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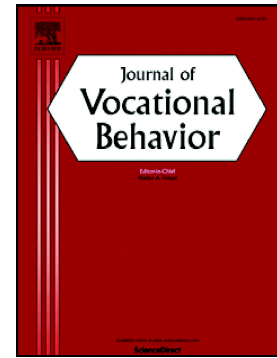
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Understanding youth athletes' life designing processes through dream day narratives

RUNNING HEAD: Dream day narratives

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Abstract

A number of studies have investigated career pathways in elite sport with retrospective designs, but few studies have explored how youth elite athletes construct narratives about their future lives and how their dreams and hopes relate to their careers in sport and other life contexts. We drew on career construction theory to understand youth elite athletes' dreams for the future and prominent life themes. Seventeen Finnish youth elite athletes (7 men, 10 women) in the first year of upper secondary sport school participated in the study. They were asked to make visual representations of their "dream days", and these were used as aids for reflection in low-structured interviews where participants were invited to tell a story about the best possible day sometime in the future. The data were analysed using thematic and structural narrative analysis. We identified three types of dream days: a day on holiday, focused on relaxation, having a good time with friends, and recreational activities; a day of peak athletic performance describing winning a major competition; and a regular day engaged school or work, athletic training and time with family. We concluded that the short future timespan and a low number of sporting dream days might indicate overload and lack of time for reflection. The implications for career interventions with talented adolescents are discussed.

Keywords: student-athletes, life design, career development, identity, future imagination

Understanding youth athletes' life designing processes through dream day narratives

Early career specialisation domains of sport, arts, music, and dance are precarious professions where few talented adolescents are eventually able to develop a professional career. Nevertheless, decisions to commit to the excessive training necessary in these career paths are typically made in adolescence (Patrick et al., 1999). For talented athletes, for example, intensive training and competition often start already at 12-13 years of age, and transition to senior elite sport occurs approximately at 18–19 years of age (Wylleman & Rosier, 2016). At the same time, the demands in the educational pathway start to intensify, and the talented adolescents need to start considering their educational choices (Nurmi, 1991). Some studies have indicated that the increased pressures in two achievement domains may render talented adolescents susceptible to burnout, stress, and anxiety (Rosen, Frohm, Kottorp, Friden, & Heijne, 2016; Sorkkila, Aunola, & Ryba, 2017). For athletes, the transition to the senior level sport has been reported as a crisis point for up to 80 % of participants (Stambulova, 2017). Therefore, there is a need to develop a better understanding of the risk and resilience factors that may influence how talented adolescents construct their life and career pathways.

Research has indicated that talented athletes may have lower career and identity exploration than their non-athlete peers (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996; Van Raalte, Andrews, Cornelius, Brewer, & Petitpas, 2017), and often prioritise their athletic careers over educational success (Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Cosh & Tully, 2014). Navarro (2015) noted that while many of student-athletes acknowledged the importance of earning an undergraduate degree, their major choices were often not linked to their future career aspirations. Coupland (2015) argued that the cultural logic of professional sport with the demand of total commitment can exclude thinking and talking about career planning. She showed how rugby

players constructed “an embodied career which renders the players as largely unaware of, unprepared for, and removed from the possibilities of pursuing career pathways beyond those that deploy their physical literacy” (Coupland, 2015, p. 118). The need to provide career counselling to safeguard youth athletes’ development and welfare has been noted in educational institutions and national and international policies. For example, the European Commission has outlined its guidelines on supporting athletes ‘dual careers’, which in the European discourse refers to the combination of sport and education/work (Henry, 2013).

Exploring and becoming aware of future occupational possibilities is a key developmental task of adolescence (Kracke, 2002; Savickas, 2005). When asked about their future hopes and goals, it has been found that especially late adolescents across cultures prioritise education and work (that is, career identity), while there is more cultural variance in other concerns such as marriage, family, leisure, or material wealth (Nurmi, 1991). Taken together, the content of “futuring” most often coincides with developmental tasks of late adolescence and early adulthood such as completing education, career decisions and forming intimate relationships (Marttinen, Dietrich, & Salmela-Aro, 2016; Nurmi, 1989). In constructing their future narratives, adolescents are most strongly influenced by the parents and values, goals and priorities learned at home, while peers and role models also become increasingly important (Nurmi, 1991). In Finland, where the present study is situated, studies have indicated that young people mostly have a positive view on future and their prospects for education and employment (Tikkanen, 2016), while they also value leisure as a part of their imagined future lives (Nurmi, 1989). Most studies have found that the timespan of adolescents’ future hopes and aims extends to their 20s or sometimes to their early 30s, but less often beyond that (Nurmi, 1991). A few studies have demonstrated differences in the extent to which adolescents plan and think about the future based

on regulatory focus (Andre, van Vianen, & Peetsma, 2017), age and gender (Ferrari, Nota, & Soresi, 2010). However, no research has focused on understanding talented adolescents' future perspectives and the impact of embeddedness in two achievement domains on the content and timespan of their futuring.

Career construction theory (Savickas, 2005) emerged as a response to the changes in work lives in the 21st century and shifts the focus from matching skills and occupations to understanding how people construct subjectively meaningful careers paths and narrative identities (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; Hartung & Taber, 2008; Savickas et al., 2009). Savickas grounded career construction in Super's (1957, 1990) developmental theory of vocational behaviour, yet reconceptualised the central concepts of Super's theory through a constructionist perspective focused on interpretive processes and social interaction. Super (1957) understood childhood career development (the growth stage) as the time for curiosity, exploration and developing time perspective and concern for one's future as a worker. Later on, Super, Savickas, and Super (1996) rearticulated the growth stage as involving (1) *concern* of one's future as a worker, (2) exerting *control* over one's life trajectory, (3) *conviction* in one's ability to realise career aspirations, and (4) *competence* including necessary skills and attributes. In career construction theory, adolescence and young adulthood (ages 14-24) is the exploration stage, which relates to developing a fit between the self and society, and fulfilling societal expectations to start developing a vocational self-concept. Importantly, exploration is considered as more than a task of comparing the self with available occupations and life roles. Instead, it is considered as a process of constructing a self-story which integrates the self into the society and the career into the broader framework of life meaning through available narrative resources and life scripts. Del Corso and Rehfuss (2011) further articulated the components of career construction through

narrative perspective, viewing vocational personality as a storied self and emphasising the multiplicity of storylines that individuals develop and ‘try out’ in the process of self-construction. In career construction, career adaptability is grounded in childhood developmental tasks, involves four core dimensions of *curiosity, concern, confidence, and control*, and is inherently future-oriented. As Hartung, Porfeli, and Vondracek (2008) described, “curiosity fuels the exploration of possible selves and occupations, career concern prompts the establishment of possible futures, confidence empowers individuals to construct a preferred future and overcome obstacles, and career control affords individuals ownership of their chosen future” (p. 72).

Recent special issues on life design interventions (which is the applied component of career construction) and narrative career counselling in *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (Savickas & Guichard, 2016) and *The Career Development Quarterly* (Hartung, 2016) highlighted the benefits of these approaches in helping clients to become aware of and re-story their career narratives and in fostering exploration of future possibilities. Within life design, counsellors are encouraged to facilitate such exploration by inviting imaginative thinking and narratives of possible future selves (Savickas et al., 2009). Life design interventions have been reported to be useful also for adolescent clients in supporting adaptability and career exploration (Maree & Hancke, 2011; Nota, Santilli, & Soresi, 2016).

Importantly, Savickas (2005) emphasised that, from a career construction perspective, career assessment should begin with locating the career concerns and work roles in the client’s broader life space. As Savickas (2005) commented, “if the work role appears unimportant to a client, then progressing to assessment of adaptability, vocational self-concept, and vocational identity may not be meaningful or accurate because occupations and their roles play little part in that client’s life” (p. 186). Following this line of reasoning, we were interested in not only inquiring into

youth elite athletes' imagined career trajectories in sport but rather on understanding their mode of being and whether and how sport intertwined with the content of their future narratives.

Although our study focused on a specific group of athletes, we anticipate that the study findings are relevant for understanding the role of futuring in talented adolescents' life design processes more broadly.

Through collecting visual and verbal representations of youth athletes' "dream days" – that is, their construction of a best possible day sometime in the future – our study contributes to the aims of the life design paradigm to understand the processes and factors associated with a person's self-construction (Savickas et al., 2009). Through exploring talented adolescents' future narratives, the study aims to contribute to theoretical understandings of futuring within career construction perspective. The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) what kind of dream days do adolescent athletes construct about their future?; (2) what do dream day narratives imply about their current life situations?; (3) what can dream days tell about life designing processes of talented adolescents?

Methodology

Narrative inquiry emphasises the storied nature of human life and suggests that stories are central to our thoughts, behaviours, and actions (Riessman, 2008). Personal stories are considered as socio-cultural constructions in that, although they draw upon unique biographical events, they are constructed within cultural narrative resources that shape the meanings that people assign to their experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Narrative scholars have argued that elite sport involvement could potentially limit the narrative horizon within which athletes design their lives because the culturally dominant narratives construct single-minded dedication to sport as the only way to athletic success (Carless & Douglas, 2013). Analysing personal narratives

may reveal how people draw upon various life and career narratives in designing their life paths and how dominant narratives shape the ways in which they think and feel about their career development (Ryba, Ronkainen, & Selänne, 2015). Within narrative psychology, research focus has been mainly on narratives of the past; however, researchers have been called to explore narratives of the future because they can reveal how storytellers construct meaning in the present (Sools, Tromp, & Mooren, 2015). In our study, we understand cultural narratives, life scripts, and developmental tasks of adolescence as the context in which our participants' narratives of future are constructed. It has been suggested that developing the capacity to imagine and tell narratives about the future may help people become more resilient in facing its uncertainties and complexities (Sools & Mooren, 2012). As Sools and Mooren (2012) put it, narratives of the future may “provide a way to creatively and concretely explore the consequences of future possibilities, and gain a lived understanding of which values we hold dear” (p. 219).

Narrative research has mostly relied on spoken and written words, but scholars have recently advocated the use of creative visual methods as additional means to elicit stories (Busanich, McGannon, & Schinke, 2016). Using visual storytelling has been advocated especially with young people as it has the potential to become more engaging, fun, and less hierarchical approach to research encounter (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005; Drew, Duncan, & Sawyer, 2010). Using visual materials produced by the participants as a starting point for interviews allows young people to take control over the selection of personally relevant themes and topics (Wells, Ritchie, & McPherson, 2012) and therefore can reduce the power disparity between the adult interviewer and the young participants (Jorgenson & Sullivan, 2009). Furthermore, visual methods can provide valuable aids of expression and communication to young people who may have accumulated limited life experience and have difficulty in

articulating life themes and more complex understandings (Drew et al., 2010). However, visual images are similar to interviews in that they too are created within specific contexts and audiences in mind to perform a particular version of the self (Drew & Guillemin, 2014). We also recognised that different people read the visual images as well as interview narratives differently based on their past experiences, social locations and theoretical lenses. Visual methods have been recently used in life design interventions where client drawings have been used to aid reflection and expression of life themes (Taylor & Savickas, 2016).

Participants

The study participants were 17, Finnish, first-year student-athletes (10 females) aged 16-17. The inclusion criteria were that the participants had to be student-athletes pursuing sport and education in upper secondary sport schools who were competing at international level, and who had started or were expected to start transitioning into senior level competition in the near future. The Finnish Sport Academies and Sport Federations collaborated in identifying potential participants with the aim to include the most talented Finnish youth athletes. A representative sample of elite youth athletes in Finland was obtained by ensuring geographic diversity (the athletes lived in different parts of the country), including a broad range of team and individual sports, and also including both summer and winter Olympic sports. Eleven athletes participated in individual sports (judo, tennis, athletics, swimming, artistic gymnastics, alpine skiing, ski orienteering, and cross-country skiing) and six athletes participated in team sports (football, ice hockey, basketball, and artistic group gymnastics). However, our sample was also homogenous in the sense that all participants were ethnic Finns, mostly came from middle-class families, and all were pursuing upper secondary level education. The study was a part of a four-year longitudinal project examining talented youth athletes' developmental trajectories in Finland. For

a full description of the study participants and methodology, see Ryba, Aunola, Kalaja, Selänne, Ronkainen, and Nurmi, (2016).

Procedure

The participants were contacted four weeks before the interviews and were asked to think about and create a representation of a “dream day”. The specific instruction for the task was the following:

Please make a creative representation of your dream day and bring it to the interview. It can be a picture; a collage made of photographs, magazine and newspaper clips, etc; a figure created on a computer; a comics story – you can choose any means of designing your dream day’s image. It should stand for a real day (not a fantasy day in Wonderland) and the way you want to live it (e.g., activities you do, people you are with, how it makes you feel, how much time you spend on different things). Please estimate the time of your dream day (e.g., when I am 19).

It is worth emphasising that the instruction did not involve any mention of sport, and thus could involve any types of experiences and activities. The participants were sent a reminder about the task before the interview. Ten participants completed the task and brought a representation to the interview (a stack of photographs, a collage of photos or pictures, handwritten account, list of activities typed on a computer, a drawing, or a cartoon drawing). The seven athletes who did not produce a visual representation most often explained that they did not have time to do the task, which in itself became a valuable form of data which we discuss in the analysis. In the interviews, the participants were asked to tell a story about their dream days, which allowed for obtaining verbal narratives from all athletes and exploration of meanings that participants assigned to visual images they had produced (see Keats, 2009).

Data analysis

Narrative scholars have suggested that visual images can be interpreted as texts or narratives (Bal, 2009; Banks, 2008; Riessman, 2008). In the present study, the verbal narratives provided the main source of data with the visual narratives as additional insight into youth athletes' stories about the future. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and verbal stories were read through several times to become familiar with their content. As a first step, we familiarised ourselves with the interview transcripts and made initial notes about the content and storylines emerging in participants' accounts. The transcripts were then subjected to thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) where we identified common themes across participants' stories. The thematic approach was complemented with a narrative analysis of structure, where we sought to discern the plot and organisation of the dream day stories (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). The structural analysis considers each participant's story as a whole and seeks to understand the internal connections and how events and experiences are interpreted to support the person's broader story and to provide meaning and coherence. We also paid attention to cultural narratives types that athletes drew upon in storytelling – for example, on *performance*, *discovery*, and *relational* storylines that have been identified as building blocks in elite athletes' life narratives (Carless & Douglas, 2013). For the athletes who did not produce the visual image, the content of the verbal narratives was similar to those who did. There was no difference in the prevalence of different types of stories between those who included a visual representation and those who did not.

The visual images were analysed alongside the verbal narratives produced in interviews. In the process of coding the images, we followed the three-step approach outlined by Drew and Guillemin (2014). The first stage was participant-driven and focused on the 'internal narrative' (Banks, 2008) – that is, noting what the representation contains and how the participants describe

what is going on. The second step of the analysis moved towards a researcher-led assessment of the representations, involving our reflections on participants' stories, and noting different sizes of objects, colours used, and how they made us feel (see Drew & Guillemin, 2014; Gillies et al., 2005). We also paid attention to how much effort seemed to have been put into creating the visual representation, and who had completed the task and who had not (see table 1). As the third and the final step, we interpreted these findings through career construction and narrative psychology which formed the guiding theoretical frameworks of the study. Although it is useful to distinguish the three steps for analytic purposes, the actual work also included moving forth and back these steps in a fluid process of seeking alternative interpretations from participant accounts, tenets of narrative analysis, and theoretical commitments to career construction.

Using visual methods adds another layer of complexity to the interpretive work, and as in spoken and written narratives, multiple interpretations are possible (Banks, 2008; Drew & Guillemin 2014). Aligned with cultural epistemology, we acknowledge that interpretive activity is theory-laden and always informed by our socio-cultural situatedness, assumptions, and values (Ryba & Schinke, 2009). Within this perspective, validity is not seen as a product of following a set of standardised procedures, as in post-positivist research (e.g., Maxwell, 1992; Sparkes, 1998; Smith & McGannon, 2017). In this study, we sought to enhance the rigour through researcher reflexivity, in-depth immersion into the data by spending an extensive amount of time analysing the images and the transcripts for possible meanings. We also explored interpretative possibilities with 'critical friends', a process which Smith and McGannon (2017) described as "critical dialogue between people, with researchers giving voice to their interpretations in relation to other people who listen and offer critical feedback" (p. 13). Presenting the images and our interpretations at a conference and in research group meetings, as well as the critical commentary

from JVB reviewers, provided us with alternative readings of the data. In this way, validity issues were addressed after the first interpretive account had been developed, rather than by employing validity ‘checks’ during the research procedure – a perspective which has been accepted by many qualitative researchers across paradigmatic positions that come after positivism (see Maxwell, 1992). Since the participants were a part of a longitudinal study, we had previous mixed methods data from them. This data could provide us with additional insights into their life-worlds, psychological well-being and career construction styles to support our interpretations (see Ryba, Stambulova, Selänne, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2017; Aunola, Selänne, Selänne, & Ryba, 2018). We acknowledge that there could be plausible interpretations of the dream day narratives through other theoretical frameworks; however, we are also confident in the plausibility of the understanding provided by our reading of the data through career construction theory. Throughout the research, we attempted to be reflexive about the theoretical underpinnings and methodology that informed us in constructing the following interpretations.

Results

In our analysis, we identified three overall storylines that provided a narrative structure for the dream day stories: (1) a day on holiday (n=9), (2) a day of peak athletic performance (n=5), and (3) a regular day (n=3). Both genders were represented in each dream day type. In the following, we will analyse the construction of each narrative and what these stories might tell about youth athletes’ career construction.

[Insert table 1]

A day on holiday

The most common narrative type was a day on holiday, which was a story created by nine athletes. These dream days all included a morning with no alarm clock, a good breakfast, and leisure activities throughout the day; most important element of these days was “relaxing”. All except for one story had a focus on the near future (e.g., next week or next summer) and were contextualised within participants’ current life situations as student-athletes. Only one participant, Hanna, postponed her dream day to until she would be 20-25 years old, with the rationale that then she could go on a skiing holiday with her friends (i.e., without her parents).

[Insert Fig 1]

Whilst Hanna included her sport as a central part of the dream day, she emphasised that, on a dream day, skiing would be done at a relaxed pace with good friends without any competitive element. Only two participants mentioned athletic training as a part of their dream day; most participants included some recreational sport activities without a competitive element, and some of them did not include sports at all. As Kimmo (orienteering on skis) explained: “it [my dream day] includes only the morning jogging, which is merely relaxing with the dog. It makes me happy, running based on how I feel”. Four participants emphasised that these experiences would take place in nature which reflects the popularity of nature-based recreation in the Finnish context (Pitkänen, Puhakka, Semi, & Hall, 2014). The participants spent time verbally describing the details of the nature experience (misty fields, sun glimmering on the snow, the Northern Lights), and made strong links between nature and feeling relaxed and refreshed.

[Insert fig 2]

Being situated in adolescent developmental context, the key people in the holiday dream days were friends. As Päivi (alpine skiing) explained: “Normally when I’m on [competition] travels I

don't get to see those friends, and then [on the dream day] we could do something and... Actually, I would like to be with my friends the whole day". Similarly, Anni (judo) maintained that time with friends was a vital part of the dream day since that was often missing from her everyday life:

Anni: in the evening there would be a so-called "girls' night", we could go to the movies and spend the evening together.

Interviewer: Do you normally have time for things like that?

Anni: Very seldom. Maybe on camps, there are those kinds of girls' nights because we are already in the same place so we don't have to organise anything.

Interviewer: But... In everyday life, there are not many [girls' nights].

Anni: No.

While depicting several positive elements such as sunshine, playing games for fun, eating good food, and relaxing on a hammock, the dream days simultaneously focused on "not doing" and "not having" certain things. The participants described several elements that would not be part of their dream days, including "no sport, no schoolwork" (Antti), "no alarm clock" (Topi, Nea and Hanna), "no need to prepare food" (Anni and Kimmo), "not feeling bad or tired" (Päivi and Timo), "no rush" (Topi), and doing sports "without the body getting stiff" (Hanna). That is, these dream days were telling about participants' daily lives involving tight schedules and intensive training. In this sense, the stories were firmly grounded in embodied, personal experiences and present life situation. Topi (football) summarised the key theme of his dream day:

Topi: [you can] do what you want, things that you like to do. That would be like a real dream day. It would be warm; everyone would feel great and things like that.

Interviewer: Your life isn't really like that at the moment?

Topi: Well no, not really like that.

A day of peak athletic performance

For five participants, a dream day involved peak performance in a major athletic competition. These representations centred on the sporting event, with the remaining of the day focused on pre-competition routines. As Ulla (athletics) described: “so it's like sleeping, then a morning walk, breakfast... Then getting ready and spending time with your nice team, then eating and I envisioned that the competition would be in the evening”. In contrast to the first type of dream days, these stories were situated further in the future within the peak phase of participants' athletic careers (age 20-30). That is, these dream days were more distanced from the current life situations and daily concerns of the participants.

While the dream days “on holiday” often had a relational emphasis, the “peak athletic performance” dream day narratives were mainly individualistic and focused on participants' actions and feelings. The athletes were familiar with a competition day routine and could draw upon their lived experiences in pinpointing certain activities for different times of the dream day (meals, rest, preparation). However, these stories contained little exploration of other narrative resources beyond the exemplary elite sport narrative focused on winning a major event. The athletes' stories generally involved little contextual detail about how it would feel being in a foreign country, what else they would see or experience beyond the competition, or with whom they would be. For example, the athletes did not mention coaches, even if it is likely that the coach would be present in an athletes' significant competitions. When others emerged, most often they were teammates and parents and were not central figures in the narratives. Marko (gymnastics) reflected:

Interviewer: Would you have anyone there with you?

Marko: Mm... The team I guess, and then a couple of friends. Or maybe my parents (...) I guess it would be nice if they were there.

Vilma (basketball) told a story of winning the American University finals as a student-athlete in her early 20s. She used a cartoon drawing to visualise her dream day. In the interview, after describing the morning practice, eating, and having a nap, her story continues:

Vilma: Then we have the game and we play very well. It's going to be a tough game and we win it with one point only. (...) Everyone's going to cheer for us and be happy for us. I'm going to be the one who is making the winning basket and yeah... After that, my boyfriend is going to hug me and kiss me. Yeah, that's my dream day.

[Insert Fig. 3]

It is notable that Vilma's boyfriend only enters the scene at the end of her story when the main storyline focused on athletic achievement has come into the close. Here, as in the other stories about athletic achievement, the others do not have a well-developed role, and sometimes they were included in the story only after the researcher asked who would be present during the day.

While these dream days were projections into future several years ahead, there were relatively few uncertainties in the narratives. In most cases, youth athletes' aspirations were tightly connected to cultural constructions of ultimate success in each sport (Olympics for swimming and athletics; playing in the NHL in ice hockey). Vilma (basketball) explained what allowed her to project herself to a dream of playing college basketball in the U.S.:

Vilma: I like the country, and my [relative] has lived there, so I've visited there when I was little. So, when I was small I thought that wow, U.S., I'd like to go there. So, that's maybe influenced...

However, she had recently started to doubt her dream:

Vilma: Sometimes... I've had thoughts in my mind that – because some girls have said that university in U.S. is a waste of time and because here's better education and... so I don't know. I'm not going to give up on my dream. I think I'm going to go there, but then there is this uncertainty. What if it is not as great as I have imagined?

Despite telling a dream day story focused on athletic performance, her broader account in the interview illustrates that education was also a central consideration in her life design. However, despite gaining access to narratives that challenged her dream (e.g., staying in Finland would be better for education), her story did not contain active exploration of alternative possibilities. She did not mention doing searches or contacting people to find more information about her options in the U.S. and continued holding onto her dream despite becoming aware of possible trouble in that projected future.

A regular day

The third type of dream day was a regular day consisting of school/work, sports, and free time. Three participants constructed these types of stories. Alisa (judo) explained:

I would eat good breakfast and then go to practice, for example, morning training in the circus or gym. After that I could eat lunch and, if I had time, it would be with a friend. Then I could go to school or read something, like intellectual activity. And then I would probably go home, take my dogs out in the woods, and there I could think about things and relax. Then I would go to my next practice, the evening practice.

Two participants situated their dream days within their present life contexts as student-athletes, and the stories included both schoolwork and sport training. These stories drew strongly on their daily lived experiences and routines. The only difference to an average day was in

having a little bit more relaxed schedule, so that “I would have some spare time, so there wouldn’t be no rush in going for practices, but then I would have practices anyway later in the evening” (Riina, gymnastics). These stories did not emphasise other people, and for example family, coaches, or teammates were not mentioned.

A story with a projection to later future was developed by Jani (tennis) whose dream day was supposed to occur when he has 30 years old. He made a collage with three pictures: a silhouette of a family (two adults, three children) against the sunset, a dentist at work, and Roger Federer playing tennis.

[Insert fig. 4]

As Jani elaborated on his collage in the interview:

The picture [of Federer] mirrors the feelings of success in Tennis, that you can do something that you like or that it can be your profession... You don’t know which one it will be yet. Then there’s a smaller picture of a dentist – that would be like a daily job. It would be nice to do that and play tennis or the other way around. One would be a job and the other one you can do. Then in the last picture, there was a family: children and wife. They were on a beach where the sun was setting. That mirrors a future family at some point and that you can spend time with them. If I could do all those things in one day... that would be a perfect day.

Jani’s story described normative events in a Western life script for adulthood including career and family. However, his story also contained inconsistencies such as a possibility of being a dentist “as a hobby” besides being a professional tennis player. His projection towards the future is realistic in containing the possibility that, while being a talented youth athlete, his professional career might not occur within sport. However, at the moment he was not acting towards realising the other future career projection as a dentist, evident in his low investment in his studies.

Interviewer: How's your school been going?

Jani: Badly (laughs). I think my best grade is seven (on a scale 4-10), so in average grades are like five and six. In the first [semester] I didn't really study at all, I wanted to see what kind the exams were and how's school in general.

Interviewer: You have kind of a conflicting situation because the dentist job requires some amount of good grades

Jani: Yeah, especially in the more difficult subjects. Languages, they just don't go well.

Interviewer: Have you ever thought that you could have some coaching with it or tutoring?

Jani: Well, no, not really. It gets better just by talking... I am not going to worry about it until I am doing [the matriculation exam]. I think I will learn those [things] before that so I will pass the exam.

As Jani's story illustrated, the dentist occupational pathway remained more of a "dream" than a plan that he was actively striving to realise. Indeed, reflecting on his two options – professional athlete pathway or being a dentist – he explained that "that [professional tennis] is my plan, it is still a bigger dream than the dentist". Within the sporting context, he was also actively designing his developmental path through intensive training and competitions.

Discussion

Having an ability to orient towards a future perspective has been found to promote more adaptive developmental pathways and has motivational and behavioural implications in the present (Crespo, Jose, Kielpikowski, & Pryor, 2013; Lens, Paixão, Herrera, & Grobler, 2012). The present study extended the literature on adolescents' future perspectives and career construction processes by focusing on the narratives of talented adolescents embedded in two

achievement domains simultaneously. Although the career construction perspective recognises the importance of future perspective, the specific ways in which the imagined future intertwines with life design are not well understood. The study highlighted the relevance of future narratives for understanding talented adolescents' present mode of being and how they construct meaning in daily efforts to realise their life and career aspirations. As such, future narratives occupy a central role in career construction in adolescence and have important implications for adolescents' adaptabilities and self-construction.

A perhaps surprising finding of the study was the low number of sport-related dream days in the group of highly talented athletes whose daily lives are primarily structured around sport. Although it is common for adolescents to contextualise their "futuring" within a relatively short time perspective (Nurmi, 1991), our findings indicated that, for talented adolescents, the demanding daily life can be especially restrictive of exploring future possibilities. It is also revealing that seven participants did not engage in the task of creating a visual representation, often because of stated lack of time. The lack of engagement with the task, in turn, supports the argument made in this paper that student-athletes' daily schedules are hardly conducive for dreaming and exploring more distant future possibilities. The dream of "having a break" from immediate daily routines could indicate that these adolescents can be situationally or more chronically tired of the constant demands of education and sport. From a career construction perspective, the emergence of days on holiday and the genuinely ordinary days situated in the present life situation could potentially signify lack of exploration of future selves and life projects. Such findings resonate with findings on low career exploration in student-athletes (e.g., Van Raalte et al., 2017) and further confirm the need to support this specific group of adolescents in their life design processes.

Sport psychology scholars have warned about the dangers of identity foreclosure in adolescent athletes (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000) and that identification with the performance narrative of elite sport can narrow the content of life design (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Ryba et al., 2015). Therefore, previous studies have highlighted the importance of supporting youth athletes in exploring *other* life domains and vocational possibilities outside sport (Murphy et al., 1996; Navarro, 2015). However, our findings extend the previous studies by suggesting that athletes may have low exploration also *within* the athletic domain. The few dream days contextualised within elite sport (i.e., the anticipated future career) were constructed within the dominant cultural narrative of success in sport focused on competitiveness and individual achievement (Benoit, 1997). This kind of future story centred on winning is easier to put into the autobiographical narrative because the exemplary plot is readily available in the elite sport culture (Douglas & Carless, 2009; Ryba et al., 2015). Our finding concerning low exploration within the sport domain connects with Henriksen and Mortensen's (2014) contention that adolescent athletes might not have sufficiently thought about the future to become aware of the challenges that are likely to lie ahead within the elite development pathway. It is not surprising that the dream days our participants constructed do not describe career challenges – rather, what we wish to highlight is the limited exploration of various possible dreams and pathways within elite and professional sport beyond the dominant success myths in sport. This finding highlights the need to understand not only the various domains of adolescents' futuring but also the narrative resources they tap into in making meaning of their dreams and aspirations within those life domains. From a narrative perspective, the more exemplary stories and narrative resources the individuals have access to, the more possibilities they have to (re)story their lives in adaptive ways if the need arises (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Although we asked the athletes to tell us about

their dreams rather than realistic goals, the limited narrative resources they draw on in constructing success is a potential source of concern.

Previous studies have indicated some national differences in how adolescents designed their futures and related these findings to issues including countries' economic situation, school systems, and social security (Nota et al., 2016; Tikkanen, 2016). The fact that some of our participants also included schoolwork in their dream days may in part reflect the high regard for education in the Nordic context and the recent developments to promote the combination of school and sport (Ryba et al., 2016). However, youth athletes' dreams within education or work were relatively vague and had not crystallised into specific goals and aspirations. The present study support previous findings suggesting that the Nordic welfare society might allow young people more safely postpone commitment to specific (non-sport) vocational pathways (Mannerström, Hautamäki, & Leikas, 2016).

We can assume that the type of a task we gave to our participants (focus on a single day instead of "a dream life" or career) had a significant influence in directing young people to think about leisure and having a holiday. Furthermore, since the dream day task did not focus on future career, it is possible that some participants could have had a more concrete career plan, but they would have considered a holiday or a regular day as their dream day. However, we do feel that the narratives reflect not only the symbolic value of holiday in the Western countries but also these talented adolescents' pressurised mode of being characterised by tight daily schedules and limited time to dream and plan beyond the present situation. This interpretation is also supported by our longitudinal data indicating that nine out of these 17 adolescent athletes had a burnout risk profile. Based on similarities in talent development contexts (e.g., music or performing arts) identified in previous studies (e.g., Patrick et al., 1999) we anticipate that our findings can be

translatable to adolescents in other talent development domains. The identified themes (e.g., the dream day as an escape) highlight that adolescents embedded in performance environments may design their future within a narrow perspective focused either on fulfilling or escaping expectations from teachers, coaches, and/or parents. As our analysis showed, these pressures can be inferred from the stories talented adolescents construct about the future. As such, our study extends narrative research within career construction perspective by showing the relevance of future narratives for understanding adolescents' life design processes.

Focusing on stories about the future can be an important direction for further research because the content of the futuring is likely to have implications for choices in the present. It has been noted that asking people to develop a story about the future in a research context is already an intervention that can change their present mode of being (Sools & Mooren, 2012). Our participants' comments confirmed this argument in the sense that for many of them the task prompted reflection on something they usually do not have time for. A few also mentioned discussing their dream day with friends or even parents, which opened an interpersonal space in which they could try out different narratives about the future and verbalise life themes that hold central importance in their life design.

Applied implications

Given the importance of exploration in adolescence for healthy identity development and career construction (Savickas, 2005), it is vital that career interventions with student-athletes and other talented adolescents would create spaces for these young people to dream and have a moment of disengagement from daily routines. Life design interventions from a preventive perspective have the potential to increase adolescents' engagement with their future opportunities before transition difficulties arise (Savickas et al., 2009). The dream day task used in this

research study could be used as a tool in career construction interventions alongside other means such as the Career Construction Interview (Savickas, 2011) to gain a more holistic and integrative understanding of the young person's life design (e.g., Brott, 2004). As Drew et al. (2010) noted, using visual aids can enhance self-reflection and self-understanding in young people, and help them express themselves on a topic that they may not have had the language or opportunity to verbalise. The open-ended structure of the task allows for assessing the importance of the sport life project in the adolescent athlete's life space (Savickas, 2005) which in turn can inform the degree to which the counselling should focus on adaptability and vocational identity in the sport context or prepare the client to other life roles. A visual task, like the one used in the present study, can help young people move towards a more creative mode of life design not bound to rationalising and dominant discourses about future lives and courses of action. Even more importantly, such task can help young people in making links between their present lifestyle and possible future scenarios, and trigger them to think what they can do today to achieve some of the dreams they have identified.

Limitations

As a limitation of the present study, like most other studies into talented adolescents (e.g., Patrick et al., 1999), our participants were from a limited demographic, representing white middle-class families. Further studies into talented adolescents' dreams of the future from more diverse backgrounds will be valuable in broadening our understanding of young peoples' life designing processes in talent development environments. Furthermore, the task only gave a small glimpse to these young people's life-worlds and should not be considered as a definite tool for assessing adolescents' career construction styles. However, as already emphasised, we suggest that the dream day task can be used as the additional means to gain a deeper understanding of

research participants' or clients' life design. Finally, we acknowledge the inherent subjectivity and open-ended nature of the interpretation of visual images (Banks, 2008; Drew & Guillemin, 2014). Our reading of the images through the lens of career construction theory offered an avenue for understanding youth athletes' visual narratives, but it is not the only possible interpretation of these representations.

Conclusions

Through collecting and analysing youth athletes "dream day" narratives in Finland, our study explored how future narratives can contribute to the understandings of talented adolescents' life design. Our analysis indicated that their future narratives are contextualised within various cultural discourses of leisure and recreation, elite athlete career, friendships, and education. However, these young people did little to challenge the dominant constructions of an elite athlete pathway, and despite dreaming of having one day "break" from their athletic careers, most of them designed their overall lives firmly within these discourses. The short timespan of their future perspectives and focus on relief from current pressures indicates that career counsellors, coaches and teachers need to be aware of talented adolescents' demanding workloads and strive to increase communication between schools and talent development systems to facilitate construction of pathways that combine both pursuits. Having more time to dream and think about a more distant future could also help talented adolescents to see more meaning and value in their current educational pursuits while simultaneously striving to realise their goals and dreams in their other career pathway.

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ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

Table 1

Dream day	Pseudonym (Gender)	Visual Representation	Quote	Main Analytic Theme(s)	Age in Dream Day
Holiday	Hanna (F)	Photographs	<i>It is a day when you wake up at the time you want, eat a nice breakfast and then go skiing for the day, like skiing at a relaxed pace. And then like enjoy the sun and the landscape. And in the evening just spending time with friends, eating well”</i>	Getaway from stressors Independence (no parents) Nature experience	20-25
	Kimmo (M)	Collage of pictures	<i>There is breakfast and jogging with the dog, haze as the mist evaporates and the sun starts rising... And then relaxing, occasionally dipping into the water and fishing... And for food - nothing self-made so there would be no stress over that. In the evening there is hiking and camping overnight...</i>	Getaway from stressors Enjoyable solitude Nature experience	Anytime (near future)
	Päivi (F)	Verbal story	<i>I would wake up around 8 am and that wouldn't feel bad, have a slalom training. Then I would eat out with my friends, then have a nap, and then see other friends... Actually, I would like to be with my friends the whole day. We could go to an amusement park or something like that. Nothing that spectacular... If I could just be with my friends.</i>	Time with friends Feeling refreshed	17-18
	Antti (M)	List of activities typed on a computer	<i>Sport takes so much from my daily life that the dream day would be like a rest day. That I don't need to do any sport or think about sports, and especially not think about school.</i>	Getaway from stressors	Anytime (near future)
	Nea (F)	Verbal story	<i>There would be no alarm clock, we would eat a proper breakfast, and then go skiing, the weather would be sunny - with a little bit of frost - the snow would be glimmering and... It would be nice and relaxing. Then we would go to a wood-heated sauna and have a relaxing evening.</i>	Getaway from stressors Nature experience Time with friends	Next week
	Anni (F)	Handwritten account with drawings	<i>In my dream day, I would relax and there would be no rush. I wouldn't have to make breakfast, it would be ready. I would want to go mountain climbing and perform a Bungee jump... And then relax in a spa and have a massage and spend time with my friends. In the afternoon go shopping, and then have a "girls' night".</i>	Getaway from stressors Time with friends Nature experience	Anytime (near future)
	Sanna (F)	Handwritten account	<i>I would start the day with my family and then I would go shopping and dining with my best friend, and then in the evening, I guess I would be with my boyfriend and we would go to the movies or something. I don't know.</i>	Time with best friend and boyfriend	19
	Timo (M)	Verbal story	<i>Just waking up with my best friend, and like going with my friends to play some roller hockey in the summertime or go to the ice. The sun is shining and it's warm. And then eat somewhere outside, that would be great and then in the night, we would do something great and funny. In the winter it's just ice</i>	Autonomy Getaway from stressors	During summer holiday

			<i>hockey so you know in summertime it's more like you can do what you want.</i>		
	Topi (M)	A drawing (clock with activities written)	<i>Something really great and relaxing... Some really awesome food and then if you could lie in a hammock and you can just be like that's the best. Maybe swim in a warm ocean, play some soccer or some ball games or just like something relaxing like PlayStation. Like, do what you want.</i>	Time with friends Autonomy Getaway from stressors	During summer holiday
<i>Winning</i>	Marko (M)	Verbal story	<i>I didn't have time to do any kind of visual collage, but I thought that in my dream day I would be in the Olympics. Wake up somewhere in the centre and have breakfast in a nice hotel, and then have the competition during the day and win gold... Or something like that. Then in the evening... I don't know... Hang out in the centre.</i>	Exemplary elite sport narrative	20
	Katri (F)	Photographs	<i>I would get a qualification time for the Olympics. The day begins like normally, have a hotel breakfast, listen to the music, go to do my warm-up. My family would be watching and my team is there. The race would go well and I would get it and make the Finnish record. And then spend the rest of the day on the beach with all my friends.</i>	Exemplary elite sport narrative Time with friends	20
	Vilma (F)	A cartoon drawing	<i>This is the day when we have the finals for university finals like I'm in America here. I'm going with my teammate to morning practice and I'm smiling and the sun is shining. We're going to eat a good meal and then of course sleep and then we have the game. We're going to win it with one point only and I'm going to be the one making the winning basket and yeah. And after that my boyfriend is going to hug me and kiss me and yeah that's my dream day.</i>	Exemplary elite sport narrative	22-23
	Teemu (M)	Verbal story	<i>I would be playing in NHL and I would go to the morning practice with friends... We would eat and then have a rest at home before the game. In the game, there would be a couple of goals and we would win. Then I would go home with my family and we would watch a movie.</i>	Exemplary elite sport narrative	30
	Ulla (F)	List with pictures	<i>The day is in the Olympics. So it's like sleeping, then a morning walk, breakfast... Then getting ready, and like spending time with your team. Then go to the track around 6 or 7 and then at 9 o'clock would be the competition. And then some celebrations or something like that.</i>	Exemplary elite sport narrative	25
	<i>A normal day</i>	Jani (M)	Collage	<i>In my picture collage, there's a big picture of Roger Federer, it mirrors the feelings of success in tennis, that you can do something that you like or that it can be your profession. In the bottom, there's a smaller picture of a dentist. That would be like a daily job, it'd be nice to do that and play tennis or the other way around. In the last picture, there was a family: children, wife and they were on a beach.</i>	Western life script for adulthood (career, family, leisure)
Riina (F)		Verbal story	<i>It's like a normal day, but relaxed so that there's no rush... Going to school,</i>	Not exploring the future	Anytime

			<i>having some nice subjects. Then I would go home and have some spare time, but then have practice anyway later in the evening and that would go well. Then in the evening, I would go back home and then have sauna... and just like a relaxed day.</i>		(near future)
	Alisa (F)	Handwritten account	<i>I would have time to eat a good breakfast and then go to morning training. I could eat lunch and if I had the time it would be with a friend, so I wouldn't have to eat alone. Then go to school or read. And I would then take my dogs out in the woods and there I could think about things and relax. The evening practice would be something that enhances my abilities in judo.</i>	Not exploring the future	Anytime (near future)

Highlights

- We explored student-athletes' future perspectives through visual narratives
- Three types of dream days were holiday, peak performance day, and regular day
- Athletes had a short future timespan
- Dream days focused on having a break can be a sign of overload

ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

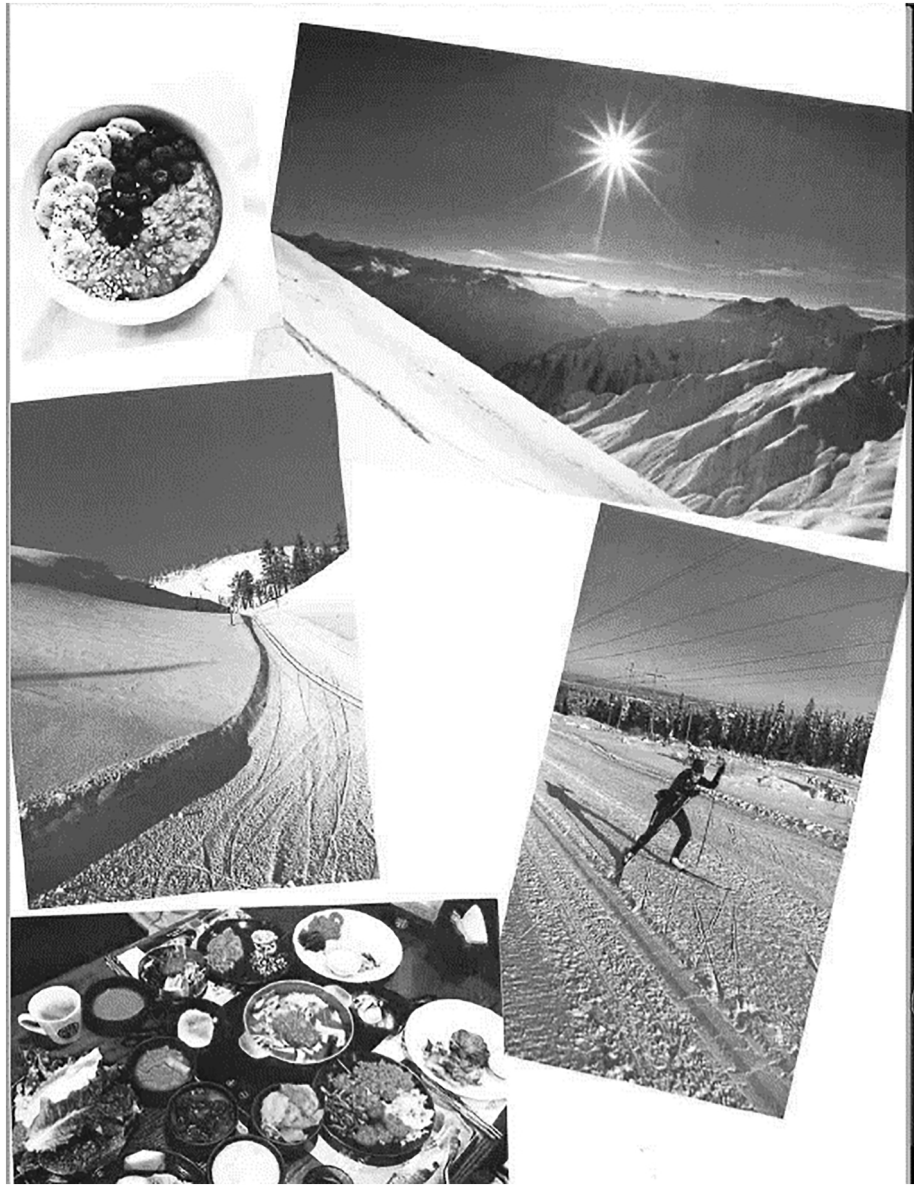


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4