disciplines, there is often no room for individuality and personal innovations because it is also crucial to be open to the needs of others. However, a direct form of cooperation in sports called individual can be observed during doubles (a game with two players of the same gender) or mixed doubles (a game with two players of different genders). During the learning of such matches, besides cooperation and the content focused around it, the leading trait of responsibility for oneself and others is also socialized. During doubles or mixed doubles, players must create a certain functional, common organism, something that Norbert Elias described using the concept of "figuration" (2008). To achieve the highest level of synergy, a style of play must be created that

matches the skills of both players and extracts the most efficiency from them. In such a competition structure, the player's responsibility includes themselves and their partner.

Sport, even outside the context of competition, provides a space for the acquisition of skills for interacting with various entities and acquiring competencies related to social relations. During the career path, an athlete enters into certain permanent relationships with individuals or institutions. We are talking, first of all, about relationships with involved actors in the life of a professional athlete, who are often present from his early years. Most often these are social relations of the following nature: player-coach, player-player, player-parent or player-sponsor. Interaction between people at the same level of the social hierarchy is quite different. Communication between athletes is much less formal and rich, with a lot of content that is understood only by them. Among athletes, especially when they are closer to each other or attend the same club, a specific slang is very often formed, which they use to tighten their bonds. However, the dark side of strong relationships in a sports environment is the formation of specific "bubbles" that "lock" the individual into both a limited range of relationships and means of symbolic expression.

Of course, the above values do not exhaust what athletes can acquire in the process of socialization in a sports environment. However, a more detailed analysis is beyond the scope of an academic article. The empirical part will present examples of how some of these dimensions and values function among table tennis players and what consequences there are of functioning in such a specific socialization environment.

3. Methodology of the study on table tennis players

The main mechanism of measurement in the following study was a semi-structured interview, while the additional tool used in the study was the autoethnography method, as well as overt participant observation and non-participant observation (Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias 2001: 220–239). Autoethnography can be described as a very valuable but relatively new pattern of knowledge generation (Kacperczyk 2014). In her text, Kacperczyk reflects on the role and usefulness of the autoethnography method, especially in the context of the methodology of sociological sciences. However, in the case of the discussed study of table tennis players, the technique in question serves as a form of enrichment of the material obtained from qualitative interviews. The most important reason for choosing such tools was the need to qualitatively deepen many issues related to the formation of the respondents' personalities, which cannot be satisfactorily achieved by quantitative methods. From the perspective of the conducted analysis, it is particularly important to discuss the selection of the sample (Babbie 2013: 204–206). In doing so, it should be noted that the informants were professional table tennis players, and the individuals recruited for the interviews were selected by the

method of purposive selection. In the case of the analysis in question, professional male and female table tennis players were selected, who are characterized by their varied modes of practicing the sport in question and lifestyles over the years. Such a division was introduced in order to observe how the values internalized through the field of sports manifest themselves on different levels of the players' lives and how much they were assimilated depending on the activities currently practiced and the form of spending time by the respondents. It should be noted that all of the people surveyed are united by their upbringing in the sphere of the professional table tennis sector and its important role in the socialization process that has taken place. The decision to create such a typology was motivated by the desire to compare the past socialization process and study how its different forms affected the components acquired by table tennis players. For this reason, key categories were created based on the study participants' selection.

Table 1. Typology of respondents by current activity

1. Retired players (people who have given up the professional game)	2. Part-time players (persons whose main source of income is other than table tennis)	3. Full-time players (people for whom table tennis is the main source of income)
B1_F ^{a)}	B4_F	B10_F
B2_M	B5_M	B11_F
B3_F	B6_M	B12_F
	B7_M	
	B8_M	
	B9_F	

^{a)} The letter "B" denotes the respondent, and "F" or "M" denotes the gender of the respondent.

The presented typology refers to the current degree of involvement in the table tennis environment and the current lifestyle in relation to it. Such a division was introduced to observe how the values internalized in the field of sports manifest themselves on different levels of the players' lives and how much they have been assimilated depending on the activities currently practiced and the form of time spent by the interviewees.

4. Results of own research

4.1. The unique nature of the sports environment: retired players

Retired athletes grew up and spent most of their lives in the sports sphere, so they spoke at great length about its unique character. The sports environment

can be distinguished by a unique form of relationship, the core of which is mutual support in an organized collective called a team:

B2: For sure, being in a sports team also connects a lot... we have some rituals and habits of our own, and it tightens the bond a lot, unlike such school relationships. [...] We were also united by a common goal, and this support was really amazing, a completely different form of bond – stronger. We were such really a team, we cried together after a loss and rejoiced after a win, and that was important because I played better in such an atmosphere, and I felt better mentally. They never expected too much from me.

B1: In the team, we were always very supportive of each other. In fact, something along the lines of one for all, all for one. At the same time, we were certainly very good friends, very close-knit. I think it's all due to the fact that we grew up together, we grew up together, and this bond was simply related not only strictly to sports, but deeper.

A team fundamentally differs in that each player involved is an equally important element at the time of the sports activity, making up the common organism. The contribution of each participant determines the final result achieved by the entire group. Therefore, it is in the interest of athletes to take care of relationships within the team, which can significantly affect the well-being and disposition of individual players. The team can also be a driving force for the athlete and reduce the feeling of stress during competition – significantly. The interviewed tennis players also speak of a certain automatic support that occurs unconditionally as an integral part of team competition. All joint successes or failures are then considered collectively rather than as individually attributed failures or merits. A sports team is united not only by a common goal but also by the representation of certain values or an unusually strong bond with each other and group-spread ideas. Not surprisingly, the surveyed tennis players also speak about their relationships with other players in relation to the non-sports sphere while comparing relatively different environments:

B2: And for me, it's the people outside of the sports community in general that are a bit of a bore. As an athlete, we, as tennis players, have a lot of these reference groups of our own, and these normal people usually have only one thing, for example, friends from high school. And these tennis acquaintances always stay; you have someone to talk to and from different corners of Poland, and there is always something to talk about. [...]

B3: With tennis people, breaking down various barriers is much easier. You meet someone at a tournament even whom you've never seen, and you still share such energy with them, and you're already compatriots, and in the evening, you go to a party. You have something to talk about, and you come to other related topics more easily. [...] When we had camps in different parts of Poland, we all had this approach... one for all, all for one. There was diversity, that just different clubs, different houses, from different cities, but you could feel that when you come to one place, it's really like we're all the same... maybe not from one mom, but you could feel that you're just among your people and you feel comfortable.

In the respondents' statements, it is possible to note the emphasis on the permanence of the relations of the sports environment and the multiplicity of contacts that participation in it entails. During the interviews, the athletes notoriously compared the sphere of sports to other *normal* planes. According to them, relationships with people associated with the sports environment (especially youth) are much more valuable and interesting because they are contained between people who have more than just school and correlated topics in their interests. Such an assessment is, again, due to the upbringing among players, which results in distinct freedom and lack of embarrassment when making contact.

Regarding the specific way of speaking, the players strongly emphasized the inability of outsiders to understand the slang of tennis players. This is a kind of vocabulary that, in the opinion of the participants of the study, distinguishes them from the rest of the groups or subcultures. To better illustrate the language in question, it is advisable to cite examples that appeared during interviews with retired players:

B1: The kind of thing that sets us apart from others is definitely the slang. The first thing that comes to my mind is the word "zyto", and it refers to something great; when someone plays a really great match, but also universally, we use it for other contexts like getting a good score, I say, "zyto!". No one outside of tennis will understand it that way, unfortunately. There's also the statement "but I'm raw," and it means that I'm just doing poorly at something; that's the opposite of "zyto."

B2: Then there's "popelina." "Popelina", I hear now... somewhere it was also passed around among normal people, but I think the centre was again as I presented it – in tennis. Popelina, if I had to translate... It's such a disengagement disorder – something like that.

People who do not belong to the group of tennis players may have quite a challenge in understanding the meaning or the appropriate context in which communication is carried out through the referenced slang. Acquisition of a such unique vocabulary, specific to a particular group, occurs precisely through the process of socialization. Players often first indirectly experience the presence of a particular slang, then learn its meaning and context, after which they themselves begin to communicate according to its rules. By replicating a group-accepted language and way of speaking, athletes can feel even more of a sense of belonging to a single sports community. However, such a mechanism can also result in a certain alienation from individuals who are in no way connected to the realm of table tennis.

4.2. The unique nature of the sports environment: part-time players

In terms of describing the peculiarities of the sports environment, part-time athletes largely compared it to other levels in which they were given the opportunity to participate directly. They first focused on the characteristics of the social relations of the peri-sport sphere, which, according to all interviewees, have a unique dimension. An example that demonstrates the phenomenal nature of a particular type of relationship draws attention to its permanence:

B6: Such a main difference between, for example, school relationships and those in sports is that we all still keep in touch today, while the school ones, however, often blur. Despite some big age differences, we have a common language and stick together. These are certainly more lasting relationships because we also constantly have something to talk about.

B7: These are friendships that are formed at such an age that they are already practically for life. This is a fundamental difference between the environment of tennis and, for example, school or work. Everything that was created in the past, from a young age between players, has remained until now.

One of the key differences presented by part-time players is the fact that the permanence of relationships in the tennis community is extremely rare. In the sports environment, everyone develops through a similar path and knows each other's needs like no one else, which one of the respondents considered a characteristic of the subculture. It should be noted that the exceptional permanence of relationships in the sports sphere was commented on by part-time athletes, i.e. people whose current main source of income is another job. This means that despite much less intensive sports activity and limited time spent in a given environment, the study participants continue to feel an extraordinary bond with other tennis players. This is certainly related to their understanding of each other and especially of each other's emotions, as they commented during the interviews:

B6: Such an outsider certainly always has a big problem entering our environment and will never succeed fully. Such normal people also don't understand all the emotions that accompany an athlete; for example, you will come back from a match really pissed off, and such a person can't understand how important it is. But these are years of experience in this environment.

B7: It's not even possible for outsiders to understand our emotions, what we experience, and how we experience being in the world of sports. Alternatively, they can understand it, maybe some partners of athletes who also live it. But when you're telling your buddy about some of your competitions, there's just no chance of them understanding it that well.

In the players' statements, one can see some suggestion of a verbal demarcation – the sports world and the “normal” world. Thus, tennis players portray themselves as a separate group, which again indicates the perception of a particular environment in the context of a subculture. Those outside of it are unable to understand what professional athletes deal with on a daily basis. An exception might be a close family member or long-term partner who lives closely with the athlete's various tribulations and thus learns to understand them. However, as the interviewees point out, people external to the sports community may try to comprehend what a professional tennis player's career entails but will never penetrate the player's feelings – as another tennis player can.

Language is an extremely important glue that binds a group together and emphasizes its uniqueness. However, it can also be strongly exclusionary to others without experience as professional players, especially when it results in

a misunderstanding of duplicated linguistic concepts and, consequently, the intentions of the dominant group. The source of the formation of tennis-specific slang is also interesting:

B4: This is an environment of simple word-making. On the basis of a word, on the basis of some situation, on the basis of various events... also not hiding, I mean, I would say that such a centre of word-making in our environment is the Training Center. There a lot of tennis players come there, at one time, in one place, together to school, together in the hall. And there they really rotate in such a company on a daily basis. And that's what I came across coming to this place only; we just lived there, too, in this centre. Separated from the group that lived there permanently in that centre. We were only so hospitable, but it was also an event sometimes with a new language, and it took a while to be instilled. And then a smooth transition to speaking it.

The genesis of the creation of the language present among the players, researchers see among the tennis players living in the training centre. This is related to their constant being in their own company, where people who are not connected in some way with tennis do not have easy access. The players surveyed are convinced that certain terms are understood only by their environment and have been created there. According to tennis players, it is a specific language that can not only describe situations related to the peri-sport plane but also universally describe events concerning other social areas. For this reason, when analyzing the issue related to the unique nature of the players' slang, it was also advisable to deepen the question of its reception by people external to the sports sphere:

B4: Well, and then there was a clash again, in turn, as you went home, to school, and the words I used, somewhere in that environment, everyone understood, everyone knew what situation to use what for. Suddenly, by accident, more from an automatic somewhere I said in my school company, it was just everyone's big eyes and asked for a dictionary.

According to the study participants, people outside the tennis community reacted to their way of speaking with surprise or lack of understanding. Moreover, even the attempt to use it by outsiders – ended in failure due to incompatibility with the situational context. What also becomes important here is the definition of the situation, which can be perceived quite differently by tennis players and differently by colloquially defined – normal people. Because of the contradictions in language issues, most tennis players, when interacting with other people, try not to use or avoid as many phrases as possible typically internalized in a sports environment. Thus, they match their way of speaking or expressing emotions to the dominant reference group to avoid being isolated.

4.3. The unique nature of the sports environment: full-time players

The research also indicated a need to discover how full-time athletes perceive the sports environment and what specific characteristics they believe it possesses. Like retired and part-time athletes, they mainly pointed to the nature of the unique relationships they have gained in the table tennis-related sphere. Many references were made to team relationships:

B10: In the league team, I have always felt supported. We rather help each other, so mega, hint at something. I'm also now playing no longer in the premier league but in the first league, and we have a common goal to get promoted, so we have a focus and helping each other to achieve that goal. I also get very stressed about how my teammates play, so that says a lot.

Players mention support as a key component that makes up team relationships. This is directly related to the fact that they are driven by common intentions, and the final outcome of the match is their collective defeat or victory. Sports, and especially team relationships, are distinguished by the fact that there is a certain state of involuntary and reflexive help or motivation for each other. This is a unique form of bonding because, without the need for extra-sports sympathy, when the moment comes to fight together for victory, one can count on each other, and personal beliefs or prejudices completely disappear for the duration of the game. The type of such support is unique because it is the people on the team who often see the player in moments of extreme emotion – whether euphoria after a win or despair or frustration after a loss. Certainly, such a strong relationship between players from one team with a common goal is something fascinating and peculiar only to the sports environment, as highlighted earlier. Other statements clearly emphasise the uniqueness of this sphere:

B12: I think people outside of tennis would not understand our emotions and experiences. I think they would even try somehow, but then they would realize... they would take such a dismissive approach. Maybe they would listen knowingly, but they wouldn't know it anyway.

B10: We also have entirely different priorities than ordinary people. For example, at school, everyone was concerned about school, results, enrollment, and something else, and when we played in a good tournament, it was all great. Everything depended on how you did in the competition. It affected every other area.

The separation of the sports area from other spaces of social activity is particularly evident in the accounts of full-time interviewees. According to the players, those outside the table tennis community will not be able to understand the world and experiences that accompany professional sports from an early age. This is due to the fact that, in general, school peers have other priorities, don't experience such extreme emotions, don't spend as much time travelling to competitions, don't know from autopsy life under one roof with athletes of different ages, and don't know what their lifestyle entails. Each full-time tennis player unequivocally stated that it is with

the athletes (or, as the respondents describe them – *the normal ones*) that they have daily contact and very rarely with other people they meet. The respondents single out the very way in which athletes of a particular sport interact:

B12: In general, we are a peculiar company. We talk a lot with sarcasm or something, and it's hard, very hard to get along with someone else, someone outside of this tennis.

B10: I was also practically constantly in this training center, and there was no time for me to meet someone. And now, for me, when you talk to someone outside of the tennis environment, it's literally heaven and earth.

The quoted statements again point to the fact that tennis players feel best in the company of other athletes since the rest of the environment does not understand them in the desired way. This tendency is felt even more strongly by respondents living in a training center, as they had far fewer opportunities to form relationships and integrate with others and learn about diverse ways or lifestyles. Being in a sports boarding school in one's youth and currently being an adult and, in a sense, more forced to interact with people outside the tennis environment, one has significant difficulties and obstacles, as indicated by the statements of full-time players. In addition, one can note an indication of the tennis players' manner of speaking as sarcastic and the presentation of phrases taken from this environment, which did not appear during the analysis of previous interviews. As can be seen from the cited example, specific definitions or phrases may be peculiar to a group of tennis players, and to those outside this bubble – there is a risk of misinterpretation. This uniqueness of sports relations, combined with the lifestyle of full-time players, resulted in a much more substantial impact of this area on their daily lives.

4.4. The impact of socialization in sports on daily life: retired athletes

Many years of activity and intensive involvement in the sports sphere have caused athletes, especially after their careers have ended, to feel the strong impact of the socialization they have undergone so far on their daily lives. They grew up surrounded by values around sports, which cannot be automatically cut off from when they give up a particular sport. Thus, in their statements, the study participants cited widely varying manifestations of both positive and negative components in their daily functioning. On the other hand, they first pointed to qualities they felt back in the days of professional competition:

B1: Tennis greatly affected my daily life because I had the same schedule from morning to evening. A person would come to school at 8, let's assume, until 2 pm, and then I only had time to return quickly, eat lunch, and go to training immediately. And so from Monday to Friday. On the weekends, too, league matches, competitions, well, time to meet with people outside of tennis ... well, it was very tiny, practically at times not at all. My life, however, was more subordinated to this tennis. Because of this, my private life, in my opinion, suffered a lot at some point.

The above statement suggests that by being so heavily involved in table tennis, the non-sports sphere was getting significantly neglected. Daily life was subordinated to a particular sport, and the calendar during the tennis season determined the athlete's priorities. The result was reduced time for socialization among other reference groups and a lack of integration with the outside world. Interviewees during the interviews also highlighted other effects of upbringing in sports that adversely affected their lives:

B1: There was a lot of pressure in the first league when I started playing with much older players. I felt a little from the coach and team; this pressure to win was there. [...] This stress also somehow transferred to my daily life because I was more impulsive. I felt such frustration. That was also the main factor that decided me to end my career.

B3: This nervousness and frustration were showing up everywhere. When something didn't go well for me in tennis, I immediately took it out somewhere else, whether at school or at home. It was as if emotions in tennis affected everything else; they were in the foreground.

Among the harmful components affecting the daily lives of ex-athletes, the most common were declarations about the impact of various undesirable emotions. Suppose an individual has internalized in the sphere of sports traits centered around feelings of stress, nervousness, impulsiveness or frustration. In that case, there is a high probability of transferring them to other areas of activity as well. The dominant emotions in the sphere of sports often become the overriding point, determining the remaining behavioral patterns of the individual. It should be noted that the respondents also pointed to decidedly positive values that manifest themselves in their daily lives:

B1: I think these qualities permeate into everyday life. Such prowess and desire to compete is at least once a week. I go to volleyball now, and a person wants to play his best and fight. Perseverance in the same way, if only for a silly example – in a relationship, however, you have to work for this relationship all the time, and I think the sport has helped me develop this trait.

B2: I think I also learned to lose, thanks to sports. However, in our lives, there are a lot of obstacles to go through, and thanks to tennis, I rarely give up, but I also know that sometimes we have to accept that something will not work out for us. It taught me that the sun always comes out after some failures in life and that there won't always be such a nasty streak.

B3: [...] I think that such an experience as a kid in this environment taught me to understand others' oppression later in school. After experiencing it much earlier, I defended and understood these people. I just knew that this was not the way to go. It simply empathized me with everything, and I became a much more empathetic person; I could put myself in the other skin.

Sports activity is encapsulated in the concepts of competition, bravery and perseverance. Not surprisingly, former athletes feel the impact of these concepts on their daily lives. Their effect is explained as a positive reflex that helps in everyday situations, such as those mentioned above – nurturing a partner relationship through diligence and patience, which the athletes learned in the sports environment.

Another essential and desirable skill declared by the study participants is dealing with failures. One interviewee noted that empathy is an exciting component of his daily life. By learning in a sports environment about practices centred around oppressing others, judging or ridiculing – an individual can become sensitive to such behaviour patterns in the future. Through such experiences at a very young age, a greater understanding of the diversity of human behaviour can be learned.

4.5. The impact of socialization in sports on daily life: part-time athletes

Given some subjects' current part-time practice of table tennis, it is necessary to assume their intensive functioning in relatively different spheres of a non-sport nature. Thus, the manifestation of traits internalized through sports can also be seen in other areas. A component drawn from the world of sports that each of the surveyed athletes notes about their daily lives is the need to compete:

B6: Of such more negative traits, I think sometimes there is too much need to compete. In other areas, it carries over, too, even with some silly board games; I don't like losing. I go to another sport; recreationally, it still has to be done well because I get annoyed. [...] I think nothing has changed in me until now. I still very much dislike losing; I get very pissed off when I lose in anything.

B7: The rivalry certainly translates into everyday life. Even with a silly example, no matter where I go with my tennis buddy, to some billiards or bowling, there is always this rivalry between us, and you can feel it a lot. We are at each other's throats, and no one wants to lose. [At work, too, rivalry can be seen with me as much as possible. Often, there is a bonus system, and this rivalry manifests itself a lot, and as an athlete, I definitely feel it.

B5: My rivalry shows that tennis has dramatically influenced everyday life by even shaping thinking in the context of a particular person. If I competed with a person on the court, I would automatically do so at school in terms of grades. How we behaved to each other at the tennis table influenced how we perceived her off the playing field.

The statements indicate that tennis players feel the pressure of competition in their daily lives. As some point out, this is an inherent part of interacting with professional sports and socializing in this sphere. A specific need to be the best is then born, which can have positive and negative overtones. As a positive influence of competition in everyday life, athletes point to activities that motivate and drive them to achieve a specific goal. This approach can be called healthy competition, which is not destructive to the individual. However, far more often, tennis players emphasized acquiring undesirable tendencies and emotions, such as frustration or stress. In such a case, one can speak of excessive competition, which becomes much more burdensome for the player in everyday functioning. The perspective of such extreme rivalry shows that part-time athletes cannot separate themselves from other planes despite less intense immersion in the sports sphere. This is a completely different competition compared to ordinary people (what the athletes call them). For each

athlete, losing has a greater significance, and they seem to experience it more than individuals without experience in professional sports. For this reason, in the company of the athletes themselves, a different form of competition can be observed, centered around an attitude of total commitment, fighting to win or displaying professionalism. On a day-to-day basis, the athletes also note entrenched rivalry in relation to their own workplace or school, especially when giving gratification in the form of a bonus or grade. Other values that the surveyed athletes also notice in themselves outside the sports sphere are those related to their approach to work:

B6: These values acquired in sports, such as punctuality, meticulousness, and such striving, now carry over to other places like work. Indeed, thanks to tennis, I am more dogged at work. It also taught me a lot about patience and faith that doing something systematically brings results. You can see this from sports; you don't achieve anything at once but do it with complex and regular work. This can be translated to learning, that the more you learn and cram, the more it will be perpetuated for you, and this was also my approach. That diligence definitely translated into my school life because I buckled down.

B7: [...] through sports and the fact that I had that kind of ambition very much, it's further what I don't get behind – I feel that kind of approach, and it's automatic, I think, for athletes just.

B5: In terms of everyday life, I can say that you do it involuntarily when you have a goal set. You automatically have to get it. That was always important and instilled in tennis, and now, at work doing specific tasks or challenges, I have it automatically dialled in... it's striving at total energy.

The first thing that strikes one's eye when looking at the above statements is that in their attitude toward their work, the players see the very positive values drawn from the sphere of sports. First and foremost, sports have instilled principles centred around reliability in performing duties. Systematic and hard work is required to see the desired results in an athlete's career. Achieving a satisfactory result is much more challenging without acquiring such values as perseverance, belief in success or ambition. The same applies to non-sports work, to which the survey participants devote much time. They declare that due to their experiences with professional sports, they also have an incredibly engaging and reliable attitude towards their professional duties. The above statements prove that sports, even if they don't bring many trophies or medals won, can positively impact an individual's overall life and attitude towards his profession. On the other hand, the issue of the impact of socialization in sports on school and college life should be further highlighted. In the case of tennis players, one can see the powerful influence of sports on the limitation of this time and the related consequences:

B5: More than once, that gee... it was a time that others were having fun, going outside, and with me, it wasn't like that. People would go to the yard at 3 pm after school, and I was the one in training. When at 6 pm, they would come to pick you up to go out, and then you would sit down to learn. [...] I also felt strongly about some social unacceptance. Maybe not that I was oppressed, but others I don't know... they went for a beer, at school it was to some square, and I missed it

somewhere because I had no time. There were some events and just no chance because, for example, you had a game on Saturday. Regarding such an everyday social life, sports excluded me a bit.

B7: When I went to college, I had trouble establishing relationships with these non-athletic ones. I didn't even feel such a desire and need to integrate with ordinary people. Not that they were inferior or anything, but I felt a different energy simply and a lack of desire because, at school, I didn't have that. You could even say I was a bit selfish about it because I only had relationships with the two guys there, to have someone to speak to in class or take notes. Still, I didn't need it for anything else, and I also found it hard to imagine such relationships.

The interviewees emphasize a certain degree of exclusion from the world of school peers through their deep immersion in the sports sphere. They didn't have as much time to integrate with others, which later even contributed to the problem of establishing relationships, which was extensively discussed earlier in this paper. Many events of daily life escaped them, resulting in alienation and exclusion from a critical arena of social activity for a young person. Suppose one becomes accustomed to one environment in the early stages of life and neglects to integrate with the rest of the social environment. In that case, one can have significant problems in the future. During adolescence, many leading moments occur in school life, in which participation is a kind of rite of passage for the child or teenager, such as the aforementioned – integration trips and parties.

4.6. The impact of socialization in sports on daily life: full-time athletes

Analyzing the interviews conducted with full-time athletes shows that the most significant impact of socialization in sports is manifested in them in relation to the school or university space. School is a field of social activity that cannot be avoided, even if one has been training professionally in a particular sport since childhood. On the other hand, studying is included in an optional form of education, which, however, becomes a frequent choice of athletes to have an additional opportunity for development and a so-called “plan B” (should a sports career not give the desired satisfaction). Against the backdrop of confrontation with different social strata, it is possible to see more clearly how sports have influenced socialization, internalization of specific qualities and how they differ from other spheres:

B12: I continue to feel very alienated from environments other than tennis. In fact, at the university, I continue to go only with my tennis friend, and we don't socialize; I sit alone when she's not there. Knowing they like people are friendly, but everyone is in such groups, and I don't fit in. I'm mega scared, that's for sure.

B11: Generally, in tennis, I'm mega open, and I can talk to people I don't know, like I've never talked to them, and I somehow find it easy to talk to them anyway. And suddenly, I'm going to college and must make a significant effort to find a topic.

B10: Certainly, through sports, I'm just so closed off to other people.

The respondents' statements show the prevailing negative feelings toward an environment other than table tennis. The experiences the players have are associated with a sense of alienation, alienation, misunderstanding, and fear. It is also interesting to note that in the case of the second statement, there is a certain duality in the characteristics represented. Openness and self-confidence in the world of sports do not mean, from the perspective of a full-time athlete, that the same components will be exposed when encountering a relatively different environment. They may disappear completely, and confusion will be felt, not only in a given company but also about one's personality, the true face of which they cannot fully externalize. Such a situation can result in the fact that for full-time players, going to school or college means a real challenge and stress. It is often greater than for the average peer, who is more strongly integrated and familiar with educational structures and norms. Another effect of the accompanying sense of isolation from the leading community can be confinement to a particular bubble or loneliness:

B12: The moment I moved to the center I started thinking about tennis as my total future. I felt that, in general, I had nothing left. In general, because of that, I began to fall into such depressive states because I started to stress that what if I don't succeed in tennis, and I have nothing else? And I began to worry that I didn't have a future. And that was also killing me terribly.

B11: And I also think it's impossible to be such a professional athlete and study to the max. There's no way to combine that. However, good studies are essential for work and familiarity with other places and people. We don't live in this tennis space only because it can close off many different opportunities.

From the above accounts, it can be concluded that despite the perceived happiness and the impression of genuine authenticity among table tennis players, this confinement to a specific bubble creates a significant risk of falling into a deep melancholy, which over time can develop into depressive states. The source of this can be sought again in the form of isolation from the outside world and various areas of activity undertaken by peers. There is also the fear that one will be left with nothing when one loses a job centered around table tennis. Concerning the quoted statements, one can again refer to the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance. On the one hand, the interviewees announce that having experience or competence in a field different from their sport is befitting. On the other hand, there is a deep fear and stress about such an attempt, which often prevails during their speculations or decisions about the future. Nevertheless, attachment to the peri-sport sphere can sometimes be so strong that a lack of confidence in their ability to maintain relationships with the rest of the individuals they meet appears, which can even affect their preference for choosing a partner:

B12: I've also noticed that I'm drawn much more to guys who are into sports. It's just the kind of professional sports, not some gym or something. I mean that seriously professional. [...] And all in all, when I see someone at the university with something to do with sports, I immediately feel much more comfortable. I can make a joke or something. And I'm not drawn to others at all... I also don't believe anything could come out of it in the long run.

Concerning the circumstances cited, the thesis that says that we look for those similar to ourselves would work among people. However, here we see a search for a match to one's interests and a greater likelihood of rejection or closure to those who deviate from the player's main field of activity and preferences. This approach only underscores the limitations of such vital socialization in one environment. At the same time, however, it should be remembered that full-time players devote most of their time and lives to developing their competencies and personalities within table tennis. So it is unsurprising that they need someone who can adequately understand their dilemmas, sacrifices, emotions or needs.

5. Conclusions

The above analysis was designed to provide an insight into the phenomenon of the unique nature of the sports environment and how its influence becomes apparent in the players' daily lives. The study unequivocally showed that regardless of their current training regimen, each interviewee feels the significant impact of participation in the sports environment on their disposition and approach to life. The survey of sports players revealed how hermetic and unusual the collective of table tennis players is. During the interviews, separating those belonging to the sports sphere from those normal, other individuals was repeatedly emphasised. The peculiarities of the tennis players' environment, differing priorities, rituals, ways of spending time, preferences or general interests were noted. However, what most strongly differentiates the players from those not associated with the sports community is how they interact, the language used to interact, and the definition of meaning shared by the tennis collective. These are premises analysed in the stream of symbolic interactionism, according to which certain group aspects contribute to the concrete formation of individual personalities. For these and many other reasons, the study found that those in the external environment cannot understand the subjects' intentions and fully grasp what the life of a professional athlete entails, resulting in their alienation from the rest of the individuals. Depending on the category of athletes studied, the intensity of the social distance they feel varies, as shown in the form of a table:

Table 2. Type of respondent in the context of feelings of alienation

Retired players	Part-time players	Full-time players
Moderate sense of alienation	A strong sense of alienation	A powerful sense of alienation

The most potent form of misunderstanding is felt by full-time athletes, for whom the sports environment is the most critical plane of activity. As a consequence of a specific lifestyle, which since childhood has been characterised by devoting the dominant amount of time to activity in the sports environment, the subjects – about

other social spheres – feel alienation and closure to others. The sense of confinement to a particular bubble diminishes as the respondents become involved in different areas, interacting with people outside the peri-sport environment. However, it should be noted that combining all the study participants' upbringing in a closed group related to sports is characterised by a more or less intense feeling of separateness. The analysis also showed that the traits acquired in this area influence other spheres of activity of the subjects (such as school, work or partnership) and guide their decisions. However, the intensity of the impact varies depending on the current immersion in the sports sphere:

Table 3. Type of respondent in the context of the impact of the sports environment on daily life

Retired players	Part-time players	Full-time players
Less impact on daily life	Dominant impact on daily life	Total impact on daily life

A limited impact can be seen on retired tennis players due to their “separated” lives from professional sports. However, It should be noted that the qualities and values internalized through sports remained a further part of their personality. On the other hand, the impact of the sports environment itself seems to be less than in the case of part-time or full-time athletes because the place of the peri-sport sphere has been filled by other social planes on which they focus their attention. The most decisive influence can be seen in full-time athletes, whose personalities have been entirely dominated by sports-shared behaviour patterns. This underscored that the socialization in sports of this group took place at the deepest level, which is the core of their personality and is an essential point of reference.

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