

**A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF ATHLETIC IDENTITY AND  
SUCCESSFUL INJURY REHABILITATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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A severe injury is an identity threatening situation for competitive athletes. Previous literature suggests that having a strong athletic identity can be beneficial for the athlete when injured. To the date there has been little research on how athletic identity is managed during that challenging time of injury. The purpose of this study was to explore how athletic identity is managed during the injury and rehabilitation phase before returning to competitive sport. Knowing the determinants of athletic identity management allows practitioners to adjust their interventions toward specific issues when working with injured athletes.

The present study is a qualitative, collective case study. Hermeneutic phenomenological research approach was used to explore the narrative identities of the participants, who were selected with criterion sampling. The data was generated in semi-structured interviews with four Finnish national or international level athletes, who faced an injury and returned to their sport successfully. The data was analyzed abductively using thematic analysis. Quality of data and analysis was enhanced by selecting varied cases and concentrating the analysis on rich narratives.

The findings of the present study suggest that athletic identity determinants throughout the injury phase include the internal will to do sports; maintenance of athletic life style; goal-setting; staying involved with team; social support from team, other injured athletes and staff and positive contact with media or audience. The findings mirror those of the previous literature.

It can be concluded that even if the injury does not change the perception of the strength of the participants' athletic identity, it does affect the role of the determinants behind it. Athletic identity is regenerated through various ways. Social support from the sport organization and staff seems to be an important factor in maintain athletic self when facing an injury and should therefore be provided. Strong intrinsic motivation to do sports, acknowledging that injuries are part of sport, and staying on athletic life rhythm also help athletes to maintain their athletic identity. The present study raises the possibility that maintaining strong athletic identity does not exclude positive outcome in regards of other identities.

Key words: athletic identity, injury, narrative identity, collective case study.

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Identity is an answer to the question “Who am I?” For an athlete athletic identity is a part of the self-concept and it can be defined as the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993). Research has shown that strong, but not exclusive, athletic identity comes with many benefits that are useful during the challenging time of rehabilitation, such as commitment in training, focusing on goals and being motivated and disciplined (Horton & Mack, 2000). When an athlete is acutely injured, normal athletic life is interfered, which threatens athletic identity. Although there is some research suggesting that athletic identity indeed decreases after an acute injury (Brewer, Cornelius, Stephan & Van Raalte, 2010), there is very little knowledge of the factors behind this decrease.

When Finnish alpine skier, Sanni Leinonen, published an announcement of ending her career, she explained that during the rehabilitation she realized how much life there is outside sport (Leinonen, 2012). It can be asked if injury causes a decrease in athletic identity contributing to these kinds of dropouts. Sport is not the purpose of life and quitting competitive sport can be the right decision. However, it is in everyone’s interest that this possibly irreversible decision is on solid bases and not made by leaping to conclusions in the challenging times of rehabilitation. Knowing the determinants of athletic identity would allow practitioners to adjust their interventions toward specific issues when working with injured athletes.

Doing competitive sport successfully requires strong investment from the athlete. Injury and its erratic nature places even more demands on the athlete. Strong athletic identity helps with the practice, since it ties together with strong internal motivation. On the other hand, in a case of possible career-ending injury, exclusive athletic identity (lack of other sources of self-worth and self-identification), there might be an increased risk for emotional disturbance (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993, 239). Therefore simply strengthening athletic identity cannot be the goal of psychological support. The situation requires understanding of the athlete as a person, of the prognosis for the rehabilitation and of the relevance of athletic identity. This study for its part helps to increase understanding in the field.

The purpose of this study was to explore which factors are perceived as important by athletes when managing athletic identity after an acute injury. That is, how to maintain athletic identity in a way that it supports the aim of rehabilitation: getting back to competitive sport. This positive basis shaped the criteria for participants in a way that I wanted to interview athletes who have successfully returned to competing, excluding athletes who were not able to return to their sport and may therefore experience identity issues related to career transition.

This study aims at creating understanding about successful management of athletic identity in a case of serious, but not permanent injury. The present study demonstrates factors that are perceived as meaningful by the athletes in regards to athletic identity during the challenging time of rehabilitation. The study is a qualitative, collective case study, where I base my analysis of the different determinants on the cases, guided by existing theory. The analysis approach is abductive.

Finally, I want to provide some guidance for the reader. In this report, I first introduce my background as the starting point for the study. Foundations are further developed with a literature review introducing the concept of athletic identity and the psychology of sport injuries. It is followed by a chapter introducing study methodology. After that, in chapter five, the actual analysis and the results are presented. The last chapter is the discussion, where I reflect my findings to the purpose of this study, position it relative to existing theory, and discuss the strengths and the weaknesses of my study.

There are many options when it comes to organizing and reporting qualitative research. I have chosen to follow the more generic thesis structure. (Patton, 2002, 439; Murray, 2011, 144–145.) I have written in first person, as I see myself in active interaction with the data (Oliver, 2004, 64; Wolcott, 2009, 16–17). For the same reason, I talk about generating, not collecting data (Rapley & Antaki, 1998).

## 2 ATHLETIC IDENTITY AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT

### 2.1 Athletic Identity

According to the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1992), identity has two major meanings: sameness (Latin: *idem*) and selfhood (Latin: *ipse*). Sameness has four components. Firstly, sameness refers to numerical identity that is identification in a sense that one is able to tell the difference between seeing one thing twice and seeing two different things. Secondly, there is qualitative identity, which means extreme resemblance; there is no semantic loss if an item is substituted. If someone's television is replaced with an identical one, they probably could not tell the difference – or if they did notice, it would not matter. Because time is a factor of difference, identification based on these two components can be problematic. Items can have different qualities over time. Therefore, the third criterion of sameness is uninterrupted continuity, which takes into account changes in an individual's development. A birch tree is the same individual from a seed to a fully grown birch. The seed looks completely different than the older tree, but still we consider it to be the same individual. This leads to the fourth and most important aspect of sameness: permanence in time. Even though all the cells in a human being get gradually replaced, this individual is still considered to be the same person. It is a case of permanence of structure despite the temporal changes. (Ricoeur, 1992, 115–118.)

Even though sameness is a prerequisite for personal identity, it alone is not sufficient to describe it. For example, some physical distinguishing mark can be enough for outside identification, but it might have no meaning for the person him- or herself. Another meaning of identity, selfhood, is an answer to a question "Who am I?" It is crucial to notice that personal identity is not just a list of characteristics. A description of that kind differs from personal identity, because only things that are relevant for one's definition of self, belong to personal identity. In fact, personal identity can also contain things that are not part of third-person description, in other words, things that can be seen as incorrect by other people. For example, one might experience that being an athlete is an important part of self, even though other people do not consider this person to be an athlete. When personal identity is defined as a hermeneutical understanding of self, it is

not seen as a factual description of self or another, but a productive way of understanding self. (Kaunismaa & Laitinen, 1998, 196–170, 172.)

According to the prevailing view, self is a multidimensional concept that allows people to activate different dimensions of self at different times (Showers, 1992; Stryker & Macke, 1978; Linville, 1985; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Horton & Mack, 2000). Therefore, it is possible to be both an athlete and a father without personal contradiction, even though one of these roles requires egoistic behavior, while the other makes it almost impossible. These role-identities can be defined as particular social objects that represent different dimensions of the self (Callero, 1985, 204). Athletic identity is one of these role-identities, and it can be defined as the degree the person identifies with the athlete role (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993). Not all role-identities are equally prominent. According to Stryker and Macke (1978), identity salience can be conceptualized as the probability of the activation of a given role behavior in a given situation. For example if one's athletic identity is strong, he or she is likely to make athletic choices in other contexts as well. This could mean choosing to leave a party early and getting enough sleep (athlete role behavior) over staying with friends (social role behavior). (Horton & Mack, 2000.)

There are at least two quantitative measurement scales for athletes' athletic identity: the widely used Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) by Brewer et al. (1993), and Public-Private Athletic Identity Scale (PPAIS) by Nasco and Webb (2006) that acknowledges the public and private aspects of the athlete role. The third scale, The Athletic Identity Questionnaire (AIQ) by Anderson (2004) is applicable for exercisers as well, not only for competitive athletes. In my study finding out the strength of participants' athletic identity is not a purpose, but it serves as a starting point for discussion. AIMS and PPAIS items are used as a part of the interview guide.

What we know about mechanisms underlying the maintenance of athletic identity is based on very few studies. Stephan and Brewer (2007) provided the first investigation of the factors contributing to athletic identity. Based on the interviews of ten retired Olympic athletes, they created a hierarchical model that is presented in Figure 1. The model shows how the feeling of being an elite athlete consists of two dimensions: social and personal. The social factors include themes such as contact with teammates and global social recognition, while the personal factors comprise themes such as life

rhythm and bodily factors. Although this is the most comprehensive account of construction of athletic identity produced so far, it does suffer from some limitations such as limited sample size and its emphasis on individual sports, and for these reasons it cannot be considered as a comprehensive model.

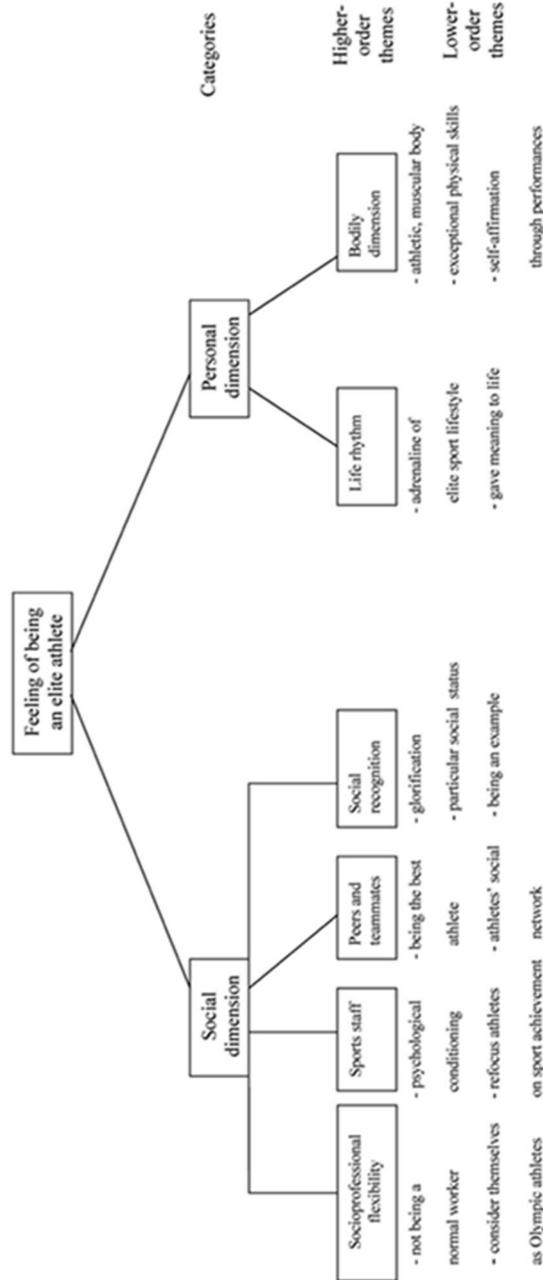


Figure 1. Perceived determinants of elite athlete's self-definition (Stephan & Brewer 2007).

The present study continues this qualitative line of research by exploring how athletic identity is managed in the situation where factors constructing normal athletic life are interfered by an injury. In other words, how athletic identity is managed when the normal athlete day rhythm, daily social interactions and own physical capability are changed.

## 2.2 Possible Benefits and Problems with Strong Athletic Identity

As Horton and Mack (2000, 102) state: “Athletic identity provides a framework for interpreting information, determines how an athlete copes with career-threatening situations, and inspires behavior consistent with the athlete role.” A reasonable amount of literature has been published on possible benefits and problems with strong athletic identity. In the following I will present an overview of these studies.

In their study of identity salience and psychological centrality Stryker and Serpe (1994) concluded that higher identity salience and centrality of that identity relate to more commitment in identity-related behavior. Thus, stronger athletic identity results in higher commitment to athletic behavior. Likewise, Fox and Corbin (1986) reported that involvement in physical activity is strongly predicted by perceived importance of physical abilities. Horton and Mack (2000) confirmed this in a study of marathon runners, where they found that runners with strong athletic identity were more committed to running. Other benefits found in this study were better athletic performance and expanded social network. Runners with higher measures of athletic identity also reported more experiences of both positive and negative effects of marathon training. There is also evidence that strong athletic identity correlates with health and physical fitness (Marsh, 1993), higher global self-esteem and social self-concepts (Marsh, Perry, Horsely & Roche, 1995).

This positive relationship is summarized by Everhart, Best and Flanigan (2013), who in their systematic review showed that athletic identity correlates with positive rehabilitation outcome in ACL-injuries. Likewise, Brewer, Cornelius et al. (2007) found that strong athletic identity can be helpful also immediately after surgery providing decline in negative mood, adaptive value and emotional resistance. Strong athletic identity can therefore be very useful in the occurrence of a serious injury.

Despite reported benefits it has also been argued that strong athletic identity can lead to over-commitment to the athlete role (Horton & Mack, 2000; Tasiemski, Kennedy, Gardner & Blaikley, 2004). This can lead to sets of problems: one related to athletic practices such as training when injured and substance use (Coen & Ogles, 1993; Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Weinberg, Vernau & Horn, 2013), and a second associated with over-commitment to the athlete role in the expense of other dimensions of the self. *Self-concept* is defined as the general idea a person has about his- or herself (Smith & Hung,

2010, 674). There is evidence suggesting that a self-concept consisting of several, independent dimensions, protects global self-concept in the event of failure in one dimension (Linville, 1987). For instance, in a case of sudden termination of sport career the athlete can rely on other aspects of self, for example academic or family role, instead of feeling failed entirely as a person. Exclusive athletic identity has also been linked with a higher risk of identity foreclosure, not exploring other career options and finally depression and difficulties of adjusting to post-competitive life (Brown, Glastetter-Fender & Shelton, 2000; Murphy, Petitpas & Brewer, 1996; Brewer, 1993; Baillie & Danish, 1992; Chartrand & Lent, 1987).

Having listed these potential risks, it is important to note that strong athletic identity does not necessarily lead to these problems. For example Horton and Mack (2000) found no evidence of strong athletic identity causing neglecting of other aspects of life. Likewise, Green and Weinberg (2001) found no significant correlation between athletic identity and mood disturbance with injured recreational participants. When it comes to sport injury rehabilitation, some of the benefits, such as commitment, social support and positive feelings, can be extremely helpful during the challenging post-injury phase, while over-commitment, on the other hand, can be very harmful. Therefore, successful management of athletic identity is an important matter.

### **2.3 Narrative Identity**

According to the American psychologist Jerome Bruner (1996, 121), stories and narratives may be our earliest way to understand our experiences and the most natural way to organize knowledge. Therefore, it is likely that also our understanding of self lies in a form of stories. In his life story model of identity, McAdams (2001) has presented that identity exists in a form of a story. An “identity story” is a form of knowing and it helps us to understand ourselves in relation to our surroundings. Single life events become meaningful when they are connected to other experiences, thoughts and feelings with narrative thinking. As a result of this thought process, narratives or stories are formed, and the experiences can be presented in a concrete form.

Personal identity is temporal and is formed in this moment. When new experiences occur, the process continues and the stories are reformed. Correspondingly, identity is formed as the story is told, and, therefore, the stories we tell about ourselves do not remain the same but change every time. In conclusion, narrative identity is a

continuously reforming story about an individual's life and experiences. In other words, it is a way of defining self in relation to the groups one belongs to (sameness) and in tandem emphasizing individualistic characteristics (selfhood). (Ricoeur, 1992, 140–141; Tolska, 2003, 32–33; Heikkinen, 1999, 276–279.)

As personal identity is not a description of characteristics, likewise, an identity story is not a description of biographical facts but a story of meaningful experiences. When a person is forming a story, it is inevitable that he or she selects some elements into the story while other elements are left out. These choices are made both consciously and unconsciously. For that reason, an identity narrative is a certain kind of filtration of personal experience. Moreover, it can be assumed that the elements in the story are somehow meaningful – otherwise they would not be presented. Unavoidably the story is also affected by the fact that own life is presented to someone else. (Heikkinen 1999, 277; Huhtanen 2004, 127.) Accordingly, my study is guided by the thought of narrative identity already including choices made by the narrator. Therefore, I can assume that the elements that are found in the story are somehow perceived as meaningful – otherwise they would not be presented.

When new experiences occur, they have to be incorporated to the story. While some experiences fit the already constructed story, some challenge the story line and lead to questioning and possibly to transformation of the identity. For an athlete, a serious injury might be this kind of a challenge. This process of interpreting past experiences and incorporating them into the life story is vital, because there is a strong body of literature showing its relation to positive outcomes, such as self-esteem, psychological well-being, physical health and life satisfaction. In other words, meaning making of past experiences and the ability of form a coherent, meaningful narrative identity is beneficial for the well-being of the individual. (Pals, 2006; McLean, Breen & Fournier, 2010.)

Rarely, if ever, in life one is asked to tell his or her life story. As a critique to this autobiographical presentation of narrative identity, in recent years there has been interest in how narrative identity is formed in every day contexts. This current view studies narrative identity that is formed as compilation of short narrative phases that are generated in interaction. These have been called *small stories*. (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1993; Georgakopoulou, 2007; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Pöysä, 2010.)

In the present study, narrative identity is explored in the form of small stories that are generated in interaction with the interviewer.

### 3 PSYCHOLOGY OF SPORT INJURY

#### 3.1 Psychological Response to Sport Injury

Because of high involvement in physical activity, athletes are in great risk to suffer from a physical injury during their careers. While the negative impact that sport injury can have on the physical functioning is obvious, the psychological toll caused cannot be belittled. There are several models describing the psychological factors involved in sport injury. One of them is a biopsychosocial model of sport injury rehabilitation (Figure 2) first presented by Brewer, Andersen and Van Raalte (2002, 47–51).

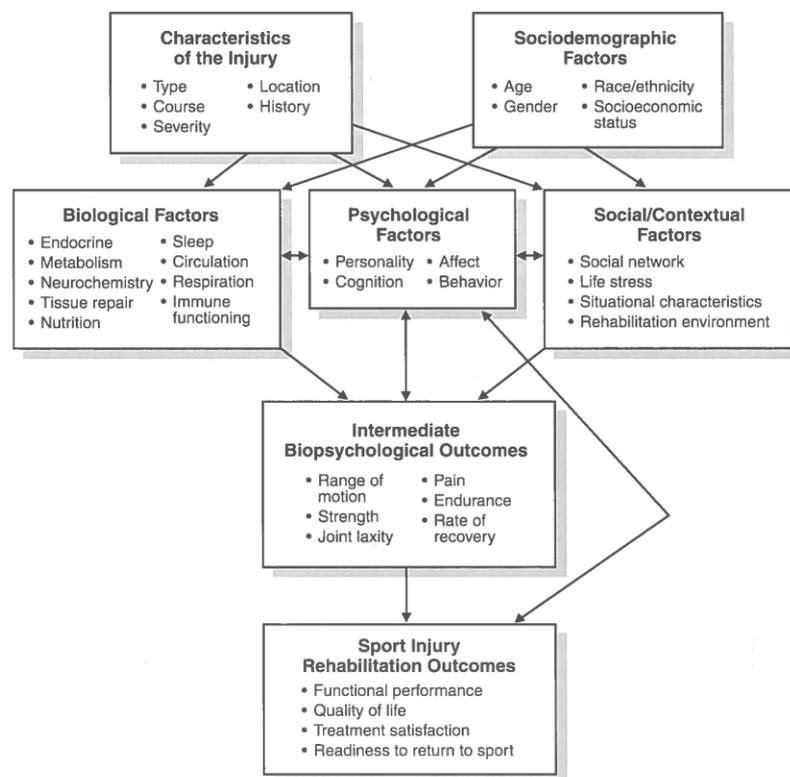


Figure 2. A biopsychosocial model of sport injury rehabilitation (Brewer, Andersen and Van Raalte, 2002, 47–51).

The model has seven key components: characteristics of the injury, biological factors, sociodemographic factors, social and contextual factors, intermediate biopsychological outcomes and sport injury rehabilitation outcomes. According to the model, characteristics of the injury, such as type and severity, and sociodemographic factors, such as age and socioeconomical status, influence the biological (e.g. tissue repair,

circulation), psychological (e.g. behavior) and social or contextual factors (e.g. life stress). Further, intermediate biopsychological outcomes, pain and strength for example, are affected by those factors. Intermediate biopsychological outcomes impact rehabilitation outcomes, while these outcomes have a bidirectional relation with psychological factors.

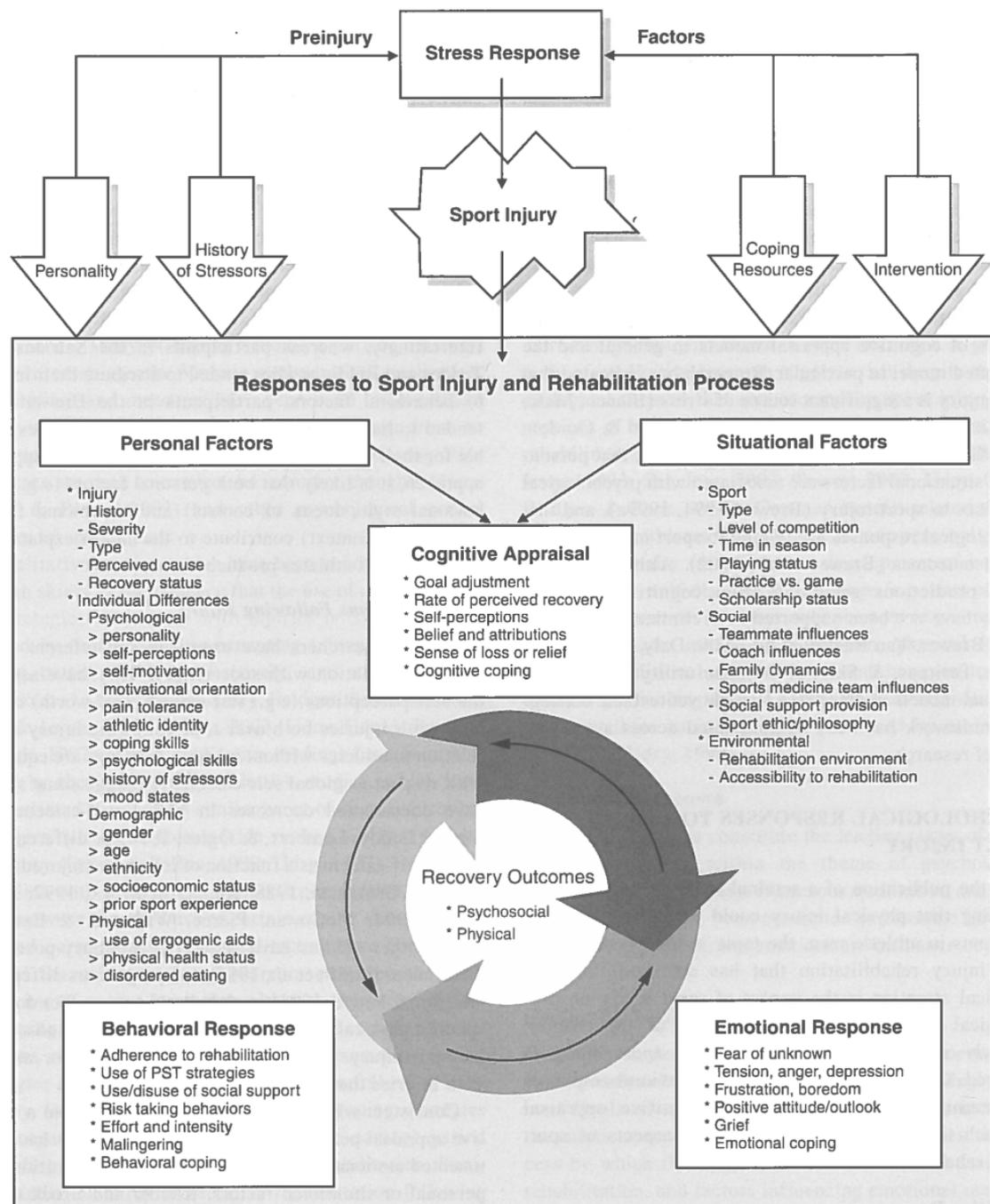


Figure 3. Integrated model of psychological response to the sport injury and rehabilitation (Wiese-Bjornstal, Smith, Shaffer & Morrey, 1998).

The most evolved and well-developed of psychological models is the integrated model of psychological response to the sport injury and rehabilitation process by Wiese-Bjornstal, Smith, Shaffer and Morrey (1998) (as cited by Brewer, 2007, 404-407). The integrated model (Figure 3) includes pre-injury variables, such as personality and history of stressors, in the upper part, and post-injury variables in the lower part with grey background. The model presents lists of personal factors and situational factors that both affect the cognitive appraisal of the injury and the rehabilitation factors. One of the personal factors mentioned is athletic identity, as well as for example perceived cause of injury, coping skills and prior sport experience. Situational factors include, for instance, level of competition, social support provision and accessibility to rehabilitation. Altogether these factors influence cognitive appraisal, meaning for example one's goal adjustment, self-perception and sense of loss or relief. Furthermore, this interpretation affects three variables: behavioral response, such as rehabilitation adherence; emotional response, such as grief and frustration; and finally recovery outcomes, including both physical and psychosocial recovery. These variables are interrelated and therefore they affect each other continuously as the process continues. (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998.)

There is a considerable amount of support for the integrated model. For example, personal and situational factors have proven to affect psychological responses to sport injury (Brewer, 1999), and that psychological responses are associated with rehabilitation outcomes (Brewer, Andersen & Van Raalte, 2002, 45-47). Based on the model it can be concluded that athletic identity is one of the many factors that have an effect on recovery outcomes, and therefore it is important to have knowledge about effective management of athletic identity.

### **3.2 Injury and Athletic Identity**

There is a growing body of research concerning changes in athletic identity after injury. Most of this research deals with career-ending injuries, in other words, sport career termination or retirement from sport. For example, Kleiber and Brock (1992) showed that high investment in sport when encountering a career-ending injury predicts lower self-esteem and life satisfaction five to ten years later. Similarly, Webb, Nasco, Riley and Headrick (1998) concluded that those, whose retirements were injury-related, had the most difficulties adjusting. Athletic identity was related to retirement difficulties,

but not to overall life satisfaction. In an interesting case study Sparkes (1998) explored the athletic identity of one elite athlete whose career was terminated by an illness. After investing thousands of hours to sports, it revealed to be problematic to give up the view of athletic self, which disturbed acceptance of other selves.

A large amount of literature has been published to support the idea of a career-threatening injury being extremely disrupting for the sense of self for people who have strong athletic identity, especially when athletic identity is exclusive in nature. Emotional distress, depression, anxiety and lower self-esteem following an injury can in severe cases even lead to the need of clinical intervention. (Leddy, Lambert & Ogles, 1994; Sparkes, 1998.)

Previous studies have suggested that athletic identity reduces after an injury as a self-protective change. Brewer, Selby, Linder and Petitpas (1999) found that athletes, who were not satisfied with their performance during the season, for example because of a deselection or an injury, decreased their athletic identity more than satisfied athletes. Furthermore, Brewer et al. (2010) found that athletic identity decreased significantly during a 24-month period following an anterior cruciate ligament surgery. When the relationship between athletic identity and recovery progress was examined, it was found that those with the slower recovery progress had greater decreases in athletic identity over the period from 6 to 12 months post-surgery. This is discussed to be a self-protective change as a response to situation where sport involvement is threatened. Even though this can be beneficial for adjustment in a case of retirement (Lavalley, Gordon & Grove, 1997) or career satisfaction outside sports (Shachar, Brewer, Cornelius & Petitpas, 2004), the aspects associated with strong athletic identity, which may have a positive effect on the rehabilitation process, cannot be forgotten.

In a recent study, Price, Phillips, Weatherby and Jubenville (2014) compared athletic identity levels of collegiate athletes who either had or had not experienced an ACL injury that required reconstructive surgery. Conversely than hypothesized, they found that athletic identity was not affected by a severe injury. Their study is especially interesting in relation to present study, since only one of the injured participants was no longer participating in sport, in other words their injuries for the most parts were not career-threatening. However, the results of the study should be applied with caution, since the study only covers student athletes. Another weakness is the rather small

sample size (n=125, from which 14 injured). In their discussion, the researchers could only hypothesize why the findings of the study disproved the hypothesis formed from the previous literature, offering explanations such as remaining connections to the team and injury providing a greater appreciation for their sport. This indicates the need to understand the determinants underlying behind managing athletic identity during the rehabilitation period.

Hockey (2005) presents a collaborative autoethnographic research undertaken by two runners during a two year period of injury and rehabilitation, and conceptualizes identity work as a recovery process strategy. The means they used to maintain their athletic identity included holding on to routines, settings, appearance and embodiment as well as identity talk. Over the two year struggle to get back to running and racing identity work was experienced as helpful, and it concluded with maintained, but transformed athletic identities. Based on the study, the author suggests that identity work should be taken into a serious consideration as a rehabilitation tool by professionals involved with injured athletes. The main weakness of this study is its lightweight theoretical background for the intervention, making the study rely on impressions.

Madrigal and Gill (2014) took a case study approach to response to sport injury with four division I athletes, and touched upon athletic identity as well. They report that the athletes experienced a loss of athletic identity. However, they present little evidence supporting this finding and due to the study design, athletic identity was not assessed during the injury and rehabilitation process. They do report that one of the athletes perceived athletic identity as a source of confidence that was lost during the injury rehabilitation. Feeling to be part of the team was interpreted to facilitate a sense of athletic self, as the athlete experienced social support from teammates, family, and coaches throughout the rehabilitation.

Much of the current literature on athletic identity pays particular attention to disabled athletes. One of the most relevant studies in relation to the present study was conducted by Perrier, Smith, Strachan and Latimer-Cheung (2014), who wanted to narratively explore why and how athletic identity may be lost or (re)developed after acquiring a permanent physical disability. The analysis reveals that the individuals who had not returned to physical activity nor wanted to do so emphasized the bodily changes they

had experienced. Instead, individuals who could see themselves as athletes in the future or already considered themselves as athletes, based their identification to determinants such as sport enjoyment, skill development, sport goals, commitment and sacrifices.

A search of the literature revealed that there are few studies that have investigated how athletic identity is constructed, and there is a need to understand the changes that happen in the athletic identity during the recovery process from a serious injury. This study examines those determinants with qualitative methods, enabling athletes to share their perceptions about athletic identity and injury.

#### **4 AIM**

The aim of this study was to explore what are the perceived determinants of managing athletic identity successfully after a serious, but not permanent injury. This study explored the narrative identities of four Finnish national or international level athletes who had faced a serious injury and returned successfully to their sport. The athletes told their retrospective stories about themselves as athletes and how they perceived the injury and rehabilitation time in relation to their athletic identity. In other words, the interest of this study is in individuals' experience of their own identity.

## **5 METHOD**

### **5.1 Starting Point**

My research interest in athletic identity originated during my bachelor studies in sport sciences when I was suggested to study how athletic identity of adventure racers is constructed. The bachelor thesis project was successful resulting in a publication (Jama, 2012), a positive research experience, and increased knowledge of athletic identity. In fact, the process clarified that it is specifically the psychological side of sport that intrigues me the most. Couple of years later I started my studies in the Master's Degree Programme in Sport and Exercise Psychology in Jyväskylä.

Soon after my bachelor graduation my own multisport racing hobby was interrupted when I suffered from an anterior cruciate ligament injury. At the time, I had finished a successful competitive season and was training hard for the next one. It was a big disappointment, but I was very motivated to rehabilitate the knee after the injury. The rehabilitation got complicated when the initial transplant was necrotized and I had to undergo another straining operation. The many complications in rehabilitation and the uncertainty of healing caused a lot of different emotions. As I was familiar with the concept of athletic identity, I pondered the effect that the injury had on my identity. After doing the rehabilitation exercises months after months, I remember standing in the gym, looking around and thinking that I don't feel like an athlete at the moment.

When it was time to design a master's thesis topic, combining the previous knowledge and personal interest for the subject felt like a fruitful starting point. There still is only limited number of research on how athletic identity is constructed. Many of the suggested determinants, such as social recognition and athletic body, seem to be such that they are interfered by the injury. Therefore a qualitative approach seemed useful to find out how these determinants are experienced during the injury and rehabilitation.

### **5.2 Research Approach**

According to Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998), narrative research refers to any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials. Creswell (2013, 70) specifies, that *narrative* might be the method used in a study or it might be the phenomenon that is being studied. Narrative researchers collect stories that tell of individual experiences

(Creswell, 2013, 71). The term *narrative* is often used as a synonym for *story* but it has many definitions. In my framework narratives are defined as first suggested by Hinchman and Hinchman (1997, xvi), who describe them through three key features, defining that narratives are chronological, meaningful and social. This means that a narrative connects a sequence of event into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood in relation to this whole, and this narrative is created for a specific audience. (Elliot, 2005, 3-4.)

A constructive view suggests that identities are presented as narratives. Therefore, it is natural in this study to generate identity stories in order to study identity. Interview is one way of generating these stories. According to Warren (2001, 83), most qualitative interviewing aims to deriving interpretations instead of factual issues. Since identity is essentially an experience, interviewing is an applicable method for data generation. Riessman (2008, 21) notes that it is generally accepted that the researcher does not find narratives but instead participates in creating them. This means that the researcher affects the narratives formed by the storyteller by choosing questions, reacting to stories and being the specific audience for who the narrative has been created. While the realist approach to narratives is that the social world is an external reality that can be observed and described, the constructivist view sees world constantly “in the making”. Instead of being interested in “what happened” constructivism is interested in how meaning making is done. (Elliot, 2005, 18-19.)

When studying narrative identity, I am in fact studying individual’s experience of their own identity. This gives my study a phenomenological emphasis. Phenomenological methods focus on obtaining descriptions of individual’s personal perceptions (Coyle, 2007, 15). For example, being an athlete is not a fact based on skills or result, but it means that the person develops different meanings in different situations. Reality doesn’t appear as neutral to people but individual create some level of meaning to everything. Same subject can appear as beautiful or disgusting depending on the interests or goals of the individual. (Laine, 2001, 26-27.)

Individuals continuously create meanings and narrative identity is no exception. When forming the narrative the individual selects the elements that she or he perceives as meaningful and leaves out elements that are not perceived important. Because meanings are not factual in the same way as natural sciences are, in research meaning making can

only be addressed through the attempt to understand and interpret (Laine 2001, 26-27). The theory of understanding and interpreting expression is called hermeneutics (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). In the data of the present study, the participants have included factors that they have perceived as meaningful related to their injury. I as a researcher have then tried to understand and interpret the narratives in order to find determinants for successful rehabilitation. Hence the present study is guided by hermeneutic phenomenology.

The present study is a qualitative, collective case study. According to Creswell (2013, 99), in a collective case study, the researcher focuses on an issue and then selects multiple cases to illustrate the issue. In this study the focus is in the athletic identity of injured athletes and the cases were selected to best understand the issue. Therefore the cases are *instrumental* (Creswell 2013, 98).

### **5.3 Interviews**

#### **5.3.1 Interview Execution**

The data of this study consists of the interviews of four Finnish athletes conducted in June-July 2014. Each athlete was interviewed once. Criterion sampling was used to ensure data quality. Creswell (2013, 155) notes that criterion sampling is suitable for phenomenological studies, because it is essential that the participants have experiences the phenomenon being studied. The eligibility criteria required individuals to have received was (1) being a competitive athlete at least in national level, (2) having within the past two years overcome a relatively severe, acute injury and returned back to competitive sport successfully and (3) willingness and ability to share own experiences verbally. I used my coach connections as informants asking them if they knew any athletes meeting the criteria. Three athletes were discovered this way. One of them was an Olympic level athlete and I decided to apply chain sampling (Creswell, 2013, 158) to get access to another international level athlete who meets the criteria. In the end, two of the participants were national level and two of them were international level athletes and they live in different parts of Finland. The athletes are introduced shortly in chapter 5.3.2.

When I asked the athletes to participate, I informed them that the purpose of the study is to explore experiences of injured and successfully rehabilitated athletes. At this point, I

did not mention athletic identity since I thought that might be confusing. Instead I mentioned that they do not need to prepare for the interview in any way, because I wanted them to participate open-mindedly without any presumptions. I travelled some for the interviews which produced some costs for data generation. I wanted to do the interviews in person, because using phone might have damaged the quality of my data. Identity is a personal subject and requires self-reflection. Advantages of in-person interviewing compared to phone interviewing are, for example, better interaction, greater effectiveness with complex issues, more thoughtful responses and better for studies involving sensitive questions (Shuy, 2001, 541-544). Additionally, in-person interview enriched the use of a written assignment during the interview. This is further explained in the next chapters where interview outline is introduced.

The interview situation started with the consent form. I explained the purpose of the study and went through the rights of the participants. The participant also had a chance to ask about the consent or any other matters related to the study. After everything was clear the participants signed the consent form. Next the actual interview started with some warm-up questions. The purpose of these questions was mainly to warm both the interviewer and the participant, but also to gain basic background information about the athlete. The background information included questions about the athlete and his or her sport career. The complete interview guide can be found as an attachment 1.

In the second part of the interview the participant was asked to take a stand on twenty statements related to their athletic identity on a five point Likert scale and justify his or her choice. The statements were adopted from the widely used Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) by Brewer et al. (1993), and Public-Private Athletic Identity Scale (PPAIS) by Nasco and Webb (2006). Even though the scales are designed to numerically measure the strength of athletic identity, I used them more as a starting point for discussion about athletic identity and therefore was more interested in their reasoning than the number. This is also why I chose to use the 10-item version of AIMS, instead of a valid and reliable 7-item version exists (Tasiemski, Kennedy, Gardner & Blaikley, 2004).

The third part of the interview utilized the stream method. In this technique the athlete considers things or events that he or she perceives meaningful considering his or her athletic self. Next I asked the participant to draw a stream or a river that describes his or

her life as an athlete. I advised to consider if the sport aspects has always been equally fast-flowing and what kind of turning points there has been. I also asked them to mark down the key things with a few words. In this technique the athlete reflects the sport aspect in relation to his or her life and clarifies to him- or herself what is meaningful in this regard. I got the idea for using this technique from Finnish study where it has been used related to the identity of music players (see Huhtanen, 2004).

The last part of the interview was a theme interview with narrative elements. The questions were based on the integrated model of psychological response to the sport injury and rehabilitation (Wiese-Bjornstal, Smith, Shaffer & Morrey, 1998) and the findings of Stephan and Brewer (2007) about perceived determinants of elite athlete's self-definition. The questions were about their experiences about the injury and rehabilitation and what factors they perceived as important in the process.

The interviews lasted from 49 minutes to 73 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, thus providing the athlete an opportunity to tell about his/her thoughts and experiences without any presumptions by the interviewer. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in July-August 2014. While recording may cause the respondents to feel uncomfortable or less spontaneous, it has many advantages, such as better documentation, controllability and accuracy, the interviewers better concentration on listening and asking questions rather than making notes, easier analyzing process and the possibility to use direct quotes in the report (Kuckartz, 2014, 123). I consider all the interviews successful and no unexpected problems occurred.

### 5.3.2 Interviewee Introduction

All the descriptions introduce the athletes as they were at the time of the interview. The content of each introduction is different, because the athletes were asked open questions and they chose themselves what information they wanted to share. Therefore these introductions reflect those aspects of themselves that they perceive meaningful in the interview context. All the names are pseudonyms.

#### *Elisabeth, individual sport*

Elisabeth is an 18-year-old sport high school student and a national level athlete. She has a diverse athletic background, but in the last three years she has focused in her current sport, which she has practiced in earnest for eight years. She has now finished her first season back after her knee injury. She suffered from a menisci and anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury that kept her out of her sport for nine months. She hadn't previously had any injuries.

#### *Josephine, team sport*

Josephine is 21 years old and about to graduate from a university of applied sciences. She has recently decided to end her national level player career and has entered working life in her field. Her family consists of her boyfriend, who still plays professionally. In her free time she enjoys exercising, movies, reading and baking. She started playing rather late, in the age of 14, when she moved to her current home town. Her last season was the return season after the injury that she suffered. She had an ACL-injury that kept her from game training for seven to eight months. It was her first sport injury.

#### *Alexander, individual sport*

Alexander is a professional athlete. He has a versatile athletic background and has previously successfully competed in another sport as well. His latest, severe knee injury was first mistreated as possible strain injury and the actual cause of the pain was not immediately found. This led to a lot of uncertainty because the pain was getting worse despite the treatment. After four months he decided to have his knee operated to see if anything can be found and to his relief a muscle rupture was found and repaired. After the operation he was able to train the sport again in two months, but it took another four

to five months until the knee was asymptomatic again, which adds to a total of 12 months of disrupted training.

#### *Valtteri, individual sport*

Valtteri is a 24 year old professional athlete and he has done the sport for approximately 20 years, that is practically his whole life. He has earlier suffered a broken bone, which he describes as a “fast injury” compared to his latest experiences, two ACL-injuries. The ACL was re-ruptured practically as soon as he got cleared for full training after the first injury.

### **5.4 Analysis and Reporting**

After conducting the interviews I transcribed them to Microsoft Word documents using the help of Express Scribe Pro transcription software. I found the biggest advantage of the software to be that when you stop the recording to write and then press play again, it automatically rewinds a little bit replaying the talk prior to the stop. With a regular sound file player I would need to constantly rewind the recording manually to make sure nothing gets lost in the pause. Rapley (2007, 52–53) mentions that using transcribing software saves a lot of time and frustration.

Because the analytic aim of my study was to examine the content of utterances, I chose to transcribe the recordings verbatim, but leave out other features of talk, such as intonational contours or volume. Since transcribing is very time-consuming, it is important to choose the appropriate level of transcribing. In most social research projects a relatively simple transcription system is sufficient, and including interactional features was not necessary for my research purposes either. (Jenks, 2011, 12–14; Kuckartz, 2014, 124–125)

According to Simons (2009, 117), qualitative case studies heavily rest on the interpretative skills of the researcher. In order to answer the research question, I used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a process of encoding qualitative data and it can be used to analyze qualitative information in a systematic manner (Boyatzis, 1998, 4–5). I started the process with coding and categorizing the data. Because of the lack of comprehensive theoretical background for injury-related changes in athletic identity, it felt natural to go with the inductive approach to developing codes. However, even inductive coding is not purely data-driven, since it is always affected by the researcher’s

previous theoretical knowledge. As Kelle (2004, 449) points out, theory knowledge helps the researcher to see relevant data and is therefore useful, not something the researcher should try to discard. Therefore the overall approach of the analysis can be called abductive.

When coding, I made an *interpretive reading* of my data. This means that I was not only coding factual codes, such as “money” or “media”, but I was also constructing what the quotes in the data represent. “Perceived competence” is an example of these more interpretative codes. One of the dangers in doing computer assisted coding is that it is a lot easier than manual coding and might therefore take on a more prominent role leaving the actual analysis and interpretation in its shadow. For this reason I chose not to be too worried about the absolute methodicalness of the coding, but concentrated on making sure that nothing relevant is left outside coding. Also, my analysis does not lean on to any kind of quantification, having some themes under different codes did not harm the interpretation in any way. In other words, I didn’t spend time looking if a similar, forgotten code already existed, but generated a new code. In this stage I did not want to narrow my data too much, so I coded everything that caught my attention. This means that coding contained some material that later got outlined from the results. After this initial coding phase I had 67 codes. Next, I went through all the codes to make sure they were logical and for example corrected some code overlaps. (Mason, 2002, 148–149, 152.)

When I was satisfied with the coding, I went back to the original data. Another challenge related to coding is that concentrating on the codes may lead to superficial analysis or losing the context (Mason, 2002, 158). Therefore it was useful to write the interview summaries in this phase. After the coding was done, listening to the original interviews allowed me to understand the context and the individualistic nature of each case and critically review the coding.

The next step was categorizing the codes to a more theoretical level. I started with placing the applicable codes in to a hierarchical order. I considered the possible relations between the different categories. I tried organizing the categories using pen and paper and ended up with the initial draft of the model I present in the result section. Simons (2009, 122–123) calls this process *concept mapping*, mentioning that it is a way

of making sense of the data. When I compared the initial model with the data, I made some adjustments, such as made the model dynamic.

Writing about qualitative data should happen at the same time than analysis, because they feed each other. When organizing the results thematically, the thematic headings are the basis for data discussion, which includes gradually unfolding arguments, extracts form data as evidence and discursive commentary guiding the reader. (Holliday 2007, 90-91.) The model generated in the previous phase acted as my guide to writing results. In this phase my focus was very much on interpretation. Simons (2009, 117–118) points out that even though it is possible to make a distinction between analysis and interpretation, as processes they are not discrete. This was characteristic to my process as well, as I was able to use my research diary as interpretation fuel while writing the result section. In the diary I had marked ideas I got during the more technical coding phase. This interpretative stage in the research was very enjoyable for me. It allowed me to use my cognitive skills providing many moments of inspiring insights.

The result of this interpretative process can be seen in chapter six. First the interview summaries are presented to make the individualistic sense of the cases visible for the reader. The second part of the chapter is the thematic view. It contains arguments and citation that make the interpretation visible and allows the reader to make his or her own reading. The citations are an important part of the result section. They are the evidence supporting my interpretation; they help explain different themes; and help to make the distinction between the data and the interpretation of it (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012, 264-268). The quotes have been “cleaned up” for space efficiency and to bring forward the relevant content, as suggested by Woods (1999, 93). This means I have deleted some characteristics of oral speech, such as repetition and expletives and deleted interviewers echoing filler words, such as “mm” or “yeah”. Identifiable information is replaced with square brackets and more generic substitute as suggested by Kuula and Tiitinen (2010, 452-453).

Because the interviews were conducted in Finnish, the quotes had to be translated to this report. Translating is not only a technical, but also ethical and political issue (Bucholtz, 2007, 800-801). Ten Have (2007, 109-110) mentions that the translator has to balance between perceiving as much as possible from the original talk and presenting a ‘natural’ translation. This can be hard when the language systems are different, like it is in the

case of Finnish and English. (ten Have, 2007, 109-110). Since I do not have the competence of a professional translator, I emphasized natural translation and communicating the meaning, instead of interactional nuances. I estimated that that is sufficient since the present study is not using conversation analysis. However, as ten Have (2007, 109-110) points out, it is important to provide the reader as much as possible about the original data as well. Therefore I have included the quotes both in Finnish and English.

### **5.5 Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of the results needs to be the most important factor guiding the research design, since the value of scientific study is highly dependable on the researcher's ability to demonstrate that accuracy (Gagnon, 2010, 21). I choose to address the issue of trustworthiness through four criteria first suggested by Guba (1981): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

According to Shenton (2004), *credibility* is the key issue when assessing trustworthiness. In quantitative research internal validity seeks to answer if the study measures what it was intended to measure, and in qualitative research credibility serves the same purpose with a question of how research findings match reality. It must be noted, that in the present study the concept of reality concerns the phenomenological reality, or the athlete's experiences, rather than some hypothetical objective reality. (Merriam, 2009, 213.) However, as Ruusuvuori, Nikander and Hyvärinen (2010, 28-29) point out, it is groundless to expect that *face validity*, that is asking the participants, would verify the results even though the study is about their experiences. Participants and the researcher can have very different interests or perspectives on the subject.

Shenton (2004) suggests several ways to promote credibility and in the following I will discuss the ones that are applicable to the present study. First of all I tried to choose and combine well established data generation and analyzing methods to serve the research questions the best. This includes a semi-structured interview that incorporated the measurement scales for athletic identity and a stream technique previously used for studying narrative role-identity. The analyzing process is based on research literature and is presented in the previous chapter. I used triangulation via data sources to enlarge the perspective to collective case study, including several different sports, both individual and team sports.

I improved the likely honesty in the participants by underlining the voluntariness of their participation both when asking them to participate and in the beginning of the interview (consent form as an appendix 2). Narrative identity research focuses on the issues that participants themselves bring forward, and therefore an open, single question format might be the most reliable, reducing the significance of prompt by the interviewer. In practice, the participant usually wants recurrently new questions to answer (Hyvärinen, 2010, 90). According to Pöysä (2010, 157), involuntariness or echoing to the prompt is often visible in the narrative as fewer words and colorless language. To increase the credibility of this study, I weighted the analysis to the rich narratives.

Furthermore, I have presented my own background in the second chapter to show relevant personal and professional information. Similarly, all participants are presented with relevant demographics and interview summaries. These actions allow the reader to assess the validity of the results and the interpretations made. I have included data quotes both in Finnish and English, which sets me as answerable of the translation and allows a Finnish speaking reader to access the original data (Nikander, 2010, 436). Lastly, introducing relevant previous research findings serves the same purpose. To further increase the credibility of the study, I could have used peer scrutiny, used triangulation broader (for example more longitudinal design) or offered the participants an opportunity to check the interview transcription and correct any possible misunderstandings. These actions were not done because of time and convenience issues. (Shenton, 2004, 65–69.)

The second issue in trustworthiness is *transferability*, which refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other situations. The idea behind transferability is not that the cases are typical in a wider population and the findings could therefore be generalized to that population, but that something can be learned from the study. (Simons, 2009, 164; Merriam, 2009, 223-224.) Simons (2009, 164-167) presents different ways in which generalization can be done from case studies. In collective case studies, *cross-case generalization* is commonly adopted. In practice this means examining which themes are common from case to case and what might be different. While general propositions can be made, it is not a generalization to a wider population.

*Naturalistic generalizations* develop within a person, when the reader discerns what aspects of the results they can generalize to their own context. Lincoln and Guba (1985, 316) point out, that the burden of considering the possible transfer lies more with the person interested in making an application elsewhere than the original researcher, whose role is to enable this by providing a thick description. That has been my intention when writing this report, where I have tried to provide enough detail about the participants and the data generation. Another strategy to improve transferability is to select the study participants carefully. Including both female and male participants, who do different kind of sports, compete on different levels, and are in different points of their careers, allows the possibility of greater range of applications for the readers of the present study. (Merriam, 2009, 223-228; Shenton, 2004, 70.)

*Dependability* (or *consistency*) replaces the concept of reliability that is used in quantitative studies to demonstrate how likely the same methods and participants would lead to similar results if the study was replicated. Since narrative identity is a temporal and generated in the moment of narrating, replicating the design does not enable validating the results of the initial study. The more relevant question in qualitative research is whether the results are consistent with the collected data. The reader is only able to assess if the results make sense, if he or she gets enough information about the research process. I have tried to achieve dependability by providing detailed information about the design and execution of the study in all its stages. (Merriam, 2009, 220-223; Shenton, 2004, 71-72.)

Lastly, when examining trustworthiness, *confirmability* should be discussed. In qualitative studies, where the role of the researcher as interpreter of the data is great, objectivity impossible to accomplish. Still, the findings of the study need to result from the experiences of the participants, not from the presumptions or the preferences of the researcher. The foremost source of error in the present study is me as a researcher. Making possible presumptions visible improves the confirmability of my research. Therefore, firstly, I have presented my own experiences about injury, and I discuss their effect to my interpretation work in the discussion of this report. Secondly, I have also included the interview guide as an appendix 1, so that the reader can evaluate the results in reflection to the interview guide. Thirdly, I have recognized my non-neutral role as a shaper of the generated data. When I have included citations to the report, I have shared information about the asked question. (Shenton, 2004, 72; Baker, 1997, 131.)

Overall, I have followed good scientific practice and documented the research process thoroughly, which is the most important factor promoting the trustworthiness of the present study. Personal bias cannot be eliminated, but I have tried to give enough information so that the reader can assess the effect of it.

## 5.6 Ethics

In this chapter I will discuss ethical issues of my study and explain what measures I took to ensure acceptable ethical practice. As a researcher I need to follow good scientific practice and be responsible of my choices during the research project. I need to be ready to accept any consequences that may follow my study. This is particularly important when doing research with people, whose life can be affected by the study. Farrimond (2013, 25) lists some basic principles when it comes to ethics in research. These principles are *respect for people, justice, beneficence, nonmaleficence* and *fidelity*. In the following I will explain how I acted in order to meet these principles.

In my study *respect for people* mainly refers to respect for participants' autonomy. This means that participants should have been able to make their own decision about being involved with the study. An important concept is 'informed consent'. Potential participants should be well aware of what to expect if they decide to take part in the study, so that they can autonomously decide if they want to be involved. (Farrimond, 2013, 26; University of Leicester, 2014.) When I had identified potential participants, I contacted them and provided them information about the purpose and the procedures of the study, so that they had enough information to make the decision. Before the interview these issues as well as risks and benefits were discussed to make sure that the participant not only knows, but also understands these matters. This was done with a consent form (appendix 2), where the participants also assure that their participation is voluntary.

Another aspect of respect for people is known as PAC (*privacy, anonymity* and *confidentiality*) (Farrimond, 2013, 126). In my study privacy was ensured firstly with choosing an interview location that is private and does not allow other people to hear the discussion. Another way to respect privacy was to use open-ended questions during the interview. This allows participants to only share what they feel comfortable sharing. In the consent form it was noted that the participant has the right to decline to answer any question. *Confidentiality* is achieved by responsible actions by me as a researcher.

This means for example not using data in other purposes or sharing data with other people. Confidentiality is also attained with anonymity (Farrimond, 2013, 133). I use pseudonyms for the athletes, don't unveil their sport and in this report have replaced all the parts of quotes that contain information identifiable information, such as locations.

*Anonymity* is important for a couple reasons. First of all, it improves the quality of the data, because participants feel safer and share their thought more openly. Secondly it protects the participants from any harm that might follow from their identification. This is relevant for example when they talk about other people involved in their life, who might be offended. (Farrimond, 2013, 128.) In my study I aimed at anonymity by storing data without real names, as well as by changing names, locations and other details that might lead to identification in this report. However, Grinyer (2002) notes, that not always participants want to be anonymous.

*Beneficence* refers to the idea of usefulness of the study. Wasting participant's time without a good intention can be considered as unethical (Hassandra, 2014). In my study the benefits can be either direct or indirect. Direct, personal gain for the participant could be increased self-knowledge or the satisfaction of being heard. However, the actual aim of my study is increased knowledge of this specific phenomenon. This would be defined as an indirect benefit. *Nonmalificence*, on the other hand, means "do no harm" (Farrimond, 2013, 27). Since on my study people can fairly freely choose what things they want to bring up, and no other intervention is done, I don't see a major risk in harming the participants.

*Justice* can be evaluated by asking who is benefitting from the conducted research and who takes the risks (Farrimond, 2013, 29). In my study participants are not especially vulnerable and receive no significant personal gain, so being excluded from the study is not harmful. Also, the participants were asked to donate only a reasonable amount of recourses (one interview up to 90 minutes), so I don't consider that as an exploitation.

*Fidelity* refers to honesty, integrity and trust. As a researcher it is my responsibility to be honest both to the participants and the scientific community. (Farrimond, 2013, 30.) This includes being honest when giving information to the participants, using proper references and reporting the results without falsification. In my study I am not trying to verify an existing theory so there was no pressure of making the results fit a particular pattern.

In conclusion I would estimate that even though there are some ethical issues to consider and take care of, from an ethical point of view my study is not particularly risky. I believe following basic principles presented above ensures my study to be ethically approvable.

## 6 RESULTS

### 6.1 Interview Summaries

#### 6.1.1 Elisabeth

In the beginning of the interview Elisabeth answers my questions related to *who she is*, and it becomes clear that as an athlete she is defined by will to success. She tells me about her sport background and current training. Even though there are other important things in life, for Elisabeth sport is the most important thing. When I ask her what being an athlete means, she refers to athletic lifestyle including training, nutrition and rest. Elisabeth's life is conditioned by sport, even though she admits there are still things she could do better in order to be "a better athlete". I present her the 20 statements from the quantitative measures for athletic identity and overall she gives quite high numerical values. This indicates that sport certainly is an important subject in her life. Therefore it makes sense that she describes her injury being a shock and she even skipped school for a week because of the physical and emotional pain.

I ask her to draw a river or a stream that illustrates her life from an athletic point of view and mark down key factors affecting the flow of the stream. Her will to success is visible in the drawing since it seems like the stream climbs up the paper as her athletic career becomes more successful and drops lower when the stream is affected by the injury. Her stream starts with involvement in a variety of competitive sports. It widens when she chooses her current sport. Important factors in her buoyant flow are personal development, success, social support and replacement of the coach. Next the injury takes the stream down a little bit and she wrote "moment of depression" next to it. Soon rehabilitation, strong will to come back and getting back to more normal training takes the river up again.

In the last part of the interview I ask Elisabeth questions related to her injury and how it affected her feeling of being an athlete. She tells me that the injury happened practically at the peak of her athletic career so far and her coach was immediately able to tell her that she is going to need a long rehabilitation. She describes the rehabilitation period and tells me about the moments of pain, uncertainty and patience but also the joy when progress was made.

The main points that she brings up are lack of competition and recognition, alienation from the coach, adjustment to different lifestyle and the influence of her role model. For example, when not being able to compete and succeed, her eagerness to achieving in school dropped down as well. The replacement of the coach soon after the injury caused her to be unsure of who she can turn to for help. Fortunately she had a physiotherapist in the family and he was an important person for her during the rehabilitation. The new life rhythm included more school and more time with friends, until the rehabilitation was fully in progress and it started feeling like training again. One important source of motivation for rehabilitation was that her role model, an elite athlete in the same sport, was suffering from the same injury at the same time. She got a lot of good tips, support and healthy competition through this idol, as well as confirmation that knee injuries are part of the sport and they happen to elite level athletes as well.

#### 6.1.2 Josephine

When I ask Josephine to tell me about herself, she tells me about her studies, work, family and hobbies. As an athlete, she tells me, she has quit her active career. Even so, she is still in touch with sport on a daily basis. Her athletic background story twines with success and advancing to higher divisions – this is also seen in her stream drawing as a broadening stream, although when she explains the drawing she emphasizes the increase in practice time. Media attention also comes up. I ask her about reasons to quit playing, and she tells me about graduating, wanting to work and having troubles combining the two; the league taking its toll; and her own perception of her potential as a player versus in other aspects in life. She also says how being injured for a season caused her to realize how choosing sport over work would mean placing all eggs in one basket.

When Josephine shares her perceptions while commenting on her ratings on the athletic identity measurement scales, it becomes clear that sport still is an important thing in her everyday life, but when she talks about sport, she doesn't only refer to sport as a profession or hobby but she also talks about following sports in general. Naturally some of the answers are reflective of her active sport career when she got paid for playing. Now that she is breaking away from the athlete status, sport is still important to her as a part of well-being.

Her knee injury occurred at a critical time: just before beginning of her first year in the highest national level league. The rehabilitation was a long and slow process, and even though she was highly motivated and determined to get back in shape and play in the league, it also gave her a glance of life without the game; she was able to advance her studies and be with her family. When “aqua running with mamas” she did not feel like an athlete.

Josephine points out how she felt that her club left her really alone after the injury. Even though it was important to her to follow her team and be present in home games, she was not officially involved with the club. She only got some pity instead of social support that she would have needed. Even her teammates couldn't offer that because they didn't know what it was like to be injured. She was eventually able to return, play in the league and be even in better physical shape than she was before, but some psychological factors, such as caution, still remained.

### 6.1.3 Alexander

Alexander describes his athletic background as a process, where the fun hobbies gradually became a profession and further developed for him to specialize in this one sport. He is a professional athlete and it is his job and hard work, but on the other hand it is still the same activity he did as a junior – and still does – just for fun. Balancing between being a professional and still just having a fun, wellbeing-enhancing and enjoyable hobby is present throughout the whole interview. His stream drawing describes factors that have made him continue sporting and words such as “fun”, “feeling well” and “challenging myself” are present.

Another category of items in the drawing are factors that have changed his attitude towards sport. These include two big injuries and publicity. He says at first publicity was kind of fun and then it started to be annoying, until he was able to assimilate it and now it doesn't bother him anymore. He makes a clear distinction between “other people” and his “circle of acquaintances” and tells that the public may give a lot of feedback but only the opinions of those close him matter.

When I ask him to tell me about the injury, he tells me how the cause of pain was not immediately found and the difficult situation put his career at risk. The relief was big when after four months he chose surgery as a last chance to find out the cause, and it

was found and repaired. The uncertainty before the operation was the low point of his whole career, causing mental burden, including financial worries. After the cause for the pain was found and repaired, the athletic routine was quickly restored. He points out that injuries are part of sport and everybody around him are well aware of that. Also a lot of peer support was available during the process.

During the interview it becomes clear that it is not easy for Alexander to define what “being an athlete” means in his case. Being a professional, sure, but it also makes him think of some qualities that are not present in his everyday life. He says that his sport is more about having the right feeling than pushing very hard, and that especially during the competitive season it is hard to maintain a proper daily routine – both of those being factors that he thinks “an athlete” should have. In any case, the sport is not the most important thing in Alexander’s life, even if it is very important. Everything is not revolved around sport, but everything else in life affects sport. Also, being able to take his mind of the sport is important for his performance.

#### 6.1.4 Valtteri

Valtteri has been involved in his sport for as long as he can remember and now it is his profession. The numerical values he gives to the 20 statements are generally not especially high or low. He explains that even though his everyday choices are made on sport’s terms, sport is not the most important thing in his life but there are a lot of other things and that is how it should be as well.

For Valtteri it is hard to imagine doing something else and he is very used to the athletic lifestyle. Even though being a professional athlete requires some sacrifices, he enjoys what he is doing. This balance of getting and giving is also how Valtteri chooses to structure his life as an athlete when I ask him to draw the river. The river is wider when sport has given him a lot, and more narrow when things have been tougher. Another thing that is visible both in the stream and in his narration is that Valtteri was doing well in his sport right before the injury. Now it is an important goal to him to reach the same level again.

Valtteri has suffered two ACL-injuries in a row. Rehabilitation is “a grind” and starting the rehabilitation again from zero was for sure frustrating, but he got good prognosis both times and rehabilitation was something he just needed to do. When I ask Valtteri if

he still felt like an athlete during the rehabilitation, he answers that even more so, because he had to do more work than the usual training routine. An important note is that Valteri describes how his eyes opened after the second injury about the importance of education. He says he should start studying in order to have another profession after the athletic career.

In the last part of the interview I ask Valteri about factors that make him feel like an athlete and if they were any different during the rehabilitation period. Among other things we discuss life rhythm, social support and media. He tried to maintain his life rhythm as well as possible. It was helpful to be in the gym at the same time as his peers, even though he had to do different things from others. Peer support was especially significant, but also his personal coach is very important factor strengthening his athletic identity. During the rehabilitation his relations to the sport staff remained otherwise the same, but even more people (such as physiotherapists) were involved. One thing he found surprising but encouraging was when media still showed some interest in his doings during the rehabilitation. This gave him a boost, since it was nice to know that someone still cares and waits for him to return.

## **6.2 Thematic View to Athletic Identity and Injury**

### **6.2.1 The Model of Athletic Identity and Injury**

On the basis of the data analysis I formulated a model describing the dynamic relationship of athletic identity and injury. The model (figure 4) includes the elements that I perceived to be meaningful in the narrations of the study participants. The model shows what elements the athletes brought up as important factors constructing their athletic identity during the injury and rehabilitation process. It also demonstrates what injury responses were perceived as meaningful when managing identification with the athlete role. The relationship is reciprocal, because while injury can affect athletic identity, athletic identity may also affect rehabilitation.

First the model presents factors constructing athletic identity. These perceived determinants are organized on a continuum including both the personal and social dimension of identity. The categories listed from the personal dimension end are *personal gain, me as an athlete, sport as an activity, social relations in sport, and surroundings and media*. The reason I chose to place them on a continuum rather than

hierarchical model (compare with figure 1 on page 9) is that in some themes, which could be defined as personal, comparison with non-athletes seems to be present. In other words, own identity is constructed in relation to others. Further, in the social dimension end, *social relations in sport* category contains personally more meaningful relationships than *surroundings and media* category. Therefore it is impractical to position the categories to strict hierarchy based on personal and social dimension. Each category includes themes that came up during the interviews. The lowest part of the model introduces injury responses that may affect athletic identity.

The suggested model is a collective presentation. This means that all the athletes didn't bring up all the factors in the model. The purpose of this chapter is to further introduce the model and the interpretations that led to the formation of the model. All the athletes also emphasized different elements; this can be seen in the interview summaries in the previous chapter.

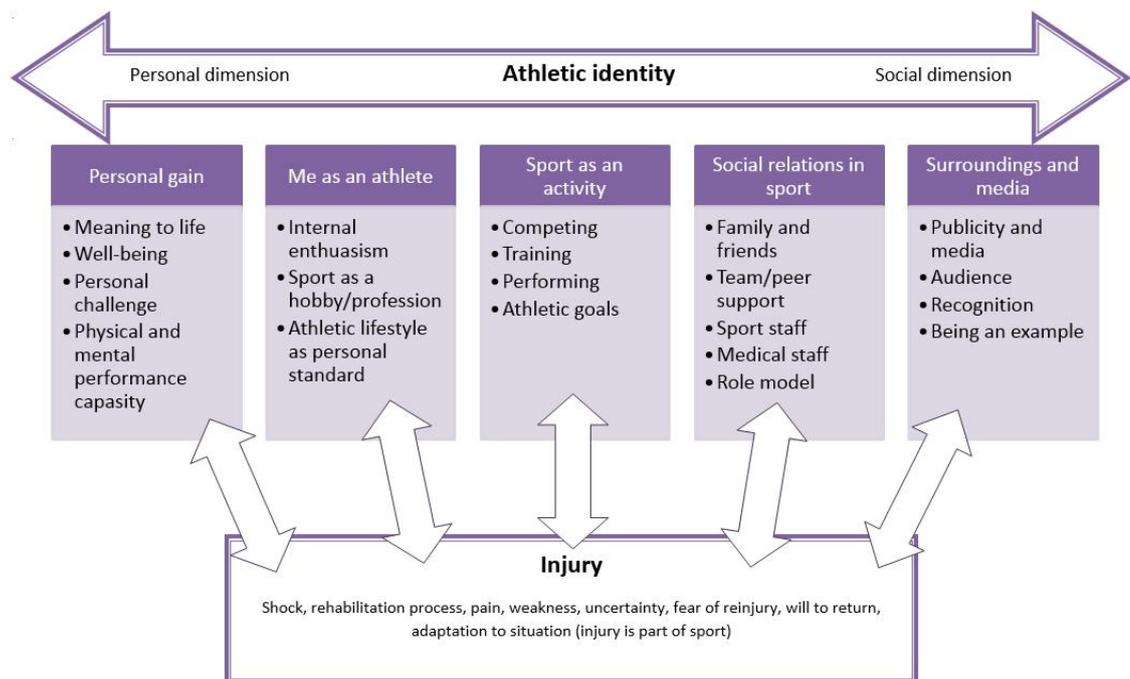


Figure 4. The model of athletic identity and injury.

### 6.2.2 Personal Gain

In the personal dimension end of the athletic identity continuum is *personal gain*. This is an important factor in athletic identity and Valtteri even bases his river drawing on how much the sport has given to him. Personal gain includes subcategories *meaning to*

*life, well-being, personal challenge and physical and mental performance capacity.* Sport is obviously an important element in all the athletes' life. Achieving athletic goals requires persevering, hard work. Sport is something that drives you to do things, therefore it can be said that sport gives meaning to life. When I ask Alexander, what position sport has in his life and how the injury changed it, he describes the mental impact as follows:

*“Ku ei oikein ollu mitään muuta, et siinä on niin vahvasti urheiluun sidottuna, että sit ku se yhtäkkiä häviääkin, sit jää tietysti kaverit ja semmoset, mutta sitten tavallaan se tunne oikeestaan siitä et mitä mä nyt teen, miks mä nyt oon tavallaan oikeestaan olemassakaan, ko ei voi tehdä sitä mitä nyt halus ja piti tehdä.”*  
(Alexander)

*“There kind of was nothing else. You are so strongly tied to sports, and when it suddenly disappears, then naturally friends and such remains, but the feeling of what am I supposed to do, why do I even exist, really, when you're not able to do what you wanted and were supposed to do.”* (Alexander)

However, only Elisabeth states that sport is the most important thing in life. Instead, especially Alexander and Valtteri emphasized how there are other aspects in life that are more important than sport. Still their lives seem to revolve around sport. I interpreted that sport as a *value* is not the most important, even though in everyday life it might outstrip other aspects. Rokeach (1973, 5, 7) defines a value as a lasting belief that a specific mode of conduct is personally or socially preferable to an opposite mode of conduct and adds that there are two kinds of values: terminal and instrumental. Shortly, terminal values are the objectives and instrumental values are the methods to achieve those core values. Sport is more an instrumental value. Here Valtteri responses to the statement "I would feel a great sense of loss if I suddenly were unable to participate in my sport":

*”No kolmonen. Sit pitäis keksiä jotain muuta, millä korvata tän.”* (Valtteri)

*“Well, I'll give it a three. Then I would have to come up with something to replace this.”* (Valtteri)

The possibility of social desirability bias should also be taken into consideration. According to Wasylikiw (2007, 891), the participant might have a tendency to present

themselves in a way that makes them look good, hence putting accuracy of their answers aside. The athletes might for example feel that they should highlight that sport is not the most important thing in life to make sure they are not sidelining the importance of family or friends. It must also be taken into account, that based on their study, Price et al. (2014) questions, if the AIMS statement “Sport is the most important thing in my life” is congruent with the degree of athletic identity, because the wording suggests that the participants do not allow other activities to control their identity.

An interesting observation is that while Alexander and Valtteri highlight how they have also other important things in life, they justify it through the sport performance. This is part of Alexander’s response to the statement “I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else”.

*”Se ei oo hyvä, se menee tukkoon sit se homma. Joskus ajautuu semmoseen, että pyörittää päässä pelkkää sporttia ja sit se vähän niinku tukehtuu se homma, se ei meekään eteenpäin.” (Alexander)*

*“It’s not good, it becomes clogged. Sometimes you end up just thinking about sport and it ends up kind of choking, it’s not going forward.” (Alexander)*

Even if too much sport can lead to stress, well-being is one of the things that sport brings to athletes. It is most strongly present in Josephine’s story, which is natural, because her current aims in sport are well-being oriented instead of competitive. The athletes talk about physical well-being as well as enjoyment in sport and fun.

*”Et vaikka tehään tosissaan työtä, niin silti kuitenkin sen pitää olla hauskaa, pyrkiä siihen aina että se on hauskaa, pitkässä juoksussa, et totta kai aina on hetkiä, että ei oo hauskaa, mut pyrin kuitenkin siihen.” (Alexander)*

*”Siitä saa paljon mielihyvää ja jos on pitkiä jaksoja, että ei vaikka pääse urheilemaan, niin siitä tulee, tavallaan huonoa omaatuntoa, mutta myös huonoa oloa, tai tulee ihan semmonen fiilis, että vitsi ko pääsis nyt urheilemaan.” (Josephine)*

*”Although we’re working seriously, it still needs to be fun, or at least aim to it in a long run. Of course there are times when it’s not fun, but I aim for it anyways. (Alexander)*

*”It gives me a lot of enjoyment, and if there are longer periods when I’m not able to do sport, I get this kind of a bad conscience, but also a bad feeling, or I feel like I wish I could do sports now.” (Josephine)*

When the injury occurs, the athlete is not able to gain well-being from sport activities. When the rehabilitation gets going, physical activity is restored, but can cause both physical pain and mental anxiety. Therefore sport cannot produce well-being like before.

The third subcategory in personal gain is personal challenge. This included codes such as personal growth, challenging oneself and perceived competence. The subcategory shows in the data in interesting ways. Challenging oneself is an important motive to do sport for the athletes. After Alexander has explained me his stream drawing, I ask him how he hopes the stream would look like in the future. His response highlights the meaning of personal challenge instead of winning or succeeding in the sport.

*”-- toivottavasti tulis paljon, tietenki onnistumisia, mutta myös semmosia pettymyksiä, jotka ruokkii taas entisestään eteenpäin tekeen, omaa uraa pitkälle eteenpäin. Et niitä pettymyksiäki aina tarvii. Et ei sekään nyt oo enää mitään ittensä haastamista, ellei pettymyksiä tuu. Et jos menee koko ajan voitosta voittoon niitten omien tavoitteidensaki kanssa, niin aika tylsäksi saattas käydä.” (Alexander)*

*“I hope there will be a lot of, success of course, but also disappointments that feed me to go further forward with my career. You need disappointments as well. It’s not challenging yourself anymore if you don’t have any disappointments. If you just go from one win to another, it might become pretty boring.”(Alexander)*

Valtteri brings up in several parts how believing in himself is important. Injury and the rehabilitation is also one challenge to meet.

*”-- et vaikka noit loukkaantumisii nyt on sattunu, niin kyl se aina niitten jälkeen heti oli, et okei, no ei voi vaan minkään, mutta pitää kuntouttaa ittensä ja sitte tullaan takasi.” (Valtteri)*

*“Even though I have experienced these injuries, afterwards it was always just like okay, now I have to rehabilitate myself and then I’ll come back.” (Valtteri)*

One outcome, that sport related personal challenge makes possible, is personal growth. When explaining the stream, Alexander describes some of the previous years in his career as follows:

*”Ihan sitä semmosta perusjauhantaa, jonka käsittely tai purku vaatii varmasti aikansa ku aikanaan urheilun lopettaa, et mitä kaikkee sieltä oikeesti jääny matkaan, mutta varmasti se on kasvattanu hyvin paljon, ihmisenä. Et hyvin nuoresta pitäen joutunu toimiin tosi paljon itsenäisesti ja oppinu hirveesti ja nähny vähän muutaki ko oman kylän Citymarketin. Laajentanu katsetta varmasti.” (Alexander)*

*“It was just working on the same basic routine. I’m sure it will take some time to process it after I retire, to really know what I have gained from it, but I’m sure it has helped me grow a lot as a person. From a youngster I needed to act independently a lot, and I’ve learned so much, and seen something else but just the local Citymarket. It has broadened my perspective, for sure.” (Alexander)*

Difficult life experiences constitute a challenge to the narrative construction of identity, and therefore it is natural that an individual seeks to harmonize the story (Pals, 2006). This comes up in Valtteri’s narrative, when present him the statement “It is very important for me to succeed at my sport.”

*”Kyl mä koen, et se on mulle aika tärkeätä. Tai oikeestaan tällä hetkellä se, että pääsis sinne tasolle, missä on joskus aiemmin ollu, ennen loukkaantumisia, niin se on semmonen tavote ja tärkeä asia.” (Valtteri)*

*“Yeah, I think it is quite important to me. Or actually, at the moment, being able to make it to that level again, where I was before the injuries, that is the goal and an important thing to me.” (Valtteri)*

The quote shows how Valtteri approaches rehabilitation as a personal challenge to restore his successfulness in sport on the level it was before the injury. This can be read as if he wanted to make sure that his story has not been permanently affected by the injuries, but the injuries are only a temporary difficulty. Naturally, he does not want the injury to end up taking something that he had away from him for good.

For Elisabeth, sport is an important source for feeling of competence, especially from the social, comparative point of view. This is Elisabeth's answer to the statement "My popularity with others is related to my athletic ability":

*"Kyllä urheilu on mulle se, missä mie oon ollu hyvä. Että esim. mulla on aika paljon kavereita, jotka on koulussa ihan kymppin oppilaita, niin mulle se ei oo ollu samalalaila ku se urheilu."* (Elisabeth)

*"For me, sport has been the thing I've been good at. For example, I have a lot of friends who get straight A's in school, and for me school has never had that role like sports."* (Elisabeth)

This might partly explain why Elisabeth positions sport as the most important thing in life. As mentioned before, after the injury she skipped school in the first week, because she was "depressed and irritated". When I ask her about the effects of the injury, she says that the injury caused her to neglect school. In this quote she points out that success in school has been important to her, contrary to the understanding that arises from the previous quote. Therefore it is important to take account the social, comparative context in that one, whereas this is more in the personal dimension. Overall it still seems clear that sport is an important source of feeling of competence for Elisabeth.

*"-- koulussaki kuitenkin pitkään olin semmonen että halusin sieltä just tällästä menestystä, sitte ku ei ollu sitä urheilua, niin mulla tuli vähän koulustaki semmonen, että no ihan sama."* (Elisabeth)

*"-- for a long time, from school as well, I wanted that success. And when I didn't have the sport, I felt little like 'whatever' about school as well."* (Elisabeth)

Interestingly, Josephine's reasons for quitting competitive sport includes her perception of her own potential as a player. She felt that she had reached the limits of her athletic abilities and was in that sense unable to challenge herself further in a worthwhile way. Later she also says how the injury enabled her to see what life could be like without the game. The combination of the two lead to the decision of quitting. Here Josephine discusses the importance of success in his sport.

*"-- se oli yks syy miksi lopetin, koska koin, että vaikka kuinka paljon reenais enemmän ja tekis asioita paremmin, ja enemmän uhrais aikaa siihen vielä lissää,*

*niin ehkä se oma taidollinen ja fyysinen limitti tuli jossain vaiheessa vastaan, tavallaan myös se psyykinen, että ei ehkä, jaksanu ennää sitä että puristaa enemmän ja enemmän, ja sitte just se, -- että muilla ne testitulokset on paremmat, muilla peli kulkee paremmin, ite ei saa niin paljoa peliaikaa, niin silloin ehkä mielummin tekee jotain semmosta, missä sitte on hyvä.” (Josephine)*

*“-- it was one of the reasons why I quit. I found that no matter how much more I would train, and do things better, and dedicate more time to it, maybe I had reached my skill limit and physical limit. In a way the mental limit as well, maybe I wasn't able to push more and more, and -- everyone else had better test results, others played better than me, I didn't get that much playing time. Then I'd maybe rather do something that I'm good at.” (Josephine)*

The last subcategory in personal gain is physical and mental performance capacity. This seemed not to affect the athletes' identification with the athlete role, even though the physical effect of the injury is probably the most dramatic of all. It seemed like the reduction in physical abilities didn't make them worry. For example, Valtteri states how he didn't even think of how much he was physically behind when he was able to return to his sport, because it was just so cool to be back doing it. Athletes also emphasized how injuries are part of sport and they all strongly believed in their ability to successfully recover. The following quote is part of Alexander's response when I asked him if he still felt like an athlete during the rehabilitation. It reflects how major part of self being an athlete is for him – even when the symptoms kept getting worse, the doctors were not able to find the cause and even his career was at risk, deep down he didn't believe that this would be the end of it.

*”-- kyllähän sitä pyöritteli päässään kaikenlaista, mut ei kyllä kertaakaan vielä jaksanu uskoo siihen, että se loppuis. Niinku oikeesti. Että kyllä sitä piti jotenki itsestäänselvyytenä, että kyllä tästä vielä nousee, tavalla tai toisella.” (Alexander)*

*“-- yeah, for sure you had a lot of different thoughts in your mind, but for once I didn't believe that this would be the end of it. Like really. It was always kind of a self-evident truth that I would be able to come back, one way or another.” (Alexander)*

It should be taken into account that all four athletes in the end had a positive rehabilitation outcome and were able to fully recover. The influence of reduction in athletic abilities in athletic identity might be significant if the athlete was not able to recover. Alexander takes this into account in his reply, when I ask him if the reduction in his performance abilities affected his feeling of being an athlete.

*”Eipä se, niin paljon on vastaavia tapauksia, että ei kai. Mut sitte se ois vaikuttanu varmasti, jos ois tullu niin sanottu kuolemantuomio, että tää ei tästä ikinä enää kuntoudu.” (Alexander)*

*“I don’t think so; there are so many cases like this, so I think it didn’t. But I’m sure it would have mattered, if I’d gotten a so called death sentence, that this will never be rehabilitated.” (Alexander)*

### 6.2.3 Me as an Athlete

*Me as an athlete* category describes athletes’ attitudes towards sport. Sport is both a profession and the fun hobby they started as kid. The athletes underline how they have an internal will to do sport. This is a big factor why the injury does not significantly unbalance the position of sport in the athletes’ life even when the situation is radically changed after the injury.

*“-- se on kuitenkin koko ajan tullu tuolta sisältä se halu tehdä, et oikeestaan ihan sama vaikka välillä on tullu kovasti turpaan ja sitte välillä on kova myötätuuli puskenu eteenpäin, mutta sillä ei oo ollu millään tavalla merkitystä hirveesti siihen, että, et on jatkanu.” (Alexander)*

*“-- the will to do this has always come from within. It really haven’t mattered, even though sometimes I’ve been beaten up badly and sometimes I’ve had good tailwind push me forward. But it really haven’t had an effect on me carrying on.” (Alexander)*

All four athletes talk about sport as a profession, even though they compete in different levels and are also in somewhat different phases in their athletic career. Elisabeth most likely reflects her thoughts to her possible future career, and she sees herself on a way to being a professional. Josephine defines professionalism through the fact that she was

getting paid for playing. Alexander and Valtteri are not studying or working but are fully invested in sport.

The injury's relation to sport being a profession is mostly present in Alexander's story. He especially highlights the effect it has on the salary and the financial situation. However, he points out that the change in salary is something all athletes are very used to and they never have regular monthly paycheck. Valtteri brings up how the second injury was an eye-opener in regards of importance of education, thus broadening his thoughts toward other possible future profession identities. Josephine and Elisabeth used the time to a good purpose and were able to advance their studies, which might indicate that temporarily there was more room for other role-identities. However, these changes did not change the strength of their athletic identity, because they were still very much working towards a better performance even during the rehabilitation. When I ask about the possible change in his identification, Alexander brings the focus of the conversation back to his internal will to do sports.

*"Mut mä en tiää siis ku mä en oo ikinä oikeestaan ehkä ajatellu itteeni urheilijana, vaan mä oon vaan tehny sitä mitä mä oon halunnu tehdä. Et en mä oo koskaan sen enemppää ajatellu, et mitä mä teen ja onko tää oikeesti joku työ." (Alexander)*

*"But I don't know, because maybe I've never really thought about myself as an athlete, but I've just been doing what I wanted to do. I've never given more thought about what I'm doing and is this really some kind of a profession." (Alexander)*

An athlete is at work 24 hours every day, since everything can affect sport performance. It requires a certain kind of a disciplined lifestyle, including training, nutrition and rest, and also sacrifices have to be made. When the athletes talk about this, they often frame it as a comparison to other people or tell hypothetical stories. Sport as a profession can be seen as a contrasting factor to other, "normal" people. For Valtteri, it is the biggest factor making him feel like an athlete.

*"-- ehkä se on isoin, että muut ku lähtee töihin niin mä lähen reeneihin, et se on se mun työ." (Valtteri)*

*"-- maybe the biggest thing is that when everyone else goes to work, I go to training. That's my job." (Valtteri)*

Hypothetical stories, or sideshadowing, tells what did *not* happen. According to Hyvärinen (2010, 96-98), hypothetical stories highlights the importance of the moment in the narrative but also means that the teller wants to make sure that the listener understands the meaning of what happened in the narrative. In this quote Josephine describes what made her feel like an athlete:

*”-- no just se, että muut kesälomalla, ei niillä oo semmosta säännöllistä aikataulua --, mutta silloin varsinkin nuorempana, ite vielä ko oli vaikka lukiossa, niin ei kesät ollu sitä, että otettiin aurinkoa ja käytiin reissussa ja tämmöstä, vaan se oli sitä, että oltiin [treenihallilla] kaks kertaa päivässä, ja väännettiin kahen tunnin puntteja.” (Josephine)*

*“-- well, when everyone else is having summer vacation, they don't have that kind of a regular schedule --, but like when I was younger, in high school for example, summers weren't about sunbathing and travelling and such, but it was about being at the [practice hall] twice a day pumping iron for two hours.” (Josephine)*

This is also an example of habitual narrative . It is not a story about one, specific event, but a description of typical situation. These kinds of narratives get their meaningfulness precisely from this continuous time frame. (Riessman, 1990, 76; Hyvärinen, 2010, 96-97.) Josephine makes the difference between the athletes, who in summer train twice a day, and others, who sunbathe and travel.

The separation between “we” and “the others” can also be seen in the way the special, demanding lifestyle is seen as normal for self, making the athlete “special” in the context of the society. Alexander repeatedly notes that it is hard for him to answer some questions about his athletic lifestyle, because it is so normal for him. Valtteri also says that he is very used to the athletic lifestyle and it is hard to imagine doing something else. The sacrifices this lifestyle requires, is one way of expressing the difference between an athlete and a non-athlete, as can be seen in the following quote from Valtteri.

*"No, työtähän se on sekin, mut se on tietenki aika paljon erilaista työtä ku perus kaheksasta neljään, se on työtä koko ajan, silloinki ku on myös vapaa-ajalla. Että -- siihen vaaditaan jonkin verran uhrauksia, -- että ehkä jostain jutuista pitää luopua tai joskus sanomaan, että ei, ku sit jos ei ois urheilija niin ehkä vois tehdä*

*jotain juttuja. Se on vähän semmosta, se ottaa jonku verran, mutta sitte se myös mahdollisesti antaa aika paljon.” (Valtteri)*

*“Well, it’s a job, but obviously it’s pretty different from average ‘eight to four’. It’s work all the time, even on your free time. It -- requires some sacrifices, -- maybe you have to give up certain things or say ‘no’ sometimes, and if you weren’t an athlete you may be able to do certain things. That’s how it is, it takes a little, but it possibly gives a lot as well.” (Valtteri)*

When the injury occurs, this athletic life rhythm gets interfered. The athletes mention that they had more time to family, friends or school, when normal training was not possible. However, training rhythm normalizes quite quickly when the rehabilitation gets started. Some change still remains, because one does not need to travel to competitions or camps.

*”-- kävin ulkona enemmän kavereitten kans, tai sitte just ku oli vaikka kavereilla synttäreitä niin pysty osallistumaan niihin, ja no totta kai, ku oli niitä kuntoutustreenejä, niin silloin mentiin aivan niitten ehoilla kans. Mutta esim. talvella, ku olit tottunu siihen että oot, joka viikonloppu jossaki, nyt ko et ollukaan --. Se oli vähän tavallaan jopa unohti sen, että minkälaista se oli silloin, ko niin tottu siihen uuteen rytmiin.” (Elisabeth)*

*“-- I went out with friends more, or like when they had birthdays, I was able to join. And of course when I had the rehabilitation exercises I went on their terms. But for example in winter time, when you were used to travel somewhere every weekend, and now you didn’t --. You kind of forgot about the old rhythm because you got adjusted to the new one.” (Elisabeth)*

Interestingly enough, Alexander specifically validates his doubts about being a “true athlete” by mentioning that someone who is to be defined as an athlete should have an exact day rhythm, but in his sport it is hard to achieve due to varying competition times. Therefore he says that even if the injury changed his daily rhythm, it played no role because he is used to not having a clear routine. Nevertheless, Valtteri, who competes in the same level in the same sport, says that he was consciously trying to maintain his athletic daily schedule. This brings forward the fact that the perceived experiences the athletes have can vary a great deal.

Being special compared to other people also comes up in the way Elisabeth describes school. She says that she now goes on a sport class, but did her comprehensive school in “normal classes”, thus positioning sport class as non-normal. Because of sport, absenteeism from school is characteristic in her studies. When her normal athletic activity was disturbed and she was able to be in school a lot more, she wondered if she was even recognized as being an athlete.

*”Se oli minun ensimmäinen lukiovuosi, niin välissä tuntu että tietääkö ne opettajat että mie ees oon urheilija, ko mie en oo ollu poissa tai jos muut [saman lajin urheilijat] on jossaki reissuilla, ja mie oon kuitenkin sielä koulussa.” (Elisabeth)*

*“It was my first year in high school, and at times I felt like do the teacher even know that I am an athlete, because I was never absent, or when all other [athletes from the same sport] were travelling, and I was in school nonetheless.” (Elisabeth)*

For Alexander, the uncertainty that came with the injury was probably the most significant thing threatening his athletic identity. This has to do with the nature of the injury and the fact that his career was in danger to end. The significance of this uncertainty comes up for example when I ask Alexander to tell me about his injury. He first uses over two minutes to describing the times of uncertainty: the symptoms; unsuccessful searching for the cause of them; the wrong diagnosis and unsuccessful treatment; and the process of going into the operation where the actual cause was finally found. In real life, this took about four months. The rest of the process, that in real life took double the time, he passes off with one short sentence.

*”Ja, no sit se vaan vaati neulaa ja lankaa ja sit vähän lepoa ja kuntoutusta niin se oli sit siinä.” (Alexander)*

*“And then, it only required little needle and thread and then little rest and rehabilitation, and that was it.” (Alexander)*

The uncertainty gets a lot of space in Alexander’s interview, even though it’s a fairly short time, about four months, in his career. He seems to be himself very well aware of this, which is well visible in the following quote. This kind of retrospective understanding on past events’ meaning is called *backshadowing* and it can be used to create coherence to the present identity story (Squire et al., 2014, 26-27).

*”Että tietysti nyt jälkikäteen aateltuna niin urheiluun sidotaan aina hirveä määrä tunnetta, urheilijat ittekin, että sitä reagoi kaikkeen mikä liittyy urheiluun tosi voimakkaasti. Että nyt jälkikäteen ku taas on päässy hyvään vauhtiin ja tervehtynyt ja kuntoutunu, niin eipä tuo nyt niin iso juttu ollu. Mut -- silloin sitä aina suhtautuu hirveen raskaasti siihen. Et se on kuitenkin sit aika lyhyt aika ihmisen elämässä varsinki, ja sit siinä urheiluelämässä, jos siitä selviää. Mut se epä tietosuus on se kaikista pahin juttu.” (Alexander)*

*”Of course when I look back, there’s always so much emotion involved in sport, for the athlete himself as well, and so you react to everything sport related so strongly. Now when I look back, and I’m back in good progress and healthy and rehabilitated, it wasn’t such a big deal after all. But -- at the time you take it very much to heart. But in the end it’s a short time especially in a person’s life, but in the sport life as well, if you make through it. But the uncertainty is the worst thing.” (Alexander)*

#### 6.2.4 Sport as an Activity

Competitive sport as an activity means doing single performances, training in general and competing. For all four athletes, training seems to be the most significant factor in identification with the athlete role. When they have drawn and explained the river picture, I ask them all when they started to feel like an athlete. All answers include training two times per day, training significantly harder or training more professionally. Therefore it is natural that the disturbance that injury causes to training routines leads to a moment of confusion and this is visible in most of the interviews. Here I presented Alexander with the statement “I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport”.

*”Joo no toihan on tullu koettuaki tossa, että kyllä se kova paikka on ja siinä on sitten hetken aikaa ihmeissään, et millä tätä, tavallaan tyhjiötä, täyttää --.” (Alexander)*

*”Yeah, well I have experienced that, and it is a tough spot for sure, and you are astonished for a while, like how are you gonna fill the void --.” (Alexander)*

Contrary to the others, Valtteri says that he felt even more like an athlete during the rehabilitation period. He explains that on top of normal training, he had to do additional

things at home with the knee to enhance the rehabilitation. This strengthened his feeling of being an athlete, which indicates that the amount of training is a significant factor determining the identification with the athlete role.

Training is not only a fun activity. Done professionally year after year it is hard work. Alexander describes the time before the injury as “monotonous”. Even if Alexander perceives the recent injury as the biggest low point of his career, he also sees the positive effect it had on his career in a bigger picture.

*”-- sieltä on kuitenkin pystynyt ammentaan paljon semmosta uutta, mikä oli tossa yhdessä vaiheessa, et se vaan tuntu semmoselta tasaselta, vuodet vierii ja sit mä vaan tein ja jauhoin sitä samaa, että siitä löysi tavallaan uutta kipinää ja uutta suhtautumista urheiluun. Uudenlaista ajattelutapaa ja pysty kaivamaan taas sen värikkyuden siihen et se ei ollu enää niin mustavalkosta vaan se on nyt taas, ajattelisin niin, semmosella ajattelupohjalla ku se pitääkin olla.” (Alexander)*

*“-- I have been able to draw a lot of new things out of it. At one point it just felt very monotonous; years went by and I was just going through the same routine over and over again, so it gave me this kind of new spark and new perspective on sport. New perspective and I was able to find color to it, so it was not so black and white anymore, but now it is again, I think so, on that kind of a foundation it should be.” (Alexander)*

Competing is obviously an essential part of competitive sport. In the data, competing is most often present together with success. The injury prevents the athletes from competing, but it does not seem to play a role with athletic identity. Elisabeth is the only exception. For her succeeding is very important in sport, and this is also visible in her narrative, when she tells how not being able to succeed in sport made her neglect school.

When it comes to performing their sport, Alexander, Elisabeth and Josephine all bring up, how their sport is demanding for athlete’s physique and therefore injuries are likely to occur.

*”-- polviahan menee [tässä lajissa] paljon. Sehän on fakta.” (Elisabeth)*

*“-- a lot on knees break [in this sport]. That’s a fact.” (Elisabeth)*

With this confident statement Elisabeth adds herself to a chain of knee-injured athletes in her sport. Also the fact that Elisabeth's idol from the same sport was suffering from the same injury at the same time, supports this statement. Alexander as well emphasizes that injuries are part of sport. Josephine deals with the occurrence of injuries from another perspective.

*"-- ja [minun lajini] on raaka laji silleen, että siinä tulee paljon hyppyjä, suunnanmuutoksia, paljon on semmosia tilanteita, missä se polvi vois ihan kellä tahansa vaan hajota." (Josephine)*

*"-- and [my sport] is a cruel sport that way, there's a lot of jumps and change of direction, a lot of situations where anyone could just have their knee broken." (Josephine)*

With the expression "anyone" and the passive form "just have their knee broken" Josephine might be differentiating herself from any possible individual reasons or weaknesses that the listener might see as possible cause for the injury. Josephine also talks about the psychological mark the injury has left, even though he is physically completely healed. When performing, the fear of reinjury is sometimes present.

*"-- on tiettenki semmosia tiettyjä tilanteita, että on vähän varovaisempi. Vieläki se polvi joskus tuntuu siltä että se muljahtaa, niin se heti muistuttaa siitä, että no hei, sielä on ollu semmonen, että se on hajonnu. Ei se ihan täysin koskaan lähe mielestä pois, se varovaisuus siitä. Se saattas hajota uuestaan." (Josephine)*

*"-- of course there are certain situations, that I'm more careful. Still the knee sometimes feels like it's going to sprain, and it's an immediate reminder that hey, there has been this thing, it has been broken. It will never completely come out of your mind, the carefulness. It might break again." (Josephine)*

Fear of reinjury have been found to correlate with not returning to previous sport levels (Flanigan, Everhart, Pedroza, Smith & Kaeding 2013; Tripp, Stanish, Ebel-Lam, Brewer & Birchard, 2007). Even though Josephine did return to her sport, I wonder if fear of reinjury can also reduce commitment to sport in emotional level, which could, as for, lead to decrease in identification with the athlete role.

Training and competing is founded on athletic goals. To the statement “I have many goals related to sport” all Elisabeth, Valtteri and Alexander give the highest possible score, and they only comment the statement shortly, which I interpreted to mean that they feel like it is obvious and does not need reasoning. Only Josephine gives a lower score, which is explained by the fact she no longer competes in sport. She also mentions having goals together with the team as one of the factors that made her feel like an athlete. The following quote shows the injury’s effects on athletic goals. The lively language and how much space is given to the topic in the narrative, reveals that the subject is important.

*”-- totta kai tiedostaa myös sen, että urheiluvuosia on aina rajallinen määrä, ja sitte jos ne nyt loppuu ennen kun on niin suunnitellu, ku ei siitäkään tiedosta oo varmuutta, et jatkuuko vai loppuuko jo kokonaan. Ja että jos jatkuu, niin milloin mahdollisesti jatkuis ja sitten tosiaan ku on rajallinen määrä vaan niitä, niitä ei oo hirveen paljon kellään, paitsi ehkä Selänteen Teemulla on ihan kiitettävä määrä, mut se on niitä harvoja, että niitä ei oikeen mukava oo tuhata siihen loukkaantumiseen ja totta kai se aina sotkee dramaattisesti sitä, että mitkä on ne omat tavoitteet ja mitä kohti rakentaa, niin kaikki menee siinä vaiheessa uusiks.”*  
(Alexander)

*“-- of course you’re aware of the limited amount of sport years you have, and if they now end before planned, because you can’t know if you’re able to continue, or if it will be the end of it. And if it does continue, when might that possibly be. And like I said, you only have a limited amount of them, no one has too many of them, except maybe Teemu Selänne has a good amount of them, but he’s one of the few. So you don’t want to waste them with being injured, and of course it always dramatically messes up your goals and what you are building towards. At that point, everything has to be replanned.”* (Alexander)

For the athletes, the immediate time after the surgery seems to be the oddest, when active rehabilitation is not yet possible. When the knee is healed enough, rehabilitation can slowly start, and then the athlete can return to a training schedule she or he is used to. Alexander described his return to physical activity as follows:

*”-- oisko siinä pari viikkoo ehkä ollu se aika, että piti vaan antaa sen olla ja pitää haavasta hyvä huoli. Mut sit sen jälkeen alko hyvin nopeesti se kuntouttaminen, --*

*ja sen mielsi itelleen jo treeniksi. Et sitähan se treenaaminen on, suorituskyvyn parantamista.” (Alexander)*

*”-- it was maybe a two weeks’ time when I just needed to let it be and take good care of the wound. But after that the rehabilitation started really quickly, -- and I thought of it as training. Isn’t that what training is, improving your performance.” (Alexander)*

When the rehabilitation starts, it creates new goals that bring meaning to training. The following quote is part of Elisabeth’s narrative about how sport brings meaning to her life, and how that situation was during the rehabilitation.

*”Siinä oli huippu nähä ko sitä kehitystä tapahtu niin paljon. Ko aluksi pääsit kyykkyyh tähän asti ja viikon päästä se oli jo taas paljon enemmän ja kuukauhen päästä sitte olitki jo ihan kyykyssä asti.” (Elisabeth)*

*“I was great to see all the progress. At the beginning you were able to squat this low, and in a week it was already a lot more and in month you were able to squat all the way.” (Elisabeth)*

The athletes describe the rehabilitation as a long process that can be frustrating. Proper goal-setting might ease this frustration. Goal-setting is one of the major things contributing to rehabilitation motivation and adherence, thus promoting positive rehabilitation outcome (Weinberg & Gould 2011, 456). When I asked Josephine to describe what made her feel like an athlete during the rehabilitation, she points out how the content of rehabilitation did not do it for her, but the goal of the rehabilitation did.

*”Itseasiassa silloin kuntoutuksen aikana ei hirveästi tuntenu itteään urheilijaksi, että täällä mammojen kanssa vesijuoksemassa, mutta -- koko ajan oli tahto siihen, että mie haluan vielä takasi sinne urheilijaksi, niin se oli se, mikä sai tuntemaan ittensä urheilijaksi.” (Josephine)*

*”Acually, during the rehabilitation I didn’t really feel like an athlete, you know, I’m just here aquarunning with mamas, but -- all the time you had the will to go back to being an athlete, and that was what made me feel like an athlete.” (Josephine)*

### 6.2.5 Social Relations in Sport

The category *social relations in sport* includes social relations that are personally meaningful for the athlete in regards of sport. This definition makes a difference between public relations, that are more “just part of sports” and maybe don’t have personal meaning to the athlete. This category includes family, friends, peers, sports staff, medical staff and role models. Athletes need various types of social support from the occurrence of the injury through the return to full activity (Bianco, 2001).

The subcategory *family and friends* bears multiple meanings in the data. These people provide important social support and offer the athletes other things than sport to think about, but are also neglected because of sport. Sport is also an important source for friends. Family is an important supporter for sport participation in general and also supports during the rehabilitation. The relation of friends and family to athletic identity is not simple. When I present the statement “Other people see me mainly as an athlete”, Elisabeth and Valteri stress that all who really know them, know that they are athletes, while Alexander underlines that those who are close to him, don’t see “Alexander the athlete”, even though sport is strongly present in his life.

In terms of the injury, family and friends are mostly present in the narratives that describe how injury made it possible to spend more time with friends and family than usual, in other words the activation of the social identity was possible more often than usual. Josephine describes honestly the situation athletes might be in, and the change after the injury in these two quotes:

*”Aika paljon kavereita, jotka ei oo urheilijoita, oon laiminlyöny, tosi paljonhan on kaikkia sukujuhlia, paljon perhetuttuja, ketä ei oo pystyny näkemään pitkään aikaan, että ne -- ei oo enää niin tärkeitä, koska ei oo niille ollu aikaa. Että kyllä urheilu vaatii paljon uhrauksiaki, mutta toisaalta se mitä se antaa, niin seki on tosi hieno asia.” (Josephine)*

*”Ja en ollu viikonloppuja kaikkia pelireissuila, niin oli viikonloppusinki aikaa nähä perhettä ja sukulaisia muila paikkakunnilla.” (Josephine)*

*”I’ve neglected quite many friends, who are not athletes; there are a lot of family occasions, a lot of family friends who I haven’t been able to see in a long time, and they -- become less important, because you don’t have time for them. So sport*

*does require a lot sacrifices as well, but on the other hand, what it gives to you, it's a great thing as well.” (Josephine)*

*“And I wasn't on game trips every weekend, so I had time on the weekends to see family also in other places.” (Josephine)*

Because the athletic lifestyle hinders athletes from spending time with other people, all four athletes have a lot of friends from the sport. In other words friends and athletic peers partly overlap. Peer support seems to be a major factor strengthening athletic identity both before and after injury. A significant booster is that even when injured, joining the training or other team activities with peers helps to hang on with normal, pre-injury social circles and normal life rhythm.

*”No kyl se oli silloin tosi hyvä homma, että ei tarvinu yksin harjotella --, vaikka eri juttuja joutuki tekeen ku muut, mutta kuitenkin monesti samassa paikassa tehtiin samaan aikaan, niin se autto kyllä aika paljon siihen, että oli kaverit jeesaamassa ja kannustamassa, että hyvä täst viel tulee.” (Valtteri)*

*“Yeah, it was a really good thing that I didn't have to practice alone --, even though I had to do different things than everyone else, I was often able to be at the same place at the same time, and it helped a lot to have friends helping and encouraging that it will be fine.” (Valtteri)*

Peer support is also important in a form of other injured athletes. As described in the previous chapter, some of the athletes felt that a lot of peer support is available, because injuries are part of sport and a lot of athletes get injured. Josephine had a different experience of this:

*”Tietenki joukkuekavereita näki, ja oli niitten kanssa tekemisissä, mutta ko ei niistä kukaan tienny sitä, että mitä se loukkaantuminen on.” (Josephine)*

*“Of course I saw my teammates, and was in contact with them, but none of them knew what it is like to be injured.” (Josephine)*

A noteworthy difference was also in the social support coming from the sport organization during the rehabilitation. Alexander and Valtteri state that their contact with sport staff was not changed after the injury, which was important.

*”Siihenkin [loukkaantumiseen] kyllä varmasti kaikki ketä urheilun parissa toimii on tottunu ja sehän siinä hirveintä oiski, et jos siinä ois joku ruvennu siitä hirveen katastrofin vääntämään, niin sithän se ois ollu vähän ajan päästä iso juttu.”*  
(Alexander)

*“I’m sure that everyone who is working with sports is used to injuries, and that had been the worst thing, if someone had made a huge disaster out of it, because then I would have soon been a major thing”* (Alexander)

Instead, both Elisabeth and Josephine describe the lack of support they experienced after the injury. For Josephine, the lack of support might be the biggest thing bothering her in the rehabilitation, because it gets a lot of space in her narration. She expresses her disappointment in the club strongly and in the narrative it can be seen how she interprets that the club sees the player as an object.

*”No, sen ainaki voin sanoa ihan suoraan, että seura jätti tosi yksin sen jälkeen ko loukkaantu. Sanottiin vaan, että tuo on viimeinen palkka minkä saat, ja koitahan pistää polvi kuntoon.”* (Josephine)

*”-- ei kukaan ollu silleen, että no hei, sie voisit tehdä tämmöstä ja tämmöstä juttua tai pysyä joukkueen matkassa, että se oli vähän että no, eipä me sinusta enää mitään hyödytä.”* (Josephine)

*”Well, I can bluntly say that the club left me really alone after the injury. They just said that ‘this is the last salary you get, and try to put your knee in shape.’”*  
(Josephine)

*“-- no one was like ‘hey, you could do this or that, or stay with the team’, but it was like ‘well, we don’t benefit from you anymore’”* (Josephine)

When the athlete experiences moments of uncertainty, it would be important to have the sport staff support. Elisabeth’s coach change timed badly in this sense.

*”Mutta kyllähän siinä kuntoutusvaiheessaki oli ongelmiaki, -- ja ku muut [teki jo monia suorituksia], ja mulla meni jo kahestaki [suorituksesta] se niin kipiäksi, -- et vähän semmonen olo, että oonko mie tehny jotaki väärin sen kuntoutuksen aikana, -- ja sitte ko se valmentajaki, kenen kanssa mie olin silloin, ko mulla se loukkaantuminen tapahtu, lähtiki siihen toiseen porukkaan, niin vähän oli*

*semmonenki olo, että kenen kanssa mie tässä nyt oon. Että kenen puoleen mie tässä voin kääntyä.” (Elisabeth)*

*“But for sure there were also difficulties during the rehabilitation, -- and when others were already [doing several performances], and my knee started hurting so bad after just few [performances], -- I felt little like ‘have I done something wrong during the rehabilitation’, -- and the coach I was with when I injured, left to be with that other group, I also felt like ‘who am I with here?’. ‘Who can I turn to?’” (Elisabeth)*

Regardless of the level of support the athletes experienced, they all tried to stay in contact with their team during the rehabilitation by attending trainings and games or following competitions closely as well as by keeping in social contact with the peers.

The uncertainty of doing the rehabilitation ”right” instead of ”wrong”, visible in the previous quote, seems to have been one of the major mental issues for Elisabeth during rehabilitation. It comes up in few other places as well when she compares herself with peers or the idol during the rehabilitation. When the athlete doesn’t know what to expect during the rehabilitation, the feelings of pain or weakness might feel like an alarm bell, even though they are completely normal phases in the process. In that situation the right kind of social support and injury expertise can ease the mental burden of the athlete.

Medical staff naturally provides important support during the rehabilitation, physiotherapists being the most important medical staff member. When Valtteri describes his relation to sport staff during injury, he points out that during the rehabilitation the team was even bigger than usual. Josephine brings up an important role that the physiotherapists have as a person who sets limits in terms of training for the eager athlete. Elisabeth was able to get the support needed to fill the coach’s gap from a related physiotherapist, who was a very important person for her during the rehabilitation. Interestingly, Elisabeth describes some kind of a slight juxtaposition between the coach and the physiotherapist.

*”Siis, mie aika paljon tein yksin, että se valmentaja ei, siis soitteli aina, että onko kaikki menny hyvin ja näin, ja sitte ko mulla oli just se henkilökohtanen fysioterapeutti siinä, niin se oli vähän niinko että ei halunnukkaan astua, sen juttuihin, sekaantua.” (Elisabeth)*

*“Well, I did a lot by myself, the coach didn’t... Well he called to check if everything was going okay and so on, and because I had the personal physiotherapist, so it was like the coach didn’t want to step into his stuff, to interfere.” (Elisabeth)*

It is hard to guess what might be behind the word choice “to interfere”. It could indicate some kind of a personal conflict or simply the coach and the physiotherapists maybe just did not know each other and therefore lacked communication. In any case, all parties should have the same goal – rehabilitating the athlete – and working together should advance, not harm the process. This might be one indication that Elisabeth didn’t get the most efficient background support as possible. A similar sign of the staff not working together is in Josephine’s story, where she describes how her physiotherapists and the operating surgeon gave notable different prognosis on when she might be able to play again.

An individual factor for Elisabeth is the effect of her role model, who is an elite-level athlete who was suffering from the same injury at the same time. She seems to have two roles: first of all, she acts as an indicator that these injuries happen to even the best, and Elisabeth herself is therefore not any less of an athlete than any of her healthy peers.

*”Therese totta kai, oli tosi isossa osassa, ja silloin ko se meni niin ei tietenkään tullu semmonen olo, että jes, Thereselläki meni, mutta semmonen, että niitä menee ja huipuilaki, ja onhan Therese niin positiivinen ihminen, että huomaa, että ei se nyt oo maata kaatava asia. Siitä tullaan takasi.” (Elisabeth)*

*“Therese, of course, had a big role. And when she injured, obviously it wasn’t like ‘yay, Therese broke it as well’, but like ‘it happens and even for the elite athletes’, and Therese is such a positive personality, so it made me realize that it’s not the end of the world. You come back from it.” (Elisabeth)*

Secondly, the fact that this role model is representing the same club as her enables also the role of social supporter. Elisabeth was able to get advice, encouragement and a baseline for rehabilitation progress.

### 6.2.6 Surroundings and Media

The effect surroundings and media have on athletic identity wraps around recognition and glorification. When Josephine tells when she started to feel like an athlete, among other things, she validated her response with things like finding game results on the teletext; having more articles in the newspaper, even with pictures of herself; and having more audience in the games. For Alexander the publicity is a significant factor that shaped his attitude towards sport, which can be seen from his stream drawing. They both said that the media attention reduced after the injury, but it was only a good thing in their perception. In this regard, disassociation from the athlete role can be helpful. Alexander connects media exposure to unknown people coming to chat with him.

*”Et sitte tuli vähemmän niitä ihmisiä ketkä tuli jutteleen, ja seki oikeestaan tuntu vaan ihan hyvältä, että ei tarvinnu ruveta niille avautuun --, että silloin oli aina se yks ja sama kysymys ku joku näki, et ”Mites Alexanderin polvi?” Niin kyllä siinä aina yritti vastailta ystävällisesti ja kertoo ne mitä kokee hyväksi kertoa, mut ku kävelet kymmenen metriä eteenpäin niin tulee toinen joka kysyy sitä samaa niin se sitte vähän raskastaki saattas olla.” (Alexander)*

*“Well then there were less people who came to chat, and it was only a positive thing not needing to open up to them --, because it was always the same question when they saw you; ‘How is Alexander’s knee?’ And you try to answer politely and tell what you feel good telling, but when you walk ten meters there’s another person asking the same question, then it gets little burdensome.” (Alexander)*

Valtteri does not talk about media on his own initiative, but when I ask about it, he presents media attention after injury as a positive factor boosting her sense of being an athlete.

*”-- vähän itellekki yllätyksenä tuli, että ku siinä oli kuitenkin pitkä aika ennen ku oli mukana missään [kansainvälisissä] kisoissa, niin silti media oli välillä kiinnostunu ja tuli kyselemään, että mitenkä menee. Niin kyl se saatto itteä, tai et vähän fiilistä, että kuitenkin kyl jotain vielä kiinnostaa, ja ehkä joku haluaa ja oottaa, että joskus vielä pääsis sinne missä oli.” (Valtteri)*

*“-- it was little surprising to me, because there was a long time without attending to any [international] competitions, and still media sometimes showed interested*

*and was asking how it is going for me. And that might have made me feel like, or give me a kick, that someone is still interested, and maybe someone wants and is waiting that someday I'd be back where I was before.” (Valtteri)*

When talking about recognition, Alexander brings the conversation back to the internal will to do sport, indicating that the personal dimension of athletic identity is more meaningful to him.

*”Että joskus se tuntuu vähän rasittavaltaki se, että -- on niitä olalle taputtelijoita, että en mä tavallaan heidän takiaan oo, tai tulee semmonen tunne, että ois tehny heidän vuoksi jotain, ja heidän eteensä, ku eihän se niin mee. Että siis hieno juttu jos joku siitä jotain kiksejä saa, sehän on ihan huippua, mutta joskus on vaivautunu vähän siitä, että ku mähän teen tätä kuitenkin ittelleni, itteni takia, et mä haluan ittee haastaa, -- et enemmän se on vaan just sitä jatkossaki, sitä itsensä haastamista ja voittamista.” (Alexander)*

*“Sometimes it feels little burdensome, that -- there are these backslappers, because I didn't do it for them, or it makes me feel like I did something for them, for their sake, and it's not like that. I mean it's great if someone gets their kick out of it, that is just awesome, but it makes me a little ill at ease, because I do it for myself, for my own sake, I want to challenge myself -- and that's how it's going to be in the future as well, challenging and winning myself.” (Alexander)*

Elisabeth, who highlights the importance of winning and success the most, describes the mental challenge she experienced because of the lack of recognition. She has first told about the boost she has gotten from the recognition and trophies she has received in the season ending celebration of her club, and in this quote she tells about that celebration event in her gap year.

*”-- esimerkiksi nimenommaan nämä seuran päättäjäiset silloin loukkaantumiskauden jälkeen, niin mie että pystynkö mie menemään sinne ko tietää, että ei oo tulossa mittään sieltä. Mutta kyllä mie sinne menin ja pysty oleen ilonen muittenki puolesta. Vaikka just ko oon niin kilpailuhenkinen, niin tuli vähän semmonen, että ei hemmetti ku mie oisin halunnu tuonki saaha, että mulle kuulus jos oisin ollu mukana, mutta hyvin mie siitäki selvisin.” (Elisabeth)*

*“-- for example that season ending celebration of my club after the injury season, I was like I don't know if I can even go there because I know I'm not receiving anything there. But I went there, and I was able to be happy for the others. Although I'm so competitive, and I felt little like 'damn, I wanted that one, that one would belong to me if I was in', but I made through it ok.” (Elisabeth)*

This quote indicates that the lack of recognition can for some individuals decrease the strength of athletic identity. If the athlete reacts to this positively and gets motivated or negatively and gets depressed, is another matter. A coach or a consultant can help the athlete to choose the positive outcome.

Athletes are associated with qualities that make them idolized. Sport celebrities are the most heroic celebrities in the eyes of the youth, and also adults worship sport and music athletes more intensively than actors or other celebrities (Stevens, Lathrop & Bradish, 2003; McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2002). Both Josephine and Valtteri comment on it related to athletic identity, but their perspectives are very different. Josephine mentions that now that she has finished her professional career, it can be relieving to give up the athlete status and the responsibilities that come with that. At the same time, Valtteri brings up the positive side of it.

*“No kyl se varmaan jollainlailla saa ittensä tuntemaan enemmän urheilijaks, jos on oikeesti jollekki esikuva ja joku nuorempi vaikka saman lajin urheilija kattoo, että mä haluan tulla yhtä hyväks ku toi, niin kyllähän se antaa aika hyvän filiksen ja semmosen, että on täs jotain tullu tehtyy oikein ja on kuitenkin sen arvonen sitte ku saa olla urheilija.” (Valtteri)*

*“I guess it makes you feel more like an athlete, if you really are an example for someone, and if for example some younger athlete from the same sport looks at you thinking 'I want to become as good as him'. It gives you a pretty good feeling, like I have done something right and I'm worth being an athlete.” (Valtteri)*

## 7 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore what are the perceived determinants of managing athletic identity successfully after a serious, but not permanent injury. While each interviewed athlete was a unique person, some similarities did exist. The main question of the study was to find out what determinants of athletic identity are perceived as most important during the injury rehabilitation. The findings of the present study suggest that these determinants include the internal will to do sports; maintenance of athletic life style; goal-setting; staying involved with team; social support from team, other injured athletes and staff; and positive contact with media or audience.

The findings of this study mirror those of the previous studies that have examined the psychological impact of sport injury and coping with it. Perrier et al. (2014) reported similar results with disabled athletes. Sport enjoyment and skill development (comparable to internal will and personal challenge), sport goals, commitment and sacrifices (comparable to athletic life style) as basis for athletic identity. Routines and settings (comparable to athletic life style) were also used a mean to maintain athletic identity in an autoetnographic study of Hockey (2005). In addition, they reported about the importance of interactional reinforcement, such as communicating with the athletic network (comparable to social support and staying involved with team). Public attention has also been identified as an identity shaping construct, even though not in injury related contexts (Stephan & Brewer, 2007; Adler & Adler, 1989).

However, previous research has not explored perceptions of injured athletes with the specific context of athletic identity. One new finding that arose from this study is the significance of internal motivation. The athletes who talked about intrinsic motivation described how difficulties, such as injury, do not change their perception of themselves as an athlete. The finding is also supported by a reverse argument: One of the athletes reported that after returning to the sport she felt that she had reached her best potential as a player and was not able to challenge herself in a meaningful way anymore. This, among other factors, led to her decision to quit playing, even though she was physically recovered from the injury.

Another main result in the present study was the significance of social support in an injury situation, also from the viewpoint of athletic identity. The international level athletes reported experiencing no changes in their social support during the

rehabilitation. This was important for their athletic identity, because it confirmed that injuries are part of sport and they are still the same athlete they were before. The national level athletes experienced lack of social support especially from their organization (club, team and coaches). The decrease in social support signals the athletes that they are not a competent team member anymore, which might cause a decrease in athletic identity. The findings also suggest that it helpful to receive social support from other injured athletes to again confirm that injuries are part of being an athlete.

Social support is broadly acknowledged as a critically important for athletes' recovery from injuries (Madrigal & Gill, 2014; Arvinen-Barrow & Pack, 2013; Bianco, 2001; Green & Weinberg, 2001; Wiese & Weiss, 1987, 327), and it plays a role with athletic identity as well (Stephan & Brewer, 2007; Hockey, 2005). Social recognition was named as one of the determinants in the investigation of athletic identity by Stephan and Brewer (2007), supporting the findings of this study.

An interesting point when comparing the findings with previous research is the role of the bodily dimension in the construction of athletic identity. In the model about perceived determinants of elite athlete's self-definition by Stephan and Brewer (2007), the bodily dimension is the other higher-order theme in addition to life rhythm. Additionally, embodiment was perceived as important in regards of athletic identity when injured in the autoethnographic study of Hockey (2005). Interestingly, strong emphasis on changed physical abilities was the main characteristic separating the nonathlete narratives from the narratives of present or possible future athletic selves in the study of Perrier et al. (2014). The participants of the present study did not consider the changes in the bodily dimension as threatening to their athletic identity. This new result may be explained by the fact that all the athletes in this study were able to return to their sport and the interviews were done retrospectively after that. They also got a positive prognosis for their return after their surgeries.

Another result of the study looks into the factors that threaten athletic identity after an injury has occurred. The participants reported a moment of confusion related to the unexpected situation, uncertainty of rehabilitation outcome, fear of reinjury and lack of recognition, as well as lack of social support, if experienced. This finding suggests that in order to promote athletic identity, these are some of the main injury responses that

should be monitored. There is little previous qualitative research about athletic identity construction, but the results can be compared to studies exploring psychological responses to sport injuries on a more general level. For example, confusion, uncertainty and isolation from the team were also reported by Madrigal and Gill (2014).

The measurement of strength of athletic identity was not in the interest of this study, but it can be noted that some of the athletes retrospectively reported a perceived decrease in athletic identity while others did not. This could be expected since previous quantitative measures have produced findings suggesting both decrease and no decrease in athletic identity on injured athletes (Price et al., 2004; Brewer et al., 2010).

The possible perceived decrease might be related to activation of other role-identities. Another result in this study examines what kind of positive effect injury might have in relation to the participants' athletic identity. The results show that the injury might lead to (temporary) activation of other role-identities, such as academic or professional, enabling the athlete to pursue other goals in life. This may not necessarily lead to perceived decrease in the strength of athletic identity, but enables the athlete to explore other aspects in life and build athletic identity on healthier surface (Linville, 1985; Brewer, Van Raalte & Petitpas, 2007, 37). It is possible that injury therefore prevents identity foreclosure. Injury can also offer a break to the athletic routine enabling the athlete to get new perspectives inside sport as well, making the basis of athletic identity broader.

This finding is important, because previous literature suggests that an individual strongly committing to the athlete role may be less likely to explore other career and education options and more likely to encounter career problems later in their lives (Brewer et al., 1993, Murphy et al., 1996). Further, Shacher et al. (2004) found that reduction in athletic identity was associated with greater life satisfaction among former athletes who pursued a career not related to sports.

Finally, a different type of finding is discussed. Compared to Stephan and Brewer (2007), the present study organized the categories of athletic differently in regard to personal and social dimension. Instead of hierarchical approach, in other words having separate personal and social dimension, the dimensions were placed on a continuum. This resulted from observations of different categories. From the two kind of social relations, personal and public, personal seemed to be personally more meaningful.

Towards the personal end of the continuum, perceptions of self were partially constructed with comparison to other people. This adds a social element to the personal dimension of self. In the middle of the continuum is the category that includes competing, which by definition is based on comparison. Still, the athletes reported the sport activity strongly as a way to challenge themselves. This mix of social and personal dimension is possible in the continuum type of presentation. Since the above issues are not only injury-related but may apply to the construction of athletic identity in a broader sense, this continuum type of approach can be seen as an alternative presentation of athletic identity.

According to the data, it can be concluded that even if the perception of the strength of the athletic identity does not change, the role of the determinants behind it certainly do. The unexpected injury turns the athlete's life upside down threatening athletic identity, but when the rehabilitation gets off to a good start, the athletic identity is regenerated through various ways. There are several key issues in managing athletic identity successfully after an injury: Strong intrinsic motivation to do sport is a solid base for athletic identity. Acknowledging that injuries are part of sport help athletes to concern the threat that injury generates to athletic identity. In a more practical level, maintaining athletic life rhythm, and having solid social support from both sport and medical staffs as well as peers, can help to maintain the sense of self as an athlete.

As discussed in the literature review, athletic identity can be helpful during the rehabilitation (e.g. Everhart, Best & Flanigan, 2013), but the risk with strong athletic identity is over-commitment to the athlete role (e.g. Weinberg, Vernau & Horn, 2013). In regards of athletic practices, this may lead to substance use or training when injured. These behaviors are athlete's choices that can be prevented with education and social support. It can thus be suggested, that the benefits of athletic identity outweigh the harms. The other set of possible problems is the expense athletic identity might have on other dimensions of the self. The present study raises the possibility that maintaining strong athletic identity does not exclude positive outcome in regards of other identities. The change in the circumstances (mainly use of time) will either way enable the exploration of other identities. An implication of this possibility is that supporting the management of athletic identity among other support can be beneficial for the athlete. This is especially when the athlete has an injury with positive prognosis in regards of returning to competitive sport.

The findings of this study help us to understand how athletic identity can be enhanced when it is threatened by an injury. This could ensure that the athlete does not lose the benefits that having a strong athletic identity can provide during the rehabilitation. However, this can be fully utilized only if the athletic identity is on healthy surface before the injury happens. Therefore, the staff around the athlete should be well aware of the risks and the benefits of strong athletic identity as well as the identity of the athlete they work with. It should be ensured that the athlete explores other possibilities of self and does not depend on sport in regards of self-confidence or identity. The athletes should be aware and prepared for the possibility of an unexpected career termination throughout the whole career. This way athletic identity can be safely supported when it is threatened. In Finland, this dual career ideology is promoted by the sports academy program that is coordinated by the Finnish Olympic Committee and aims to help athletes to combine competitive sports with studies (Urheilukaatemiati, 2015).

The findings of this study suggest that there are several ways athletic identity can be consciously supported during the injury rehabilitation. First of all, the sport community around the athlete should acknowledge that injuries indeed are part of sports and continue working with the athlete similarly as before. The athlete should be invited to visit the normal routines of the team or training group. When possible, the athlete should be provided with rehabilitation possibilities with the team. This will help the athlete to interact with the normal social group and to maintain the athletic life rhythm. This should be an invite for the injured athlete expressing that he or she still has the place in the group. However, this should be done by taking into account the injured athlete's coping and the athlete should not be required to join. Different forms of social support can be provided by teammates, other injured athletes and sport and medical staff. The athlete should have opportunities to interact with all these parties, and to receive best possible support, sport and medical staff should work in cooperation, when possible. Even though some of these actions can be done by the sport community, the athlete must have an active role in engaging in these objectives.

When Elisabeth's positive experience of communicating with her idol and Valtteri's positive experience about being an idol are combined, it can be suggested that it might be worthwhile to use injured athletes as example to younger athletes. Athletes could for

instance interact with injured juniors and this might affect both parties positively strengthening their feeling of being an athlete even during the rehabilitation.

The key strengths of this study are my background in research of athletic identity at bachelor's level and personal experience about injury, familiarity of used research methods, including different athlete as cases and reporting the study thoroughly. Some of these factors may also act as limitations, which is further discussed later. Some time and convenience issues are also discussed.

The previous knowledge of athletic identity enabled me to both deepen my understanding of it and on the other hand using more time exploring the psychology of sport injury. If the integrated model of psychological response to the sport injury and rehabilitation (Wiese-Bjornstal, et al., 1998) is considered, athletic identity is just one personal factor among many others. The data shows many injury responses and coping methods that can be discussed outside the context of athletic identity. Sometimes it was hard to tell the difference between athletic identity and other reciprocal psychological connections the injury might have had. Good knowledge in athletic identity helped me to understand the data in the specific context of it. Personal experience helped me to relate to the experiences of the athletes and I was able to be sensitive to their perceptions, a fact that can be highly beneficial since the researcher is the instrument of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002, 513). However, I am well aware that my level of sport dedication has never been in the same levels as theirs, and therefore my thinking was not limited by my own experiences.

Previous experience of the used research methods enabled me to utilize lessons learned from previous work improving the quality and cohesiveness of this project. However, this might also be one of the limitations of the study. It may have locked my thoughts to proceeding in a certain way causing me to leave some possibilities unnoticed. Here the supervision of the teaching staff was helpful, asking me questions that freed me from some of the "old habits".

I am satisfied with the selection of the athletes. I was able to find participants that fitted the criteria, but they varied in many ways. They competed in different levels and represented both genders as well as both individual and team sports. One of them has already quit competitive sport. These details brought a lot of depth and vividness to the data. Still, there were also some similarities between the cases, which helped me to

remember how the perceived identity is individual and not a result of certain demographics. The study quality could have been further improved by adding more cases. However, the resources (mainly time) is limited in a thesis project, and four cases provided enough variation without sacrificing the depth of the analysis, which would have been inevitable with more cases.

This study is also limited by convenience issues. In general, after the helpful suggestions made by supervisors and peers in the planning phase, I conducted the study quite independently. For example, using triangulation in data coding might have revealed something that I missed. Also, the interview guide was not commented by anyone. I conducted data collection while I was living in a different city and maybe if I was in Jyväskylä, I would have been in a closer contact with peers and supervisors.

The final strength of this study is the thoroughly done reporting. I have aimed at justifying my choices transparently and providing enough detail for the reader. I am satisfied with the report and I am confident that it is an interesting, logical wholeness contributing to the field with increased understanding about construction of athletic identity and more specifically, maintaining it when injured.

More research is needed to further increase the understanding of the role of athletic identity in the rehabilitation process and based on this research some possibly fruitful designs can be suggested. The present study was completely retrospective, so a similar collective case study approach could be repeated with the addition of quantitative baseline measures, enabling a longitudinal approach. Athletic identity could be measured from a large group of athletes and when injuries occur, the athletes at issue could be taken into a closer examination. This would enable a more objective perspective in the strength of athletic identity combined with the individual determinants.

Another line of interest would be exploring the position of athletic identity in the wholeness of the injured athlete. An in-depth case study might help to understand the role of athletic identity during the rehabilitation process. It would also be interesting to assess the activation of other role identities and their meaningfulness in the rehabilitation process. The present study touched on the issue, but the method was only designed to capture athletic identity.

Based on the findings of the present study, an interesting future study would be to investigate the usefulness of systematic athletic identity support as part of psychological support provided by a professional when the athlete is facing an injury. It would require an intervention as well as a control group. The findings of the present study, together with the previous knowledge, could serve as a guide for intervention planning. This kind of a trial might clarify the role of athletic identity in rehabilitation.

Finally, I want to assess my thesis process as a part of my studies and learning. The aim of writing a master's thesis is to familiarize the student with academic and scientific thinking and research practices, while also demonstrating these abilities (University of Jyväskylä, 2015). I feel satisfied with achieving these objectives. I was determined to follow good scientific practice through the whole process. For the first time I broadly explored international research articles and learned a lot about both the substance, and the practices of the scientific community. Personally my aim was to develop my expertise in the area of athletic identity and psychology of sport injuries. I hope the attained understanding comes across this research report.

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## **APPENDIXES**

### **Appendix 1 – Interview guide (in Finnish)**

#### **Haastattelurunko**

##### **Suostumuslomake**

Osallistujan tulee ymmärtää, että

- Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tuottaa tietoa loukkaantuneiden urheilijoiden kokemuksista
- Osallistuminen tutkimukseen on täysin vapaaehtoista
- Osallistujalla on oikeus olla vastaamatta mihin tahansa kysymykseen
- Osallistuja voi halutessaan keskeyttää haastattelun milloin vain
- Haastattelu nauhoitetaan tutkimusteknisistä syistä
- Haastatteluaineisto on luottamuksellista ja sitä käytetään vain tämän tutkimuksen läpiviemiseen
- Osallistujan henkilöllisyys pysyy salassa

Onko sinulla kysyttävää näistä tai muista tutkimukseen liittyvistä seikoista?

#### **Taustatiedot**

Kerro itsestäsi. Kuka olet?

Kerro itsestäsi urheilijana. Millainen olet?

Kerro urheilu-urastasi.

Kerro harjoittelustasi. Millaista, kuinka paljon?

Esitteletkö itsesi urheilijana?

Mitä mielestäsi tarkoittaa se, että on urheilija?

Minkä tason urheilijana pidät itseäsi? Miksi?

## **AIMS**

1. Pidän itseäni urheilijana.
2. Minulla on monia urheiluun liittyviä tavoitteita.
3. Useimmat ystävistäni ovat urheilijoita.
4. Urheilu on elämäni osa-alueista tärkein.
5. Käytän enemmän aikaa urheilun kuin minkään muun asian ajattelemiseen.
6. Minun täytyy urheilla tunteakseni oloni hyväksi.
7. Muut ihmiset näkevät minut pääasiassa urheilijana.
8. Tunnen huonommuutta, kun minulla menee urheilussa huonosti.
9. Urheilu on ainoa tärkeä asia elämässäni.
10. Olisin hyvin masentunut, jos loukkaantuisin enkä voisi kilpailla urheilussa.

## **PPAIS**

1. Urheileminen auttaa minua ilmaisemaan tunteitani.
2. Minulle on hyvin tärkeää menestyä lajissani.
3. Suosioni muiden keskuudessa on yhteydessä urheilullisiin kykyihini.
4. Urheileminen tuottaa minulle mielihyvää.
5. Urheilen vain, koska olen hyvä siinä.
6. Pelkään usein, että ihmiset eivät pidä minusta yhtä paljon, jos en onnistu kilpailusuorituksissani.
7. Ensisijainen syyni osallistua kilpailuihin lajissani on palkintojen ja tunnustuksen saaminen.
8. Urheilijana oleminen on tärkeä osa sitä, kuka olen.
9. Pelkään, että urheilu-uran päättymisen jälkeen en enää saa sitä tunnustusta ja huomiota, jota saan ollessani urheilija.
10. Minulle olisi suuri menetys, jos en yhtäkkiä voisikaan osallistua lajiini.

Kuvaile urheilu-uraasi.

Virta (piirrostehtävä):

Pohdi sellaisia elämässäsi tapahtuneita asioita, jotka ovat mielestäsi jollakin tapaa merkittäviä urheilemisestäsi kannalta. Piirrä sitten paperille virta tai joki, joka kuvaa elämääsi nimenomaan urheilun näkökulmasta. Mieti, onko urheileminen ollut koko ajan esimerkiksi yhtä leveätä tai vuolasta ja millaisia käännekohtia urheilun parissa olet kokenut. Merkitse piirroksesi lyhyillä huomautuksilla ne asiat, jotka ovat vaikuttaneet virran kulkuun.

Koska aloit tuntemaan itsesi urheilijaksi?

Tulevaisuus?

**Kuvaile, millainen asema urheilemisellä on elämässäsi.**

Miten urheiluvamma muutti tilannetta?

*Integrated model of psychological response to the sport injury and rehabilitation:*

**Kerro vammastasi.**

- historia
- vakavuus
- tyyppi
- koettu syy
- ennuste

**Kerro kuntoutuksestasi.**

- minkälaista
- kuinka paljon

*Perceived determinants of elite athlete's self-definition:*

Onko urheilijaidentiteetti tuttu käsite? Urheilijaidentiteetti tarkoittaa sitä, kuinka vahvasti tuntee itsensä urheilijaksi ja kuinka iso osa itseä urheilijana oleminen on.

Mitkä asiat saavat sinut tuntemaan itsesi urheilijaksi?

Miten urheiluvamma vaikutti kokemukseesi urheilijana olemisesta?

- Muuttuiko työssäkäynti / opiskelu kuntoutuksen aikana jotenkin? Vaikuttiko se urheilijaidentiteettiisi?
  - o Joustavuus?
  - o Urheilijana oleminen ammattina
  
- Miten kanssakäyminen urheilun henkilökunnan kanssa ( esim. valmentaja, fysioterapeutti jne.) tukee urheilijaidentiteettiäsi? Muuttuiko se?
  
- Miten kanssakäyminen kilpailijoiden ja vertaisten (esim. joukkuetoverit) kanssa tukee urheilijaidentiteettiäsi? Muuttuiko se?
  
- Miten urheilijana saatava tunnustus ja esimerkkinä oleminen vaikuttaa urheilijaidentiteettiisi?
  - o medianäkyvyys, ”erityinen ihminen”

Muuttuiko se?

- Muuttuiko elämänrytmi kuntoutuksen aikana? Miten se vaikutti urheilijaidentiteettiisi?
  - o Urheilullinen elämäntapa
  - o Urheilu antaa merkitystä elämälle
  
- Muuttuiko urheilullinen kehosi kuntoutuksen aikana? Miten se vaikutti urheilijaidentiteettiisi?
  - o Fyysiset taidot ja suoritukset
  - o Oman itsensä vahvistaminen urheilun kautta

**Muut elämän osa-alueet**

- yleensä
- kuntoutuksen aikana

**Yrititkö tietoisesti vaman aikana pitää yllä tunnetta siitä, että olet urheilija? Miten?**

## Appendix 2 – Consent form (in Finnish)



### Liikuntatieteellinen tiedekunta Liikuntakasvatuksen laitos

**Pro gradu –tutkimus:**

**Loukkaantuneiden urheilijoiden kokemuksia / Kaisa-Mari Jama**

### Suostumuslomake

Olen kuullut ja ymmärtänyt tutkimuksen tarkoituksen ja oikeuteni osallistujana. Minulla on ollut mahdollisuus esittää kysymyksiä tutkimukseen liittyvistä asioista. Suostun osallistumaan tutkimukseen.

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Paikka ja aika

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Osallistujan allekirjoitus