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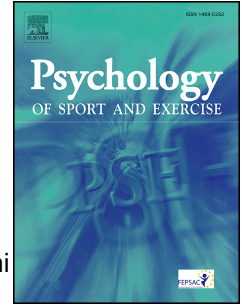
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# Accepted Manuscript

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**“Sport has always been first for me” but “all my free time is spent doing homework”:**

**Dual career styles in late adolescence**

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1 **“Sport has always been first for me” but “all my free time is spent doing homework”:**

2 **Dual career styles in late adolescence**

3 **Abstract**

4 *Objectives:* In adolescence, personally meaningful autobiographical memories begin to  
5 integrate into cultural narrative structures to form a life story. We examined how and to what  
6 extent adolescent Finnish athletes narrate and integrate significant life events in sport and  
7 education into their identities and future narratives in order to delineate the different styles of  
8 athletes' career construction.

9 *Design:* Longitudinal qualitative study.

10 *Method:* Ten female and eight male, elite junior athletes, aged 15-16 at baseline, participated  
11 in individual conversational interviews. The resulting interview data were analyzed using  
12 narrative analysis.

13 *Results:* Thirteen of 18 adolescent athletes drew primarily on the performance narrative plot  
14 to construct their life story and five of 18 athletes could not project into the future beyond  
15 their athletic selves. We identified three styles of athletes' career construction. Employing  
16 musical terminology as a metaphor, the contrapuntal style entwines sport and education as  
17 harmonically related life-themes; monophonic style draws on a prominent athletic life-theme;  
18 and dissonant style is underpinned by discord of sport and education. We did not detect direct  
19 associations between narrative types (performance, discovery and relational) and career  
20 construction styles. We show the dominant style development within an exemplary story.

21 *Conclusion:* Exploration of the future and possible selves are critical for developing  
22 meaningful (dis)continuity of a dual career pathway from adolescence to adulthood. We  
23 conclude that dual career discourse is gaining traction in directing young athletes' future  
24 thinking; however, a broader repertoire of exemplary success stories which allow athletes to  
25 imagine achieving excellence in diverse ways would enable them to channel action.

1 **“Sport has always been first for me” but “all my free time is spent doing homework”:**

2 **Dual career styles in late adolescence**

3 One of the main challenges facing aspiring and elite athletes, aged 12-25, is to  
4 successfully combine education and high performance sport in a dual career pathway due to a  
5 significant overlap between normative developmental tasks, such as obtaining an education  
6 and secure a job, and athletic career development (see Figure 1). The structural support of  
7 athletes’ dual careers in Finland is part of a European initiative to ensure that young people  
8 receive an education and/or vocational training alongside their sports training, thereby  
9 safeguarding their employability and adaptation to life after elite sport (EU Guidelines,  
10 2012). Recent dual career literature, including the *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* special  
11 issue on athlete dual career development and transitions (Stambulova & Wylleman, eds.,  
12 2015), emphasizes the benefits of dual careers that may help athletes to better prepare for  
13 their retirement from sport (Aquilina, 2013; Torregrosa, Ramis, Pallarés, Azocar, & Selva,  
14 2015), but also acknowledges the challenges and tensions that many athletes experience  
15 trying to excel in two anxiety laden and highly evaluated areas of life (see Christensen &  
16 Sørensen, 2009; Gustafsson, Hassmen, Kenttä, & Johansson, 2008; O’Neill, Allen, & Calder,  
17 2013; Sorkkila, Aunola, & Ryba, 2017). Retrospective studies with mature and retired  
18 athletes in diverse sociocultural contexts revealed that the athletes on a dual career track  
19 reported more successful transition and adaptation to work life compared to those who  
20 focused exclusively on sport during their athletic careers (e.g., Aquilina, 2013; Torregrosa et  
21 al., 2015; Tsube & Feltz, 2015); thus, illustrating Stambulova and colleagues (2015, p. 5)  
22 assertion that “winning in the long run” “means to retire being prepared for it.” Elaborating  
23 on the results of their two-wave longitudinal study of Swedish adolescent athletes’ transition  
24 to elite sport schools, Stambulova et al. (2015) stated that in order to become winners in the  
25 long-run, student-athletes should first “win in the short-run”—that is, become well-adjusted

1 in their present dual career programs to gain possible benefits in the future. Inability to adjust  
2 in a dual career program might lead to dropping out of sport or education. However, dual  
3 career theory and research are unclear about the processes that contribute to dual career  
4 construction in adolescence (short-run) that in turn may safeguard athletes' welfare in the  
5 future (long-run). Situating our study in the identified research problematic, we turn to  
6 developmental psychology for inspiration to formulate our research questions.

7 From the perspective of developmental theory, developing identity and future  
8 orientation are the main, intertwined tasks of adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Nurmi, 1991). It is  
9 also in late adolescence that young people begin to construe their lives in narrative terms as a  
10 means to connect remembered past, perceived present, and projected future in an internalized  
11 identity narrative that supports self-coherence and communal relatedness of a cultural  
12 member (McAdams, 1999). For narrative researchers, we are the stories we tell about  
13 ourselves and in the process of narrating our experiences, "we simultaneously create structure  
14 and meaning in our lives" (Fivush, 2010, p. 88). Recent cultural sport psychology research  
15 revealed how cultural narratives and discourse practices of elite sport shape psychological  
16 processes of athletic identity development by emphasizing and regulating the ways of being,  
17 feeling, and behaving as athletes (for a review, see Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2016). For  
18 example, Carless and Douglas (2013a, 2013b) employed narrative methodology to illuminate  
19 the embeddedness of young athletes in "familiar" stories that gave meaning to their sport  
20 experiences by validating certain interpretations of specific events. Drawing on their early  
21 work that delineated cultural narratives underlying identity stories of elite golfers (Douglas &  
22 Carless, 2006, 2009), the authors offered evidence of comparable processes among athletes in  
23 other sports and concluded that a performance narrative can still be considered the dominant  
24 narrative type while discovery and relational narratives are often trivialized and silenced  
25 within elite sport culture. Hence, individual differences in ways young athletes begin to story

1 their lives may contribute to (dis)continuity of the dual career pathway as they transition from  
2 adolescence to young adulthood.

3 In his influential review of the development of future orientation, Nurmi (1991)  
4 emphasizes the importance of developmental environments in defining opportunities for  
5 developing persons to channel their future-oriented motivation, thinking, and behavior. Most  
6 of the developmental tasks of adolescence involve thinking about and planning for the future,  
7 especially with respect to education and work (Di Maggio, Ginevra, Nota, & Soresi, 2016;  
8 Nurmi, 1989; Nurmi, Seginer, & Poole, 1995). Developmental and vocational psychologists  
9 generally agree that imagining the future is vital for exploring career-related interests, making  
10 personal decisions, and committing to activities that will influence the course of adult life.  
11 Research with adolescents has shown that the timespan of their future thinking typically  
12 extends to their 20s and seldom beyond early 30s (Nurmi, 1991). However, studies with elite  
13 level student-athletes often report their difficulties to project into the future beyond the  
14 athletic selves raising concerns whether the narrative-discursive content of elite sport narrows  
15 down the field of possibilities in which athletes construct their life projects (e.g., Carless &  
16 Douglas, 2013a; Cosh & Tully, 2014; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017; Ryba,  
17 Ronkainen, & Selänne, 2015a). Alluding to a strong identification with the athlete role and  
18 subsequent difficulties to make vocational decisions and life choices, Navarro (2015) recently  
19 reported that while the majority of varsity athletes in her study considered obtaining an  
20 undergraduate degree to be important, their major choice did not align with their future career  
21 aspirations. While pressure to think about educational goals as a prerequisite of the more  
22 favorable vocational future begins at continuously earlier age in the Nordic countries  
23 (Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Ryba, Aunola, Ronkainen, Selänne, & Kalaja, 2016), young  
24 people in most industrialized nations typically view secondary education as an inevitable part  
25 of youth rather than a critical context for exploring the way they are going to live their lives

1 (Pekkarinen, 2012; Pless, 2014). It has been moreover argued that planning to attend a  
2 university after high school and constructing a career path are distinct aspects of career  
3 preparation (Xiao, Newman, & Chu, 2016). This seems to strike a chord with Navarro's  
4 (2015) and other research findings that although student-athletes embark on a dual career  
5 track, they tend to 'choose easy subjects' or university majors 'just to pass' and obtain a  
6 degree without meaningful engagement in the fields of their studies (see Cosh & Tully, 2014;  
7 Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen, Bundgaard, & Selänne, 2015b; Petitpas, Van Raalte, &  
8 Brewer, 2013). Indeed, vocational researchers have been increasingly advocating for early  
9 exposure to career exploration and life design counseling to enable students to construct  
10 meaning and make connections between subjects being taught in school and occupational  
11 opportunities available to them in the future (Di Maggio et al., 2016; Savickas et al., 2009).

12 In this paper, we assume that emergent competence to construct a life story in  
13 adolescence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1999) is closely linked to narrative  
14 construction of athletes' identities and future career paths. While recent narrative research  
15 into athletic identity elucidated the evolving connections between self and elite sport culture  
16 (see Carless & Douglas, 2009, 2013a; Ronkainen, Ryba, & Nesti, 2013), we know little about  
17 what youth athletes think about their future. To the best of our knowledge, there are only two  
18 prospective qualitative studies that explored how young talented athletes construct narratives  
19 of their imagined career paths. The interviewed Danish athletes, aged 15-19, were asked to  
20 tell tales from the future about their lives as elite athletes (Mortensen, Henriksen, & Stelter,  
21 2013), and then themes derived from the aspiring athletes' imagined career stories were  
22 compared with the career accounts of elite level athletes (Henriksen & Mortensen, 2014). It  
23 was reported that talented young athletes envisioned their pathways in line with the  
24 normative script of athletic career development and underestimated relational contexts and  
25 interconnections between sport and other areas of life. Through a narrative approach to



1 futuring (that is, imagining the future) these findings are insightful because they reveal the  
2 narrator's meaning making in the present (Sools, Tromp, & Mooren, 2015). With reference to  
3 Augustine, Crites (1971, p. 301) convincingly argues that in every moment of experience, "a  
4 present of things past" and "a present of things future" are inextricably joined in the "present  
5 of things present." In other words, while anticipatory stories are "very thin and vague" they  
6 are "not altogether formless" (Crites, 1971, p. 302), for future thinking also relies on  
7 "learning the culturally available temporal and evaluative frameworks for interpreting a life,  
8 including culturally canonical biographies, life scripts and master narratives" (Fivush,  
9 Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011, p. 328).

10 Thinking of dual career construction as a temporal process, in which individual style is  
11 revealed through action (Crites, 1971), we suggest that adolescent athletes in this study, by  
12 virtue of their historical and sociocultural situatedness as upper secondary school students  
13 and elite junior athletes, develop inner story of experience that is already infused with  
14 cultural narrative structures and forms. Developmentally, however, they are at a critical time  
15 when they begin to integrate sequential autobiographical reasoning (such as starting school  
16 aged 6 and leaving home to attend elite sports school aged 15) into an interpretive framework  
17 of prevailing cultural storylines to develop an understanding of personal identity (Erikson,  
18 1968; Fivush et al., 2011; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1999). Given that athletes'  
19 dual career is a relatively recent academic and policy discourse in Europe, it is important to  
20 examine the relationship between cultural narratives of elite sport (performance, discovery,  
21 and relational narratives) and adolescent athletes' future orientation as a possible vantage  
22 point for understanding the developmental arc of dual career construction in the changing  
23 social world. In this research, we conceptualised dual career as a story that young people tell  
24 about their engagement at sport and school (see also Savickas, 2011) to examine three  
25 research questions: (a) How and to what extent do adolescent Finnish athletes narrate and

1 integrate their autobiographical events in sport and education into identity narrative?, (b)  
2 How and to what extent are sport and education integrated in the adolescent athletes'  
3 projected future?, and (c) What does the relationship between one's narratives of the past and  
4 narratives of the future reveal about their dual career style?

### 5 **Methodology and Methods**

6 This article is based on two waves of interview data gathered for the ongoing Finnish  
7 Longitudinal Dual Career Study (Authors, 2016). The qualitative study was designed to  
8 follow a life course of aspiring athletes participating in the national talent development  
9 program, particularly examining subjective meanings of career turning points and life  
10 transitions in their developmental trajectories. To answer the stated research questions, we  
11 situate our research within the interpretive paradigm and draw on narrative inquiry to explore  
12 processes of dual career construction through stories of concrete events and happenings  
13 (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Smith & Sparkes, 2009) that have occurred and are also projected  
14 to occur in young peoples' lives. While narrative researchers tend to analyze personal stories  
15 as a way of retrospective meaning making (e.g., Busanich, McGannon, & Schinke, 2014), the  
16 role of narrative in creating and realizing meaning for the future has also been acknowledged  
17 (e.g., Bujold, 2004; Crites, 1971; Sools et al., 2015). For McAdams and McLean (2013, p.  
18 233), "Through narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to others who they are  
19 now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future." As  
20 Crites (1971, p. 303) eloquently argues, memory is "the depth of its [embodied present]  
21 experience" while anticipation is "the trajectory of its [embodied present] action;" and when  
22 "the past remembered and the future anticipated but still undetermined" meet, the whole story  
23 "vibrates with the musicality of personal style." Through narrative methodology we hope to  
24 glean insights into how elite youth athletes develop a certain career construction style.

25

## 1 **The Finnish context**

2 We culturally adapted a holistic athletic career model of Wylleman and colleagues  
3 (2013) to incorporate the specificities of Finnish society (see Figure 1). This model describes  
4 five layers of athletes' development – athletic, psychological, social, academic/vocational and  
5 financial – and predicts athletes' major normative transitions within the Finnish sporting,  
6 educational, and broader sociocultural contexts. In the Finnish educational system, after  
7 completing 9 years of compulsory education, students need to make a decision on whether to  
8 take another 3 years to complete their secondary education at upper secondary level  
9 (considered to be an academic track that prepares students to sit for the university entrance  
10 exam) or vocational high school (professional preparation), or enter the labor market.  
11 Participants for the present study pursued secondary education within the national talent  
12 development program that structurally enables the construction of a dual career pathway.  
13 Upper secondary sport schools (urheilulukiot in Finnish) collaborate with athletic clubs and  
14 sport federations to arrange morning practices for athletes, offer the possibility to extend a 3-  
15 year academic curriculum to 3.5 or 4 years, give some study credits for sport, and assist with  
16 dual career planning. Nevertheless, pursuing an academic track in Finland has been shown to  
17 be more challenging and stressful for adolescents than the comprehensive school or  
18 vocational track (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, & Nurmi, 2008). This is possibly because the medium-  
19 skill well-paid jobs are rapidly disappearing (Pekkarinen, 2012) and Finnish youth is  
20 expected to earn a university degree.

## 21 **Participants and procedures**

22 The study participants were 18 (10 female) elite junior athletes, aged 15-16 at baseline,  
23 who were identified through Finnish Sport Academies under the auspices of National  
24 Olympic Committee. Ethical approval was obtained from the first author's university ethics  
25 committee before participant recruitment. All participants agreed to participate in a four-year

1 project and gave written informed consent prior to the first interview conducted at the  
2 beginning of their freshman year in upper secondary school. The insights the longitudinal  
3 qualitative study has been providing into the lives of these young people serve as the  
4 backdrop for the study we present here (see also Carless & Douglass, 2013a).

5       The aim of the first interview was to get to know young people and to understand their  
6 experiences as student-athletes through their individual history of becoming athletes who had  
7 achieved international success at junior level. We used a conversational approach in the  
8 interview which began with a question, “Can you tell me your story of becoming an athlete?”  
9 The follow-up questions were based on the interviewee’s responses. We also aimed at  
10 learning about their relational life-context, such as family, friends, and personal interests, as  
11 well as career aspirations and future plans (e.g., Let’s take an overall glimpse of your future.  
12 What are biggest dreams and hopes?). The conversational approach was decisively used to  
13 supplement the ‘big’ story perspective with small stories-in-interaction to gain an analytic  
14 insight into processes of adolescent situated construction of who they are (Bamberg, 2006).  
15 The second interview was conducted six months later to follow up on their daily lives and  
16 also probe more into their futuring. To facilitate the exploration of the future during the  
17 interview, we asked the participants to create a visual representation of their dream day  
18 sometime in the future, which was subsequently used to elicit more nuanced descriptions of  
19 the dream day and also probe into the areas of life that were not included in their creative  
20 representations. In this study we do not analyze visual data, which are submitted elsewhere.

21       Due to a limited journal space and our intent to illustrate processes of career  
22 construction through stories of “the past remembered and the future anticipated but still  
23 undetermined” (Crites, 1971), we chose to explore the dominant dual career style within the  
24 story of Unelma (pseudonym), a 16-year-old track athlete, based on her two one-hour  
25 individual interviews. Unelma was interviewed by third author with whom she established a

1 quick rapport, felt confident to engage in small-talk on everyday matters and to co-explore  
2 thoughts about her future. Unelma demonstrated a high level of engagement in meaning  
3 making within conversational interview contexts confessing that some past traumatic  
4 experiences made her “grow up faster as a human being.” It has been observed by  
5 developmental researchers that depth of meaning-making is linked to greater exploration of  
6 identity (Fivush, 2010; McLean & Pratt, 2006) and attentive listening helps adolescents to  
7 ‘figure out’ who they are (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Consequently, in all the interviews, a  
8 low structured, conversational approach was used to gain a rich and holistic understanding of  
9 each athlete’s experiences in specific biographical, historical, and cultural contexts  
10 (Atkinson, 1998).

### 11 **Data analysis and interpretation**

12 The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. As a first step, the youth  
13 athletes’ stories were read and re-read to become familiar with their content and to get an  
14 overall sense of how they are put together in a particular historical and sociocultural context.  
15 Guided by our first research question—that is, how and to what extent adolescent Finnish  
16 athletes narrate and integrate autobiographical events in sport and education into their  
17 identity narrative—the first author conducted a narrative analysis of structure to examine the  
18 types of cultural narrative the athletes drew on to organize their personal stories (Riessman,  
19 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). This allowed us to understand what type of story was guiding  
20 individual actions, feelings and behaviors, and the ways identities constructed within  
21 particular narratives may impact the athletes’ possibilities of development in their current life  
22 situation. With respect to second research question—that is, how and to what extent sport and  
23 education are integrated in the adolescent athletes’ projected future—a within-case thematic  
24 narrative analysis was conducted (Riessman, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2012) to identify  
25 themes of adolescents’ future orientation (see Table 1 for participants’ dominant narrative



1 narrative resources of the performance plot, young athletes' stories revolved around winning  
2 or being the best, training hard, competing and achieving in the senior ranks. Five of 18  
3 adolescent athletes drew primarily on the relational narrative when recounting and making  
4 sense of their experiences. According to Carless and Douglass (2013a), this narrative type is  
5 characterized by making life events meaningful through relationships (e.g., comradery with  
6 teammates, participating in sport with family members) rather than performance outcomes.

7 [Please insert Table 1 around here]

8 While at the time of this research, all 18 participants were integrating sport and  
9 education in their daily living, most of the adolescents considered school activities to be the  
10 inevitable part of youth, which consumed all their "free" time after sport, and five of them  
11 had difficulties to imagine themselves to be anything but professional athletes in the future.  
12 For Crites (1971, p. 291), "the formal quality of experience through time is inherently  
13 narrative" and "the style of action through time is inherently musical." Adopting these  
14 metaphors, we identified three composition styles that adolescent Finnish athletes in this  
15 sample used to construct their dual careers (see Table 2 for definitions and examples of career  
16 construction styles).

17 [Please insert Table 2 around here]

18 To avoid a conceptual confusion with established narrative terminology (e.g.,  
19 monologue and dialogue), we chose to draw on musical terminology to term the career  
20 construction styles. Any usage of established terms may result in projecting theoretical  
21 underpinnings of those concepts onto career composition styles. For example, Carless and  
22 Douglas (2013a) present the performance narrative as monological. Terming a monophonic  
23 career construction style "monological" could have led to "fixing" this career style into a  
24 certain identity typology. However, we did not detect a direct correspondence between the  
25 types of narrative athletes drew on from elite sport culture (performance, discovery, and

1 relational; Douglas & Carless, 2009) and their career construction style. As presented in  
2 Table 1, there are both male and female athletes whose “classic” performance story, at the  
3 time of interviews, vibrated with two interdependent storylines of sport and education as they  
4 were projecting their selves into the future. There were also athletes whose personal stories  
5 drew mainly on the relational narrative plot in which professional sport was a single-line  
6 melody of their future. It would be important for future work to examine the dynamic co-  
7 development of narrative meaning-making in relation to identity and career construction style  
8 and to better understand associations between them.

### 9 **Unelma’s story**

#### 10 *Developing an identity storyline: “I have chosen sports and that is what I want to do”*

11 In this section, we focus on showing key elements of Unelma’s evolving story of the  
12 self in response to our first research question how and to what extent young athletes integrate  
13 autobiographical events in sport and education into their identity narrative. Our presentation  
14 of Unelma’s storied experiences is interwoven with analysis and interpretation of her account  
15 in relation to the narrative typology of elite sport and developmental literature.

16 Telling her story of becoming an athlete, Unelma invoked competition and being  
17 athletic from the early age:

18 Well, I had always been going to all competitions like these Hippo-competitions for kids,  
19 but it really started from when I was participating in ballet and there they told me that I am  
20 too muscular to be a dancer and that my muscles would fit better with athletics. I was  
21 maybe six then, and then I went to track and field school. Ummm, then, basically I just  
22 tried and exercised at the track and field school, and then, it was maybe at age 9 when  
23 different competitive age groups start, then there are competitions, so then it became more  
24 established. I have not ever had any other hobbies...I just liked the sport and I was good at  
25 it, and then there was also that my family...umm, my siblings skied, but I did not want to



1 ski because of the cold...I liked track and field and I was good at it. And I have always  
2 been training really well and diligently, but when I really started being focused on it [was  
3 when] I switched from team A to team B two years ago, and then I had like real success  
4 for the first time, and I succeeded also in the adults, so then I really started to think about  
5 other things than just training, such as how you eat and what you do during your free time,  
6 and how it all impacts on athletics.

7 Can you give us an example?

8 Well, for example, like how you spend your evenings when you come home after  
9 practices...like how you spend those few hours. For example, you can spend a lot of time  
10 with your phone, which takes time away from like doing your homework or stretching and  
11 then you have to think about in what order you do things...like I make my own food so  
12 when do you do that so that you don't spend time on something else like your phone.

13

14 Do you have enough time for school and other things?

15 Well, track takes a lot of time...so then I really put all my time for school and doing  
16 homework, and there is no time to do other things that I would like to do, like be with  
17 friends and such. For that I have very little time, but on the other hand I have chosen  
18 sports and that is what I want to do, and I have gotten friends from there.

19 The story shared by Unelma illustrates the process of identity construction with  
20 narrative resources of the performance plot, defined by Douglas and Carless (2009) as a  
21 “story of single-minded dedication to sport performance to the exclusion of other areas of life  
22 and self” (p. 215). In the presented excerpt, by making intermittent references to social  
23 relations and school while centralizing athletics, Unelma demonstrates how she has organized  
24 her storyline around the performance script and committed to commonly held views of elite  
25 athletes' functional lives. Although she estimated spending about 25 hours a week on her

1 sport, she dreams “to live an athlete’s life” as she attests, “right now I have so much school  
2 and such... I have so much school that I cannot focus fully on athletics.”

3 Unelma continues to draw on the performance narrative as she recounts her athletic  
4 experiences; however her story is not yet finalized as she emphasizes “personal development,  
5 learning, and mastery of skills (rather than solely the outcome), something which is not  
6 present in the current [performance] typology” (Ronkainen et al., 2016, p. 133). For example,  
7 Unelma likens her motivation for sport to “inner desire” and describes her zeal of learning  
8 her own capabilities:

9 I don’t do sports so that I could be on the news or something. I don’t even really like that.  
10 But often...it’s kind of like this inner desire to do it. Something like success –well, of  
11 course, you do not care to do it if you don’t succeed and you’re last all the time—but  
12 ...they are like things that will get you to a certain point, but then you have to have  
13 something else in addition to the will to win prizes and get publicity...well in competitions  
14 you get it from...well sometimes you don’t even know what you’re capable of...like  
15 sometimes you are able to do things so well that you didn’t even yourself have the  
16 knowledge of that. I think that gives me the most...that’s like the most wonderful thing.  
17 In line with McAdams and McLean (2013), Unelma’s narration illustrates a high level of  
18 exploratory narrative processing to achieve self-understanding as she draws on different  
19 storylines to weave her athlete self. Although she utilizes predominantly the performance plot  
20 to make sense of her experiences in sport, there are traces of an embodied discovery narrative  
21 in the aforementioned extract too.

22 Developmental research has indicated that meaning making, particularly at  
23 adolescence, can be a hard work (McLean, 2005). By sequencing and describing details of  
24 her autobiographical events in certain ways, Unelma attempts to convey her values, beliefs,  
25 and what she thinks is important about her life. While she does not narrate rich details of her

1 activities in school, educational values are signaled by taking her studies seriously (e.g., “I  
2 have to study a lot”), having fun learning at school (e.g., “I like physics, chemistry, and also  
3 history, geography, social studies...those are the most fun), as well as reflecting on other  
4 athletes’ decision-making:

5 Even though I take my sport too seriously sometimes, but if you think about it, then school  
6 is your future and sport is really uncertain, you never know what happens. I have always  
7 wondered about it when hockey players, and even soccer players, often quit studying, so  
8 what then if you get injured and such?

9 We suggest that although Unelma’s account of her involvement in athletics discloses how the  
10 performance narrative’s seeds have already been planted to instigate her identity narrative  
11 “from the singular self-position of ‘athlete’” (Carless & Douglas, 2013a, p. 31), at the time of  
12 her first interview, Unelma was actively exploring what being an elite athlete would mean for  
13 her future.

#### 14 ***Exploring the future: “That’s not my goal to be best in everything”***

15 Our second research question concerned how and to what extent sport and education  
16 are integrated in the adolescent athletes’ projected future. Confirming previous conceptual  
17 and empirical findings that young people’s future narratives are thin and vague, but  
18 nonetheless revealing with respect to meaning making processes (Crites, 1971; Habermas &  
19 Bluck, 2000), Unelma’s account illustrates how the master narrative of elite sport has been  
20 tightening its grip on structuring her story. Her “dream day” was constructed as a peak  
21 performance story of winning at the Olympic Games, which adhered closely to a well-  
22 rehearsed pre-competition routine that led to victory in her main event, followed by  
23 celebrations with teammates. As attested by Unelma, it was easier for her to project into the  
24 athletic future than other areas of life because her futuring was facilitated by formal as well

1 as tacit knowledge of the elite sport (e.g., most celebrated sporting achievement, optimal  
2 maturation age in her sport, competition script):

3 So this is like it's related to sport, but you know I was just thinking about it yesterday that  
4 like you have dreams related to many different things, so not only in sport, but on the  
5 other hand sport is like the closest thing to me at this moment. So if you think that one  
6 dream could be like your own house or something, well that feels pretty far like that's  
7 further than those related to sports. So I thought that my dream day would take place at the  
8 Olympics. And I envisioned that this would happen in the 2024 Olympics, and I would be  
9 like turning 25 years then, so that would be like an optimal time point for me.

10 Unelma emphasized, "this is just a dream because it's still so far away," and reflected on how  
11 with time her childhood dreams, such as "to run on the Olympic stadium at the Finnish-  
12 Swedish games," "somehow became smaller and turned into goals." In these simple words,  
13 she shows processes of futuring, in which the cultural repertoire available to her to construct  
14 her story has been guiding her hopes, thoughts, emotions, and actions. Unelma's search for  
15 meaning and validation of her life have been narrowing to a performance or achievement  
16 story which, in research with late adolescents and emergent adults, has been shown to contain  
17 a low meaning-making content (in contrast to stories about relationships, at a crossroads or  
18 mortality events) and to relate positively to diffused (no commitment, no exploration) or  
19 foreclosed (commitment, no exploration) identity statuses (McLean & Pratt, 2006).

20 Interpretive studies with athletes revealed how powerful exemplary narratives and  
21 normalizing discourse practices are in foreclosing athletes' sense of self and their career  
22 trajectories; and because the performance narrative is omnipresent in the cultural sphere of  
23 elite sport, its script is often accepted as the only way to success. It has been shown, for  
24 example, that the performance narrative undergirds athletes' extreme disciplinary practices of  
25 daily living with respect to diet and exercise (Busanich et al., 2014; Papatomas & Lavallee,

1 2014), and may disrupt their life narratives leading to distress and mental health difficulties  
2 during periods of poor form, injury, and acquired disability (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017;  
3 Sparkes & Smith, 2002), ageing (Ronkainen et al., 2013), and following career termination  
4 (Carless & Douglas, 2009).

5 There is, therefore, a warning sign in Unelma's linear athletic future orientation that  
6 stretched to her mid 20s whereas her future thoughts about education were dim revolving  
7 mostly around managing her school courses and day-to-day studies. Despite these narrative  
8 signs of foreclosing her identity development, Unelma eagerly exchanged "small stories"  
9 with the researcher at the interview that were high in self-exploration content and can be  
10 thought of as reflective practice to forming a life story (Bamberg, 2006; McAdams &  
11 McLean, 2013). For example, as Unelma talks about her strengths:

12 Well, let's say...in sport I am rather...I'm not sure whether this is a strength or weakness,  
13 but I'm rather critical and I like to improve everything...and that is also in school and life.  
14 But I think it can be a weakness if you take it to the extreme. But then I am very persistent  
15 and...what else? I am persistent and diligent, so if I have a task, I will do it even though  
16 it's not so much fun. And then I am tenacious, which is a good trait to have, for example,  
17 in the last stretch of a race. But then...did you say in school as well? Well, actually those  
18 three [critical, diligent and tenacious] fit them all.

19 In this narration, Unelma starts reflecting on her strengths as an athlete and then shifts  
20 between different life-contexts extending her gained knowledge to other parts of the self.  
21 Discussing her future possibilities in the field of healthcare, Unelma has made connections  
22 with her strengths suggesting that although she does "not have a particular profession in  
23 mind," she "knows the direction [she] wants to go." Past research with adolescents has shown  
24 that career exploration typically occurs in conversations with parents, mentors, and friends  
25 (Nurmi, 1989; Xiao et al., 2016) and is particularly important with respect to facilitating

1 narrative meaning processing even though “the events upon which one is reflecting are not  
2 eventually integrated into that life story” (McLean & Mansfield, 2011).

3 Unelma’s story provides a convincing illustration of how her futuring processes are  
4 channeled along the established contours of the performance narrative plot. As part of the  
5 new generation of dual career athletes, she acknowledges that education is important and  
6 increases chances of getting a good job, but was seemingly vague when asked to describe her  
7 vocational future. Against the developmental psychology backdrop, the study participants are  
8 entering the stage of career exploration and identity ‘coming-into-being’ and, therefore,  
9 Unelma’s values for education are rather expressed through actions (e.g., doing homework,  
10 not cutting classes) and small stories of dual career achievements as illustrated in the  
11 following interaction:

12 How has your school year been so far?

13 It’s been okay like I thought it would be even more work. You know, the most important  
14 thing is that I’ve been able to combine sport and school like even though sport has not  
15 gotten down like I’ve actually become better you know and still I’ve also been able to do  
16 schoolwork. So it has been going really well.

17 Yeah.

18 But like I somewhere said, I invest in sport like my energy at this moment. And that’s not  
19 like...well in school I don’t want to give myself some goals for my grades because that  
20 will add stress. So like, well sometimes you perceive things so that you should be good in  
21 everything, but well I would like to highlight that that’s not my goal to be best in  
22 everything, because that’s not even possible.

23 Similar to the views of adolescent Swedish athletes (Stambulova et al., 2015), Unelma asserts  
24 that it is not possible to invest fully to all areas of life quite simultaneously and learns how to  
25 find her own optimal rhythm in the temporal process of career construction, previously

1 shown to be a resilient way of coping with dual career challenges. While she draws mostly on  
2 the performance narrative to make sense of her experiences and to project into the future, the  
3 polyphonic texture of her experience in which sport and education are valuable but  
4 independent in rhythm (i.e., sport and school in counterpoint) and contour (i.e., more defined  
5 athletic future), suggests a contrapuntal style of career construction. By deliberately choosing  
6 to focus more on her sport within the prime period of her athletic development, Unelma  
7 eschews neither schoolwork nor decision-making about academic subjects necessary for her  
8 professional education in the future, nor learning in various informal contexts. With respect  
9 to the latter, without prompting Unelma talked about life learning in the sporting context:  
10 “I’ve really studied a lot about food stuff and also been to a nutritionist. Yeah I just want to  
11 learn things.”

12 Like many young athletes in this sample, Unelma narrated conflicting events in her life  
13 and tensions about making the right choice about her future, also resisting to becoming a  
14 subject of the dual career discourse of how society expects her to be: “*I would like to*  
15 *highlight that that’s not my goal to be best in everything.*” As Unelma develops her personal  
16 ideology through narrative meaning-making processes directed at understandings of self,  
17 other, and the world (McLean, 2005), it is particularly significant that she can have access to  
18 a broader repertoire of narratives to draw on to frame her experiences of the possible future.  
19 Considering the developmental stage of her life cycle, we resist finalizing Unelma’s story as  
20 linear and monological and agree entirely with Frank (2005, p. 968) not to “fix participants in  
21 identities that fit typologies.” Rather we emphasize Unelma’s “own struggles of becoming”  
22 an Olympian, an educated professional, and a grown woman, and the need for significant  
23 adults in her life to expand narrative opportunities for her life design in the continuing  
24 dialogue.

25

## 1 **Concluding Thoughts**

2 The driving force of this research was to understand the developmental processes and  
3 consequences of dual career construction in adolescence. We drew on narrative theory to  
4 demonstrate the narrative construction of experience through time and the ways in which  
5 processes of identity development and future orientation interpenetrate. In the past, athlete  
6 career research has only shown a “big story” of identity development through the  
7 retrospective representations of the teller. Though diverse narrative threads have been  
8 considered (e.g., Carless & Douglass, 2013a, 2013b), we advocate for more sensitivity to the  
9 narrative-discursive content within the established typology by “shifting focus from overall  
10 storylines” to “small stories” (Ronkainen et al., 2016, p. 133) in the conversational context of  
11 interviews. By supplementing the life story approach with the athletes’ use of small stories in  
12 particular interaction, we have shown how it is possible to tell an athletic performance story  
13 without neglecting other areas of life or self. Yet, the athletes’ narratives of their projected  
14 futures were indeed thin with respect to creating situated accounts of their non-athletic selves.  
15 Therefore, there is a need for future research to ‘gather’ the textual features of small stories as  
16 constructive means of contextualized identities to add layers to our understandings of  
17 athletes’ lived lives and to inform narrative-discursive interventions with an aim to foster  
18 meaningful (dis)continuities in the process of dual career construction. This is particularly  
19 important in research and applied work with adolescents to encourage them to ‘figure out’  
20 who they are (McAdams & McLean, 2013) and to provide them with conversational contexts  
21 that can instigate their meaning-making processes. Based on our findings we suggest that  
22 exploration of the future and possible selves are critical for a high level of narrative  
23 processing to achieve self-understanding and design a dual career pathway from adolescence  
24 to adulthood. Our study confirms previous research results that many young athletes are  
25 motivated to excel in both sport and education (e.g., Lupo et al., 2015; Stambulova et al.,



1 2015), but often experience inner conflict, tensions, and personal doubts whether achieving  
2 success at elite level is possible without rigid adhering to the performance script (see also  
3 Carless & Douglas, 2013a; Gustafsson et al., 2008; Ryba et al., 2015a). While we found  
4 evidence that dual career discourse has made inroads into young athletes' thinking about their  
5 future—that is, all participants were engaged in dual career practices and 66% displayed a  
6 contrapuntal style—it would also appear that societal expectations for young athletes to  
7 succeed in dual career pursuits heighten their anxiety about making “the right choice” in the  
8 bigger frame of their life course. As shown by past research, formation of identity and style  
9 of action are inseparable from developmental environments and seldom are conscious events.  
10 Therefore, coaches, teachers, school counselors, and sport psychology service providers are  
11 encouraged to take seriously small-talks and chit-chats in their everyday encounters with  
12 young athletes as a means for prompting meaning-making and probing the boundaries of their  
13 imagined futures.

14

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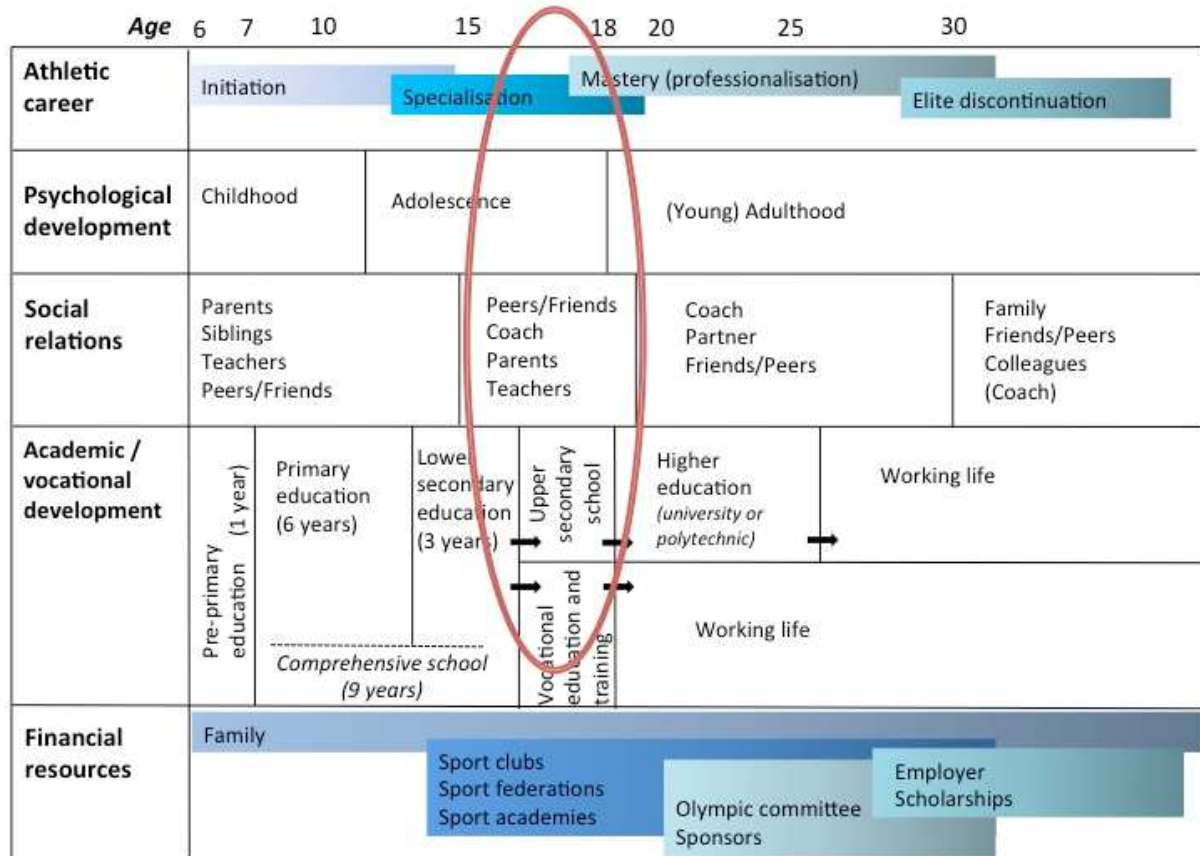
Table 1 *Participants' age, sport, narrative type, and future orientation*

Pseudonym	Age	Sport	Dominant narrative type	Future orientation
Unelma	16	Athletics	Performance	Olympic Games, healthcare professional
Fem 2	16	Cross-country skiing	Performance	Olympic Games, professional athlete, coaching
Fem 3	16	Alpine skiing	Performance	World Cup, university, judge/lawyer
Fem 4	16	Aesthetic group gymnastics	Relational	Olympic Games, university, exercise science
Fem 5	15	Basketball	Performance	Universiade, college basketball (USA), journalist
Fem 6	16	Soccer	Performance	College soccer (USA), professional athlete
Fem 7	16	Swimming	Performance	Olympic Games, college swimming (USA), lawyer
Fem 8	16	Judo	Performance	World Championship, doctor or physical therapist
Fem 9	16	Judo	Performance	World Championship, medical school
Fem 10	16	Judo	Relational	European Championship, university, exercise science
M 1	16	Orienteering on skis	Relational	World Championship, university, school teacher
M 2	16	Artistic gymnastics	Performance	Olympic Games, university, professional athlete or doctor
M 3	15	Artistic gymnastics	Performance	Olympic Games, entrepreneur
M 4	15	Tennis	Performance	APT tour, university, professional athlete and/or dentist
M 5	16	Ice hockey	Performance	NHL, professional athlete, entrepreneur
M 6	16	Ice hockey	Relational	NHL, professional athlete
M 7	16	Soccer	Relational	Premier League, professional athlete
M 8	16	Judo	Performance	Olympic Games, university, healthcare professional

Table 2 *Definitions and examples of career construction styles*

Career construction style	Definition	Example quotes
Contrapuntal (n = 12)	An athlete style of career construction characterized by sport and education forming an interdependent relationship. Both themes are congruent with a personal identity and are independent in the ways they progress with respect to each other.	<p>“If I will not be an ice hockey player, I would like to have a good profession. That’s why I am here in upper secondary school. I try to do well, so it will help me in the future. My family encourages me to do school too at the same time [with hockey].” (M 5)</p> <p>“My dream has always been to become a professional athlete and go to the Olympics, but those are dreams and not very many people achieve that. I am thinking of something to do with sport...maybe a PE teacher, personal trainer, nutritionist. I have always liked to study about health and people’s wellbeing.” (M 8)</p> <p>“We do not have a contract to keep a certain GPA, but we always try our best and if grades start going down, then we need to reconsider how much we train...and maybe get some extra teaching sessions or something. [...] I have to see how my judo career will progress. And if it goes well after high school, then I will take a year off and focus on judo; and if I have no energy to do judo, then I go straight to the medical school.” (Fem 9)</p> <p>“I would like to do gymnastics as long as I can, usually people do it until they are 20 or so and if you are older, you start getting injuries. Our main goal is 2020, so till then. I don’t know about a dream, we did win the World Championship in *****, so maybe do that again. I do not have anything exact about my future job, but something related to sport and exercise would be nice. So if I would graduate from school and then I would quit gymnastics and replace it with some other sport...well, I like to run and I like to run long distances, so I think I will follow my dad’s lead and start running marathons.” (Fem 4)</p>

Monophonic (n = 5)	An athlete style of career construction characterized by one overarching theme, typically expressed in terms of a subjective professional athletic career. Monophonic style is often associated with the difficulty to imagine other possible selves.	<p>“I would like to ski in the World Cup and represent or be a part of the national team [...] I can’t even imagine that I would participate in any other sport...and at some point I will find a profession within sport, if I won’t be an athlete, I will coach or something like that.” (Fem 2)</p> <p>“I have a plan for the next few years...like with my agents we have discussed like what makes sense for a Finnish player in soccer. Like next year and this season—just being able to play with a men’s team as much as possible. Like forget the junior soccer and tap into the men’s game...And like the very first thing that I want is to stay healthy, like I’ve had a lot of injuries, so it’s really important to stay healthy because then you are able to train and play well. If I’m able to play well this season, there will be options where to go. Like in Finland, during next season I could take a bigger role and then maybe after that go abroad. So like when I’m about 20, then it would make sense to move forward.” (M 7)</p>
Dissonant (n = 1)	An athlete style of career construction characterized by sport and education forming a discordant relationship that is seemingly impossible to integrate into a personal meaning structure.	<p>“If school doesn’t go well, I won’t be doing sports. That is the contract between me and my dad.” (Fem 3)</p> <p>“...it just feels like I don’t have energy for school anymore and like who cares if I get grade six...and I cry almost at every practice cause I can’t get through the slope.” (Fem 3)</p>



**“Sport has always been first for me” but “all my free time is spent doing homework”: Dual career styles in late adolescence**

**Highlights**

- Through narrative methodology we delineated three styles of athletes’ dual career construction.
- Contrapuntal style entwines sport and education as harmonically related life-themes
- Monophonic style draws on a prominent athletic life-theme
- Dissonant style is underpinned by discord of sport and education
- There is no direct correspondence between narrative types (performance, discovery and relational narratives) and career construction styles