

Ice and Nets: Comparative Study of Structure, Socialization and Culture in Youth Figure Skating and Basketball

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AUTHOR BIO

Yingzhi Jiang is a senior at Shenzhen College of International Education interested in pursuing psychology and sociology. She started figure skating at the age of six and joined the school basketball team in high school, training intensely. Thus, by experiencing both an individual and team sport, she was inspired to study sports from a comparative angle.

ABSTRACT

This comparative study examines how different sporting environments shape the athletic identities of young athletes through the following sociological perspectives from *The Sociology of Sport: An Introduction*: sporting structures, socialization and culture. Drawing from semi-structured interviews with a total of eight interviewees consisting of athletes, coaches and parents in China, alongside the observance of six training sessions, the research investigates the nuanced dynamics of individual and team sports. Findings suggest different structures of sporting systems, individual versus group, create distinct expectations for young athletes from different perspectives. While figure skating emphasizes personal skills and individual responsibility, basketball focuses on collective teamwork and communication. Yet, these boundaries are not completely binary. Individual figure skaters can build close peer relationships during training, and basketball players need personal responsibilities within team roles. Furthermore, socialization is not a one-way transmission from the sporting environment to the athlete. Athletes may develop agency to critique and transform their sporting environment when stepping into roles of leadership or coaching. Overall, the study argues that young athletes are indeed shaped differently by the distinct individual or team sports they participate in. Moreover, the study also demonstrates how the agency and structure of individual and team sports interact.

Key words: *sports, sociology, sports sociology, individual and team, figureskating, basketball, athletic identity, young athletes. Metabolism, Hepatotoxicity.*

INTRODUCTION

Sport plays a significant role in people's lives. From primary school P.E. classes to game night with friends, sport is one of the earliest influential environments young people encounter. Beyond merely learning techniques and competing, intensive participation in sport during childhood and adolescence exposes young athletes to particular sport systems of expectations, relationships, and values (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 6). From a sociological perspective, an athlete's experience is not only shaped by their individual ability but also by larger structures, roles, and institutions.

Individuals are, for the most part, socially determined, and as social beings, they are products of their social environments (Delaney & Madigan, 2021). Thus, it follows that athletes are products of their sporting environments. Through methods of learning and training, athletes develop values, identities, and relationships specific to their sport. Moreover, the features of each unique type of sport influence athletes differently. In particular, young athletes often enter a sport highly influenced by key agents within its structure, notably coaches, parents, peers, and competitors (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 115). Thus, examining the structure of sporting worlds provides an important foundation for understanding how different sporting environments create particular pathways and experiences for athletes.

While the social structures of sport provide the fundamental framework in which sport occurs, athletes become members of these sporting worlds through processes of *socialization*. Socialization is defined as 'a continuing process of social development and learning that occurs as individuals interact with one another and learn about society's expectations of proper behavior so that they can participate and function within their societies' (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 110). From a microsociological perspective, individuals learn the expectations of their positions and aim to live up to them. What is more, socialization is not a short-term process: it instead describes long-term development in which the 'social environment, rather than physical ability, determines behavior' (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, pp. 110–111). Thus, within sport, athletes are typically expected to fulfill certain expectations of their roles, which are themselves an element of the broader structural environment. Therefore, socialization in sport is not simply a transmission of sporting techniques—it is an ongoing process where athletes internalize sporting values and construct their own identities (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 111).

Beyond structures and socialization processes, every sporting environment also develops its own unique *culture*, defined as 'the shared knowledge, values, language, norms, and behavioral patterns, or customs, of a given society that are handed down from one generation to the next and form a way of life for its members' (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 83). Moreover, culture consists of 'material culture', defined as the physical, tangible creations of a society, and 'non-material culture', defined as abstract creations: beliefs, values, ideology, norms, and symbols (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 84). Culture shapes how athletes define success, respond to challenges, interact with others, and construct their athletic identities. From competition rules to sport terminology, athletes make sense of their participation and roles through these frameworks (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, pp. 84–90). Therefore, understanding these cultures in sport is essential for understanding how athletes are embedded in different sporting worlds.

This study will examine how sporting subworlds shape the experiences and identities of young athletes through a comparison of individual and team sports by specifically analyzing figure skating and basketball respectively. Although social structure, socialization, and culture provide general conceptual frameworks for understanding athletics, these frameworks take empirically different forms across sporting subworlds, particularly when comparing individual- and team-based environments. Through conducting interviews with athletes, coaches and parents involved in intensive participation of these sports, viewing training sessions, and considering own experience, this research argues that the type of organization of sport, individual versus team, creates different social environments in which young athletes develop distinct expectations. However, these differences are not binary: these expectations are often internalized and finally reshaped.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative data collected through interviews with athletes, coaches and parents who are heavily involved in figure skating and basketball, as well as through the careful observation of training sessions of the two sports. The interview participants are two figure skating athletes, two basketball athletes, one figure skating coach, one basketball coach, one figure skating parent and one basketball parent. The data collected during these interviews was collected both in-person and online, using the communication platform WeChat. Six training sessions were observed in total at ice rinks and basketball courts, three for each sport.

To protect participants' privacy, all interviewees are given pseudonyms throughout this paper. The interviewees' information can be found in Table 1 below:

Table 1
Basic Information of Interviewees

Interviewee Pseudonym	Relationship to Sport
Figure Skating Parent: Lee	Parent of Jiang
Figure Skater: Jiang	Figure skater for 10 years
Figure Skater: Sun	Figure skater for 13 years; currently part-time figure skating coach
Figure Skating Coach: Gao	Coach for > 20 years; owner of a figure skating club
Basketball Player: Chen	High school basketball player
Basketball Player: Jia	High school basketball player; aiming to be professional

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Figure Skating Coach: Gao	Coach for > 20 years; owner of a figure skating club
Basketball Coach: Xiao	Basketball coach
Basketball Parent: Dong	Parent of high school basketball player

The interview questions can be found in Table 2 below:

Table 2
Interview Questions

Interviewee Category	Athlete	Parent	Coach
Questions	How did you enter into the ‘world’ of [the sport] How did your experiences develop or stay the same over time within that world? What ‘values’ were most emphasized in the sport? Were you motivated by ‘heroes’ within the sport? What was the ‘culture’ of the sport? Specific language or lingo? How important is this sport to ‘who you are’ / how you define	Why did you choose this sport for your child? What do you want your child to learn or benefit from? Do you consider the beauty aspect of this sport as unique? Did your thoughts change during the process? How much effort did you put in as a parent?	How did you enter into the ‘world’ of [the sport] How did your experiences develop (or stay the same) over time within that world? What ‘values’ were most emphasized in the sport? And what values do you emphasize when you coach? Are there any stories of specific students or young athletes you would like to share? What was the ‘culture’ of the sport? Specific language or lingo? How important is this sport to ‘who you are’ / how you define yourself?

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Interviewee Category	Athlete	Parent	Coach
	yourself?		

Note. Some questions were added based on the different situations of the interviewee.

Notes were taken in the following aspects during training sessions: date, duration, level of training, routine, coach-athlete interaction, and athlete-athlete interaction. All of the responses were subsequently analyzed in terms of their relation to the three key conceptual themes of the project: social structure, socialization, and culture.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Sporting Structure

The two sports, figure skating and basketball, represent typical examples of individual and team sports respectively. Individual sports can be sorted into ‘with cooperation’ and ‘without cooperation’, while team sports are sports ‘with cooperation’: the winning of a game depends on coordination of individual efforts (Fraemaey-Lamon et al., 1979). Single figure skating is considered a technical, non-cooperative sport. As previously indicated, sport is not simply an activity that individuals participate in: it is rather a social institution that shapes how athletes understand themselves and others. Therefore, athletes’ experiences cannot be understood only in terms of individual ability. Instead, the structure of each sport creates particular expectations based on the role of the athlete. This is one of the clearest differences that emerged from the interviews: although figure skating and basketball are both competitive sports, they construct fundamentally different sporting worlds. Single figure skating creates a world centered around individual responsibility, while basketball creates environments where athletes must constantly work together and develop relationships.

In individual figure skating, the structure of participation places athletes at the center of responsibility. One figure skater, Sun, described the sport as one in which “you only need to be responsible for yourself.” Within this structure, success and failure are directly connected to the individual athlete. Thus, during training and competition, the athlete needs to be responsible for every movement and mistake on the ice. This reflects how sporting structures establish roles and expectations. The skater’s role is to progress in individual skill, personal performance and self-discipline. According to *The Sociology of Sport*, social institutions organize individuals through different sports identities, and these positions influence how people behave within the same institution (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p.116). In this case, the role of the figure skater encourages independence because the athlete must constantly improve their own performance.

By contrast, during an observation of a basketball training session for primary school boys, the basketball coach called out multiple times in a shooting practice that, “One don’t score, you all run!”. This shifts responsibility from an individual to a shared outcome in a team. This in turn shows the expectations of the sport of basketball: athletes were asked to stand up and take responsibility for

mistakes as a team unit, not individually.

During observations of a figure skating training session, no matter whether it was an individual session or a group session, coaches gave feedback to individuals one by one. “If you still miss one turn in this spin, you’ll be the last one off the ice!” was called out by coach Gao to a skater. Similar to the call out by the basketball coach, this was also used as a ‘punishment’ call during training. However, the ‘punishment’ or responsibility for mistakes during training is entirely put on individuals in figure skating. The coaches’ expectation of responsibility shapes what athletes are expected to pay attention to, making a difference in the two sports. Expectations and morals related to responsibility in sports are gradually internalized by athletes, exemplified by figure skater Jiang stating, “I try really hard to focus only on myself during training, and this becomes more evident as I age.”

The significance of the social-structural difference between individual and team sport becomes clearer when comparing individual figure skating and synchronized skating. Figure skater Sun explained that since transitioning to synchronized skating, she has to “know where everyone is”, communicate with teammates, and adjust her movements according to those of others. Unlike individual figure skating, where the athlete’s attention is inward, synchronized skating requires the athlete to be more aware of other people’s actions. She also described how training became more socially interactive: “synchronizing training is more chill: slight chatting is allowed by the coach. That is something I would never dare to do when I was training as an individual. I feel that I know my teammates more.” Synchronized skating, as a team sport, values communication and cooperation. Expectations are held for athletes on the same team to skate in unity for a program, and to collaborate during training. This demonstrates that even within the same sport institution, different structures produce different patterns of interaction and expectations.

Basketball represents team sports where relationships and collective responsibility are embedded into participation. Unlike individual figure skating, in which athletes often train and compete independently, basketball requires constant coordination among teammates. During observations of basketball training, athletes are required to work together starting from warm up games. This is comparable to figure skating training: even though it was a 1 v 3 session, athletes completed the training tasks individually. The basketball parent Dong emphasized that one reason she chose basketball for her child was the opportunity to “meet more friends and become more outgoing.” She viewed the team environment as a space where participation could encourage social interaction and personal development. Therefore, basketball does not only develop physical skill: its structure naturally creates opportunities for young athletes to learn cooperation and communication, as well as gain a sense of belonging. While both sports emphasize high personal skill and technique, team sports like basketball also illustrate negotiation skills and value contribution to a collective goal.

The difference between these sporting structures also influences athletes’ experience as participating in a role. In basketball, the existence of teammates creates social roles that do not exist in individual sports. Basketball player Chen stated he became a team leader because “I was the best player on the team” and his teammates naturally looked to him for guidance. The existence of the position of team captain was not due to this basketball player’s personality or personal characteristics. It was

produced through the structure of basketball requiring roles such as captain, teammate, and even key player and substitute. By contrast, individual figure skating has only the positions of athlete and coach.

Sporting structures also shape who has access to participate in the first place. Figure skating and basketball differ also in terms of the economic resources they require. The figure skating parent Lee described figure skating as “a completely marketized sport”, explaining that annual training costs are high, with some families making significant sacrifices to support their children’s participation. In contrast, the basketball parent Dong described basketball as relatively affordable and accessible, and the reason for her son playing was, “there is a court in front of our apartment.” This demonstrates that sporting worlds are not equally available to all individuals. Participation is shaped by broader social institutions, particularly economic resources and family support.

Socialization

Socialization is defined as ‘a continuing process of social development and learning that occurs as individuals interact with one another’ (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 110). More simply, socialization is the process whereby the self is formed and changes throughout an athlete’s life. For young athletes, sports are particularly important in this development of self, as individuals are socialized through face-to-face interactions within primary groups and secondary groups (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, pp. 110–112). This is especially significant in individual figure skating. Individual figure skaters who start professional training at a young age spend a large proportion of their time within the athletic environment interacting with coaches and fellow skaters. Figure skater Sun said, “More time was spent with my coach [than with my family] both on ice and in life.” Indeed, if based on the daily structure of the seven-hour training period, more waking hours are spent at the training center with coaches than at home. However, this intense training environment also needs the help of a broader social structure around the athlete. For success, ‘determination, discipline and commitment from the skaters and the whole family’ is needed, and high-level figure skating often involves early specialization and intensive year-round training (Salonen, 2020).

By contrast, basketball interviewees pointed out that basketball was nothing more than a fun after-school activity during their childhood. This is a function of the difference in the intensity of training periods. The age when figure skaters start professional or elite training is comparatively younger than that of basketball players. This suggests that young skaters are more engaged and embedded within the sporting world from an earlier point in their lives. However, the number of interviews may not be enough to draw a valid conclusion.

Coaches play a crucial role in socialization as they directly determine expectations and the correct modes of execution during training. Figure skater Sun said the training was mostly “copy and paste.” Training sessions almost always follow a routine choreographed by the coach, who also gives out orders that the skater executes. The coach also provides feedback. Sun’s role was to closely follow the coach’s instructions rather than question them. In comparison, basketball coach Xiao said he would deliberately design his training sessions to value both individual skill *and* team work—“your individual skill affects

the team!” he shouted during a training session. This contrasts with the figure skating coach Gao shouting, “Why do you care what she is doing!” when one of his students asked them where her friend went.

The effect of socialization via sports intensifies as the age of the athlete increases. Additionally, the socialization process is the ‘most effective’ when a role within the institution is assigned to the athlete (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 110). During this process, young athletes experience a looped phenomenon of getting socialized and socializing others. For basketball player Chen, he “learned how to exactly be a ‘captain’ of the team only when I was pushed into that position.” He started to learn and internalize more qualities and expectations only when he became captain. He learned to internalize the norms and culture of the sport, for instance, by helping others and organizing the team. Basketball player Jia also described her understanding of the sport growing with age: “I began to understand how to actively train and push myself. In the past I was [only] being pushed.” Similarly, figure skater Sun said, “only when I got older did I start to actually think.” Sun’s realization of what it means to “actually think” shows she was more so following the rules during her younger years, but developed internal agency as she grew older. Also, when she came back to the figure skating club after university, she played the role of a mentor: “I feel I am responsible for the junior kids at the club. I try to help them as much as I can, helping them with both skating knowledge and personal life, like how to maintain a good relationship with the coach.” The socialization process, then, is most effective when people within the institution react dynamically to stimuli (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 111). Here, both athletes Sun and Jia become two senior athletes and mentors in their sports institutions. Not only have they already internalized the norms and culture of their subworlds but they are also starting to socialize others. They could be acting as socialization agents in others’ socialization process.

However, young athletes do not always simply accept and reproduce the expectations and culture of their sporting world: there are times when they question things, demonstrating how socialization is not a one-way process. Being in a sporting structure from a young age does not guarantee a full acceptance of the expectations in that sport. Attention could be placed on the ‘agency’ within sporting structures, meaning athletes can interpret and respond to the cultural environments they participate in (Broch, 2022). Even though figure skater Sun had pointed out she felt more mature and contributed more of her own thoughts into training as she grew up in the world of figure skating, she also sometimes “feel[s] a paradox seeing the junior kids go through the same strict and serious training, which [she feels] is unnecessary sometimes, and it did have a negative influence on me.” This reflection illustrates how being socialized into a sporting world does not necessarily mean total acceptance. Instead, it was exactly because she had been socialized into the core of the sporting world that she was able to reinterpret norms and values in figure skating. This situation is also shown by basketball coach Xiao, although he implemented his ‘questions’ into his own new training methods for students. He said when he was younger, training was “less scientific and logical.” Thus, when he designs his lessons for students, he makes it more in the way he thought was “appropriate.” He noted that training during his childhood valued individual skill more, and the words of the coach and seniors in his club were to be obeyed at all times. However, during his training session, it is obvious he values teamwork and sportsmanship, constantly shouting “communication guys!” and “switch! switch!”. Coach Xiao explained he tries to make a team successful

rather than one specific young athlete in his club. Altogether, the sporting values and practices passed down from generation to generation are not necessarily replicated. They can be reconsidered by young athletes as they mature and then transformed when they become coaches. Therefore, the structure of sport worlds can evolve across time as individuals move from being receivers of socialization to becoming agents who shape expectations for others.

Despite the substantial differences between the socialization processes of the two sports, they should not be separated into opposite ends of a spectrum. Even though socialization tends to emphasize responsibility for one's own performance in individual figure skating, while basketball places emphasis on understanding how individual actions affect and depend on teammates, 'individual sports performance are rarely individual efforts.' (Evan et al., 2012) Thus, although athletes compete individually, their sporting experiences are still embraced within a collective environment (Evan et al., 2012). For example, figure skater Sun mentioned several times that individual training requires her to "only be responsible to yourself", and when she transitioned into synchronizing skating, she found out during training she has the responsibility to "know where everyone else is." Despite this difference in actual training, she noted what she cherishes most from her childhood memory of training in Coach Gao's professional club are the peer skaters, and those childhood friendships were "the best part of training". Figure skater Jiang also shared, "the girls in my club were all very close. We would spend most of our time together off ice, and keep each other going during training." Although individual figure skating emphasizes responsibility for one's own performance, Sun's interview shows the presence of demand for a concept of 'team' even in an individual sport. Similarly, basketball's emphasis on teamwork does not eliminate individual responsibility, as Xiao's statement "your individual skill affects the team" demonstrates.

Culture

Language in a sports culture is an important part of how athletes learn to participate in that sub-world because the specific words allow only participants to communicate and understand shared meanings that are not accessible to outsiders. Sports develop cultural systems organized around distinctive 'symbols, myths and narratives' (Broch, 2022). Language acts as symbols through which people express ideas and communicate. Different sports develop their own sets of language unique to athletes, coaches, fans, and everyone in that distinct sub-world (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, pp. 86–87). The interviews suggest that figure skating competitions and movements are set and fixed: a program is made up of step sequences, jumps, and spins. Interviewees use technical terms such as "GOE", which refers to the extra points added on a technique during a program, as well as more casual terms such as "clean", which refers to a flawless start-to-finish execution of a skating program. Such language strengthens the sub-culture of figure skating in which movements and techniques are fixed and patterned during a competition. Another common term is "Kiss & Cry", which is the name of the score waiting area, where the skater and their coaches typically wait for the judges' scores. Although these terms may appear highly technical or strange to an outsider, they are immediately meaningful within the figure skating community. The language of figure skating reinforces the sport's subculture by creating a shared vocabulary through which participants understand and communicate.

In contrast, language in basketball reflects a sporting culture in which communication and cooperation are more central. Words are more dynamic, with the following language appearing in the interviews: “court vision,” “assist,” and “block”. These words, different from figure skating, describe not only individual actions or areas but also how players should respond in a court with opponents and teammates. The term “court vision” was particularly emphasized by basketball player Chen: “I think it is the most important quality one needs for this sport. Top individual skill might even lose to a team with good court vision. Knowing when to pass [the ball] and how to cooperate [is very important].” This specific language reveals how teamwork and cooperation are the most valued qualities in basketball and team sports in general. This is strengthened through the use of language during training. At one of Coach Xiao's practice sessions, the young players were asked to shout out each others' names when they passed the ball, and clap their hands when they wanted to receive the ball. Ultimately, language can reflect the diverse nature of the sports. With a fixed routine, the language of figure skating is more static, whereas in basketball, where anything can happen on the court, language used on and off the court is more dynamic.

Media and sports have a symbiotic relationship (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 407), meaning that media does not merely report sport: rather, it interprets and represents sport. Through the media, people's impression and image of the sport is shaped. Thus, the media influences young athletes' socialization into sports. For example, figure skater parent Lee noted that she saw elegant figure skaters on TV, and thus chose figure skating as a sport for her daughter. In addition, figure skater Jiang described watching documentaries about the Japanese figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu when she was younger, explaining that, “I would watch his documentaries” and that they gave her the impression that he was “extremely disciplined”. Her understanding of Hanyu came not only from watching competitions but also from seeing a variety of media forms such as documentaries and online videos. Yuzuru Hanyu's documentaries present particular aspects of his identity that helped young skater Jiang understand what athletes should be like. This suggests that the media can extend sport beyond physical training. Thus, while coaches teach young athletes technical skills, the media can indirectly construct an image and presentation of what a successful athlete should be like. This is also shown in basketball. Basketball player Jia expressed her admiration for famous basketball player Stephen Curry. She expressed that, “It feels very awesome to wear something Curry wears, and I feel closer to him whenever my 3-pointers improve.” For young athletes, this is significant because they are not only participants in this sport but also the audience of sports media while their understanding of the sport is still developing. Thus, the media extends the sporting culture beyond the ice rink or court, exposing participants of the sport to specific images and narratives, helping them form expectations about the sport.

Heroes ‘represent culture and value components’ and become culture symbols (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 98). Athletes act as important role models for young people, influencing behavior by providing examples of how members of a sporting structure are expected to act. Figure skater Jiang also added that she looked up to Yuzuru Hanyu as a hero, describing his technique as “top level” and his jumps as “clean and precise”; she also emphasized Yuzuru Hanyu's qualities of “a very smart mind” and a “capable body”. Her description reveals the qualities she thought an ideal figure skater should have: strong technical skill and a quick mind. Thus, the role of heroes can act as a significant agent of socialization for young athletes. Young athletes would try and live up to their heroes. This is reinforced by

Jiang later indicating she would want to skate in competition up to almost age thirty, just like another “hero”, Amber Glenn, an American figure skating Olympian. The hero functions not simply as a successful athlete to admire but also as a model of their own future sporting pathway.

However, in comparing ‘heroes’ of figure skating and basketball, there is still a significant contrast. Sports heroes in both sports embody the cultural values of their sporting structure. Basketball heroes specifically can be categorized as ‘group servants’. A ‘group servant’ is a particular type of hero who places the needs of the team above individual achievement (Delaney & Madigan, 2021, p. 98). In the figure skating interviews, admiration tended to focus more strongly on the individual athlete and qualities demonstrated through personal performance and more sources. However, this does not mean figure skating heroes are purely individualistic. Figure skaters can also represent national teams and collective identities, while basketball heroes also can be admired precisely for their individual skill and achievement. Basketball heroes are often recognized through both individual skill and their position within a team, as well as for their contribution to a collective success. Basketball player Jia indicated how she first took notice of Stephen Curry, her childhood hero, then moved on to become a fan of his team as a whole, the Golden State Warriors. She noted Curry’s “staying in the same team for so many years” is another reason she admires him. This reflects a broader pattern found in the interviews: basketball players are socialized to understand their abilities in relation to teammates. For instance, player Chen described how becoming captain meant learning to “look after teammates” and “encourage them.” Thus, an individual figure skating hero can represent perfecting oneself, whereas a basketball hero can represent an individual within a collective identity. Conversely, it is important to note that figure skaters can also represent their country in a collective way.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how the structure of individual and team sports shapes the experiences of young athletes through the sociology perspectives of social structure, socialization and culture. The comparison of figure skating to basketball as a case study of individual versus team sports suggests the type of organization between sports can create distinct expectations that lead young athletes to develop different understandings of relationships and responsibility within those sports. In individual sports, individual performance and competition are of primary importance. Thus, in the case of figure skating, young athletes are socialized into having strong self responsibility and a close connection with the coach rather than with teammates. For team sports such as basketball, athletes are more connected to each other within a team unit in which there is more collective spirit and communication. Structural differences are also reflected in the cultures young athletes participate in, including the specialized language they use and the sporting heroes they admire.

Overall, the contrast does not reach a conclusion of one being better than the other. Rather, the results suggest that different sporting structures shape athletes into different identities. However, the interviews also demonstrate that athletes are not always passive in only internalizing the rules and expectations. As they become more experienced, they may start to question and reinterpret the practices into which they were initially socialized. In most cases, they subsequently become agents of socialization

themselves, transmitting or modifying these expectations for younger athletes. Thus, sporting structures shape young athletes' experiences, but the relationship between structure and individuality is not in one direction. Athletes are simultaneously shaped by and capable of contributing to the reproduction and transformation of their sporting environments.

However, because this study used a relatively small sample size of athletes, coaches, and parents within two sporting contexts in China, the findings represent contextualized patterns rather than universal generalizations across all individual and team sports. Future research could collect data of a larger and more diverse group of athletes and agents, with different genders, age, or competitive level groups. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking athlete-coach and peer relationships over extended periods would further illuminate how sporting structures are reproduced or transformed across generations.

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