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The Process of Becoming an Active Disabled Person
—the Psycho-Social Mechanisms of Sport's Influence
on Physically Disabled Individuals

Abstract: The article raises the notions of changes that take place in the life of a physically handicapped person which are caused by their engagement in a sports activity. In the article I make an attempt to reconstruct the detailed mechanisms of sport's influence on the life of a physically handicapped person, pointing to the manner in which physical activity supports the reconstruction of self-perception, a redefinition of their role, and the acquisition of a cognitive perspective of people meaningful to the individual.

I refer to the subjective perspective of those researched, rendering their own point of view into the major subject of analysis. Hence, the research exploits qualitative data, collected during in-depth free interviews and observations conducted among the disabled practicing sports. Analysis and interpretation of the research material was performed in accordance with the procedures of grounded theory.

Keywords: sport, activity, disability, change, grounded theory.

Introduction

The problems of disability, both in the scientific discourse and social perception, form a notion which is still being broadly discussed and thoroughly analyzed (Ostrowska 1994; Kryńska 2013; Gąciarz and Rudnicki 2014). As a result, it has led to the formation of various perspectives and ways to understand it (Barnes and Mercer 2004; Ostrowska 2015). Two of them, regarding their contrary character, are especially interesting: the social and the individual models of disability (Finkelstein 1993; Balcerzak-Paradowska 2002). The latter was based on the assumption that disability is a personal tragedy. In this model, the problem of disability is "located" in the individual himself, and its reason is sought in the functional limitations or psychological defects which arise from disability (Oliver 1983). On the other hand, there is an opinion within the social model of disability that disability results—to a significant extent—from the barriers experienced by the disabled, and resulting from the "disabling" society (Finkelsterin 1980; Oliver 1983; Abberley 1987; Balcerzak-Paradowska 2002). Therefore, the factors that "create" disability are not individual limitations, but rather it is society not providing proper services or fulfilling the needs of the disabled. In this model, reasons of disability are not sought inside an individual, but in the environment and various social, economic and physical barriers (Barnes et al. 1999; Oliver 1990; Swain et al. 1993).

Thus, disability is treated as a phenomenon which strikes particular people, and is caused by adverse, often even negative attitudes of their environment (Finkelstein 1993a).

The notion of ableism was coined to specify such a social attitude, where disability is perceived as something that should be treated, repaired or eliminated. In other words, it is a set of beliefs and behaviors which aim at the unequal and varied treatment of a person regarding their factual or expected disability (Williams and Marvin 2012). Ableism understood in such a manner means a belief that disabled individuals are worse, standing lower in a hierarchy of values than able-bodied individuals. Therefore, this is an attitude demonstrated by the majority of society, tinged negatively on the basis of discriminating stereotypes (see Czykwin 2007).

At the same time, those negative attitudes towards the disabled may exert a negative influence on the behavior of the latter towards themselves and towards the fully able (Zola 1993; Ostrowska 2015). This happens because they hinder the adjustment and acceptance of their disability, they discourage making even the slightest effort, they trigger the feeling of contempt towards themselves and their disability, they weaken the mechanisms of integration and destroy the effects of conducted medical, educational and rehabilitation procedures (Thomas 1999).

The disabled also receive more harsh feedback much more frequently than healthy individuals, which may push them to form a negative identity (Goffman 1963). In extreme cases it leads to an understated self-esteem, the feeling of guilt and a weakening or lack of identification with others and their reification (Barnes and Mercer 2004). According to Roman Ossowski, the situation of the disabled is especially influenced by the following factors: qualities of the social environment, visibility of the disability and the material status of the disabled (Ossowski 1999: 284–286). Existing in a disadvantageous social situation, the disabled, according to Ryszard Szarfenberg (2008: 4) may have simultaneous problems with recognition, freedom of choice, equality and positive social image.

Hence, in the contemporary approach, a significant role in sociological analyses of disability is played by the "new sociology of disability," where the center of attention is *disablism* (Thomas 2004, 2007, 2012). Disability is perceived as being rooted in unequal social relationships, and its consequences may be reflected as physical, social and emotional barriers, which limit lives of the disabled and their families. *Disablism* may demonstrate itself in institutionalized and other forms of socio-structural relationships (Thomas 2010). The "new sociology of disability" arises and remains in connection with the human rights-based approach, which is rooted in the belief that the disabled and those who are able-bodied are equally valuable (Lawson 2006; Mabbett 2005; Piron 2004). According to Woźniak (2008: 78–79), this model is the episodic quintessence of all concepts embedded in a social model. This approach emphasizes that there are too many spheres of social life with phenomena and processes that support the devaluation of the position of the disabled persons, the limitation of their rights as citizens, and the depreciation of their roles in community life through narrowing down the problem of disability to economic

costs and the professional activity of the disabled. This remains in contradiction to real sources of problems in this group, which result from the "disabled environment."

Therefore, the state's duty is to protect civil rights and counteract discrimination. It poses a starting point in the process of generating new values, views and social attitudes, which replace the previous social expectations and criteria for evaluating people from minorities. Bearing in mind the above, there are various initiatives taken up by state institutions, self-government bodies or social and non-governmental organizations (Croft and Beresford 1992). The latter are also being increasingly created and managed by the disabled themselves. Actions taken by all those groups lead towards the creation of conditions which will allow the disabled not only to function in an environment that would be adequate for their needs, but also to be satisfied and happy with their everyday lives (Ingstad 2001).

One way is a sports activity, which may be perceived as an opportunity for both the individual development of a person and their social integration (Nigel and Smith 2009). The need for self-realization and social acceptance may be fulfilled in such a manner (Femniak 2006). A sports activity should cover solutions which would stimulate the comprehensive development of people with various body defects, to enable them to take a full part in various life disciplines, and to play certain social roles valuably, according to guidelines laid out in the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*, published in 2001 by WHO (Shephard 1991). In the literature on the subject it is emphasized that sports forms of rehabilitation are fundamental in preparing the disabled for the most complete participation in social, professional and family life (Molik, Morgulec-Adamowicz and Kosmol 2008: 8). In this context, sport may exert an influence in two directions. On the one hand, it may change the social image of a disabled person through presenting the disabled in a manner different from stereotypes (Olszewski, Parys and Trojańska 2012; Morris 1991). On the other, which constitutes the subject of my research interests, it may change how a disabled person defines their life, first of all of perceiving himself as a fully-entitled member of a given community (Somers 1994; Corbin and Strauss 1985). Hence, practicing sport may be treated as an activity which triggers transformation, from a disabled person accepting the imposed manner of how reality is interpreted (according to social perceptions), to its rejection and the acceptance of a new set of definitions, where previous ways of perceiving himself are reformulated (Kowalik 2012; Charmaz 1983). Disability becomes an element of an individual's life that is possible to accept, something which their whole attention is not focused on anymore, and the disabled person is capable of moving from passiveness to life activity, focusing on sport and relationships with their environment which are created around this kind of activity (Williams 2000).

From this perspective, it seems especially interesting to grasp the essence of this activity, and to comprehend the processual dimension of connected changes that take place in the disabled person's life, together with a reconstruction of particular dimensions which provide it with a specific character.

Therefore, the research aims to reconstruct the mechanisms of sport's influence on the process of defining oneself and interpreting the social reality that surrounds the individual (Charmaz 1987).

Theoretical Framework

As a researcher, I was interested in the reconstruction of the researched processes, together with their whole interactional context. I made an attempt to grasp their complexity through exploring the manners in which the individuals interpret their own experiences, and reflect those interpretations in their actions (Strauss 1959). I tried to achieve it through familiarizing myself with the meanings that particular people ascribe to their experiences, as well as the roles that are played by individual social actors and collective partners in interactions (Blumer 1962).

Hence, to be able to research and understand the specificity of the researched process, I chose that the theoretical framework would be symbolic interactionism, where the social world is a construct and the language is its biggest and most significant tool (Blumer 1969). According to the mentioned theoretical assumptions, the manner of looking at reality and ourselves is a reflection of the surrounding social world. At the same time, the social world cannot be understood in basic categories, in terms of casual connections, or analyzed through the application of universal rights for social events (Charmaz 1994). This arises from the fact that human actions are based on social meaning, such as: intentions, motifs, beliefs, principles and values (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). The significance of the processes of interpreting objects and phenomena, and defining oneself and situations in a manner appropriate for a given role, is emphasized on the grounds of symbolic interactionism (Becker 1953). According to this view, the nature of an individual is creative, and reality as an intersubjective creation of participants is dynamic and changeable. Therefore, it is impossible to discover the "rights" that govern human behavior without consideration of the symbolic character of the perception of the world by individuals, and the symbolic character of interactions that take place between social actors (Blumer 1969).

Reconstruction of the processes, interactions, interpretations and actions that are meaningful for the individuals, that create them, requires familiarization with the actor's point of view, to grasp everything that is meaningful to them, and to analyze each phenomenon in the context of those meanings (Blumer 1966).

Therefore, taking into account the theoretical references mentioned above, in the research, which constitutes the foundation of this article, I refer to the subjective perspective of the researched individuals, rendering their own point of view into a basis for the construction of theoretical generalizations.

Grasping and emphasizing both the reflective character of the people acting in the process of individual development, as well as the dimension of the group, supra-individual relationships and impacts, and all of this with consideration of the processuality and situational grounding of each symbolic interaction (Denzin 1972). This

is the fulfillment of such requirements, which means that the methodology needs to be selected according to its functionality and potential with certain ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher.

Methods

Study Sample

The research material applied in this study encompasses the personal experiences of disabled people, realizing their physical activity through participation in various forms of sport. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of this category of disabled people. Questions posed in the interviews referred to, among others, the role and meaning of the researched people's participation in institutionalized forms of sport activity. The study also applied some records from participant observations made during meetings and sport events, trainings and consultations. The research was performed between 07/2013 and 12/2014 within the territory of Poland, in training centers devoted to/adjusted for the needs of disabled sportsmen.[1] In preparing this text, the empirical material comprised: 47 interviews and 23 records from observations (as of 1 December 2014). The interviews were performed with 20 women and 27 men between 16 and 50 years old. The interviews usually lasted from 40 to 120 minutes. Before analysis, the interviews were transcribed word-for-word, preserving the details of the interviewees' utterances as faithfully as possible.[2]

The premises that supported the selection of the abovementioned techniques arise first of all from accepted ontological (human experiences, interpretations, knowledge, evaluations, interactions are perceived as significant interdependencies of the social reality) and epistemological assumptions (the legal manner of data generation on the basis of those ontological assumptions comprises interaction, conversations with people, listening to stories and gaining access to knowledge, evaluations, impressions of individuals). Secondly, the acquired data are of a whole and in-depth character, which complies with the notions put forward by H. Rubin and I. Rubin (2012) who state that qualitative research is applied in relation to those notions which require a deeper understanding, served best by detailed examples and elaborated narration.

The participants were assured that all information provided would be treated with anonymity and confidentiality, and pseudonyms are used throughout. All quotations cited are in the participants' own words.

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[1] Research that posed the basis for this paper is a part of a greater project related to the life situation of disabled individuals that take up a sports activity, currently being carried out by the author, and referring to the role of sport in the process of identity reconstruction of persons with physical disabilities.

[2] The research regarded the disabled individuals residing in Poland who practiced sport at the time of the interviews. Therefore, the notions discussed in the article refer to the native situation of disabled sportsmen population, however, they do not grasp it in its fullest extent because of the selected research method.

Data Collection and Analysis

Analysis of the research material is performed in accordance with the procedures of grounded theory. Data analysis involved open coding and axial coding. All interviews were encoded with open coding. Afterwards, with the application of axial coding, the codes were ordered and selected, which led to the generation of the most significant analytical categories and revealed the complex relationships between them. As a result, three main categories have been differentiated, corresponding to three subprocesses: taking on a role, moving reference and self-identification, all of which make up the process of identity reconstruction which, as a consequence, allowed the question about mechanisms of sport's influence on a disabled person's life to be answered.

The research used interviews performed with physically disabled people. The main selection criterion was constituted by the practicing of sport. The selection of subsequent cases for research was of a theoretical character (*theoretical sampling*), based on the constant comparative method. Thanks to theoretical sampling, the researcher, while collecting, encoding and analyzing the materials, makes simultaneous decisions about where and what data to collect (Charmaz 2006). While applying the constant comparative method in my search for other data, the researcher made an attempt to choose cases that are both highly diverse and similar to each other, to understand the maximum number of conditions differentiating the occurrence of categories and how these categories are interrelated (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 45–53; Charmaz 2006: 74). Such a manner of performance resulted in people representing various kinds of physical disability being a part of the researched sample. There were people with quadri- and paraplegia, spastic paralysis and those with amputated legs. The selection of cases lasted until the theoretical saturation of the generated analytical categories was achieved, and its purpose was to diversify comparisons made during that stage of the research, but also to increase or decrease the level of variety of cases, grasp the changeability of circumstances and complement the database (Glaser and Strauss 1967). It was not a selective choice, as it was not based on any initial assumptions. It was not also an accidental choice, as while taking up analysis of subsequent specified cases, a researcher is driven to gather such data which allow them to specify categories conceptually, develop a theory and understand the phenomena that they refer to (c.f. Glaser 1992; Cutcliffe 2000; Konecki 2000). The essential purpose of the selection was to maximize the uncovering potential of circumstances which create a certain level of intensity of a given quality for the analyzed category (Strauss, Corbin 1990), while specifying a substantive field which the data should be derived from, depending on the course of the comparison procedure (Strauss and Glaser 1967; Corbin and Strauss 2008). The mentioned substantive field may be of a wide scope, thus a collected sample may be narrow or wide (with different levels of conceptual similarity), enabling the generation of theories with various levels of generality, from factual, related to a particular phenomenon or a group of phenomena, to general, referring to classes of phenomena (c.f. Glaser and Strauss 1967; Cutcliffe 2000; Glaser 2006). Therefore, the content of this article is a result of analyses which, according to the procedures of

grounded methodology, aim at the reconstruction of a basic process responsible for the researched phenomenon. As an explanation of the main actions of social actors goes beyond an ordinary description of a researched phenomena, the research result is not a presentation of particular variables, but a demonstration of mechanisms that form the foundations of the analyzed process. Hence, while developing this article, I focused my efforts not on aspects that distinguish separate groups of disabled sportsmen (regarding their age, sex or a type of dysfunction, among others) but on a notion that connects them all within the field of a broadly understood sports activity. The aim of the article is to demonstrate common characteristics of all examined cases, and not to reconstruct differences characteristic for particular cases or their groups. [3]

Data analysis was supported by CAQDAS—*Computer Assisted/Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software*. Work on the analysis-conceptual level was carried out with the NVivo 9 program, which supported the process of ordering and sorting the data, creating categories and developing hypotheses and constructing an integrating diagram (Richards 1999; Lonkila 1995).

Findings

The influence of sport practiced by a disabled person on their self-identification and perception of their life situation may be investigated from numerous angles. On the basis of the performed research it was found out that it is based on three main and simultaneously realized (sub)processes, influencing each other. The first (sub)process is identifying and taking on a role, which means the creation of a concept of actions connected with a sports activity (Tuner 1962). The second one is the moving reference, which means the acquisition of a certain cognitive perspective (Shibutani 1962, 1972). The third one is self-identification, which refers to the reconstruction of the individual's identity (Becker 1953). The following points of the article are devoted to each mentioned subprocess. [4]

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[3] Regarding the wider scope of the conducted research, going beyond the notions described in this article, the presented aspects pose just a certain thread, where a crucial place is occupied by a holistic approach to the processual character of practicing sport by people with physical disabilities. The process was reconstructed through the recreation of subsequent stadia, following each other in a particular sequence, the description of qualities related to each phase, conditions that need to be met to keep the process going, and the end of each phase initiated the simultaneous commencement of the next one. However, the multitude and diversity of sub-categories and qualities related to the process means that its reconstruction in this article is performed without recognition of detailed dimensions of the researched phenomenon, but bearing in mind their importance for the course of a given process. Among others, this is the reason why age, sex or disability character, and even the kind of practiced sport, treated according to the coding paradigm, as intervening variables (Strauss and Corbin 1990), were omitted in this text. The author's intention was to present a general pattern of transformations that take place in disabled people's lives thanks to practicing sport. Nevertheless, those aspects are listed and described individually in the whole research project, where one of the key elements is provided by the process presented in this article.

[4] While discussing the notion of transformations in lives of people with disabilities which take place through practicing sport, I focused on the presentation of three main sub-processes which jointly provide a basis for such transformations. It is worth emphasizing here that each of the listed processes may embrace the circumstances and events that cause a so called fiasco of changes in the way a disabled person perceives

Constructing a Role Through Acquiring the "Qualities" of a Sportsman

The (sub)process of creating the role of a person who practices sport is usually connected with their entering a new environment, which in turn means the necessity to become familiar with its principles, and the most important element is to gain a specific scope and type of knowledge.

Therefore, a formal aspect of role creation is participation in an institution or an organization, which consociates the disabled, providing them with conditions allowing for the realization of a given physical activity. This process will first of all refer to a set of actions, which is called membership in a given group. Meanwhile, the physical (sport) activity of a given person is composed of a set of actions and their features, which makes such an action meet the premises for sports practicing.

In this context, one of the basic aspects is the temporal dimension, meaning the regularity of training and successiveness of participating in any kind of meeting related to the physical activities. Such cyclicity pushes a person to become familiar with the "scheme" of an action, which poses one of the key aspects that legitimize membership of an individual in a group. Furthermore, a disabled person becomes convinced that their actions bear the hallmarks of sports practicing, so they begin to construct a certain definition of the situation.

It is crucial to become acquainted with the principles and rules that a given discipline is based on, not only regarding the basic requirements related to the commencement of sports practicing, but also in order to demonstrate one's commitment to obtaining the right competences. What is more, it is also significant to acquire general knowledge on the practiced discipline. Therefore, a person shows more interest in practicing the sport, which additionally makes their involvement more honest (Hughes 1958).

At the same time, it is especially significant to become familiar with various secrets of the game, also those informal ones, which are handed down between members of the group as "expert knowledge". It often constitutes a resource of knowledge provided by experienced players to those who have just started their adventure with sport. Hence, transmission of knowledge among group members takes place, which additionally strengthens their internal unity, assuring functioning continuity. At the same time, this is the principle that governs the reconstruction of separate people's statuses, as on one hand we deal with people that have the "authority" label attached, and on the other we deal with "pupils".

To describe the relationship between a person with disability in sport and the concept of training introduced by Anselm Strauss, one can compare it to a signpost directing the disabled person to the desired action (Strauss 1959). The main qualities of the coaching relationship are rooted in the fact that a pupil, while going through subsequent stages, needs a guide. This is not only about the conventional sense of teaching skills, but also about the fact that while the "coached" is moving within the

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himself and his own life situation. Nevertheless, their specificity, complexity, as well as multithreading go beyond the framework of this article, therefore requiring a separate work.

social space, there are highly important processes taking place inside them, requiring an explanation.

Hence, so-called role controllers may appear, i.e. people whose task it is to help a new group member become familiar with, understand and realize a new role. These may be individuals formally designated for this task, such as volunteers (often fully able people), or those who would like to help of their own free will, or who were asked for advice or support (in such a situation, usually these are disabled people). The role controllers have it to try to shape the new member through their comments, provide them with instructions on how to fulfill their role, and adjust the way they act to organizational requirements (Glaser and Strauss 1971). A specific balance inside the group can be maintained in this manner, but this is also a significant process in terms of the legitimization of new people by other group members.

However, a key element in the process of role development is, first of all, to improve skills and make progress in the game, which results in appreciation of the new person as a "valuable" team member. Such an individual becomes respected by the other team members, thus their group status increases. While considering the character of the group and its membership, which aims at the activation of the disabled and their social integration, the question of sport competences do not play a crucial role, unless it is a group established within a sports organization bringing together individuals that practice sport professionally.

Another significant aspect of developing a role is to acquire the manner of perceiving the surrounding reality and interconnected reactions towards the individual's surrounding, when it is hostile or the person simply does not understand their involvement in sport activity. A group provides each member with certain resources. On the one hand, it provides them with a certain matrix through which they interpret their own and others' behaviors, and on the other, with stimulation to act, consolidating a belief that these actions are right (Turner 1962). Therefore, when a given individual acquires the mentioned membership, they start to gradually change not only their thinking, but also how they function and react to other people (Hughes 1958). Therefore, we encounter a situation in which a disabled person acquires a feeling that their involvement in a sports activity is right, bringing not only physical but also mental and social benefits.

You know, it was only here that I started thinking of myself normally, that I'm not a cripple who can only sit at home and do nothing. When I came here for the first time I saw so many disabled people in one place, jumping, running and making wonders, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was a shock that you can do it, you can do it at all [a fragment of an utterance by a disabled person practicing sport—15/14]

The role of team member should provide the disabled person with positive life experiences and prevent tensions related to the difficulties and problems of every day life. But it should also reassure the disabled person about what they are doing, thus rendering it resistant to evaluations made by other people. While adopting the role of a sports group member, a disabled person learns to interpret how to take in and deal with being evaluated by others, and the attached negative labels (Goffman 1963). Such interpretations pose an element of reference knowledge of an individual, and serve not only to explain the reasons of bad evaluations and negative actions from their surroundings, but also to support the interpretations of other team members.

A disabled individual who becomes a sport team member, tries to combine their own observations, formal requirements and controller's comments, creating a general concept of the role, i.e. such that it will provide continuity of self-presentation to others, and which will constitute a compromise between the normative regulations and group requirements of the role, individual views and independent actions (Becker 1963).

A consequence of a certain "hardening" in the role is the adoption of a certain strategy of role realization—often preceded by errors and failed attempts and not initially accurate—which consists in particular actions and solutions that a disabled person applies in relationships with both team members and outside the group.

The most often encountered strategy is imitation (Boscom 1968), which consists in acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences on the basis of comparisons to a given person or persons, who pose a pattern to follow for the new team member, and who are credited by other team members with a high status. This may result from, among others, their knowledge, skills and possessed cultural and social capital—often as a consequence of long-standing experience.

First of all, I observed the others, how they deal with things, what they do, and what the results are. But you also need to look at those that are good, because they're worth learning from. Take Irek for example, he used to play in the national team, so he's like an unwritten coach here, as he's got the biggest experience [a fragment of an utterance of a disabled person practicing sport—9/14]

Another, less frequently encountered strategy is the internal reconstruction of a role, understood as playing it according to what is socially specified as practicing sport. In this case, a given person derives the patterns not from particular people around them, but he builds the pattern on the basis of the acquired knowledge and interpretation of subsequent experiences. The adoption of such a strategy is caused by insufficient involvement of the remaining team members in the inclusion of the new person (which actually happens quite seldom), but also regarding the previously adopted and strongly internalized social patterns of behaving and, what is more important, defining the environment.

I don't know, it wasn't like someone taught me something here, or took me under their wing. It was rather me who learnt through observing others, looking for information on the Internet. Later, I even tried to watch and repeat the way the capable players play, at least as far as I could [a fragment of an utterance of a disabled person practicing sport—5/13].

Regardless of the adopted strategy, while taking part in activities of a sports team, a disabled person reconstructs the concept of their own role. As a result, they become more realistic, less focused on stereotypical beliefs and more on particular actions taken by physically active people. The creation of a role, and first of all the presentation of the role, is interconnected with overcoming one's feelings, defeating barriers in dealings with others, and relationships with oneself (Goffman 1959). This is usually accompanied by a redefinition of one's life situation, which often moves from the experienced discouragement, withdrawal and self-alienation, to a felling of self-confidence and a belief in one's own possibilities, first of all rejecting the imposed criteria of social evaluation which the disabled person identified themselves with previously.

Change of the Cognitive Perspective of the Disable Person

As it has been already outlined, sport's influence on a disabled person, connected with their participation in various forms of physical activation, requires them to take on the role of a team member, but at the same time to adopt and share a certain cognitive perspective (Shibutani 1962). Hence, despite becoming a team member formally, a person needs to be accepted by the team, and this depends to a significant extent on the fulfillment of certain requirements and the adoption of the team's principles, but also on whether the individual identifies with that group. This, in turn, becomes possible when the cognitive perspective represented by team members is recognized, understood and then accepted and internalized. That is why, in this process, the disabled person becomes familiar, on the one hand, with the whole substantive sphere characteristic of the group, and on the other, with everything connected with the interpretative sphere, allowing himself to realize and gradually accept a cognitive perspective that differs from the one that was known and shared by the individual previously (Thomas 1972).

While disabled people do not accept those principles mechanically and without any thought, and the regulated team actions are not based on achievement of *equilibrium*, when the individual internalizes the functioning principles, it results in their subordination to external requirements. A given person becomes familiar with the mandatory rules, which they redefine within the course of time. This meta-rule interpretation becomes a basic cognitive tool, one which serves to specify group requirements, and determining the course of undertaken actions. Therefore, these rules are reconstructed creatively in the action, and not accepted as superior over their own thoughts and interpretations (see: Opp 2002).

When they become a team member, the disabled encounter a material novelty, i.e. the emergence of previously unobserved objects, new phenomena and people. Hence, such a person becomes a stranger entering unknown environment, becoming familiar with the space, the organizational customs and how things are done. A second type of novelty is interpretative i.e. perceiving already known entities, but in a different manner than before, as well as contact with entities whose symbolic meaning and definitions need to be acquired by the disabled (see: Strauss 1959: 19). Both types of novelties trigger the interest of the disabled, aiming at greater familiarization with differences in the situation, its material elements or the interpretative manners of how they are presented. As a result, the individual realizes that the previously known reality is not the only one, which means that there are also other other ways of doing things and other definitions of those actions and situations, and where they take place.

Actually everything was new here for me, I had not encountered it before, and I was pretty surprised when I saw for the first time what they did here. I knew nothing about the disabled people's sport at all, and that the disabled may actually be pretty able (laughter—note by JN) [a part of an utterance of a disabled person practicing sport—21/14].

It is a highly significant moment because, without the realization of those novelties, the process of moving references could not begin. This process commences only when a given person realizes that their interpretations are not right, i.e. that they make

definitional mistakes, which otherwise would enable them to fully understand the context of actions, interactions and attached meanings (Goffman 1959). In other words, the definitional mistake consisted in attaching an improper meaning to the experienced or observed phenomena, which was related to the fact that society pointed out a certain cognitive perspective to the individual, which was a collectively organized view on reality. At the same time, the framework of perception of the social reality may become inadequate for interpreting a new situation which is undoubtedly posed by the participation of a disabled person in a group sport activity. The changes taking place under the influence of a disabled person's participation in the organized forms of sports activity mean a gradual rejection of the previous manner of perceiving himself as an individual with the stigma of disability, internalized by the person on the basis of "patterns" of disability functioning in society (Hughes 1958: 126). Therefore, it is a process of realizing his own mental, social and physical potential, which supports the breaking of the stereotypical perception of himself, enabling the effective prevention of common, social labels and schemes which the disabled person is incorporated into. This is the way in which specific definitional revision takes place. It means that an individual begins to realize that the previous way in which he interpreted reality wasn't the only way, especially since it was not "neutral", but rather it bore the markings that objectified and degraded him. He now sees that it is possible to take a different look at his surroundings and himself.

When I think about it now, before I started practicing sports, I was like away from everything. I wasn't sure what I could do, and nobody never told me that I actually can do something. And I was sitting at home, without any sense, because I was afraid, because I didn't know, probably because I was taught so [a fragment of an utterance of a disabled person practicing sport—19/14].

The mistakes mentioned above appear as long as the interpretations are made from the cognitive perspective, characteristic of the previously internalized generalized social pattern. Only adoption of the point of view of the sports team, which provides a reference group, supports a gradual change of the cognitive perspective.

A group of active people practicing sports, which becomes the reference group, often represents a manner of perceiving the disability itself differently from that known to the disabled person previously (Shibutani 1962: 141). Instead of frequent whining and taking too much for granted, there is the belief in their own strengths and the willingness to be more independent, and the appreciated values are independence, self-reliance, activity and faith in their own strengths. It is a change of perspective, where previous anxieties and concerns are replaced by courage and self-confidence, rooted in observing their changing bodies and improving skills (Osborne 1997). It becomes possible to start noticing these changes effectively thanks to the adoption of such a cognitive perspective. Therefore, a revision of references takes place, resulting in a differentiation of former definitions from current ones. This happens as a contrast, where the primary meaning is played not by the disability but by the sports activity of a given person. Thus, we reach a situation where a disabled person undergoes a gradual metamorphosis related to the acquisition and translatability of the cognitive perspective (Schutz 1982), thanks to the membership in the group of disabled people that are physically active, within which their role of a sportsman is shaped.

Since I started moving, coming here and meeting people, I started looking at myself, and generally at people, in a completely different way. Before, I had the impression that nothing was awaiting me, that I was doomed to live in my house, maybe in front of the computer, but not with people, but virtually. It's different here, I feel that I can do more, but I'm also required to do more. And I think it's so normal, not sitting on your ass and wanting others to do everything for you [a fragment of an utterance of a disabled person practicing sport—4/13].

The change of such a perspective means that disability is not a taboo anymore, something to be ashamed of, something that should be hidden and potentially afraid of. Instead, disability becomes a fully legitimized topic of conversation, equal to any other, and instead of posing certain problems, it becomes a reason for "technical conversations" related to the basics that can be found in the categories of a "normal" life and regular experiences, which are required to be solved on an everyday basis (Leder 1990).

The Process of Self-identification of a Disabled Person

The last (sub)process connected with practicing sport by the disabled is the resulting self-identification of an individual, which consists in a gradual acquisition of a new, different definition of himself. This happens because in order to "be" a sportsman, apart from formal requirements, there is a need for a harmony between the thoughtful image of oneself, created by the individual, and an image reflected in attitudes, opinions and actions of other people (Cooley 1922: 179–185). Two previously discussed (sub)processes are related to the process of becoming an active disabled person in two dimensions. The first one is acquisition of the ability to act, i.e. to interact with others in a manner that provides the disabled with the possibility to take on a role according to the specific socio-institutional and organizational conditions which the participant group is based on (Strauss 1959). The second (sub)process, in short, is the adoption of cognitive and interpretative perspectives, characteristic of the new reference group (Shibutani 1962: 141).

As an effect, both (sub)processes lead to the gradual identification of the individual with principles, rules and values present in a group that the individual aspires to. Therefore, we deal with the emergence of another (sub)process, corresponding directly to the attitudes of a disabled person towards themselves. When analyzing his biography, man seeks continuity, over-situational essence, which provides the feeling of ego cohesiveness (Strauss 1993). Stability discovered in such a manner, treated as the true "me" of a given person, is compared with current actions or roles, in terms of correspondence or divergence. This is the manner in which a disabled person checks the extent to which their sports activity is similar to or different from their expectations. The more they turn out to be similar, the more the sport activity will be treated as the realization and fulfillment of himself, and then self-identification will achieve an authentic dimension (Strauss 1959).

It is worth emphasizing that such a situation is characteristic of informal thinking, which is based on, among others, the reciprocity of perspectives. In other words, what is taken for granted are all interpretational schemes and cognitive experiences that make up the given group's stock of knowledge at hand related to a particular fragment

of reality, in this case to the creation of intersubjective activity based on practicing sports (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Thus, a specific mental transition of a disabled person takes place, shown by the fact that they can take a different look at the surrounding reality and themselves, and adopt a different cognitive scheme whereby sport plays a significant role. In some cases, it even becomes a central life activity which focuses all the other actions of the individual. Sport is then treated as a leading motif, constituting more than just a basic action of a given person. However, regardless of the final position occupied by sport, it constitutes not only a form of life activity, but also a certain showcase and an important element through which a given person defines himself and through which he would like to be seen (Cooley 1922). Hence, disability is not a specific taboo anymore, it is also not defined solely in the category of problems or difficulties. The person stops being ashamed of their disability. They start talking about themselves increasingly more often and more confidently, mentioning their life difficulties, emphasizing their determination, the spirit to fight and get involved, at the same time specifying themselves as an independent and autonomous individual. In such circumstances, disability becomes an accepted part of a given person, it is not hidden, but treated normally. To a certain extent, disability is defined as an ordinary asset of a given person and his identity, it is not a label or a stigma that they are socially associated with.

Goffmann (1961) pointed to the fact that, regardless of the sources of a particular behavior, social reactions are significant factors that determine how an individual self-identifies and also how he conducts himself. Public response to a given behavior supports not only its consolidation, but it also changes the manner of defining the identity of a "stigmatized" person. This is why sport practicing may be interpreted as a premise of a conscious fight against social prejudices and interpretational clichés, where the disabled person's social role is determined in advance, connected first of all with passiveness, dependence and a demanding attitude. In the case of a sports activity of a disabled person it is about breaking a stereotypical manner of perceiving not only an individual person, but the whole category of people, with various visible body dysfunctions.

Now, the only thing that counts is to be able to carry on doing what I really like, simply to be active. I didn't have this courage in the past, I didn't even think in this way. I think that everything told me that it's not for me, that it can't or shouldn't be done. But now I know that I used to limit myself, that I let myself be, hmm…, manipulated by others, I'd put it that I believed others, and because of that I disbelieved in myself. And it's not like that, you need to overcome your feelings, stop thinking about yourself as if you were a cripple, because it's in our heads, and you need to fight it, because otherwise nothing will change [a fragment from an utterance of a disabled person—7/13].

As a result of a sports activity, the existing set of self-definitions of a disabled person is complemented by others, which derive from their newly-adopted social roles. The transformation of a system of identity of a social actor—a disabled person practicing sport—frequently results from an identity crisis, triggered by processes of negative life experiences and interferences in the realization of previous identities in specific interactional systems and the interconnected feeling of incompatibility with the socio-cultural environment (Lynd 1961). Consequently, transformations of

self-identification can therefore be associated with: the eradication of the existing social world, the marginalization of the individual, and his participation in a group acting on it in a negative way. In this way the individual experiences otherness and the inability to adopt a positive self-identification… Glynis M. Breakwell lists three kinds of attack on the individual's identity: questioning a certain definition of oneself, questioning a person's membership in a given group, and depreciation of the group (Breakwell 1986). In turn, Helen Lynd writes about two destructive experiences. The first is connected with a disabled person's inability to accept as appropriate the identification created by a group that is significant to the individual, and the second is when this identification is negated by meaningful others, e.g. parents (Lynd 1961).

As I've said before, it was a difficult time for me, when I got out of the hospital, and it turned out that everything was different, that I'm different. I was ashamed to go out, that someone would see me on the streets. I was afraid that they would look at me in a weird way, and I didn't want to leave home. It was even harder for me to pull myself together when I was thinking this way. I didn't want to see anybody. I was unable to do anything about it. And I don't know how long I would have been like that if it wasn't for Zbyszek, who found me somehow, contacted me and said that I could come to him because I've got physical predispositions. And then I thought that he was talking rubbish, but he left his business card and told me to call him if I wanted. This business card lay in the cupboard for several months, but I somehow decided to call, I don't even know how it happened [a fragment of an utterance of a disabled person practicing sport—27/14]

The feeling of destabilization and threats that accompany the crisis may push the individual to mobilize himself and start a creative search for a new lifestyle. In some cases, it turns out that this new manner of living is based on a widely understood physical activity, including sport practicing. In such a situation, the identity crisis may result not only in the process of transforming the previous system of self-definition for an individual, but it can also support deepening of thoughts and self-awareness, therefore strengthening new self-identifications (Strauss 1959).

Discussion and Conclusion

The article raises the notions of changes that take place in the life of a physically disabled person which are caused by his engagement in a sports activity. Conclusions from the research point out that practicing sports may create advantageous conditions allowing for the self-discovery and self-acceptance of a disabled person. And because—as suggested by Goffman (1963)—the manner of perceiving oneself depends on the way we are seen by others, the disabled, often an object of stigmatized stereotypes, need to somehow respond to the imposed identity through opposing their stereotypical image. A manner of effective opposition to a stereotypical image of their own is the widely understood activation of the disabled, and one manner to realize it may be practicing sport.

The performed research proves that a sports activity exerts a positive influence on the manner of defining the self and the surrounding reality by the disabled people. People with various dysfunctions are able to change not only the manner of perceiving themselves but also they can influence how they are perceived. Through their own actions, including successive, repeatable and planned physical activity, the people

practicing sport may improve the condition of their bodies, gain additional practical skills and enhance their functional fitness.

Secondly, the research has shown that a person practicing sport starts perceiving himself in other categories than those arising from their disability and body dysfunctionality. Crossing subsequent mental and physical barriers moves the disabled away from the feeling of the attached stigma, which leads to defining themselves in new and "normalized" categories. The dysfunction of the body stops being an impassable barrier, impossible to be overcome, and it acquires a new face, one which puts emphasis on the underlying potential and unexplored possibilities. Consciousness of one's own body, improved through a sports activity, allows a disabled person to experience stimuli flowing from the outside in a controlled manner, on the one hand, and on the other, to control the body itself, its functioning, condition, and reactions. The body, as a system of actions and the source of routines, becomes a significant element of the development of the feeling of self-identity, through participation or involvement in a sports activity, and the regulated control over one's body becomes a basic resource of maintaining biographic continuity and identity. In this context, the problem of corporeality of the disabled practicing sport may be analyzed with the application of the stigma categories by Goffman (1963), and through other concepts of this author, such as e.g. territories of the self, which depending upon the distribution of bodies, space, and propos, are what individuals can claim as the proper spacing of self from others, and which could also provide a basis for the development of empirical explanations of the researched phenomena (see: Turner 2010).

Thirdly, the performed research has shown that practicing sport may influence the manner of perceiving oneself and one's life situation, leading to a gradual regaining of self-esteem and restoring faith in one's own strength. A sports activity is a basis for the social and mental transformations of a disabled person. This happens because the group within which the sport activity is realized is a social environment supporting life progressions, where an individual can find not only some mental support, but also can become aware that there are other people out there who will share their cognitive perspective (Shibutani 1962, 1972). The sharing of this perspective results in the individual finding support for their needs, which become fulfilled on the basis of being a member of that group.

Fourthly, the research points out that within a group of people practicing sport jointly, there is a process of forming the individual's identity, which is based on the mechanism of recognizing, defining and interpreting oneself and others in situations with certain influences. Therefore, as highlighted by Mead (1934: 243), the ego of the individual emerges, resulting from his attitudes of others, but simultaneously this organized collection of attitudes of other people are adopted by this individual.

As a result, the performed research proved that the mechanism of sport's influence on a disabled person is based on three basic (sub)processes.

The first one is about having a relatively permanent concept of the role, developed and played through accumulating interactional experiences, enabling the person to reconcile formal, informal and group (organizational) expectations with individual goals.

The second (sub)process is about sharing a cognitive perspective with a group, i.e. adoption of a certain manner of perceiving the world and interpreting phenomena in a manner similar to that applied by other team members, using group definitions of situations, and referring to their own individual observations.

Finally, the third (sub)process is self-identification in a new, reconstructed manner, which initially is present only in the demonstrational dimensions, but over time it also becomes an element of the general self-concept of a human, an indispensable element of their self-awareness, therefore a clear identification of the self.

It is only possible to achieve each of the presented (sub)processes with simultaneous development of the two remaining ones. Hence, the described process of becoming oneself by a person involved in practicing sport is actually a synergy of those three (sub)processes.

To sum up, we can use Strauss' words (1959), when he suggests that what is constructed undergoes reconstruction and reinterpretation—a change of social experiences triggers the pressure of the reconceptualization of oneself. Therefore, the system of self-definition of social actors is transformed, which results in an individual becoming someone different than they used to be, perceiving and valuing themselves in another manner (Strauss 1959: 91–92). As proved by the performed research, a source of such transformations may be provided by physical activity of a disabled person, which leads to the gradual development of a new role as well as a transformation of the vision of oneself and the surrounding social world.

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