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Ryba, Tatiana V., Ronkainen, Noora J., Douglas, Kitrina and Aunola, Kaisa (2021) Implications of the identity position for dual career construction: gendering the pathways to (dis)continuation. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 53. p. 101844. ISSN 1469-0292

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2020.101844>

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# Implications of the identity position for dual career construction: Gendering the pathways to (Dis)continuation

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Youth sport  
Late adolescence  
Identity development  
Gender  
Life story  
Narrative

## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** To examine how gender functions in the narrative construction of dual career styles, and how these styles impact the (dis)continuation of a dual career pathway.

**Design:** Longitudinal qualitative study.

**Method:** Life story interviews with 18 talented Finnish athletes (10 cis women, 8 cis men) at four points in time – when they averaged 16, 17, 19, and 20 years of age – followed by an integrative narrative-discursive analysis.

**Results:** (a) contrapuntal style was gender-typically female; (b) monophonic style was gender-typically male; and (c) dissonant style was an important pathway to dual career discontinuation through which gender ideologies impacted the emergent adults with differential outcomes. Although all adolescent athletes aspired to construct a dual career pathway into adulthood, less than half (7 of 18) sustained dual career on and after graduation from upper secondary school. The life course and performance master narratives provided gender-specific scripts for life story and identity development.

**Conclusions:** Our findings signpost that dual career discourse practices are organised along the gender binary, which may be fortifying the assumed normalcy of gendered life choices instead of opening up the field of possibilities. To facilitate cultural change in dual career development environments, we urge for the critical examination of socio-cultural constraints on adolescent athletes' choices.

Recognising the challenges of attaining sustainable individual and sports-based development in high performance sport, the European Commission released dual career (i.e., integration of sport with education/work) policy recommendations for the European Union (EU) nations in 2012 (EU guidelines, 2012). The subsequent allocation of grants for sports projects across Europe provided the impetus for research concerning athletes' dual careers and policy development in the member states. In their review of dual career research, Stambulova and Wylleman (2019) identified a number of benefits of dual career, which included individual development, enhanced sports performance and, in the longer term, enhanced life satisfaction.

Research investigating elite athletes' career pathways has indicated that they typically follow one of three trajectories: (a) focusing exclusively on sport; (b) combining sport and education/work while prioritising sports-based development; and (c) constructing a stable dual career pathway. These three pathways, labelled as linear, convergent, and parallel (Torregrosa et al., 2015), are associated with different

psychosocial implications of career transitions (e.g., career ending injury), with only the stable dual career trajectory being found to safeguard athletes' broader personal development, employability, and re-integration into society after careers in elite sport (Barriopedro et al., 2019; López de Subijana et al., 2020). Though research clarifying the psychosocial outcomes of athletes' career behaviour exists, fairly little is known about the developmental curves of a dual career that would explain how the career pathways diverge among elite athletes and the role they play in dual career (dis)continuation. As late adolescence has been identified as a transitional period in which athletes progressing to senior sport are challenged to combine higher levels of competition with other roles in life (Stambulova et al., 2015), it is important to consider how the dual career developmental trajectory during this phase becomes embedded.

Research with talented adolescents transitioning to elite sport has revealed that many experience role strain and exhaustion in their efforts to balance increasing, often contradictory, cultural expectations to excel

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2020.101844>

Received 12 May 2020; Received in revised form 17 October 2020; Accepted 11 November 2020

Available online 25 November 2020

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(Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Elliott et al., 2018; Gledhill & Harwood, 2015; Knight et al., 2018; Kristiansen, 2017; O'Neill et al., 2013; Rothwell et al., 2020; Skrubbeltrang et al., 2016; Sorkkila et al., 2020). Baron-Thiene and Alfermann (2015) reported that 29.6% of dual career adolescents in German elite sport schools dropped out of sport prior to reaching their peak performance. Furthermore, an emerging body of research has identified underlying gender structures that influence athletes' experiences and decisions about their dual careers. For example, although female athletes' motivation for their sport is similar to males, they are more likely to invest into educational and dual career goals and identities (Aunola et al., 2018; Ekengren et al., 2018; Moazami-Goodarzi et al., 2020) as well as to story their lives along multiple cultural narratives (Ekengren et al., 2020; (Ronkainen, Ryba, & Selänne, 2019)). Studies that investigated athletes' dual careers within handball (Ekengren et al., 2018), basketball (Tekavc et al., 2015), and football (Harrison et al., 2020) reported that, unlike their male peers, the majority of elite level female players pursued or were planning to pursue a dual career at the level of higher education, providing further support to the assertion that gendering the life careers of athletes is salient from adolescence to adulthood (Ryba et al., 2015).

Adding to these gendered differences, Baron-Thiene and Alfermann (2015) and Ronkainen, Watkins, and Ryba (2016) reported female athletes having more physical complaints and exhaustion than their male counterparts, with many women receiving little emotional support from their coaches and parents and feeling lonely. These types of experiences partly contributed to the decision by female athletes to withdraw from sport and focus on education, work, and family. Based on the ethnographic study in the specialised classes at Denmark's elite sport schools, Skrubbeltrang et al. (2018) argued that even when there is the intention to support equal opportunities for adolescent athletes to develop a dual career, gender expectations and sport shape an adolescent athlete's future perspective on what career is (im)possible.

Feminists scholars have asserted that this so-called 'gender gap' across the (sub)fields of sport and education is sustained by hierarchical gendered logic of patriarchal societies, whereby identity is inevitably linked to (often binary) meanings of femininity and masculinity (Kavoura et al., 2015; Lappalainen et al., 2013; McGannon & Busanich, 2010; Weedon, 1997). The social and psychological implications of the pervasively gendered life-world for an individual is that presumably neutral identity positions, such as athlete, teacher or coach, are implicitly woven into particular ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. This, in turn, makes the individual either vulnerable or rewarded, contingent on their transgression or compliance with gender ideologies at a given (sub)cultural and historical conjuncture. As the dual career discourse has been mobilised at the intersection of sport and education, each with distinct stereotypical views of high- and low-achieving gendered identities, it seems pertinent to carefully scrutinise the assumed normalcy that, compared to their male peers, female athletes aspire more towards educational and dual career goals (Ryba, 2018).

A recent study examining a discursive construction of subjectivities by female judoka from two demographic cohorts, and these young women's struggles of negotiating the multiple identity positions available to them, indicates that the dual career policy may have been implicated in the contradictory feelings of empowerment and psychosocial distress (Kavoura & Ryba, 2020). Although the younger judoka projected themselves into more ambitious civic selves than their senior counterparts (e.g., doctor vs. nurse), they at the same time lowered their sporting aspirations (e.g., European championships vs. Olympic Games) to cope with the anxiety of (not) living up to the heightening societal expectations of excellence. The notion that a dual career discourse is reconfiguring the gender identity positions that are available for adolescent athletes highlights the importance of exploring this issue to understand the workings of gender in dual career construction and (dis)continuation.

Previously, based on Finland's talented athletes' stories of school and sport, Ryba, Stambulova, Selänne, Aunola, & Nurmi, (2017) delineated

three narrative types of an athlete dual career named *dual career construction styles*. The findings suggested that identity and future orientation, both of which are the major developmental tasks of adolescence and emerging adulthood, constitute the psychosocial content of a dual career style. As Heinämaa (1997) suggested, a personal style is "not a collection of actions but a way [our emphasis] of acting: thinking, writing, dancing, throwing, breathing, reasoning, arguing. It runs through one's whole life like a melody [...]" (p. 27). Inspired by music metaphors, the three distinct styles of dual career construction were categorised as contrapuntal, monophonic, and dissonant. In music, when the left and right hands play different parts, but are in harmony by overlapping, interrupting and supporting each other through the music, it is referred to as contrapuntal or counterpoint. When music is written in a single melodic line without harmonies or melody in counterpoint, it is called monophonic. A dissonant musical sound can be described as jarring, unsettling, or unstable. By analogy, the *contrapuntal* dual career construction style is a style of being and doing dual career within an interdependent configuration of sport and education themes; a *monophonic* style is constructed in a singular professional athletic career life theme; and a *dissonant* career style is clouded with discord within athletic and educational/vocational themes. To contour the dual career styles, the focus was on young people's meaning-making of the self and the future as they strove to construct a sense of personal continuity across time. However, neither the stability of these styles in and after the graduation from upper secondary school nor gender-typed aspects of the dual career construction were examined.

Taken together, the findings reviewed point to the gendered patterns in dual career; however, we know almost nothing about how they develop and relate to (dis)continuation of a dual career after the upper secondary. The life course perspective taken in the current study emphasises temporality, process and contextual change in people's lives, thus, seeking to relate the lived experience of individuals to their developmental processes (Elder & Giele, 2009). Given that late adolescence is the developmental stage wherein constructing gender identity becomes a critical challenge (Erikson, 1968; Fivush, 2010), studying adolescent athletes' evolving life stories opens a possibility to understand gendered influences and processes that exist at both personal and cultural levels with regard to sport and education. Indeed, Hammack (2008) argued that narrative identity "offers a powerful theoretical lens for the study of human development in cultural context" (p. 226).

Gender in this study is regarded as a critical aspect of self, constructed through the process of (dis)identification with cultural norms and expectations about femininity and masculinity in the development of a life story (Fivush & Marin, 2018). From our theoretical standpoint, gender identity is not fixed in concrete expressions of meaning across development, requiring continuous maintenance through imitation and repetition of particular values and practices deemed appropriate in a given context (Weedon, 1997). In our commitment to the multi-layered and incomplete self as a story, we resist naturalising differences between males and females and their life choices. Yet we argue for master narratives being stereotypically gendered and that individuals, therefore, may be reifying the cultural stereotypes in their lived experiences. As life stories are constructed against the gendered cultural and individual histories to embody authentic acts of meaning (Heinämaa, 1997), gender is implicitly linked to dual career practices, identities, and styles. Next we review theoretical tenets of the narrative identity development.

## 1. Narrative identity development

Identity development is regarded as the major psychosocial task of adolescence. In order to create and develop an identity, an individual is required to both explore potentialities and imagine a future (Erikson, 1968; Nurmi, 1991). Developing a future perspective is entwined with narrating one's identity and its development because constructing stories about the future selves involves creating ideas about who we are and what kind of life roles we want to inhabit (McAdams, 2008). As

narratives of the future shape narrators' self-understandings of what is possible or desirable, they are central to young people's career decision-making. When older adolescents are asked about their future goals and hopes, most often they appear to follow culturally accepted responses (Fivush, 2010; Nurmi, 2004) to prioritise their career identities (i.e., education and work).

Contemporary culture provides a set of 'scripts' of what is expected from a young person and these scripts not only guide young people's personal story construction, but also serve a prescriptive function of how a 'good' life should look like (e.g., when one should graduate from school, get married, and begin a career path). Fivush (2010) asserted that cultural scripts differentiate possibilities based on gender (among other sociocultural characteristics) and serve as a lens for evaluating biographical events and making meaning of an experience. Initially, young people develop an understanding of values, meaning, and identity options from their home environment. Later, peers, role models, school and other learning environments play an increasingly important role (Nurmi, 2004). For young people who enjoy sport, the stories shared by famous athletes often become exemplary scripts. Within most sporting communities, there exist sub-cultural stories that inform youth athletes' interpretations of certain events, expectations of themselves, and their general understanding of the shape of a successful life. Thus, 'exemplary life stories' (Spector-Mersel, 2006) provide narrative plots and discursive resources for constructing a self-story.

Among the many stories that may be created, 'master narratives' are those which, by their prevalence, are deemed to reflect the beliefs and values of a given community (Fivush, 2010; Hammack, 2008). Although master narratives are discursive structures, they function as enduring parts of structural marginalisation in a cultural community or society at large (Fivush, 2010; McLean & Syed, 2016). For example, Douglas and Carless (2009) identified three cultural narratives circulating within sport – the performance, discovery, and relational narratives. As narrative scripts these stories provide a plot and template that shape elite athletes' life stories and have different implications for their identities, life choices and psychological health. The authors described a performance narrative as a storyline where "winning, results, and achievements are pre-eminent and link closely to the storyteller's mental well-being, identity, and self-worth" (p. 215). That is, the athlete's self and identity are on the line every time he or she fails. The performance narrative's troubling implications for athletes' health and psychosocial well-being have been well documented in the sport psychology literature (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Douglas & Carless, 2015; McGannon et al., 2019; Ronkainen, Kavoura, & Ryba, 2016).

However, not all athletes' experiences align with master narratives and, to make meaning of these 'unfitting' experiences, they may need to construct or adopt an alternative narrative, which either diverges from or even resists the master narrative (see also Carless & Douglas, 2013). When a person's experiences do not fit with the group's normative projections of the life course, then the identity work is to mend the biographical rupture by making sense of that deviation. For example, in a recent study of elite athlete mother identity, McGannon et al. (2019) explicated the complicated processes of reconfiguring the performance narrative meanings through alternative narrative resources in the cultural sphere which ideals and values construct sport and motherhood as incompatible.

Narrating a life story is a complex social practice involving selection of tellable episodes and reflectively bracketing and organising them into broader themes and storylines. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) contend that adolescents may have limited narrative resources nor enough practice for this task. Although their stories are often small interactions about mundane events, they are important sites for testing out their identities (Bamberg, 2011). Thus, through a life history where individuals share stories across different time frames, there is potential for young athletes to develop and extend their narrative resources as well as 'practice' using them from a particular identity position.

In this study, we applied an integrative narrative-discursive

approach (McLean et al., 2017; Taylor & Littleton, 2006) to understand participants' gender identity positions in both a particular interaction and the wider context of a life narrative. Our aim was to investigate how gender functions in the narrative construction of dual career styles, and how these styles impact the (dis)continuation of a dual career pathway.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Context overview

This study is situated within a broader, longitudinal mixed methods study examining adolescent athletes' dual career trajectories in Finland (Ryba et al., 2016). In addition to multiple interviews with talented athletes ( $n = 18$ ), the larger project involves extensive surveys of youths' ( $n \approx 400$ ) well-being, identity development, motivation, and career construction that forms the backdrop for the interview data on which this article is based.

In Finland's schooling context, the first major educational transition occurs after the completion of compulsory school (grades 1–9) at which 15–16-year-old adolescents need to decide between academically oriented general education (i.e., upper secondary) and vocational education. More than 90% of Finnish youth continue to upper secondary education immediately after completing compulsory schooling, with young women comprising about 58% of that population (Brunila et al., 2011). Although Finland has one of the lowest rates of school dropouts in Europe, Nurmi (2011) reported that 2.1% of upper secondary students discontinue their studies without moving into any educational programs that would lead to a professional certificate or a degree. Similar to the general trends in educational routes across Europe, Finnish women make up the majority of higher education graduates and the gender difference in bachelor's degrees in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries "resemble the divergent career expectations among 15-year-old students, as recorded by PISA, and the gendered life and career choices later on" (OECD Gender Gap in Education, 2016).

Talented athletes often pursue secondary education in elite sports schools which collaborate with Sports Federations and local sports clubs to provide additional training for athletes within school hours. The amount of training per week varies based on the requirements of each sport; for example, the participants in our study reported 15–40 h per week at the first year of upper secondary. The admission to these schools is competitive and potential students must possess above average grades in addition to strong potential in their sport (estimated by points given by Sports Federations). Student-athletes accepted into elite sports upper secondary tend to have a higher grade point average (GPA) in comprehensive school than students in regular upper secondary schools (Aunola et al., 2018). Although the Finnish Olympic Committee (NOC) has recently declared dual career as a core value of the Finnish sport ("Urheilijan kaksoisura – Dual Career", n. d.) and although the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM) does, indeed, act as a facilitator of higher education at the level of secondary education, there is a less established structure in place to support the dual career policy in higher education (Morris et al., 2020). Moreover, Finnish sporting women remain underrepresented in receiving financial support from the NOC and the OKM (Turpeinen et al., 2012); hence, despite increasing numbers of professional athletes in the last decade, only 1.6% have been women (Lämsä, 2018).

### 2.2. Participants

Eighteen athletes (10 cis women, 8 cis men) born after 1996 (the first generation of adolescents under a dual career sports policy) participated in this study. They were purposefully selected in collaboration with the Finnish Sports Academies to include talented athletes who had already begun transitioning into elite sport. At the time of the first interviews,



the participants had recently started their studies in four different elite sports upper secondary schools across Finland. All identified as ethnic Finns from a middle-class background. The athletes were from individual ( $n = 12$ ) and team sports ( $n = 6$ ). Data used in the current study were collected at four points in time – when they averaged 16, 18, 19 and 20 years of age. At the last interview, only one participant still attended the upper secondary school (in conjunction with professional ice hockey). See Table 1 for participants' background data by pseudonym.

### 2.3. Procedure

After obtaining institutional ethics approval, participants were contacted and invited to take part in the study. All gave a written informed consent and agreed to participate in multiple interviews within the four-year project. In Finland, informed consent from the parents or guardians of young people over 15 is not required. The interview data reported here were collected at four time points – at the beginning of Grade 1 (September, Time 1;  $n = 18$ ), at the end of Grade 1 (March, T 2;  $n = 17$ ), in the middle of Grade 3 (January, T 3;  $n = 17$ ) and at the end of Grade 4 (May, T 4;  $n = 16$ ) when the majority of participants graduated from upper secondary school. The interviews were conducted by the first author and a project researcher at Times 1, 2 and 3 and by second author at Time 4, audio-recorded using a digital recording device, transcribed by trained research assistants, and immediately anonymised for storage and analysis. Bilingual participants could choose the language of interviews (i.e., Finnish, English or Russian). The missing interview data (due to athletes being unavailable) were supplemented by the participants' responses to open-ended status questions obtained from surveys at the respective waves of data collection. Over 75 h of transcribed interview data were collected during the overall study.

The aim of the first interview, which lasted on average 35 min, was to get acquainted with the young athletes and to start developing an understanding of their individual histories and present life situations as prospective elite athletes. The interview began with the question, 'Can you tell me your story of becoming an athlete?' To reflect on how the participants construct themselves and other people in telling their experiences, we attempted to map out their relational life-sphere, such as family and friends, as well as vocational interests and anticipation of the future (e.g., Let's take an overall glimpse of your future. What are your biggest dreams and hopes?). The second interview lasted on average 40

min, and aimed at gaining insights into the young peoples' adaptation processes during their first year at upper secondary school, such as changes in living arrangements, daily schedules and interpersonal relationships; the meaning-making strategies about sport and studies; and their overall sense of (dis)satisfaction with the current situation. The follow-up questions were derived from the content of student-athletes' responses and further attempts were made to probe into their dreams and aspirations, and also beliefs about their abilities to manage the tight timetables associated with upper secondary school curriculum and high-performance sport. The third interview, lasting on average 20 min, was designed as a brief follow up on the participants' life course especially with respect to critical moments that have shaped their dual career trajectories (e.g., What kind of important decisions did you have to make? What pressing issues are you facing now?) and future choices (e.g., When do you plan to graduate? What will you do after the graduation?). In the fourth interview, lasting on average 80 min, we used creative non-fiction vignettes as the prompt for reflection and dialogue about the participants' life designing in and through sport. For current purposes, we draw only on the status update in the first 15–20 min of the interviews. As we were interested in how young people acquire self-understandings and establish a narrative orientation to the future, in all interview sessions we attempted to engage them in telling small stories (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) about mundane recent events (e.g., this week, last night) or elaborate on a point they would make in relation to their peers or significant adults within the ongoing conversation. In doing so, we aimed at gaining insights into processes of identity work in the self-constructions of who they are and what they will become with regards to cultural resources available to them.

### 2.4. Narrative-discursive analysis

The interview transcripts were analysed with an integrative narrative-discursive approach, in which a life narrative is understood as both a situated story of self and a more fluid resource for identities in the making. As suggested by Taylor and Littleton (2006), through narrative-discursive analysis, the commonalities of established meanings in participants' biographical events can be explored. In addition, "it can show the identity work through which these available meanings are taken up or resisted and (re)negotiated" (p. 23). The analysis comprises of two iterative tasks – identifying narrative patterns across interviews,

**Table 1**  
Participants' background information by pseudonym.

Pseudonym (Gender)	Sport (HPW <sup>a</sup> at T1)	Pro athlete aspiration (T1)	GPA <sup>b</sup> (T1)	Dual career style <sup>c</sup> (T1)	Dual career athlete <sup>d</sup> (T4)
Vilma (F)	Basketball (≈35)	No	9.86	Contrapuntal	Yes, university athlete
Katri (F)	Swimming (≈25)	Yes	9.50	Contrapuntal	Yes, university athlete
Ulla (F)	Athletics (≈30)	Yes	9.00	Contrapuntal	Yes, full-time athlete + open university
Sanna (F)	Soccer (≈25)	N/A	8.70	Contrapuntal	Yes, full-time athlete + work
Riina (F)	Aesthetic group gymnastics (≈30)	Yes	8.80	Contrapuntal	No, retiring from elite sport
Nea (F)	Judo (≈20)	N/A	8.70	Contrapuntal	No, retired from elite sport
Anni (F)	Judo (≈20)	N/A	8.58	Contrapuntal	No, retired from elite sport
Alisa (F)	Judo (≈17)	Yes	9.10	Contrapuntal	No, retired from elite sport
Hanna (F)	Cross-country skiing (≈16)	Yes	9.85	Monophonic	No, gap year to focus on sport
Päivi (F)	Alpine skiing (≈15)	Yes	9.05	Dissonant	No, retired from elite sport
Timo (M)	Ice hockey (≈30)	Yes	7.80	Monophonic	Yes, pro athlete + upper secondary
Topi (M)	Soccer (≈40)	Yes	8.20	Monophonic	No, retired from pro sport
Jonas (M)	Tennis (≈15)	Yes	8.30	Monophonic	No, full-time athlete
Marko (M)	Artistic gymnastics (≈30)	Yes	8.40	Monophonic	No, full-time athlete
Adam (M)	Artistic gymnastics (≈25)	Yes	7.60	Contrapuntal	Yes, army service + sport
Kimmo (M)	Orienteering on skis (≈25)	Yes	8.90	Contrapuntal	No, retired from elite sport
Tero (M)	Ice hockey (≈35)	Yes	7.80	Contrapuntal	No, pro athlete
Unto (M)	Judo (≈20)	Yes	8.60	Contrapuntal	Yes, army service + sport

Note. HPW = hours per week spent on sport; GPA = grade point average.

<sup>a</sup> HPW are self-reported estimations.

<sup>b</sup> Participants' self-reported GPA on a range of 4 (insufficient) to 10 (excellent) in previous report card.

<sup>c</sup> Classification based on Ryba et al. (2017).

<sup>d</sup> Classification based on Morris et al. (2020).

as well as at different points in the same interview, and studying the use of discursive resources within the context of a particular interview, although below we detail them in a sequential manner.

We first read the transcripts several times to become well versed in the participants' biographical events, made notes, and discussed commonalities and differences of the storied content and form in the author team meetings. Since the stories were gathered over an extensive period of time and some interview passages have been analysed in regard to other research questions (e.g., Ronkainen & Ryba, 2018; Ryba, Stambulova, Selänne, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2017), we were cautious not to impose previous interpretations and rigorously explored textual layers of continuity and change in the same life story. The first author conducted a structural narrative analysis to identify the key plots and types of narratives in the data (Riessman, 2008) with a particular focus on understanding how cultural resources organise participants' experiences to create a life trajectory. A within-case thematic narrative analysis was performed to identify and explore narrative types of dual career construction and moments of tension in participants' stories (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Riessman, 2008).

As a next step, we adopted a discursive approach to narrative to explore how culturally available resources are used to produce the speaker's identity within a particular interaction. In other words, we were interested to understand how individual participants respond to narrative constraints and tensions in the context of the interview (e.g., the constraint of earlier accounts as well as the awareness of occupying a socially unpopular position). According to Reynolds et al. (2007), narrative positioning connects "wider notions of discourses and dominant cultural storylines to the social construction of particular selves" (p. 336). This allowed us to examine fluidity of positioning on the micro level (a small-story iteration) and the macro level (with regards to gender norms) and was particularly fruitful in tracing strategies that were used in the construction of (dis)continuous dual career style (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

Methodologically, the narrative-discursive method balances the notions of 'positioning oneself' and 'being positioned' by recognising an active meaning-maker who can resist and alter canonical scripts while bearing in mind that the narrator can only utilise existing discursive resources which constrain agentic 'becoming' (Fivush & Marin, 2018; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Having analysed the full data set, the first author charted intraindividual stability and change in the participants' dual career styles across the four time points, which effectively showed the outcomes associated with different dual career styles – that is, (dis)continuation of elite sport/education. Throughout the process, the co-authors acted as critical friends to enhance interpretive rigour of the developing themes and narrative types. The deployment of the narrative-discursive method over longitudinal data and the author team's adoption of a critical meta-theoretical lens enhanced our understanding of the gendered pathways to dual career (dis)continuation.

## 2.5. Research rigour and quality

In line with the critical constructivist position that underpins our research, we sought to develop open and caring relationships with the young participants that would allow them to reflect and learn about themselves through the research process. While acknowledging that researchers' positionality inevitably shapes knowledge construction, we were cognisant that some interpretations and explanations can be more trustworthy than others due to being more ontologically plausible and empirically adequate (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2019). Within the overall project, we have employed methodological integrity as the methodological foundation of trustworthiness (Levitt et al., 2017). As we have spent extensive time analysing the dataset with diverse methodologies, we engaged in reflexivity when discussing and contesting our interpretations of the present findings. The results were also subjected to the scrutiny of peers in several conference presentations and research group meetings. In assuming that all knowledge is theory-laden, our

account of the studied phenomena provides a partial and socio-culturally situated theorising (Haraway, 1988).

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Overview of the findings

At the beginning of first grade (Time 1), 17 athletes shaped their life stories either in the contrapuntal or the monophonic styles and expected their lives to follow a dual career pathway through upper secondary: the following extracts from Adam, Marko, Hanna and Riina provide illustrations of typical responses.

Adam: *I think it will be possible to combine sport and school ... [name of athlete removed] has done well as far as I know, so I believe I can do well too;*

Marko: *It's probably going to be tough ... I will try to survive and pass everything, and train well;*

Hanna: *Well, manage it so that I can focus on training and not stress out about school too much, but have a decent high school diploma at the end;*

Riina: *It is more demanding than in a regular school, but it is going well right now and I think it will go well.*

These extracts suggest that the projected identities of both male and female participants aligned with a dual career storyline of valuing school achievements and sport success, at least at the level of upper secondary education. In light of the normativity of secondary education in Finland, this is unsurprising (Brunila et al., 2011; Nurmi, 2011). The extant literature also indicates that upper-secondary-school athletes tend to have higher grades and graduation rate than their non-athlete peers (Aunola et al., 2018; Hwang et al., 2016; Jonker et al., 2009). At Time 4, however, less than 50% (7 of 18) participants were sustaining a dual career. These findings are similar to previous research with high-performing adolescent athletes, which found the dual career to be a demanding developmental task with high individual costs (Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Gledhill & Harwood, 2015; O'Neill et al., 2013; Rothwell et al., 2020; Skrubbyeltrang et al., 2016). Five women and two men withdrew from the elite sport pathway, while three men and one woman ceased education entirely. Alisa and Jonas illustrate the typical reasoning provided by each group.

Alisa: *well the fact that it started affecting like, my education is when I decided to put judo on the backburner [tearing up].*

In comparison, Jonas shrugs when asked about his earlier plans of studying to become a dentist.

Jonas: *I play the tennis card first and then think what I want to do after that. I'll have time to study then, even in my 30s, if that's what I want to do.*

The present study's idiosyncratic findings are summarised in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

A second point of note within our analyses were the distinct differences - in both the contents and the processes of identity development - between adolescent athletes with different dual career construction styles and between young men and women in the contrapuntal style. As presented in Fig. 1, all participants drew on the life course and performance narrative resources to construct and account for their experiences. However, there were differences in the ways in which they negotiated the integration of sport and school into a coherent life story across time. For example, we found an overrepresentation of young women in the contrapuntal style and an overrepresentation of young men in the monophonic style. To us, this suggests that young people are influenced by the gendered expectations that exist within their social and cultural milieu.

Finally, though the dissonant style was the least typical across school years (see Fig. 2), it was an important pathway to dual career

Pseudonym			Career identity positions (what?)		Life themes (why?)	Cultural storylines (how?)
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 4		
<b>Vilma</b>	US college basketball, journalism	US college basketball, study business administration, pro player in EuroLeague <sup>a</sup>	NCAA Division I university <sup>b</sup> , engineering, EuroLeague	NCAA Division I university student-athlete, EuroLeague	-Be a hero -Succeed in life -Travel and experience the world	-Performance narrative <sup>c</sup> -Exemplary DC narrative <sup>d</sup> -Superwoman <sup>e</sup>
<b>Katri</b>	Olympic Games, US college swimming, lawyer	DC concern at the upper secondary level, major upcoming competitions, lawyer	Student-athlete at an American university, gap year to focus on sport, DC in Finland	University student-athlete, preparing to move to US to participate in collegiate athletics	-Competing is fun -Be with friends -Subjective professional athlete career	-Performance narrative -Exemplary DC narrative -Superwoman
<b>Ulla</b>	Olympic Games, healthcare professional	Major upcoming competitions, DC concern at the upper secondary level	Graduate in 3 years, focus on her sport, take courses in open university	Pro athlete, some coursework in open university, university student in the future	-Prove herself -Subjective professional athlete career	-Exemplary elite sport narrative <sup>f</sup> -Education is important for a good life
<b>Sanna</b>	US college soccer, pro athlete	DC concern at the upper secondary level	Graduate, maybe study sport and exercise sciences	Full-time work, club player but doesn't want to be a pro athlete, university student in the future	-To belong (in a team) -Subjective pro athlete career -Sport is a lifestyle	-Performance narrative -Education is important for a good life -Superwoman
<b>Riina</b>	Olympic Games, high school diploma, exercise science profession	Major upcoming competitions; DC concern at the upper secondary level	University, exercise science	<b>Discontinuing elite athlete career</b> having achieved 'everything' in sport, no more sport, new chapter as a sports instructor student in the university of applied sciences	-Gymnastics is a project of youth <sup>h</sup> -Sport is a lifestyle -To have a job in the future	-Exemplary elite sport narrative -Superwoman -Education is important for a good life
<b>Nea</b>	World Championship, doctor or physical therapist	DC concern at the upper secondary level	Graduate ( <b>discontinued elite athletic career</b> )	Recovering from sport burnout, adult education college, full-time work, future studies in the university of applied sciences	-Sport is a lifestyle -Judo community is a second family -Help people	-Performance narrative -Education is important for a good life -Superwoman
<b>Anni</b>	European Championship, doctor, researcher, police officer	University, profession related to sport, European Judo Cups	University to study psychology ( <b>discontinued elite athletic career</b> )	Serious illness, adult education college, part-time work, no sport	-To be with friends -To have a profession and good life	-Performance narrative -Gendered life script <sup>h</sup> of a good life
<b>Alisa</b>	World Championship, medical school	Medical school, rehabilitating from sport injury, taking judo career to the highest level possible	Gap year to study for entrance exams to medical school, get some work experience ( <b>discontinued elite athletic career</b> )	Studying for entrance exams, future university student, sport as a 'serious' hobby (cheerleading, circus, yoga)	-To be the best -A perfect ordinary life	-Performance narrative -Education is important for a good life -Superwoman
<b>Hanna</b>	Olympic Games, professional athlete, coaching, represent Finland on a team	DC concern at the upper secondary level, maybe study exercise science in the university	Gap year to focus on her sport, university to study sport and exercise sciences	Athletic 'hopeful', pro athlete ideal, study biomedical technologies in the future	-To represent Finland -Subjective pro athlete career -Sport is a lifestyle	-Performance narrative -Education is important for a good life
<b>Päivi</b>	World Cup, university, judge/lawyer	DC cynicism, 'failing' as a student and athlete	Graduation ball, business school, preparing to move to the USA ( <b>discontinued elite athletic career</b> )	University student, part-time work, no sport	-To win -To have a successful professional career -See the world	-Performance narrative -Education is important for a good life -Superwoman
<b>Timo</b>	NHL, professional athlete, DC concern at the upper secondary level	DC cynicism, failing school	Professional hockey player ( <b>school dropout</b> )	Professional hockey player, back to school to earn General Upper Secondary School Certificate	-Professional ice hockey career	-Exemplary elite sport narrative of hockey players
<b>Topi</b>	Premier League, professional athlete	Pro soccer player, graduate from school, maybe physiotherapist or coach	Pro soccer player (signed a contract), DC concern at the level of secondary education, study something somewhere later on	<b>Discontinued elite athlete career</b> , open university, part-time work, time to do other things, apply to study law	-Professional career in soccer -To excel -Excited by chasing success	-Exemplary elite sport narrative -Education is important for a good life
<b>Jonas</b>	APT tour, university, professional athlete and/or dentist	Professional tennis player or dentist	Uncertain whether focus on sport or school, dentist in the future	Full time athlete, pro athlete ideal, no plans for studying in the future	-To have a good profession -To be important & loved	-Exemplary elite sport narrative -Gendered life script -Education is important for a good life
<b>Marko</b>	Olympic Games, university, professional athlete or doctor	Olympic Games, DC concern at the upper secondary level	Missing data	Full time athlete, pro athlete ideal, wants to study something interesting in the future	-To be successful -Subjective professional athlete career	-Performance narrative -Education is important for a good life
<b>Adam</b>	Olympic Games, entrepreneur	Major upcoming competitions; DC concern at the upper secondary level	Graduate, military service to focus on sport, business school	Army service + sport, full time athlete	-Subjective professional athlete career -To have a prosperous business career in the future	-Performance narrative -Education is important for a good life
<b>Kimmo</b>	World Championship, university, school-teacher	Graduate with good grades, professional athlete, World Championship	Military service to focus on sport, university studies in business and economics	<b>Discontinued elite athlete career</b> , army service, wants to study in business school	-Personal achievements -Sport is a lifestyle -Explore the world -Self-acceptance	-Exemplary elite sport narrative -Education is important for a good life

**Fig. 1.** Participants' Career Identity Positions, Life Themes, and Cultural Storylines.  
Kirk and Weaver, 2018

Tero	National Hockey League (NHL), professional athlete, entrepreneur (sporting warehouse)	National Hockey League (NHL), professional athlete, entrepreneur	NHL (signed a contract), <b>school dropout</b>	Professional athlete	-Professional career in NHL -Good profession -Really likes ice hockey	-Exemplary story of elite hockey players -Gendered life script -Education is important for a good life
Unto	Olympic Games, university, healthcare professional	Missing data	DC concern at the upper secondary level, military service to focus on sport, later on university studies in exercise science	Full time athlete, army service, no plans to study in the near future	-Judo is a calling (get closer to God) -To succeed in life -Subjective professional athlete career	-Exemplary elite sport narrative -Education is important for a good life

Note. DC = dual career; NCAA = National Collegiate Athletic Association; **bold** = female.

<sup>a</sup> EuroLeague is the top-tier European professional basketball club competition.

<sup>b</sup> NCAA Division I is one of the three NCAA divisions, which is associated with a wider range of opportunities for sport participation in addition to a high academic standard in an American University.

<sup>c</sup> Performance narrative is defined by Douglas and Carless (2009) as a storyline where “winning, results, and achievements are pre-eminent” (p. 215).

<sup>d</sup> With exemplary DC narrative, we refer to the U.S.-based discourse that promises scholarship opportunities for more than 170,000 student-athletes to compete in NCAA sports each year. This discourse has been influencing European discourses of what ‘an ideal’ DC looks like (see also Kirk & Weaver, 2018).

<sup>e</sup> The “superwoman” myth constructs an ideal Finnish woman as a strong and independent actor who can excel simultaneously in multiple life domains such as education, work, family, and volunteering (Lietzén et al., 2015).

<sup>f</sup> Exemplary narratives are culturally exalted stories based on real (or imagined) lives (Spector-Mersel, 2006). Sport sub-cultures have different exemplary narratives of the ‘ideal’ career development trajectory that are based on life stories of current and former top athletes, typically storied in a performance narrative plot.

<sup>g</sup> The normativity of athletic retirement before 30 years of age has been recently challenged by remarkable achievements of elite athlete mothers and/or older athletes; however, these stories are rarely popularised and often centred on white heteronormative privilege.

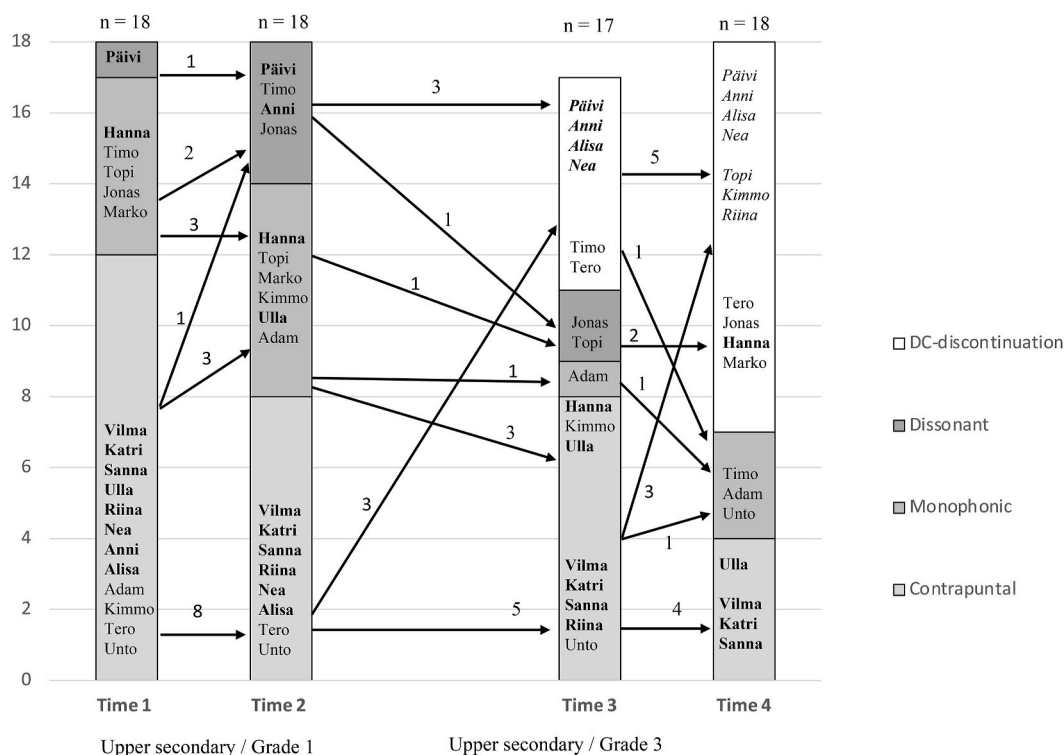
<sup>h</sup> Life script is “a schematised framework shared among members of a culture for representing a typical life common across individuals” (Fivush, 2010, p. 93). Western life scripts for adulthood typically focus on career, family, and personal achievements, but are gendered in prescribing different ‘ideal’ life courses for men and women.

Fig. 1. (continued).

discontinuation, which was associated with differential outcomes for women and men. Due to space limitations, we focus on the final interpretive stage of our analyses, which revealed how the life stories of participants not only accounted for past experiences, but also positioned them within networks of gender norms.

### 3.2. Continuation of the dual careers

Here we present findings and discussion together in order to show the processes of positioning in and gendering of the contrapuntal and the monophonic dual career styles. The identified patterns are shown by drawing on interviews with Kimmo, Jonas, Vilma, and Timo.



Note. DC = dual career; *italics* = athletic career discontinuation; **bold** = female.

Fig. 2. Stabilities and Changes in Participants' Dual Career Styles and Dual Career Discontinuation across Time Points.



### 3.3. Positioning: in line or counter the master narratives

Kimmo illustrates a pattern typical for both male and female athletes in the contrapuntal dual career style. Kimmo is 17, and European Champion (U18) in his sport.

The interviewer attempts to ask an open and non-specified identity positioning question by asking Kimmo, “What kind of schedule do you have?” Such a question allows the participant to centre schooling (with sport as secondary) or sport (with school as secondary).

Kimmo: *During this period, I had three one-week absences from school in a row [due to training camps]. There are also competitions during week-ends, and then I may have to take Friday or Monday off too, depending on where the competition is held.*

In the above, the work that Kimmo’s story achieves is to ‘position’ his athletic identity as primary – he is absent from school because achieving in competition is more important, at least ‘during this period’. The interviewer follows up Kimmo’s response with a more probing question asking, “Are you talking about camps and competitions outside of Finland?” In asking about ‘camps and competitions’ the interviewer – likewise – centres the question on sport. Kimmo’s response, however, shows that he is also dedicated to his education:

K: *Yes. One needs to work independently then and think about where to do schoolwork.*

I: If you are on a training camp, for example, are you able to do your schoolwork?

K: *I usually finish all schoolwork during the first two evenings. Of course, this takes some time, but then I am able to be stress-free for the rest of the camp [and concentrate on sport training]. Then when I return to school, I quickly go over the lessons to review and revise my work.*

In the second part of the extract, Kimmo alerts the interviewer to the fact that competing and maintaining his education is stressful. Yet his strategy to manage stress is to carefully plan to complete his course work ‘during the first two evenings’ and then ‘review and revise’ when he returns to school. A significant part of Kimmo’s ‘identity work’ in the extract above lies in his manoeuvring between the performance and the life course master narratives. At this point in his life, Kimmo aligns his story with two storylines which allows him to maintain both identities.

Jonas illustrates a positioning pattern typical for participants in the monophonic style. Jonas, also 17, has been identified as the most promising junior tennis player in Finland. Unlike Kimmo, Jonas’ story provides an example of narrative fracture, where the story an individual wants to tell (of being an athlete) is threatened and undermined by the actual material circumstances.

J: *I don’t feel like a top athlete, like top athlete ... but on the other hand I feel like that because I practice so much and my goals are far away in the future, but right now I think I am not there yet. Right now I’m still in school so I don’t have the feeling I am the top athlete because I’m forced to go to school. I can’t do things the way I want to. That’s really not the everyday life of a top athlete. But after I finish high school, then I can see how far I can go. Now I have to focus on school so it is hard to do that [sport] in addition.*

I: How’s your school been going?

J: *Badly [laughs] ... my average grades like five and six [on a 4 to 10 scale].*

For Jonas, the barriers to claiming the identity of dual career ‘athlete’ are twofold. Firstly, he needs agency, so he is not ‘forced’ to attend school and can begin ‘living the life’ of the athlete (see Carless & Douglas, 2013). Secondly, while going to school sanctions social approval because schooling is valued, he is ‘doing badly’. Hence, the social and cultural evidence to others is that he is not at the top of sport and is performing poorly in his education. Although, in the short term, the performance script (Douglas & Carless, 2009) that it is schooling that

is holding him back, allows Jani to negotiate his current position, a ‘trouble’ has become visible by revealing internal inconsistencies in his story. Ultimately, to claim the valued identity of ‘athlete’ he has storied, Jonas would be required to leave school and succeed in sport.

### 3.4. Troubling moments: reciting, bending and entrenching gender norms

Taylor and Littleton (2006) conceptualise ‘troubling moments’ as a set of constraints when a storyteller becomes aware of inconsistencies and contradictions between previous and new identity positionings. This typically happens when facing uncertainty or when a new experience creates a fracture in the storyline. As the authors explain (p. 26):

This is not to say that identity is, or can be, wholly coherent and integrated. There are inevitably differences and disjunctions, for example who I am and who I have been, and between who I am in different roles and contexts. Some inconsistencies are tolerable.

However, to be ‘believed’ some deviations require explanation or repair (Fivush, 2010; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). In the following we show how young people responded to existential uncertainty in their life projects, which provides an analytical opening for examining broader understandings in the participants’ social and cultural context.

To exemplify a contrapuntal pattern among male athletes, we again draw on Kimmo’s interview. In response to increasing dual career demands, Kimmo aligns with an accessible story script circulated in his sport to resolve tensions between athletic and post upper-secondary-school careers.

Kimmo: *At [Time 1], I was thinking of teaching, but another option would be to work in the army ... that would be good for my sport. There are many athletes who work in the army. So they can do their morning training, then work about 4-5 h and eat there, and then do another training. I’m not sure whether they sleep in barracks or at home.*

Above, Kimmo centres his identity in sport and looks for ways to sustain this identity. Given that military service is compulsory for men in Finland, his choice of potential options for a dual career is a gendered role that carries social value for men. Although Kimmo’s identity work has shown a high level of exploration over time, constructing his story along the contours of the masculine master narratives can be seen as reciting the gender norms.

A contrapuntal pattern among female athletes is illustrated by extracts from an interview with Vilma, a high achiever in both basketball and education. Vilma is one of three participants (see Fig. 2) who sustained the contrapuntal style through upper secondary and after graduation by doing intensive identity work of negotiating, resisting, and bending the gendered scripts to construct her life story. At Time 2 she said.

Vilma: *I’ve always had this thought that I would go to a university in the USA, but maybe I would like to be a pro too ... my main goal has always been like first university there [USA] because after that, if I want and train hard, I can go to Spain to play as a professional.*

Above Vilma shows the seeds to maintaining her dual career post upper secondary by imagining the potential for both higher education at a university and professional sport. At Time 3, Vilma sees herself as a successful professional woman after her athletic career and does not want to put her education on hold – she wants to ‘have it all’.

V: *Because that is the thing, I want to do it while I play basketball. I want to go to an American uni and get my Bachelor’s degree, but when I come back I want to do the Master’s degree too, like right away, not to wait until my career*

is over and then do it. But then [sighs] ... I don't know of any player who has done it.

I: Right

V: And it's okay, I totally understand that after you've done the bachelor's, you play as a pro and then do the master's. That's one way of doing it and it's okay, no problem. But I don't want to do it that way. Because when I stop playing, I want to be able to ... already have the degree. Then I can get a job.

Vilma's extracts reveal how some young sporting women are able to resist the tendency to 'narrow' identity positions in a performance narrative of elite sport (Douglas & Carless, 2009, 2015) while drawing on the very same discursive resources to construct her story within the performance life narrative as 'superwoman' who can succeed at everything (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Lietzén et al., 2015). The myth (unattainable ideal) of a Finnish superwoman (Lietzén et al., 2015) has likely provided cultural meaning-making resources for female participants' legitimization of their investment in schooling that would secure their future position in society. The recent expansion of new femininities (e.g., pretty and powerful) and a growing interest in sport by women, may have extended the 'superwoman' ideal also to sport as a site of self-construction (Azzarito, 2010). Although without a narrative script to follow, "I don't know of any player who has done it", the 'superwoman' script is currently serving Vilma well as she maintains her dual career and imagines her future roles and identities.

However, the 'superwoman' ideal is constructed within the patriarchal discourse where the position of (Finnish) women is culturally rooted in "a balanced totality" of being perfect mothers, earning one's own living, and being active citizens (Lietzén et al., 2015). As shown earlier, Vilma is determined to pass through the life course stages 'on time' without allowing herself any margin for completing education and professional self-development. With the increased proportion of women in general education across Europe, the 'feminisation' of education in media and public discourses has become a recurrent theme (Brunila et al., 2011). Mapping this onto the historical struggle of sporting girls and women to gain recognition for their athletic abilities and to access professional sport, we would argue that young women's performance of the contrapuntal dual career style allows them to reconcile the contradictory societal mandates. As such, Vilma's compliance with the normative life script as 'superwoman' simultaneously permits her to bend the gender norms of storying herself as a professional athlete.

Finally, a monophonic pattern is illustrated by Timo, aged 19, a talented ice hockey player who has been dreaming about NHL 'all his life'. Timo, like many participants in this group, likes school as a social place as opposed to it being a way to get on in life. In his words, *here I got many friends and it would not feel like the right choice not to come. Like you don't know what to do in the middle of the day ... it's a bit boring to stay at home doing nothing.*

However, Timo struggles to engage with schoolwork. For (Finnish) men, stories about careers in ice hockey proliferate and are easy for a young person to appropriate. In the following extract, Timo's story provides an example of how his future perspective has been shaped by understandings which prevail in the elite ice hockey culture.

T: Well um, in five to ten years, I hopefully still play ice hockey. Hopefully playing on as high of a level as possible, in the world's most, um, most competitive league, but what's then ... in 15–20 years, then um, I wouldn't be playing hockey anymore actually, so

I: Yeah

T: What is it then, um, probably I'd live in Finland and um, then, I'd just enjoy doing something else after that. I can't say what that else would be, um, something else that I'd like to do, but

I: Yeah

T: Probably I'd have a family and, um, with whom I could spend time and they'd live here [in Finland], so

I: Yeah

T: Something along those lines but, um, what type of work I'd be doing then, after my career [in ice hockey], if I were working, um, that I honestly don't know.

Although Timo's futuring lacks specific detail, it takes a recognisable narrative structure of a typical successful male athlete's story. Timo's exclusive athletic identity aligned with the hypermasculine ice hockey culture was substantiated by his nominating Teemu Selänne, a Finnish ice hockey legend and hegemonic masculinity icon, as his role model (see Ronkainen et al., 2019). Narrative researchers have noted that achievement stories rarely explore alternative self-understandings and that adolescent men's life stories constructed along the normative gendered script are often short in duration because they simply recite the stories that are most often shared (that of career first, then family, and at some time, retirement) (Fivush, Bohanek, Zaman, & Grapin, 2012; McLean et al., 2017). By storying himself within the masculine master narrative plot, Timo arguably is entrenching the gender norms in his experiences.

As shown in this section, adolescent athletes constructed a self-story by drawing on available narrative scripts which maintained their dual careers within the support structure of elite sport schools. The troubling moments in identity work revealed the narrative tensions of leading a life of dual-career athlete which participants had mended with different discursive resources, based on gender and the career construction style. The extracts from interviews with Kimmo and Vilma demonstrated patterns typical for athletes in the contrapuntal dual career style while Jonas and Timo illustrated patterns associated with the monophonic style.

### 3.5. The discontinuation of dual careers

According to Taylor and Littleton (2006), repairing identity trouble is not a straightforward act, but rather a complex process of gradual and partial bending of existing gendered scripts that also shift an individual's narrative positioning and orientation to the future. This is the work required of adolescent athletes to maintain their dual career pathways. However, if and when personal crisis (illustrated in the forthcoming passage) fractured the dual career narrative script, participants were called to repair the damage by reducing the widening fracture between how life was lived and how life was storied (Douglas & Carless, 2015; McLeod, 1997). Thus, a story about 'sport and education incompatibility' became a 'workable' pathway forward to dual career discontinuation.

For participants with a dissonance in maintaining dual career narratives, we observed differences in the ways male and female athletes attempted to repair the fracture. Recall that adolescent women were overrepresented in the contrapuntal and adolescent men in the monophonic dual career construction style. This means that the participants had different interpretive resources at their disposal for constructing narratives of a possible future. While young men polarised incompatibility as either 'be good at sport or be good at school', young women engaged in a complex integration of narrative fragments and storylines to create a pathway away from 'having it all'.

Examples of these differences are illustrated in the following two extracts from Päivi, a female Alpine skier, and Timo, the male ice hockey player who was featured earlier. Both extracts are from Time 3.

Päivi: My problem for the past few years has been, like hitting my head against the wall, you know, trying to make myself better and coming short again ... it made my decision clearer. I realised I had to take care of myself. And school was another thing that affected my decision [to withdraw from sport]. Because now we have those finals

[matriculation exams] coming up and my grades had come down, so I had to study more.

Timo: And of course, I've had to think a bit, do I, um, intend to take care of my upper secondary studies or, um, am I going to drop out? That [decision] I've had to ponder about quite a lot, but, um, that, I haven't decided yet. I probably do not have to decide yet whether I'm going to finish it [school] or throw in the gloves, that I'd say that I can study when I'm personally interested in that studying. It makes no sense what-so-ever that I try to do it if it doesn't interest me at all, because, if I come home from practice and it's that sort of a thing that starts stressing me out, then it makes no sense at all ... I'm not interested. [...] yeah, I don't have to rush in deciding yet like this moment, I can do them [credits] when, when I feel like it.

In Päivi's case, the bar she measured herself against was set high through three integrated strands: a successful family, her own performance history, and the elite sport development environment. Her daily lived experience of 'coming short' does not align with the performance narrative of elite sport, but neither does it align with 'superwoman' who has it all. Reflecting on the first 2 years at the upper secondary, Päivi storied them as the most horrible time in her life - when her grades dropped, her social time with friends was severely reduced, and she cried at every practice session. After sustaining an injury in the second grade of upper secondary, her dreams of skiing at the World Cup were 'falling to pieces' and Päivi withdrew from sport.

In contrast, for male participants, the strategy was to calibrate their life story against the performance narrative where a masculine form and structure facilitated coherence with a (male) gendered life script. As previously stated, to us, the master narratives seem to be innately gendered by disseminating gender-specific scripts for both events as well as the timing of events (Fivush & Marin, 2018). This was particularly evident in the amount of emphasis on and temporal flexibility in the sequencing of future events. Hence the scripts utilised by male participants were more malleable than those available to female participants, such that young men were supported into developing multiple futures and having 'time' to 'work out' what they want to study/do after the elite sport while focusing on their sport now (cf. McGannon et al., 2018; Ronkainen, Watkins, & Ryba, 2016). Although the gendered script enables Timo's strategy "not to decide now", the performance narrative plot of his self-story has steered him toward disengaging from schooling practices and education pathway.

To sum up, a dissonant style was an important pathway to dual career discontinuation through which gender ideologies impacted the emergent adults with differential outcomes. Since a life story aligned with master narratives appears easier to narrate and engender (Fivush & Marin, 2018; McLean & Syed, 2016), the dual career narrative fracture resulted in reifying gender norms in the lived experiences of the adolescent athletes. Hence, as illustrated by Päivi, the female participants ( $n = 5$ ), who no longer could make sense of their experiences through the 'superwoman' ideal, withdrew from sport to realign their stories with the script of a 'good life' for women. The male participants ( $n = 4$ ), as illustrated by Timo, resolved the incompatibility tension between sport and education by narrowing their identity positions in the performance narrative and dropping out (permanently or temporarily) from education. To substantiate this further, although seven out of eight male athletes in our study storied themselves in the 'education is important for a good life' storyline, none of them continued their dual career to higher education. For additional insights into the young people's struggles of being (how life was lived) and becoming (how life was storied), please refer to Fig. 1.

In conclusion, the results of the current study advance the theoretical understanding of dual career development among talented and transitioning to elite adolescent athletes. Our findings show that participants' stories were largely organised along gendered contours of the life course that promoted differently the proper ways to be a successful athlete for young men and women. While the dominant performance

narrative supported male participants' identity construction, we see 'superwoman' providing a better interpretive frame for understanding female participants' self-stories. The gendered nature of the master narratives may explain why the monophonic style was gender-typically male and the contrapuntal style was gender-typically female. Furthermore, studying the outcomes associated with each dual career construction style provided insights into the personal and the cultural aspects that influence the stability or change in identity positions over time. Our findings resonate with the findings by Torregrosa et al. (2015) that dual careers organised in contrapuntal and monophonic styles (i.e., parallel or convergent trajectories found in Spanish Olympic athletes) are viable transition pathways to adulthood. However, when there is a lack of structures facilitating systemic integration of high-performance sport with higher education, contrapuntal athletes may be vulnerable to discontinuing their athletic careers while monophonic athletes are likely to withdraw from education (cf. Moazami-Goodarzi et al., 2020; Skrubbeltrang et al., 2018).

The longitudinal approach has also begun to tease out how hegemonic gender scripts infuse dual career policy. While our study was not designed to assess meanings encoded by policymakers, based on our findings we can infer about their impact on stakeholders. In this regard, we would argue that the dual career meanings are constructed on normalising dominant masculinities - for example, by taking for granted that athlete identity is storied in the masculine performance narrative. Although female athletes are often used as the 'face' of dual career promotion, it does little to deconstruct the embedded (heteronormative) masculinisation of sports institutions but to transmit demanding expectations on high-achieving women. Hence when seeded in practices, the current political agenda may limit female athletes' life choices by holding them to unattainable ideals. Such naturalistic generalisability (Smith, 2018) is useful for helping athletes, their families, support personnel, as well as policymakers to recognise and address differential and shared effects of dual career, although we would caution from essentialising differences between women and men.

### 3.6. Limitations

The study's novel findings should be interpreted within an understanding of the emergent nature of experience. Across the different time points, participants experienced a variety of life events, including sport injury, illness, performance stagnation, (dis)empowering coaching or family pressure/support, that may have influenced their decisions about their dual career. Ability to access a dual career development environment after upper secondary (e.g., sport friendly universities, defense forces programs, etc.) was an additional factor that influenced participants' career decisions. Since the focus of our study was on understanding the ways in which gendered scripts provide a plot and narrative template for developing a dual career identity, we did not examine how the aforementioned life events were shaping a life story. Further studies are needed to investigate how adolescents and emergent adults make sense of critical life events vis-à-vis gender narratives underpinning everyday practices in dual career development communities. Another limitation is that adolescent stories are 'small' - that is, situational, shifting, and tentative (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008); so are our inferences about what kind of 'big' story participants were developing. In regard to the latter, there were also differences in data quality among the participants as it is widely known that individuals differ in narrativity, introspection, as well as willingness to extensively share stories about their lives. However, by gathering interview data across several time points and utilising the narrative-discursive method, we were able to map narrative structures underpinning 'one-off' situated stories and to develop analytic insights into how gendered scripts become realised in youth athletes' dual careers.



### 3.7. Practice implications and future research directions

Our findings have important implications for supporting adolescent athletes in making meaning of their dual career practices, experiences, and identities. Specifically, the current study shows that interventions are needed to broaden youth athletes' narrative-discursive resources. Especially important are those that allow individuals to deviate from traditional gendered expectations. The dangers of 'feminisation' of dual career, as well as instrumentalist discourses of education (something to 'fall' back on after failing in sport), have led to a cultural reservoir devoid of stories where education is empowering, liberating, and integral to a life plan. As sport is dominated by a hegemonically masculine narrative, female athletes have few options to story their sport experiences and are seemingly in lack of cultural resources that would support mature careers of women along multiple storylines. Including a variety of role models who have resisted the master narratives, as well as exploratory activities to identify different ways of 'becoming' in career interventions, would be some of the practical ways of supporting youth athletes in developing meaningful engagement with dual careers. Moreover, although dual career policies in Europe have resulted in augmented institutional support than enables more flexibility in the combination of schoolwork and sport, it is essential to examine the wide range of socio-cultural constraints on adolescents' choices. By endorsing an 'up to me' attitude in managing dual careers, the rhetoric of individual responsibility masks structural marginalisation in elite development environments in which certain identities are granted/denied access to specific experiences that promote future options. Our findings signpost that dual career discourse practices are organised along the gender binary, which may be fortifying the assumed normalcy of gendered life choices instead of opening up the field of possibilities. As gender identity is inextricably entwined with sexuality and sexual identity formation, critical research is urgently needed that would destabilise dichotomous thinking about athletes' identities, facilitating the culture of change in dual career development environments.

### 4. Declaration of conflicts of interest

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

This study was funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (grant number OKM/13/626/2015; OKM/42/626/2016; OKM/39/626/2017) and the European Commission (grant number 792172). We thank all of the study participants for sharing their stories; Dr Harri Selänne, who was instrumental in data collection, for his support and insightful comments; Marija Riba for editing; and our research assistants: Natalia Korhonen, Sanna Niemi, Sonja Into, and Anniina Selänne. Thank you also to the anonymous reviewers for critique and encouragement in peer review process.

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