

Talent stories in youth sports

Discursively shared narratives of success

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Success stories are a frequently investigated genre of shared cultural narratives. This paper will pay particular attention to success stories in sports and investigate how young participants in selection camps in soccer and hockey are using a set of shared narratives in order to produce their personal stories of success. By looking at narratives-in-interaction in this specific context, these interviews are investigated as a narrative genre. The analysis shows how a set of shared narratives are used in storylines in order to legitimize the personal story of success and how a number of dilemmatic spaces are addressed. This study shows how personal success stories are intimately tied to “discursively shared narratives” and how this context constitutes a specific narrative framework.

Keywords: success-stories, talents in sport, talent selection, culturally shared narratives, narrative genre, discursively shared narratives

Introduction

Only 17 years old and expected to be the next star in Swedish track and field. What is really the secret of Iréne Ekelund? Until now, she has “lived on her talent”, and this has taken her far. Outstanding in Sweden and a top name internationally. Now she has changed coach and club. The idea is that this will make her ready for the next step – to become a world star. (Candert, Aulin, & Widman, 2016)

Success stories or heroic tales are a frequently investigated genre of culturally shared narratives in areas such as literature (Propp, 1998), journalism (Lule, 2001) and, not in the least, sports (Dahlén, 2008; Hargreaves, 2000; Hellström, 2014; Williams, 1994). There are few other areas, if any that appear to have such an extensive need for personal success stories – that is, hearing the athlete tell us about the game at half-time or provide personal reflections about a recently completed race. However, this personal story is not produced within a societal vacuum; they are a part and

product of its context. The trajectories for a coherent personal story are limited and specific storylines are repeated as reinscriptions with certain dramaturgical characteristics and specific rhetorical building blocks. A personal story of success is both a contextually specific narrative and a culturally shared narrative. These shared narratives serve as a rhetorical resource when new personal stories are to be told, and contextual narratives are built upon shared cultural narratives (Hoebeke, Deprez, & Raeymaeckers, 2011). This paper will pay particular attention to shared narrative in sports – more specifically success stories as they are employed by young talent in selection camps for Swedish youth national teams.

From culturally shared to discursively shared narratives

Cultural narratives are often explained as shared stories within a society and serve as important guides to cultural learning (Watkins-Goffman, 2006). Along similar lines, culturally shared narratives function as a means to understand the moral and normative framework that surrounds us. Furthermore, elements of these narratives are recruited in the construction of personal stories and in the production of social identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). By considering the cultural context of personal narratives, Phoenix (2008) argues that such narratives can help us to recognize how participants draw upon broader cultural narratives.

In the media discourse, attention is often directed towards the understanding of individuals through the analysis of their narrative statements (Douglas & Carless, 2015). Success stories are, of course, used to support a dream of success, but they also serve as a symbol for societal values and cultural morals. Furthermore, these narratives have not only been regarded as having a certain structure; they also function as storehouses for shared knowledge and beliefs as an essential source of cultural learning (Nelson, 2007). Therefore, these shared narratives are important tools for making sense of the discourses concerning sports, and moreover they serve as a framework for specific ways of narrating sporting success. However, studies that aim to identify culturally shared narratives have been criticized for approaching stories as monolithic and static, when instead these often familiar and established narratives are heterogeneous, contradictory and constructed as discursively specific (Page, Harper, & Frobenius, 2013). Moreover, researchers have argued for a small story-approach as well suited for studying the processes of co-constructing social identity in every day interaction (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Esteban-Guitart, 2012). These approaches have largely contributed to the knowledge of identity construction beyond the narrative prototype. In order to analyze personal narratives of identity, a contextualized understanding and a contextual analysis of stories as discursively situated practices, have been proposed (Aronsson, 2015).

The “personal” in these narratives does not mean that the speakers are revealing a more authentic or true story of self. When constructing a self as a character in a story within this genre of interaction, this requires additional rhetoric work in order to be understood in the right way (Bamberg, 2004). This additional rhetoric work makes it a “personal narrative”. Personal stories are not only stories that reproduce the moral beliefs and values of a society; they are a situated narrative practice, a narrative genre (De Fina, 2009). However, personal stories are culturally constrained and, whether fictional or non-fictional, they are agreed upon by the members and thereby become self-evident and true (Barthes, 1983). The personal story requires the use of cultural resources, such as shared narratives that work within a discursive framework, and the story enables a specific set of accepted storylines. In this paper, I argue that the shared narratives are specific within this discursive practice (rather than culturally specific) and produce and reproduce a specific set of discursively shared narratives. These shared stories are specific within the discourse of sport, and in particular in a discursive practice such as the talent selection camp. This practice as a narrative genre produces and reproduces a specific set of discursively shared stories. Therefore, the use of *discursively shared narratives* will be used in this text.

Discursively shared narratives in sport

MacIntyre (1981) emphasizes that the self as a concept *is* narrative, and therefore, narratives are essential in order to understand and analyze identity work in this genre of interaction. There are many situations where people want to, or are expected to, talk about themselves. This can occur across contexts like in social media, in performance appraisals, or in interviews to name only a few. Holstein and Gulbriun (1995) emphasize that we do not only live in a storytelling society, we live in an interviewing society. Interviews are an everyday practice and this applies especially in competitive sports, as a key element in the production of personal success stories (File, 2015). A central narrative in sports involves reaching success in a high-risk discourse and how to overcome setbacks and develop through a fighting spirit, hard work and extraordinary dedication (Baker, Safai, & Fraser-Thomas, 2015). The story of success is not only about extraordinary talent; it is also about handling adversity. One often highlighted feature is how a talent identity involves “mental skills” or “mental factors” (Baker, Cogley, & Schorer, 2011; Meylan, Cronin, Oliver, & Hughes, 2010; Saeter, 2014). Rhetorical concepts such as “game intelligence”, “mental maturity”, “being a winner” or having “a winners-head” are repeated to illustrate this. Furthermore, self-reflection, hard work and being highly motivated are underscored as key factors, and by using “facts” and “objective claims”, the act

of decision and judgment appears as if it were a technical mechanism that can be used as a narrative resource (Billig, 1996).

Hargreaves (2000) claims that a culture is remembered by its heroes where the sporting hero becomes a symbol of cultural values which serves as a moral role model and national symbol in modern western societies. Elite athletes are easily transformed into heroes in popular culture, and these stories are well known, easily recognizable and frequently reproduced in the media. However, an increasing intrusion of the media in the personal lives of athletes is confusing this traditional image (File, 2015). Moreover, the sporting-hero-narrative needs to balance a dilemmatic space of being a self-confident and yet humble team player. Hellström (2014) addresses these dilemmatic characteristics in his study of sport heroes in the media discourse in Sweden during the 2000s. He also shows how team loyalty, humility and honesty are key features that are needed in order to obtain hero status while simultaneously being idiosyncratic, headstrong and individualistic. Furthermore, the sporting hero is often represented as hard working, moderate and non-indulgent in luxury or self-promotion. Moreover, being a subject under development and showcasing learning potential is a highly marketable position in a school discourse (Fejes, 2006) and, as will be shown in this paper, in this narrative genre. Andrews and Jackson (2001) underline the specificity of the success story in sports as a narrative that emphasizes success accessed through hard work. Furthermore, they consider this narrative promise of “success through hard work” to fit into a neoliberal discourse of Western society today that strengthens this shared meritocratic narrative. Benedict (1997) has highlighted a shift in the credentials of heroism: from a self-confident, brave maverick, to a self-reflecting and modest team player with social skills. At the same time, “the confident ego” is a repeated storyline that emphasizes self-centeredness as a prerequisite for success in a competitive neoliberal sporting society, including in team sports. This narrative is transgressing a traditional genre norm where one’s own talent is downplayed and the role of the teammates and coaches are highlighted. File (2015) emphasizes that presenting oneself, as an ordinary, authentic person is desirable within this genre. Accordingly, there are many historical examples of ego-focused-stories. Two examples are the American boxer Cassius Clay when he stated that “I am the greatest of all times” (Hauser, 1991) or the Argentinian soccer player Diego Maradona declaring, “I have a god sent gift” (Maradona, 2005). However, as File (2015) highlights, these self-assured-narratives are historically rare exceptions and not common within the genre. Cameron (2000) underscores how this “anything-but-ordinary-narrative” can only be viable from an underdog position and not from a privileged position. When the Swedish footballer Zlatan Ibrahimović, gave rise to a new verb in French dictionaries, *zlataner*, it echoed in the international press (Le Huffington Post, 2012). The verb meaning “to dominate” or “to cope with force” was intensively debated

internationally. In Sweden, the discussion lifted a new sporting ideal characterized by self-confidence and a cocky attitude (Sjögren, 2012). In order to explain this attitude, Ibrahimović's background marked by a difficult home condition and distrust from his surroundings, are key elements in the production of his media identity as "a confident ego" (Lagercrantz, 2013). In the media, this attitude is attributed to a new generation of players from a different sporting tradition, although these players have their entire sporting background within the Swedish sports education system. This attitude as narrative resource is also used by the athletes, as when Zlatan compared himself to a Ferrari among Fiats (Grossekathöfer & Moreno, 2013, Oct 2), or "in typically 'Zlatan-fashion'" announced his retirement from Paris SG by emphasizing that he "came like a king and would leave like a legend" (Davies 2016, May 13). This "super-confident-narrative" becomes a new familiar narrative portrayal of the sports star.

This paper will show how different shared narratives of success are represented and discursively reconstructed in personal storylines within a specific site of engagement: selection camps. Discursively shared narratives are often used in order to legitimize specific actions, and are put forth as providing support or as an evaluation of certain behaviors (Georgakopoulou, 2007). However, stories about the self often involve dilemmatic spaces that need to be handled (Bamberg, 2012). One such dilemma here deals with agency in terms of "having" (as an innate capacity) or "receiving" (accessed through hard work). The degree of agency is an important part of personal narratives concerning success or failure. Whereas success is often highly agentive, failure tends to have low agency. In this paper, the dilemmatic space of agency is treated in a rather disparate way.

Data and analytic approach

This paper examines a collection of stories about how it is that players have been selected and brought into final selection camps for the youth national teams in three large team sports in Sweden: ice hockey, floorball and soccer. This high stakes context situates the interaction in a specific frame of time and space during a few days of final selection. In order to identify and analyze the types of stories the participants use, a thematic content analysis was initially made (Kohler Riessman, 2008). Repeated topics or storylines were analyzed with regard to shared discursive narratives and thematically structured. In this study, the concept of storyline is used to describe narrative elements of a story. The analyses are focusing on these specific storylines and how they are recurrently used and build on a number of different shared discursive stories. The recurrent storylines are investigated by analyzing how rhetorical devices were used to produce a coherent and personal success-story.

For instance, certain categories of people were entitled to make trustworthy claims and could be used to give credence to a personal storyline (Potter, 1996). A speaker could rhetorically handle having self-interest in a specific story, in order to build legitimacy for a statement by demonstrating their own, or others', insight into apparent stakes with an utterance. This self-interest could be mitigated and thus, be part of building credibility. Furthermore, by using speech acts from a legitimate category, reported speech are re-contextualizing storylines and can be used to access other speakers' legitimacy (Svahn, 2016). Moreover, reported speech is closely linked to assessment, and therefore a viable resource for stance taking in interview interaction. As will be shown in this paper, managing stake and using reported speech are both necessary and productive rhetoric elements in personal storylines of success.

The corpus of data includes 53 audio-recorded interviews with players, which amounts to a total of six hours of recorded material. The data were coded, translated from Swedish to English and transcribed by the author. Excerpts in the finding-section were chosen as archetypal storylines to illustrate each narrative. The author has participated throughout the selection camps and interviews have been carried out during the pauses between training sessions or matches. The questions were thematically arranged according to different subject areas, such as the participants' personal road to the try-outs, the upcoming process of selection and the requirements in order to be selected. The interviews started with a question where the participants were asked to describe how they went from starting their sport career to the point where "we are sitting here today". This type of question, often typical of life history research, was aimed at allowing a degree of autonomy for the participants to raise events and issues that they expressed as important (Douglas & Carless, 2015). The majority of participants have participated in a number of regional selection processes during at least the last year. The players are used to talking about themselves, their goals and their characteristics in relation to their sport, and this is not a new experience but rather an integral part of the selection procedure. This study follows the Swedish Research Council's guidelines for research practice within the humanities and social sciences with respect to information, anonymity, archiving and dissemination. All participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study, and all names and clubs have been anonymized.

Findings

Rather than focusing on the stories the interviewees tell, the focus of the analyses is to investigate the different storylines and rhetoric elements that are used to construct personal story of success. In order to make personal narratives understandable and

recognizable to others they need to build on several discursively shared narratives within a discourse of sport. As we will see here, the discursively shared stories are important tools in storylines of sporting prosperity. During the interviews, specific storylines are emphasized and repeated by players, such as the importance of “having the right character” and “being a team-player”. This potential dilemma between appearing as an outstanding individual and at the same time being benefitting of the collective makes a dilemmatic space that needs to be balanced. A recurrently repeated organizational narrative in Sweden is underlining “a typical Swedish story of success”, emphasizing team spirit and the collective as of greater importance than the individual (SSC, 2009). However, this archetypical narrative appears in team sports worldwide (Urstadt, 2006; Williams, 1994). In tandem, the media story of a new type of player, “the ego in team sports,” is also a repeated storyline and a rhetorical figure that the participants relate to. In this section, they are illustrated by narrative examples of archetypical storylines displayed in the interaction. The material shows four types of narratives: (1) the humble story, (2) the hard work-story, (3) the natural talent-story, and, (4) the Zlatan-story.

The humble story

In this storyline the players emphasize their surprise, or the unexpectedness of being selected, and that they did not believe this would happen. The process of selection has lasted over a year and whether this can come as a surprise cannot be assessed, but this is nevertheless a viable narrative resource. This narrative is characterized by a downgrading insight or agency and in particular balance the own agency in relation to the collective. Complementary to previous research on success narratives as highly agentive (see e.g. Bamberg, 2012), in this context, success can also be displayed as having low agency. One storyline is navigating towards the ideal of modesty or a narrative figure of “the humble team-player” (Hellström, 2014). However, it must be made clear that the selection is conducted on adequate grounds. The storylines often involve invoking other people’s statements, such as coaches and teammates, who have clarified and legitimized the selection. This then serves as an indicator, a form of category entitlement by reported speech, in order to legitimize being chosen (Potter, 1996). Certain entitled categories, as in the following excerpt from coaches and teammates, are used to make particular knowledge claims, and their accounts are considered more authoritative than those of others are. Here the coaches are a reliable source within the category of experts and are therefore entitled to declare who is a talent. Furthermore, when somebody categorizes you as talented, this can be undermined by the (recruited) speaker’s potential interest. For example, the role of the coach is to build self-esteem by giving positive

feedback; they have a stake in this talent claim. By using categories such as the opponent's coach or parents of the opposing teams, this can be handled. Furthermore, using objective claims and facts – such as being awarded a prize as the best player in a tournament, being the top goal scorer or, of course, being selected for representative teams – serves as proof (Billig, 1996). As described earlier, being selected for the team is not solely about being the best player at a given position; it is also about being a team player. Recurring elements during the camps emphasize being humble and not “float[ing] away”. Even if one is considered or deemed to be successful, it is essential to not fall under the category of diva. Let us look at the example with Anne that illustrates a storyline concerning when selection has “just moved on”.

- (1) 1 I: How come we are sitting here, take me on the whole trip until we're, like, sitting here today.
- 2 A: Ah (.) Like, what do you mean? Shall I, sort of [mm]. Yes, we (.) I started. I went down to a super-small gym-hall with my friends. When I went to (.) Yes, school there. And then we went done there and trained a bit. And then I shouldn't start to train floorball. Because we were too many (.) in Tibble ((name of the team)), they pooled. But (.) then a coach just like, “ah, she should join”, sort of. And then I was in. And then I played and played and then a played with the 96s ((age-cohort)), then I stepped down to play a little with the 97s (1). And then it's just, like, just moved on. From different positions to (.), now I'm defender, so [mm] so it just moved on. And then I was (.) from my coaches, or we've won a lot and so on. So it's much stuff like that. And then. (2). Yes, and now I'm here, sort of (giggles).

The storyline of being selected by luck or chance rather than a planned career path is another central narrative element. This is a way to recruit a position as a natural talent, in contrast to a narrative position as one selected based on hard work. The implicit conclusion here – by stating that “it just moved on” – indicates special qualities and the space of agency. In order to show one discursively preferred position as being humble and modest, Anne is also showing a low degree of agency in her story. This is in a way a paradox: selectability is displayed by downgrading agency and by letting external experts or facts speak for themselves. This, as we will see contrasted in the Zlatan-story later on, shows a viable way to narrate selection without running the risk of being designated as declamatory or excessively bombastic. This personal narrative needs to strike a balance when displaying self-confidence. Thus, to be perceived as overly assertive here may seem misplaced (Kilger & Jonsson, 2017).

The hard work-story

Another repeated storyline in sports concerns the hard working individual and how to succeed through fighting spirit, hard work and extraordinary motivation (Baker et al., 2015). The narrative of the individual's hard work as the basis for success is a discursive viable figure (Andrew & Jackson, 2001). Here, this narrative is used in a specific way to display the proper personality – that is, certain personality traits – as an indicator of talent. It emphasizes social skills, e.g. public speaking skills or social qualities, and fitting in as a team player. Here, positioning oneself as team loyal and humble is a key feature in order to appear selectable (Hellström, 2014). The storyline highlights adequate social traits rather than sporting skills as the foundation for success. This narrative is also supported in the discursive framework of talent selection, as policy documents from the Swedish sports confederation also emphasize the importance of hard work (SSC, 2009). The significance of adequate personal traits is also highlighted in different ways, as can be noted in Emma's story about why she has been selected.

- (2) 1 I: What do you think it all depends on? Yourself.
 2 E: Well, I think it may be because, I am quite straight forward. And I'm fighting quite a lot and I'm have a strong desire.
 3 I: Mm. How could one possibly notice that then, I'm wondering?
 4 E: Well, that I'm social with people I don't know, for example. Or, when you come from these different teams. That I, like, dare to talk to. Because, they've said that they very much look for that. That they will look for, that you dare to talk to someone you don't know and stuff like that (.). So, that I feel that I can show. And then (1), like, I'm pretty much a winners-head. So if I, like, this is not just soccer but sort of everything. So if I, like. If anyone, for example the coach, like one specific game. Then, he didn't bring me in, but let someone else come off the bench. And then I was sort of pissed off. And then I was like, I'll fuckin show him that I can be in this fuckin regional team. Yes. H:m, and then it became like this that I fought quite a lot because I really wanted to come by. So, I think it was that too [mm], like fighting spirit, ha-ha.
 5 I: How do you show this, I'm thinking, on the pitch and (.) How do you show fighting spirit and how do you show a-winners-head?
 6 E: To. For example. To (.) To not totally mope. Like, if you have done something wrong. Perhaps one shoots but it doesn't go in. Or you dropped the ball. Then you will not be grumpy and lie down and sulk for that, but you go like, like, you go out on the pitch and continue playing. Like, that, it's our, we have another coach now, but he's really meticulous, when you have made a mistake [mm] that's how it is. That is, if you totally mope

after that. It doesn't help the team at all. And there is where I think you show your will. That instead of, ar:gh, I can't do this. You, like, keep going. That you have the strength to, like, develop.

This story positions motivation and the ability to work hard as key elements. Moreover, the importance of being social and being a good teammate is highlighted as a crucial part of this sport hero narrative (Benedict, 1997). In this story, Emma is emphasizing fighting spirit when things are going badly and to keep working when in a downturn. This is also about being in balance, mentally strong and stoic when facing adversity. Moreover, this storyline is reproducing the narrative of lability as a problem, which is particularly emphasized in stories of the successful athlete (Baker et al., 2015). Furthermore, being a subject under development is a viable position in order to display selectability (Fejes, 2006). The material shows how "the will to improve" is a frequent and viable storyline. It is one of the terms used most frequently, both by the players in the interviews (line 4: "And then (1), like, I'm pretty much a winners-head") and the coaches in non-recorded conversations, training sessions and meetings. This is described as a strong will to win no matter what the case and to see every moment, both in sports practice and in everyday life, as a competition where they have a very strong desire to win. This capacity is described as an inborn trait, absolutely critical in order to gain sporting success. Several participants described how this trait has followed them throughout their childhood. It is described as an inherent quality rather than shaped by a long participation in competitive sport. In the stories it is often described in terms of traits that might be similar to what can also be described as a poor loser: a person being disproportionately angry when losing in seemingly insignificant events or exercises without an explicit element of competition. However, in these narratives it is used as one of the most significant characteristics of success.

- (3) 1 I: But as a person, is a specific personality required?
 2 T: To go far?
 3 I: Yes.
 4 T: Yes, attitude. And to fight. Play, extra training. And that's what I do. And then during practice, give one hundred. And here (.) Be able to hang out with everyone. And not be, like saucy and not brawl. Because they look at that to. If you are as good as another player, and then if I like, have bad attitude. Then they'll choose me off. And take the one with good attitude. So.
 5 I: You talk about attitude, is it possible to describe what good attitude is?
 6 T: Yes, for example. If you are benched and I like, ps:t, doesn't listen to what he is saying. Like, sort of, get like angry. And then when I get on the pitch and they don't pass the ball, I scream PASS THE BALL, WHY

NOT PASS THE BALL. And stuff like that. Then, I always have to be positive, anyway. Then they're going to choose me. Instead of just walking around with those from my team (1) Like, I have to be able hang out with everyone. Also, they look at that (2) [ye:s]. That's also important. To advance further, that to.

In this example, Tim shows how contextual knowledge and this storyline clearly demonstrate the abilities that he intends to display. By giving your teammates positive feedback, you give indications of a being a team player. A repeated storyline in this narrative category emphasizes how the hard work is to be combined with social skills. By maintaining "a positive attitude," submitting to the coach's orders and handling adversity the players can show off a mentality suited for a selectable subject (Fejes, 2006). At the same time, this also includes being able to manage the coach's orders and to handle setbacks such as, for instance, being "benched". This element, being able to handle adversity, is a key component in the genre of the sporting hero-stories (Hargreaves, 2000).

The natural talent-story

One of the most prevalent success stories emphasizes a history of always having been a talented player and always having been told you are the best or an upcoming star. This story is accompanied by media stories, as shown in the introduction, and with the rhetorical use of reported speech and category entitlement. Through the use of other observers such as teammates and coaches who highlight their potential and tell them that they are talented, they manage to find a way to be "braggy". The narratives also describe a history of, from an early age, always being selected for the representative team or the first team. The story emphasizes the naturalness of being selected and being a natural born talent. Talent has been a natural principle, rather than a result of active choices – it just happens. These narratives often included a story about being part of a larger sports family, a context where sport is a central part of family life which has resulted in a strong sporting identity – as if to say I have always been a sporty person. In the following example, Sophie is responding to a direct question regarding the road to this final selection camp and uses reported speech in order to make accounts for her "always shown potential".

- (4) 1 I: But, tell me about your football playing until today. How come you're here at a selection camp?
 2 S: Ah, oops, ah, I have always been, like, like I have always been. I have always loved playing football. So, it's been a lot of football, and then, like. I often heard like, when I was little like, that, Well I've always been, like,

sort of the best player in the team. And when we played 5 on 5 it was like, “but, you, you’re going to be something”, “it only you that decides”, sort of. And then [mm] “If you want, you can be something”. So. And then it has always been like that, yes, that I always thought it was fun. So it’s become that I have invested and so. And then when my sister started with all this stuff, the district team and stuff like that. Then I thought it seemed like great fun, so then I have always aimed elite camp this summer. It has of course been my goal. That I’ll be there. Sort of. So, I think I’ve always been, like, goal oriented. That I shall, like (.) make it (.) Sort of. In football. It’s been my, like, big thing in life. Like, a bit like that (1). Always been training a lot, a bit like that. Yes.

This storyline is recurrent in the material. In this example, Sophie describes how she has always been talented or had a unique potential. We can see how her retrospective narrative of being selected views the process of selection as unproblematic, without specific effort or as natural. In the material, these stories often underscore a straight chronologic line of being selected from early childhood. They have always been selected or viewed as the most prominent talent or have always been the best player, and this is the natural state. This storyline corresponds to a media narrative of the sporting hero, where young talents are portrayed as “children of nature” rather than products of systematic training (Hellström, 2014). However, this inborn talent needs to be handled in the stories, often by adding a passage emphasizing that it takes more than just talent: it takes hard work, too. To be perceived as a person living on talent alone may seem problematic, and the importance of hard training is expressed by both coaches during the camps and in governing documents (SSC, 2009). The natural talent story is often reinforced by the narratives of being chosen for first teams from an early age or accounts from coaches or teammates regarding their outstanding potential. As in this case, the entitled category of the coach is used to handle the potential dilemma of being perceived as too self-confident (Potter, 1996). This narrative can also be analysed as a “talent personality-narrative”. Reaching success based on unique personal traits, or having the X-factor rather than being a product of hard work, gains a higher value (Williams, 1994).

Another important narrative element is to refer to facts, for example being selected as the best player or being chosen for training and tournaments with older players. These objective claims often serve as evidence for, in this case, a legitimate selection (Billig, 1996). This is recurrently used by both players and coaches during camps as indicators of a player’s status as a natural talent. Furthermore, research within different fields has emphasized how maturation is used as an important narrative element to emphasize skills. By highlighting the natural-talent as an exceptionally fast learner, this is used as a narrative resource. By invoking the element

of early maturity into the success-story, the legitimacy for being selected becomes evident: these individuals showed, at an early stage, to be better than the average.

The Zlatan-story

This narrative interferes with several elements of the traditional success story in sports, particularly within a Scandinavian sporting discourse. While that narrative highlights work ethic, rigor and loyalty to the collective, this story resists the ideal of team equality (Dahlén, 2008). However, there are two dilemmatic narratives visible in the material, and these stories are using each other as both contradictory and complementary narrative elements. Firstly, this is a sub-genre of uninhibited boasting. While all the other storylines try to parry the position of being too self-assured or cocky, in these narratives this seems to be repealed. If the rules of the traditionally shared discursive narratives that emphasize humility, team spirit and balance are to be broken, this needs to be done explicitly and over the top in order to appear unproblematic. The explicit breach with regard to the other narratives is here perceived as charming rather than intimidating and problematic. However, this is a high stakes narrative sub-genre with a risk of being positioned as arrogant and too ego-centric to fit in with the team.

Secondly, the shared discursive narratives of success in team sports in Sweden highlight the individual's ability to submit to the team. In the context of individual selection, but as a part of a team as a unit, the players need to tell the story of an outstanding talent yet team player. This means that the story should include both their visible abilities and how they relate to the team's needs. Their own position as part of the team is crucial by displaying a function to the group and the ability to contribute to the group's competence and development. The skilled individual has to be useful for the collective. In this narrative, the importance of fitting into the group is emphasized and coaches often underline that the team's needs take precedence over the ego, which is supported by phrases such as "there is no I in team" or "the team before the ego". To legitimize these actions, they should appear to be carried out to the benefit of the team and not in order to promote personal success. In this interview, we can see how Jim is handling his obviously bold statement, which is perceived as too self-assured.

- (5) 1 I: Finally (1). If we look at this team. Who would you say (.) is the most talented player here?
 2 J: (2) Myself (4) [-ha-ha-]
 3 I: Because?

- 4 J: There are many talented players here. That's clear, because, we are at this camp. You wouldn't get here if you're not talented. But, it still feels like that. I have very, very many strong qualities. Ah, many have like, one strong skill, but then they have nothing else. While I have great number of very strong qualities (.) But I also have an extreme speed for my age. I'm very, very fast and very, very good touch on the ball. And then, the game perception. So, I have a lot of very strong qualities. I have not just one of those strong qualities. And then that I can play in many different positions, this is very useful for big teams. You see it often, out there in the big leagues, that when they recruit players, they think that (.) Ah, look at United that won the Premier League this year, so Alex Ferguson used by many players in many different positions. He does not think like that, Wayne Rooney is a striker. Rather he uses them, on the right against Real Madrid, central midfielder against Chelsea, as second striker against Tottenham. So it is things like that (.) It is important to be able to adapt for the team's best. That is, to think that, but I'm so good as a right winger. Ah, and then when you come to a team and the team needs to strengthen the left back position, ah, in a match. But then you cannot go down and play there. And, but you have someone else who is better than you as a right winger, then you will not be able to take a place in the squad (.) And you will be a bit ostracized and that's not. Then you will not come so far. You must be able to adapt to the team. And do not just think of yourself. In order to develop.

Jim explicitly positions himself as the most talented player in the camp and is drawing on narratives of the confident ego. He explicitly displays high confidence and self-esteem, but at the same time, he has to balance this in order to be of benefit to the team's needs. As underlined by Kilger and Jonsson (2017), this act of narrative balance is a central part in order to appear selectable in the process of selection. By describing how he as an individual can contribute to the collective performance, this corresponds to factors frequently highlighted by the participating players (Saeter & Mehus, 2016) and by the selecting coach – specific psychological and social skills (Meylan et al., 2010). This is also repeated as a key feature in the everyday interaction during the selection camps. At the same time, this position as “the most talented” is not entirely unproblematic since it may seem cocky and egoistic, and it is negatively underscored by both coaches and other players during the camps. Therefore, showing how the most talented can be to the team's benefit, as Jim does in the final part, is also desirable. Furthermore, the risk with this kind of story is to open up for gloat if one fails and thereby, the big ego becomes a rewarding target for criticism or even ridicule.

Conclusions

In this paper I have argued for ways that personal stories need to be investigated as intertwined with shared discursive narratives within a specific narrative genre. Analyzing these personal stories, and how the participants recruit established narratives into their personal stories, can help us understand how certain narratives and subject positions are discursively produced. This paper highlights that these stories are discursive practices rather than cultural practices and that the concept of “culturally shared narratives” can be too general, vague, and imprecise. Personal success stories in sports thereby emerge as discursively specific, as an element within this genre of interaction. Therefore, the analytic concept of *discursively shared narratives* is better suited when analyzing such intertextual narratives in a genre specific discourse. This analysis shows how the personal stories of success are balancing the dilemmatic space of agency and how to handle discursively shared and well known narratives of success, while at the same time producing a personal narrative. This act of balancing dilemmatic narratives is shown in the material, including how this is done rhetorically.

The first three stories are based on similar narratives of sporting success, where hard work, the need for cooperation, and toning down one's own agency are key elements. In this specific narrative genre, the narrator uses shared discursive narratives to create a legitimate and coherent personal story of a successful talent. In order to tell a story of personal success, the story needs to balance dilemmatic space, such as individual and collective needs. Complementary to previous research that suggests success-narratives as highly agentive (Bamberg, 2012), this study shows the humble-story is downplaying agency within this specific narrative genre. Within a discursive framework where individuals have undergone an extensive process of selection to showcase high agency, this can instead be perceived as too self-assured or even unnecessary. Another repeated success narrative highlights talent as “the ability to work hard,” often emphasizing a mental ability to work harder than average. Furthermore, the importance of social skills is highlighted in the personal stories, which, in line with studies by Dahlén (2008) and Hellström (2014), highlights team spirit as a central ingredient for a success story. These storylines must fit into a context of accepted narratives of sporting success, and these can sometimes be conflicting and quandary.

Accordingly, narrative extremes seem to work to fend off the critique of being, for example, egocentric or overly self-assured. In the Zlatan-story, personal skills are emphasized and personal talent is put forth uninhibited. Despite the narrative infraction, this story is perceived as viable and personable, almost charming. By being so obviously over the top the rule of moderation is repealed. However, the Zlatan-story is representative of a different kind of storyline, as sub-genre unlike the

other stories. This narrative challenges and contradicts traditional cultural ideals in sports narratives and therefore can be provocative (Dahlén, 2008). Hellström (2014) emphasizes how hero-narratives in sports reproduce the dominant narratives of national identity, of class, and of ethnicity. Therefore, the Zlatan-story represents this new narrative of success that abandons the traditional sporting ideals, such as team member equality and appearing humble. In order to be legitimate, this narrative has to depart from a specific position: The underdog. The story cannot start from a privileged position, and it also requires loyalty to your background. This storyline often emphasizes and celebrates the childhood suburb and the individual who believed in them when all others hesitated (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Hauser, 1991). Distancing yourself from your background seems to jeopardize your credibility as “authentic” and this type of storyline is at risk for losing acceptance. Accordingly, Andrews and Jackson (2001) argue that this narrative fits well into the meritocratic neoliberal discourse of today. At the same time, the Zlatan-narrative needs to respond to the team’s needs and balance between personal skills and the ability to contribute to the group’s needs and development. In other words, it needs to use the narratives of the skilled individual and at the same time underline, how the individual benefits the collective. Nevertheless, this story is often used as an example of a changing norm within this narrative genre, as part of a broader change of self-presentation-narratives in sports (File, 2015). These storylines include other rhetoric elements and personal characteristics, such as self-assertion and highlighting one’s own outstanding qualities, as a prerequisite for success as with success stories in other areas such as in education or in professional life (Baker et al., 2011; Fejes, 2006).

As shown in this paper, personal success stories are intimately tied to the concept of shared discursive narratives. The use of a set of shared narratives in interview interaction shows how specific narratives of success are produced and reproduced in storylines in order to legitimize success. Therefore, there is not one storyline that is more viable than the other, but rather several stories can be used deliberately in order to produce legitimate narratives of success. It is important to mention that all the storylines are not accountable for everyone in this study. To challenge traditional and normative success stories that seem to emphasize a downplaying of ones’ own agency and underline how hard work pays off, an underdog-position is required. In the present study, I have underscored how personal success stories, in order to be convincing, must relate to previously shared narratives. There is a limited set of accepted versions within this context. These storylines are bound to context and are a specific genre of narrative interaction. Therefore, I argue that these individual stories cannot be understood as reflections of personality or serve as proof of certain characteristics, as is often done in the selection process in sports.

Rather, these stories are to be analyzed as discursive practices. I propose that the analysis can lead to important insights on how context, and in particular high stakes contexts such as this one, produces (and reproduces) specific narratives as legitimate. These kinds of analyses will allow both narrative researchers and practitioners within the field to answer further questions about the construction of preferred positions and to make different kinds of presuppositions apparent in interviews and selection processes. In conclusion, how the different stories and storylines affect the selection process is not possible to establish in the present study. Undoubtedly, it takes more than just skills on the pitch to become a selectable talent. This requires an adequate personal narrative where both the story, the narrator's position and the discursive framework are key elements. However, it may be noted that Jim was not selected for the youth national team.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Karin Aronsson for insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper and Mats Börjesson and Rickard Jonsson for invaluable suggestions on the final version. I would also like to thank Ezra Alexander and Kari Trost for proofreading and the reviewers for their proactive suggestions.

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