

Talking talent

Narratives of youth sports selection

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Abstract

In sports, there seems to be an eternal interest in discovering young talents and refining them into elite adult athletes. The dilemma of selecting talent, while at the same time ensuring every child's right to participate, needs to be addressed and have consequences in social practice. This dissertation elucidates the discourse of selection and the process of selecting young sporting talents during final selection camps for youth national teams in football, hockey and floorball in Sweden. More specifically, the aim is to analyze how talent selection is organizationally legitimized, how "selectability" is produced in interaction and how specific narratives are used in success-stories. The empirical material includes research interviews, performance appraisal interviews (between district or national team coaches and the player) and field studies during ongoing final selection camp. Drawing on a discursive-narrative approach, the aim is to investigate how selection is discursively legitimized and, by using narrative analysis, how positioning in talk-in-interaction functions.

The first article investigates the construction of legitimate selection within the Swedish Sports Confederation by analyzing their organizational documents, sport journals and literature for coach education. The findings show how a specific set of narratives are used to legitimize selection and how legitimacy works both individually to those within the selection system and on a wider arena of welfare politics. The second article investigates the co-construction of selectability in *small story-interaction* during interviews between the coach and a player in the final selection camp. The analyses highlight how this narrative genre produces certain stories and preferred positions. The third article analyzes how the young participants, in research interviews during final selection camp, uses *discursively shared narratives* to produce personal stories of success. The findings illustrate how the personal stories of success are balancing the dilemmatic space, positioning yourself as outstanding and at the same time appear a humble team player.

The principal contribution of this dissertation is to show how talent is organizationally legitimized and how selectability is produced in interaction, as well as illustrate how specific stories are used in stories of success. This work investigates the discursive framework for selection and how rationalities for talent selection are produced (and reproduced) and co-constructed in narrative interaction. In this apparatus of selection it takes more than physical talent to be chosen; it takes talking talent.

Keywords: *talent, selection, talent in sports, narrative analysis, narrative genre, discourse, discursively shared narratives, positioning.*

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Talking talent: Narratives of youth sports selection
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Narratives of youth sports selection

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To my mother.
The last working class
hero.

Abstract

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Keywords: talent, selection, talent management in sports, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, narrative genre, discursively shared narratives, positioning, rationality.

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It is time to formulate the narrative genre of acknowledgements. This means balancing archetypical statements and managing elements within a specific genre. As it turned out, it is easier to study than to execute yourself. However, many people have had an important impact on my work and some of them I intend to acknowledge here.

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List of papers

This dissertation is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

- I Kilger, M., & Börjesson, M. (2015). Searching for talent: The construction of legitimate selection in sports. *Scandinavian Sports Studies Forum*, 6(3), 85-105.

- II Kilger, M., & Jonsson, R. (2017). Talent production in interaction: Performance appraisal interviews in talent selection camps. *Communication and Sport*, 5(1), 110-129.
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- III Kilger, M. (in press). Talent stories in youth sports: Discursively shared narratives of success. *Narrative Inquiry*.

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Introduction

This dissertation elucidates the selection of young talents in sports. It sets out to explore selections to youth national teams and district teams in football, hockey and floorball and examine how this selection process is understood as legitimate. Moreover, it investigates how the position as a selectable talent is constructed in narrative interaction.

While working on this dissertation, it turned out that this issue was filled with strong opinions, determined views and debates by the media, researchers in the field, coaches and players. Everyone had their own talent story to tell as well as precise ideas about what it was all about or how selection should be carried out. The concept of talent appears everywhere in contemporary society: in media reports, at schools, in workplaces and, not least, in sports. In many areas, such as education, dance and music, the interest for the especially gifted has been considerable (Heller, 2004; Phillipson & McCann, 2007). The quest for the especially gifted is present in many different arenas of contemporary society, followed by numerous practices developed to try to discover this excellence. These are found in TV-shows seeking for the X-factor in a search for new young and promising artists, or elite schools and corporations testing young candidates in attempts to find and select the especially gifted, or the best suited candidate (Ganetz, 2008; Kreger Silverman, 2013).

In the world of sport, the search for talented young athletes seems more vibrant than ever, followed by a rancorous debate (Coyle, 2009; Epstein, 2014). This field has also attracted considerable research interest and a large number of studies have tried to uncover “the essence of talent”, primarily focusing on how to identify, select and develop young talents into elite adult

athletes (Bloom, 1985; Burgess & Naughton, 2010). Despite the extensive interest and thousands of research articles, both empirical and those models designed for talent development, the concept is often considered somewhat blurry and an empty signifier (Adamsen, 2016). At the same time, the use of systems to select children for elite sport investment are recurrent in everyday sport practice. Selection is a central part of the sporting rationale, and systems for the selection and development of young promising children are today a standard procedure (Fahlström, 2011). In recent years, however, there has been an intense media debate worldwide targeting the low accuracy and the ethical issues surrounding such practices (McClusky, 2014). Selection, Johansson (2010) claims, is primarily about which athlete is best suited according to the pre-set criteria. In Sweden, the discussion has been stimulated through the publication of research that questions the principles for selection in relation to governmental assignment and how selection is implemented in every day practice (Fahlström et al., 2015; Peterson, 2011). The legitimacy for these practices has been questioned, and it has been argued that organized child and youth sports lack a child's perspective (Trondman, 2011).

The intention of this dissertation is to do just that: to focus on the young participants' stories analyzed in the context of ongoing selection – final selection camp for youth national or district team. I intend to study these young people's stories, not as separate statements, but within its context. Thereby, the purpose is to bridge the gap between analyzing stories as personal and analyzing discourse as general societal patterns. This work investigates a repertoire of talent stories: in journals, official documents and everyday language use and how stories about selection or talent appear in the different types of materials. The aim is to analyze how talent selection is organizationally legitimized and how “selectability” is produced in interaction. This dissertation contributes to the field of child and youth studies by illustrating how selection, in this case in sports, works within a contextual framework which gives implications for identity construction and selection practices.

Finding and developing individual potential

The interest for endowment, the extraordinary individual and the young talent, seems to be historically recurrent and a substantial concept in many different areas. This widespread interest has meant that the concept emerges in many different shapes. Although the term is often used, it has a relatively unclear meaning and is seldom defined. In popular culture, management literature and self-help-books, it is often underlined that everyone has their own innate talent and that this potential to become great in a particular field calls for action (Coyle, 2009). In this perspective, talent is not limited to a small number of individuals within a population. Everyone possesses and can develop their own unique talent, if given the right prerequisites. On the other hand, descriptions often emphasize talent-skills connected to age, such as individuals showing skills significantly above average for their age group (Simonton, 1999). What everyone concerned has in common is an interest for the causes of these exceptional skills. Questions are raised whether this is because an individual has been practicing more or if it depends on biological prerequisites. Other might suggest that innate psychological characteristics make some individuals exceptional. A common denominator in this research is the conclusion that biological prerequisites, anthropometric measures and psycho-social factors interact. Gulbin (2008) emphasizes how such a wide explanation allows selection to be left open to arbitrariness, and he claims that the wrong individuals can be selected if the selection is done too early. In contrast, others claim that the talented individual must be identified and processed at an early age in order to develop an individual's full potential (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993).

In sports practice, talent development is a central part of the operation, and this is highlighted as a crucial prerequisite for the success of a club. It is argued that a successful development program can provide the club with players from their own ranks for the first team. By channelling these home-grown talents into the professional operation, this is perceived this as both cost-effective and

practical, as they are already educated in a system and familiar with the club's core values (Houlihan & Green, 2008). As a consequence, sport-academies have become a widespread phenomenon worldwide in a number of sports and in particular within European football. Here, young players from the local area, or in the case of major clubs, from all over the world, are part of a professionalized development program (Adamsen, 2016). Claiming to provide professional development environments creates societal legitimacy and inspires the young players and their families to join such activities. To legitimize this practice within the club or the sport federation, it is emphasized that the intention is to more effectively educate these young players. It is underlined how these environments are better suited for player development, as a central part of the professionalization of talent management. Moreover, it is argued that by this increase in self-sufficiency, the club avoids investments in expensive adult players.

Selecting the talented individual

In sports, the concept of talent is constantly debated, and the difficulty in determining which children will become adult elite athletes is widely discussed. Despite extensive research in this field in order to identify these exceptional individuals, there is comprehensive criticism (Henriksen, 2010). One critic has shown that, despite considerable resources, a low percentage of players from academies reach the first teams and that players from smaller clubs seem to have equal (or better) chances of adult success (Carlsson, 1991; Peterson, 2011). This critic has also targeted the basis for selection, arguing that it is difficult to select based on observation of practice and to predict future development. Furthermore, it is argued that the efficiency of talent identification programs have weak empirical support (Meylan, et al., 2010; Henriksen, 2010). For the most part, talent is described as multifactorial, where a number of factors determine whether a young player may progress to senior elite level. How these factors interact, and to what extent they cooperate or affect each

other, is however often more vaguely described. This screening hardship is repeated and emphasized when assessing current skills and, even more so in relation to the difficulty of determining potential development.

A recurrent critique involves how selection is made based on maturity. Researchers have shown that players born early in the selection year have an advantage of being bigger, faster, stronger a longer period of training in their sport (Delormé, Boiche & Raspaud, 2010). It is argued that using *chronological age* instead of *biological age* in selection practice creates a selection based on physical maturity rather than future potential. This problem, often termed *the relative age effect* (RAE), underlines that such selections run the risk of choosing the early matured rather than the most talented. Accordingly, it has been shown how the cut-off dates determine which children will be selected. For example, when cut-off dates, as in e.g. Britain, follow the school years (i.e., September to August), children born in September and October are overrepresented in the selection for youth national teams and club academies. When cut off-dates follow the calendar year of January to December, as in e.g. Scandinavia, children born in January and February are more likely to be selected over those born in November and December (Meylan, et al., 2010; Peterson, 2011). Therefore, it is argued that the premises for the selection are based on maturity instead of talent or potential. To handle the dilemma of inadequate selection due to this relative age effect, systems are created to both fend off criticism and produce a more adequate selection program by using *bio-banding*. This means using different formulas in order to determine maturity or *maturity offset*, for instance by looking at the stature of the child (Meylan, et al., 2010).

Selection in sports

Selection processes occur in many areas in society today and depending on context and the implications of the decision, this demands legitimacy (Johansson, 2010). We are constantly involved in different kinds of practices where we are being judged, assessed or selected or supposed to perform such acts of judgement. In sports, it is often emphasized how the selection process must gain a comprehensive view on the gifted individual as a part of “an ecology of talent” (Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2010). Talent is often emphasized as connected to personality, which is highlighted as a basic criterion by the coaches in selection practice (Lund, Nilsson & Söderström, 2016). A key purpose of this process is, therefore, to identify personal characteristics, attitudes or traits, often perceived as difficult to grasp by simply observing everyday sporting practice. Thus, in selection practice, different forms of dialogues and interviews have become an increasingly common element as a way to ascertain the individual's personal characteristics, motivation and goals. Selectability is performed not only through actions on the football field, but in inter-action as well. Accordingly, even the most physical activities require a continuous storytelling and this applies to the athletes' production of their own personal stories.

Today, a structure for talent development in sporting federations is customary and often well developed, particularly in major, and in particular more commercial, team sports (Baker, Coble & Schorer, 2012; Fahlström, 2011). In Sweden, this is outlined in both governmental reports and national sport organizational guidelines and manifested in everyday activities, such as selection camps (SOU, 2008:59; Swedish sports confederation/SSC, 2009). However, the issue of selection involves questions of societal legitimacy and *house a dilemmatic space*: When a smaller number of players are selected and given particularly favorable conditions, the conditions for “the others” need to be addressed. In Sweden, it is underlined in operational guidelines that organized sports shall ensure every child the right to participate while simultaneously

enabling elite investment (SSC, 2009). This means harboring different logics, both an *educational logic*, which aims to convey societal values, and a *competitive logic* that enables individuals to develop into elite athletes (SOU 2008:59). Quennerstedt (2006) shows in his study of physical education how activity and social development are key parts emphasized in this discursive logic. This space of different logics constructs rationalities of practice, i.e. how particular ways of thinking produce accounts, which provide implications for social practice (Bacchi, 2009). Therefore, selection needs to be legitimized as rational to those within the system, as fair and unbiased, those within the sporting organizations and to societal welfare politics at large. These dilemmatic spaces, as will be shown in this dissertation, have consequences on many levels: in organizational storytelling, in personal stories and in institutionalized social interaction.

Aims of the study

This dissertation sets out to explore the selection of girls and boys, age 15, during final selection camps for youth district- and national teams in football, hockey¹ and floorball in Sweden. The overall aim is to analyze how talent selection is organizationally legitimized and how selectability is produced in interaction, as well as how specific narratives are used in success-stories. The dissertation investigates the discursive framework for selection and how rationalities for selection are produced and co-constructed in narrative interaction.

The corpus of data includes research interviews, performance appraisal interviews (between district or national team coaches and the player) and field studies during an ongoing final selection camp. The players under observation have participated in several selection processes, many of them for years, when

¹ As the number of young female hockey-players was so small, no selection camp of this type was conducted.

it is time for the final cut. For many players, this means not only a place on the national team, but also the beginning of a professional sporting career. During a short period of time, often two or three days, they are urged to show qualities that justify their selection. This cannot only be done on the pitch; it must be displayed in their social behavior and interaction.

This dissertation investigates the discursive framework for selection and how rationalities for selection are produced and co-constructed in narrative interaction. It provides three empirical studies, each focusing on different elements or practices within selection in sport in order to investigate the overall aim. The analytical focal points in the different studies are as follows: (1) the organizational narratives used to legitimize selection, (2) the rhetorical resources used by participants and positioning in small story-interaction, and (3) the participants' use of shared discursive narratives in personal success stories. The analytical focus is on the underlying statements, conceptions and narrative practices that classify, regulate and legitimize the understanding of selection and success. Rather than try to identify the essence of the concept or produce knowledge to support a rationale for ideal selection, this work analyzes how rationalities for selection are legitimized and how this produces interactional practice and narratives. The theoretical basis for the analysis will be further elaborated in the chapter theoretical framework.

Framework of the study

Drawing on a discursive narrative approach, this study investigates how selection is legitimized, and it analyzes two discursive practices produced within this framework. The analysis of how the process legitimates selection is constructed in documents, reports, magazines and educational literature by the Swedish Sports Confederation. It is here, in article I, the discursive framework for talent selection is underlined. In article II, the study aims to investigate the

narratives of selectability and positions co-constructed interaction during performance appraisal interviews between the coach and the player. Finally, the article III explores how young talents produce personal narratives of success and how they use a specific set of *discursively shared narratives* to produce a legitimate and trustworthy story. By investigating the repertoire of narratives in different types of material in disparate discursive practices within this context, the study intends to bridge the gap between the production of legitimacy for selection and how this is locally managed. When studying how narrative elements are used in personal narratives within such a specific framework of cultural aspects, values and morals, the study uses a discursive-narrative approach. These narratives cannot be explained simply in terms of their parts; rather, they need to take into account all the different relations and the framework for such narratives. De Fina (2013) describes ethnographic fieldwork as a complex lens and a necessary instrument when analyzing personal stories in a specific context. This means analyzing the personal story and how the narrator recruits discursively shared narratives into these narrative genres (PAIs and success-stories) within a particular discursive framework. Furthermore, articles II and III assume a child-centered perspective that focuses on the young participants' narrative, complementary to the large corpus of studies focusing on the coaches and their narratives (Krogh Christensen, 2009; Cranmer & Myers, 2015).

This process of selection is a high stakes context and needs to be legitimized not only within the system and its participants, but also with regard to the Swedish welfare state. Bacchi (2009) underlines the fact that organizational power is produced by means of *problematizations* as a response to this rather than a response to an actual problem. Accordingly, this dissertation studies talent selection by analyzing the organization's representations of this problem and the rationalities and the practices that follow. Elite sport is in many respects a relatively closed world, with little research insight, not least

when it comes to studies of everyday practice (Seamus, 2008). Interview studies have often focused on the coach-player interaction, or used interviews with coaches to determine what makes them successful (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Potrac, Jones & Cushion, 2007). Other studies focus on the athlete and their retrospective narratives of success (Carlsson, 1991) or the coaches' stories of their practical sense for selecting (Krogh Christensen, 2009). This dissertation focuses on the young participant's stories during ongoing selection camps. It has been argued that gaining access to such unique material provides an opportunity to study a context very rarely investigated (Meckbach, 2016). The empirical material in this work highlights such material. The participants' narratives are performed in the middle of their progression through the selection system. This work takes as its starting point the stories of the young participants, rather than adult athletes' retrospective stories of childhood perceptions of problems and opportunities (Carlsson, 1991). This child-centered approach looks to bridge this gap in this area of research on selection and theoretically contribute to the knowledge of the construction of narratives in specific discursive practices.

A recurring aspect in child and youth studies is highlighting a child's-perspective and emphasizing a more child-centred research, as well as illustrating the links between the study of childhood and its connections to historical, political and cultural dimensions (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Along these lines, this dissertation also starts from the narratives of the participants, although for other reasons. In this work, the focal point is to analyze the participants' narratives as representations and as discursively constructed, not as means for a subjective understanding of the young people's lives. By investigate how organizational ideals and norms are constructed in organizational narratives and in small-story-interaction, the purpose is to explore how these narratives interact. A set of narratives are shared and serve as both a normative framework for interaction and moral fostering but also, in addition, they are

used as narrative resources in personal narratives. Through investigating small-story-interaction within this discourse, we can learn something about shared discursive narratives and how people in everyday language use position themselves in these larger, established narratives (Phoenix, 2008).

Therefore, the focus is directed towards the construction of talent as a position within a discursive framework, rather than trying to uncover talent as pre-existent. Foucault (1975) suggests such a point of departure, where the researcher starts from a theoretical and methodological decision supposing that universals do not exist. Accordingly, the fundamental analytical questions target the form of reason and the historical conditions that led to this practice, narrative or subject position. Foucault explains his starting point in his investigation of madness. “[...] the method consisted in saying: Let’s suppose that madness does not exist” (Foucault, 2008, p. 18). In keeping with this perspective, the methodological point of departure in this dissertation starts from the statement: *Let me study talent, as if it does not exist*. This does not mean that I propose talent or giftedness as non-existent, but that these concepts need to be understood and given meaning in a context. This work intends to analyze how selection is understood, legitimized and given meaning in this specific context. This is crucial, not least as selection has become such a central part of children’s and youth sport worldwide.

Outline of the study

The dissertation consists of a frame and three separate articles. The chapters in the frame underpin the contextual framework in order to advance the analyses. The *introduction* chapter introduces the purpose of the work and illuminates how talent and the process of selection are discussed in sports today. The chapter *searching for talent* illuminates previous research on talent and talent management and deals with the broader framework of the concept of talent. This part explores research on selection in sports and elucidates its relation to

social practices and its kinship to similar practices in other contexts. The interest is directed towards how talent management research and practice work simultaneously and produce a rationale for selection. The following chapter, *success-stories in sports*, focuses on success-stories as a shared narrative genre and the trajectories for personal stories of success. This part illustrates the analyses of personal stories in local interaction, investigated in a discursive framework of sports. The chapter, *theoretical framework*, highlights the discourse-narrative-approach used in the work and the ways to analyze of the production of legitimate selection. Moreover, this part foregrounds success-stories as a narrative genre and explores the concept of discursively shared narratives. The chapter *method and the empirical material* illustrates how the theoretical perspective of discourse and narrative are used as well as how such an understanding of in-discourse-narrative analyses supplies implications for the analyses. Furthermore, the construction of rationalities used to legitimize the selection of young people are illustrated, in addition to how this narrative genre produces and reproduces a specific set of narratives. Moreover, the concept of apparatus as a concept for analyzing narrative practices is described. This chapter emphasizes how personal narratives are analyzed within a discursive framework. This part illustrates the setting in more detail and demonstrates how this is a key issue as framework for the analysis. It shows how this is a frame for the production of a specific set of discursively shared narratives.

In the chapter, *summary of studies*, the three articles are summed up and important findings are emphasized. Moreover, the chapter explains the sequence of articles and how this provides an important thread and how each article contributes to the general aim of the dissertation by investigating various elements of the apparatus of selection. In the chapter *concluding discussion*, expansions of the analyses of the articles are provided. This section also highlights important potential contributions to research both empirically and methodologically. The last chapter, *sammanfattning*, consists of a summary in Swedish of all chapters of the frame and the three studies.

Searching for talent

In the previous chapter, how talent and talent selection is debated was described as a high stakes subject. This chapter will explore previous research on talent and the discourse of selection, the rationality for the management of individuals and the specific accounts and actions that are highlighted as legitimate. This part investigates talent management in research and also the use and implementation of research in social practice. This is done to illustrate how the scientific discourse is closely linked to social practice in order to legitimize every day selection practices. Talent research often aims to produce more efficient and better systems for screening, selection and development or to contribute to development rather than adopt a critical approach to this apparatus. By co-studying the research on talent management and its social practice, the purpose is to make these intertwined relationships visible.

Moreover, this section uses a “genealogic gaze” on the concept of the talent management. This means focusing on selection practices in other contexts and historical conditions rather than trying to trace its essence (Foucault, 1978). It also means investigating how specific practices of choice appear in different historical contexts. Accordingly, this part sketches how different ways of explaining and understanding the concept have been done in various areas and how this produces specific social practices. By using such an approach, in order to contextualize talent management, this part will underline the practices as parts of a discursive framework. This is an important framework for the three empirical studies. Some analytical concepts are introduced in this section to illustrate how previous research evokes the need for my theoretical starting point. These concepts are addressed in detail in the subsequent chapter.

The concept of talent

The concept of talent is not only questioned in terms of its moral foundation, the hit-rate in early selection or the accuracy of talent development programs. It is questioned for being an empty signifier that gives little or no guidance for social practice (Adamsen, 2016). As a result, many have resisted and abandoned the concept and are instead using other terms, such as e.g. ability grouping, claiming that this is more adequate or better suited for selection. Despite which concept is used, selection of the best-suited children are a reality in sports practice today. However, practices to screen, identify and select the exceptional child or the gifted individual are not only limited to sports. These types of practices can be found in many different fields of contemporary western society: in TV-shows searching for talented singers (Ganetz, 2008), special school classes for gifted children (Gentry, Steenbergen-Hu & Choi, 2011) or programs for the management of young talents in academia (van den Brink, Fruytier & Thunnissen, 2013). These practices of selection are not only part of a broader societal apparatus with a strong focus on finding outstanding individuals; it also produces a specific subject position – the entrepreneurial self (Bröckling, 2016). Moreover, Dahlstedt and Hertzberg (2011) emphasize how such an *entrepreneurial subject* is characterized by a willingness to develop through self-reflection, as part of a neo-liberal society of self-promotion and self-improvement.

Talent is a widespread term used both in a research context, in media discourse and in everyday language. It is often described as something that an individual possesses or is, and refers to a form of innate force that some have and others do not or, a personal trait (Adamsen, 2014). The term is seldom defined in everyday interaction or in the media coverage. Today, there is a common acceptance of the term as having a multiplicity of meanings. When it is used, the concept of talent needs no further concretized explanation. However, the term talent has existed in different contexts for thousands of years, defined and explained differently over the centuries (Abbott & Collins, 2002;

Adamsen, 2016). Before the 14th century, as a noun it referred to a precise amount of weight in silver and was used to indicate personal monetary richness (Adamsen, 2016). Undoubtedly its meaning has changed, and not only its grammatical function as both a noun and an adjective. It has become an increasingly metaphysical term used to describe special abilities or innate qualities and to be distinguished from merely skills (Tansley, 2011).

A common feature of the term today includes talent as something a person has, a property at a given time, or simply an is or is not. These ways to define and categorize are often referred to as a *subjective approach* to talent or an *objective approach* to talent (Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries & Gonzalez-Cruz, 2013). A subjective approach understands talents as individuals rather than attributes. This bio-category understands talent as individual traits; by means of their exceptional nature they are destined, or rather have an innate potential, to achieve success. On the other hand, an objective approach equates talent with exceptional performances in relation to peers in the same age group. Moreover, these different stances give implications for social practice, and whether selection should be based on current top performance or on future top performance is often quite unclear. It is often emphasized that both shall be assessed. At the same time, to develop this kind of inclusive approach to talent selection, which is often argued for in sports, makes talent development programs no different than regular activities in child and youth sports. Accordingly, this implies a reduced legitimacy of such particular investments.

The concept of talent in sports

In sports, being talented refers to the relation to peers of the same age as being outstanding, or at least significantly above, the average. A recurring definition formulated by Bloom (1985) emphasizes current skills and domain specificity emphasizing an unusually high level of demonstrated variability, achievement or skill in some special field of study or interest. On the other hand, another definition by Simonton (1999) highlights biological heritage as a central part.

This means non-trainable abilities provide certain individuals (given they are provided adequate training) better conditions than others to become adult elite athletes. He suggests that talent is an innate capacity that gives an individual the opportunity to show exceptionally high performance in an area, which requires special skills and intensive training (Simonton, 1999). This relationship between biological inheritance and training is a recurring topic of discussion both in sports research, coach education and every day sporting practices when selections are to be implemented. This “nature/nurture-debate” of innate talent versus the effect of systematic training often ends up in the conclusion that both are important and interact and influence each other. Epstein (2014) argues that this conclusion, that it depends on both genetics and environment, in no way can be considered satisfactory or gives guidance for social practice. It is highlighted that this lack of semantic clarity affects the rationale for selection and management.

We have not yet found any evidence to suggest that there is any identifiable, concrete entity to which the term refers, either alone or in the compound phrase ‘talent management’. Some terms have simple, concrete referents – ‘mother’, ‘water’ – while others are abstract but clearly defined – ‘interest rate’, ‘chief executive officer’. ‘Talent’ is neither concrete nor abstract; no one can point to a human being in the actual world and determine (i.e., conclude on the basis of specifically relevant characteristics or features) that they are a talented person (Adamsen, 2016, pp. 75).

Such claims, of course, complicate the production of legitimacy for selection as a practice and provides little guidance for the construction and implementation of systems of development. Although this discussion about nature or nurture is not a particularly vivid issue within the everyday sporting discourse and is rather used as a well-known fact, this will affect the practical approach to talent management. If it is inborn, this could downsize the effects of a talent-

managing-program and increase the importance of finding the right individual. This search for the talented individual and the apparatus constructed to support this also produces the need for those who can make fair and unbiased selections, that is, professional selectors.

Searching for the exceptional individual

There are many historical examples of how children and young people are valued and assessed in relation to normality (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2013). In order to do this, examinations and standardized evaluations of individuals are required. Börjesson and Palmblad (2003) underline how an increased professionalization of childhood and childcare has resulted in a strong focus on evaluations to identify the deviant or troubled child to, for instance, legitimize and initiate support measures in school. As in such studies of categorizing and identifying deviation through different forms of examinations, this work also deals with identifying individuals that deviate from societies' understanding of normality. However, instead of trying to identify individuals inferior to the yardstick of normality (an unwanted position), this work is interested in a highly aspirational position: the extraordinary.

Although these positions are different and valued in separate ways, these are two positions that render special treatment. The selection must appear legitimate, fair and unbiased and to legitimize such practice, rhetorical work must be developed. An organization's effort to achieve legitimacy for such an operation becomes a central issue and, accordingly, it needs to be accepted as rational. The organization needs to produce a rationale for selection. Not rational as in a common-sense understanding, being particularly good or wise, but rather the thinking that lies behind this specific way of governing (Bacchi, 2009). This organizational rationality is not something that just occurs. Rather, rationality must be produced and supported by practices that fit within this logic. Legitimizing is not something that 'arises' in descriptions of operations

and policy or educational documents. Legitimization work occurs in everyday language use by the young participants, coaches and parents. The apparatus of selection does not work as an unequivocal top-down movement; this power of legitimacy circulates everywhere and works simultaneously on many levels. Such practices thereby become self-evident and relevant within a rationale and thus are not a subject for questioning (Brunsson, 2006).

Analytically, importance must therefore be given to the analyses of how rationales for identifying, selecting and developing talent are produced and affect social practice. This approach attempts to understand ways in which organizational dilemmas are solved in policy documents and educational literature and, at the same time, how this affects narrative practice. These studies of ways of legitimizing practice within this discursive framework of talent selection is not limited to sports, but part of a larger culturally shared narrative emphasizing a strive for individual development, the power of hard work and the responsibility of the individual.

Selecting the exceptional individual

In sports today, it is assumed that it can be observed and detected during childhood, as exceptional performances or specific traits for future prosperity (Pearson, Naughton & Torode, 2006). Moreover, the concept implies a number of ontological and epistemological assumptions as taken for granted, which has repercussions in every day practices. Firstly, it is the ontological assumption that there are such individuals existing within a population of children or young people. Secondly, there is the epistemological stand point that these young individuals can be identified through e.g. observation and/or physical and psychological testing. Thirdly, these assumptions end up in a decision that these individuals shall be selected and given the right to particularly favorable conditions (Burgess & Naughton, 2010). Adamsen (2014) emphasizes that the concept does not just include high performing or potentially high performing children, as it claims to include more than just high performance.

There are more criteria that must be met. Talent is understood as involving psychological factors and specific personal characteristics, such as work ethics, competitiveness, social team skills and outstanding will or motivation (Connaughton & Hanton, 2009). However, these elements or criteria are seldom pre-set, well-defined or publicly displayed and hence they become difficult to validate or evaluate (Johansson, 2010). Rose (1998) describes social psychology as “the science of attitudes” and raises a question of what affect the birth of *attitude* as an invisible psychological state has meant for the invention of self. In sports, it is motivation, will and competitiveness that are emphasized as key personal characteristics that need a trained eye. Accordingly, I raise the question: what was born when *motivation* became an invisible and leading concept in sport selection practice? As will be shown in this work, motivation is a key rhetorical element in the process of narrating talent, and “being highly motivated” is a key feature to show. Which actions on the field indicate motivation is, however, relatively imprecise or unclearly formulated.

These searches for *character-talent* have similarities to other fields, where the exceptionally gifted child is attributed personal properties besides just skills. Kreger Silverman’s (2013) study of methods to identify and develop gifted children and propose that giftedness also involves personal traits and claims that these children's experiences and interpretations of the world are essentially different from their average peers. Furthermore, she underlines that the average teacher does not have a trained eye to identify the exceptionally gifted, and therefore their skills run the risk of being neglected and their unique potential left unused. Within this field of giftedness research, as in talent research in sports, the concept is linked to personality and psychological factors beyond skills observable in the sporting arena. Accordingly, the importance of coach-player interaction is often highlighted as a way to identify motivation and get to know the personal motives for sports (MacNamara & Collins, 2012) as well as identify individuals that have, as it is often stated,

“what it takes to go all the way”. Thereby, talent also needs to be presented in interaction in order to be legitimized as selectable.

Selection and expert knowledge

Taylor, Piper and Garratt (2014) argue that this creates opportunities for a new authoritative position to be legitimized, that of *the expert*. By claiming expert knowledge on how to judge and assess fair selection, a new professional authority, *the talent-selector*, serves as a guardian for a correct selection. This focus on personality or attitude makes selection difficult to validate or measure and, therefore, it is attributed to expert-knowledge of the expert-selector. Therefore, the emphasis on personal characteristics dissolves the uncertainty surrounding the grounds for selection and gives expert-selection-knowledge, based on both physical skills and personal character, increased legitimacy (Lund, Nilsson & Söderström, 2016).

On the other hand, it has been argued that talent is as much the power of hard work as it is an inborn trait (Simonton, 1999). Accordingly, if talent is more an effect of systematic training, where biological and psychological factors are of secondary importance, the legitimacy for selections becomes considerably more problematic. The ongoing debate and the confusion about concepts have led researchers, sports federations and coaches to distance themselves from the concept. Instead, this has led to the construction of other concepts, such as “skill grouping”, “ability grouping” or “individually tailored groups”. These are emphasized as clearly distinguished from the talent. Even so, these concepts have similarities and comprise similar problems when trying to define them. It is often emphasized how an even level of skills or social maturity is beneficial for all. Talking about talent as the basis for selection is delicate, and the term has become almost tarnished and linked to an unethical selection. Regardless of terminology, however, the intention is to group children or young people, and this classification can be named differently, such

as selection based on “maturity”, “ambition” or “talent”. The focal point here is to study the production and legitimation of such categories. Although different terms are used, in this dissertation the process in which certain individuals are selected for the benefit of others will be known as *talent selection*. Whatever concept is used to categorize, there must be an acceptance for a practice where some children are chosen in favor of others. To legitimate such processes is an organizational key issue that has repercussions in social practice.

Sports organizations legitimizing selection practices

Sporting organizations all over the world have designed different systems for identifying and selecting the most suited children, and as a consequence some children are selected at the expense of others (Epstein, 2014). This is a well-integrated part of the sporting discourse and the programs for identification, selection and development have effect on social practice (Houlihan & Green, 2008). Also, for the clubs it has become increasingly important to identify and develop these youngsters at an early stage to attract them and to keep them within the organization.

At the same time, the systems of talent management are not constant over time. They are under continuous change and within this study the selection process has been debated and undergone reconstruction. The selection procedure is part of a larger societal sporting debate worldwide, targeting both its moral legitimacy, structure and productivity (McClusky, 2014; Russell Martindale, Collins & Daubney, 2013). However, regardless the debate of structure or moral framework, this requires rhetorical work to produce a legitimate selection practice, and there seems to be little general opposition to child selection as a practice. Rather, the discussion focuses on when and how the selection should be made (Baker, et al., 2012). This issue deals with the question

of when it is reasonable to single out with precision. Seemingly obvious questions are raised – such as whether it is possible to identify children with pre-conditions and/or development potential for adult success, and if so, when this can be done and what parameters one should look for. These areas are linked to both moral principles about when children should be assessed and how this is done with high accuracy (Russell Martindale, et al., 2013).

The line of young people prepared to invest in becoming professional athletes is extensive, and the organizational apparatus for selection has continued to expand (Fahlström, 2011). Research has often divided talent management into identification or detection, selection and development. The process of identification intends to predict future sport success and is “designed to identify young athletes, who possess extraordinary potential for success in senior elite sport, and to select and recruit them into talent promotion programs” (Vaeys, Gullich, Warr & Philippaerts, 2009, p.1367). This research has often tried to develop methods and systems for identification and selection and highlight the importance of finding and choosing the right individuals (Bloom, 1985; Meylan, et al., 2010). This refers to children with the best (pre)conditions for success and/or the highest potential for future development into an elite adult athlete. Woodman (1985) underlines that identification comprises the screening of young sport participants to determine those most likely to succeed and direct them to a sport to which they are best suited. This detection often involves screening by coach observation to identify extraordinary skills. Moreover, this also involves different forms of physical and physiological tests and performance appraisal interviews as tools to identify these individuals with the potential for success in a specific sport (Anshel & Lidor, 2012). Accordingly, talent selection is concerned with finding the right individuals and constructing systems to support a fair and correct selection. This is accompanied by talent development, which focuses on systems designed to accelerate the individuals’ development and provide an adequate infrastructure. This is supposed to enable the young players to develop their full potential

(Lidor, Côté & Hackfort, 2009). It often includes programs for coaching, training and competition, alongside access to facilities, equipment and medical support. With this follows physiological, anthropological, biomechanical and psychological testing, during the early years, to predict long-term success in the particular sport. In the absence of an accepted definition of the concept of talent, much research has instead focused on talent management (Adamsen, 2016). This shift, from focusing on the concept itself to a managerial view, has meant that sporting organizations have focused on selecting and developing. Instead of trying to define the term itself, it is presupposed to exist and, therefore, it is not important whether talent is innate or learned. Accordingly, displaying practices that indicate development have become increasingly important. Within this apparatus of talent development, specific actions and stories become rational and reasonable as elements of a rationale of improvement.

Development in social practice

In the last decades a strong focus has been to not only identify but also determine how to develop children into elite adult athletes. Many studies have been devoted to developing talent, which has also greatly influenced the social practice (Baker et. al, 2012; Meylan, et. al, 2010; Vaeyens, et. al, 2009). One of the most influential theories, deliberate practice, foregrounds how sporting success is connected to the quantitative amount of training, and the systematic standard of training (Ericsson et al., 1993). The theory highlights the amount of training as vital, regardless of field of expertise, including both music, research or, as in this case, sports. In short, this theory of talent development underlines that a person should train 10,000 hours to reach their full potential. Translated into practical training, this means 10 hours per week during 50 weeks per year for 20 years, or consequently, 20 hours per week for 10 years.

Furthermore, this training should be conducted on the basis of some principles, which highlights systematic and specialized training in order develop outstanding abilities. This theoretical model has been met with a considerable amount of criticism, not least for having weak empirical support, being too general, and for not emphasizing other aspects of learning and development, such as motivation (MacNamara & Collins, 2012). However, this theoretical figure is often used in sports practice as an argument for the importance of systematic and purposeful child and youth training. Moreover, this theoretical formation is often used as an argument for the need for early specialization in one main sport.

A further central theory formation, understood as a reaction to the previously described idea of *deliberate practice*, is *deliberate play* (Côté & Gilbert, 1999). Deliberate play also foregrounds the importance of the amount of training during childhood, but focuses on enjoyable training and more general sporting skills (Côté, Baker & Abernethy, 2007). The comprehensive training is emphasized as important, and this has often been used as an argument for a later selection to a main sport. The basic concept for training is based on a number of sampling years followed by a later specialization. This early engagement hypothesis is often underscored in recent years and involves an early sporting engagement, but a post-puberty specialization in one main sport (Fahlström, et al., 2015; Ward, et al, 2009).

However, as have been elaborated in the previous section, the understanding of the concept seems to differ depending on the historic era or context. Henriksen (2010) claims that research has failed to establish a common approach to the term talent or convincing models for development that are more suitable than others. The heterogeneity is great, but one starting point recurs: the importance of an extensive amount of training during childhood. The questions concern how training should be organized, when should children specialize on one sport and how the training should be organized. At the same time, the systems must be legitimized and built on different stories about what

talent *is*. Some emphasize the speed of learning, underlining that some individuals learn faster than what can be perceived as normal. The hypothetical figure involves, for instance, two people with equal anthropometric pre-settlement as well as physical and psychosocial conditions when going through the same exact training (in quantity and quality) and, as a result, the most talented reach a higher level of competence. Therefore, it is argued, the most talented can be said to have a higher learning speed. Others, in contrast, emphasize how the concept is coupled with personal characteristics, such as working capacity, motivation, ambition and a will to work. Here, the concept of talent is rather connected to personal traits or personality and the individuals' capacity to undergo hard training for a long period of time (Simonton, 1999).

Another approach emphasizes development as linked to the surrounding environment, as a key framework for development. This position often uses retrospective studies of adult elite athletes to identify common denominators in successful development. Studying such retrospective narratives of success from former elite athletes has been taken as a pretext to identify the elements needed for success (Carlsson, 1991). This has contributed to knowledge used as a basis for designing talent development programs. At the same time, people that succeed in a system tend to be positive towards the system where they have been successful.

Theories of talent development also operate in social practice and on an individual level. Once distinctions are given legitimacy, this has implications for social practice and the process of developing the potential prospects. When legitimizing organizational policy and practice, a number of different components are graded and then given greater or less importance as indicators when trying to identify and choose. In some cases, they are understood as assimilated or interdependent, whereas in other cases, some components are emphasized as having a greater significance. For the most part, talent is described as multifactorial and interdependent, where a number of factors determine

whether a young player may progress to the senior elite level. How these factors interact, to what extent shortcomings can be compensated for or how the components interact or affect each other is often vaguely described (Meylan, et al., 2010). This stands as assigned revenue of why it is difficult to identify the right individual and therefore require expert knowledge. This selection hardship is underlined and critiqued, both in association with the ability to assess current skills and, even more, the difficulty of determining potential future development.

Selection in a Swedish context

Systems and structures for developing talent within the framework of organized sports are widespread in most of the Western world (Houlihan & Green, 2008). Also, in a Swedish context, the vast majority of the sport federations within the SSC have talent development programs (Fahlström et al., 2015). These are, however, based on different rationales and are designed differently on the basis of somewhat different moral and theoretical foundations. This includes, as previously described, the question of when selection can and shall be made. To define and categorize childhood is, of course, historically and contextually relative. In Swedish sports there is a distinction between children's sports, adolescents' sports and adult sports. Unlike other categorizations of children and childhood, such as in e.g. in law or in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, the SSC divides sports into the following: child sports from 7-12 years, youth sports from 13 to 19 years and adult sports from 20 years (SSC, 2009). This categorization, as will be shown in this study, provides implications for selection in social practice.

Furthermore, the system deals with the question of when to specialize on one main sport and therefore when the so-called sampling years should end. Moreover, this involves content, the amount of training and the structure for

progression. This often results in different types of systems for talent development, which are often described in detail in written documents and supported by recurring practices, such as self-evaluated competence-profile-testing, selection camps and tournaments (Fahlström, et. al., 2015). Furthermore, the need for well-educated expert coaches, as a guarantor of a fair selection, is regularly emphasized (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Accordingly, the extensive level of coach education in Sweden, and the buildings of general systems for selection, is often highlighted by the SSC as a key issue to explain Swedish sporting success (SSC, 2009).

The process talent management includes a variety of elements, from screening and selection to practices of refinement. Some of them are sporting unique, but often kindred or showing similar purposes and differing in form, duration or frequency of occurrence. One such recurrent element is the selection camps. Depending on which sport it concerns, these can be performed at various ages, with different sample groups (national, regional or local) or with different duration and frequency. However, the purpose is to select a final team from a larger squad. Other recurring elements within these camps are physical tests, internal games, performance appraisal interviews and lectures by coaches and visits from active professional players. In team sports, it is often emphasized that the selection is based on not just individuals with the highest skills, but also identifying individuals with adequate character, social skills and identity (Pearson, Naughton & Torode, 2006). Even though character and personality are emphasized as important ingredients in individual sports, other forms of elements such as competition results, a specific time limit or placement in competition are underlined as the breeding ground for selection. In addition, a series of different types of observations and inspections of the children and adolescents in training sessions is to identify those with particular talents, as well as reports from club team coaches regarding who is particularly promising.

An important part of policy documents and educational coach literature studied in the first paper involve statements of the basis for legitimate and fair selection. These statements address both coaches about to make selections and even local government, parents and participants (SSC, 2009). However, talent selection and screening of children on the basis of different types of skills are undoubtedly now a significant part of sporting practices, designed and governed by the sporting organization. Power (1997) emphasizes how the *effectiveness* of an organization is a vague idea, forcing the organization to focus on input and output. This, Power suggests, means that organizations produce *auditive practices* rather than assess effectiveness. Therefore, these practices of control and examination become rituals of verification as a way to legitimize the operation. Accordingly, in the context of organized sports selection, the systems for selection produce a focus on effective programs for selection. Therefore, selection must also be analyzed as a ritual of verification and legitimation and not as an assessment of effectiveness.

Selection and resistance

Critics of attempts to select young talents are not lacking, however. Many researchers emphasize how an early selection is made based on maturity, social prerequisites, anthropometric measurements and body measurements rather than talent (Burgess & Naughton, 2010; Pearson & Naughton, 2006; Russell Martindale, et al., 2013). This refers to factors impossible to influence by training, and therefore selection runs the risk of selecting children who are precocious, rather than the most talented. Thus, they argue that the basis for early selection on such premises means selecting the wrong individuals. Instead of finding talent, they find early maturity (Peterson, 2011). Numerous studies have emphasized this *relative age effect* (RAE), showing how children in a selection period are more likely to be selected if they are born early in a selection period than would be expected from the potential sample group as a whole (Musch & Hay, 1999). Moreover, researchers have emphasized talent

selection as a self-fulfilling prophecy and position a number of individuals as having high potential, as giving them favorable conditions explains the increased performance (Rigney, 2010). This, as much as innate potential, Adamsen underlines, can be an equally important reason for success in these development programs.

[...] by explicitly differentiating those 'who have more' (and so receive 'more', thanks to the effect's underlying mechanism) from those who have less (and so receive less), the theory implicitly provides criteria for identifying talented individuals. In other words, those who have more wealth, more skills, more ability or a greater mental endowment will – again, thanks to the underlying social mechanism – receive more recognition, more resources and better opportunities. This, in turn, means that they will be treated as having some kind of talent (Adamsen, 2016, pp. 11).

Instead, Adamsen (2016) argues that variables such as arbitrariness, discrimination and faith influence the process of selection. This is particularly significant in team sports where e.g. the cooperation with teammates is a central parameter (Pearson et al., 2006). It is argued that it is not only about identifying a few single factors and the individuals' skills, but also employing a multifaceted set of characteristics in community with others in order to get a team to perform (Krogh Christensen, 2010). Within clubs, it is highlighted that the intention is to find players to, for example, fit into a group or to find specific role-players.

Researcher has also criticized attempts to select talents at a young age, targeting the low accuracy of the sample and the social costs associated with this activity (Anshel & Lidor, 2012; Fahlström, 2011; Russell Martindale et al., 2013). Moreover, this organizational structure has produced a specific logic of practice. Numerous studies have pointed out that the sporting field is primarily based on *a logic of competition* (Engström, 1999; Trondman, 2011).

This logic produces a rationale of practice, which has been described as problematic for participants not embracing this logic and as standing in conflict with the individual's opportunity for lifelong sporting activity without an interest or requirement for progression (Engström, 2011). In recent years, however, criticism has been raised and alternative theoretical points of departure have been suggested to rework the subject matter, such as discourse analysis, discursive psychology and narrative inquiry (McGannon & Smith, 2014). Criticism has been directed towards this competition critical discourse, arguing that this reduces complex social processes and fails to take into account that each sport has its own discursive framework (Hjelm, 2014).

Success-stories in sports

Success stories are a familiar narrative genre to which a significant part of society can relate to, either by embracing or resisting. These stories are constructed as a part of a normative framework and produce normative practice. The success story is personal but also produced in a context, and therefore genre specific and discursively archetypical. Personal stories are culturally constrained and whether they are fictional or non-fictional stories, they have to be agreed upon by the members to become legitimate, self-evident and true (Barthes, 1983). The trajectories for these personal stories are limited and specific versions are repeated and contain certain dramaturgical characteristics and narrative elements. Through investigating small stories in local interaction, Phoenix (2008) foregrounds, we can learn something about discursively shared narratives and how people in everyday language use positions themselves in larger, established narratives. Interaction, whether it is in group-work (Barker & Quennerstedt, 2016), mundane conversations (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006), or interview interaction, are always part of a wider context and are to be analyzed within their discursive framework. This part illustrates a number of shared narratives of success within the discourse of sport and demonstrates recurrent narrative elements. This dissertation does not purport to map and compile all success stories, but describes a pallet of familiar stories that form the framework for interaction and serves as rhetorical resources in the personal stories in the empirical material.

Stories of sporting success

Stories of heroes, natural talents, geniuses, and the exceptionally gifted are a historically familiar narrative figure and a central element in various genres of stories. The concept of exceptional individual occurs constantly as an important resource for narrating personal success in a variety of areas, such as gifted child research (Kreger Silverman, 2013), heroes in folk tales (Propp, 1968) and, not the least, the sport hero (Hargreaves, 2000; Hellström, 2014). The narrative of being exceptionally gifted is often emphasizes a struggle for acceptance and understanding and researchers often underline how the exceptionally gifted have been (and still are) stigmatized (Coleman, 2012).

In sports, there seems to be an eternal interest in stories of talent discovery and how the young athletes are refined into elite adults. There are numerous stories of how they are discovered and transformed into elite athletes in a tortuous road to success. However, narratives in sports not only embrace trajectories for elite success, they also underline sports as an arena of fostering and an important part of civil society. Messner (2011) shows how parental stories about reasons for letting their children attend sporting activities are clearly gendered. Expectations of sporting success seem to differ and the purpose of sport practices is explained differently. When narrating girls and sports, it is 'freedom of choice' and the empowerment of engaging in traditionally "non-girly-activities" that is emphasized, while when talking about the boys sports practice, it is explained by predispositions of being active and aggressive. This shows how sports participation is legitimized by using different gendered narratives and gender stereotypes that are not used by the parents outside the field of sport. This *soft essentialism* is a key site for the construction of a shared narrative of gender difference in sports (Messner, 2011). Furthermore, organized sport is an arena of socialization into a competitive individual, and it encourages particular behaviors and emotional expressions. One such expression is the approach to failure and not being (too) emotional and openly dis-

playing sadness. Instead, the boys are schooled to respond to failure with anger and sport practice can be understood as an arena for “hardening boys” (Messner, 2009). In this dissertation, it is illustrated how being too emotional, or rather showing the wrong kinds of emotional expressions, produces a non-desirable position. The narrative accounts from the young participants in this work show particular ways of handling pressure by being stable (adequately emotional) and hard-working in order to display “the right personality”.

Moreover, the athletes’ personal stories are attracting a growing interest. The trajectories for such personal, yet shared, stories is limited, and specific versions are repeated and have certain dramaturgical characteristics and features. For instance, the storyline of succeeding against all odds, such as those of the soccer players Luis Suárez or Zlatan Ibrahimović, who despite rowdy home situations and adversities have reached worldwide success (Lagercrantz, 2013; Suarez, 2014). Another frequent narrative emphasizes “the power of hard work” and how team spirit can turn on pre-superior opponents, as when the US hockey team managed to accomplish “a miracle on ice” by beating the unbeatable Soviet Union (Coffey, 2005). There are also storylines of under-dog-success, such as the Russian tennis club which despite “non-existing” economical resources, managed to create more world class women players than the entire United States (Coyle, 2009).

Hellström (2014) highlights specific characteristics of a sporting hero in the media discourse in Sweden during the 2000s, showing how loyalty, humility and honesty are key features that are needed to create and obtain hero status. Furthermore, he suggests two main narratives, i) the nature-child and ii) the perfectionist. The nature-child-stories describe “the oddballs” going their own way, whilst the perfectionists are the hard-workers leaving nothing to chance, prepared to work harder than everyone else. Stark (2010) claims that the sporting hero is used as a cultural substitute for the war-hero in the postwar era. This representation comprises a normative Swedish masculinity:

a well-behaved, simple and unspoiled athlete from a small industrial community. These narratives of success through hard work, team-work and being an underdog are particularly central in the Scandinavian narrative context (Dahlén, 2008). At the same time, Tolvheden (2008) are emphasizing a “play-boy-masculinity” in sports, characterized by an independent and pleasure-seeking consumer. Moreover, stories about the small country in the north, despite its size manage to achieve success through team spirit and their unique model of sports are recurrent stories and supported by the national sports confederations. However, this uniqueness is similarly described in the writings of both the Norwegian and the Swedish organization (SSC, 2009; Norwegian sport confederation/NIF, 2011).

Narrating the Swedish model of sports

Companies and political organizations often emphasize their corporate story as elements to build and showcase their corporate identity and to produce a legitimacy for the operation. This narrative work of legitimizing practices is also vital for the Swedish sports movement. Certain organizational narratives and historical descriptions become central to underpin as elements in a legitimate narrative and to legitimate as tools in organizational activities (Bacchi, 2009). Accordingly, the Swedish sports confederation is also safeguarding a particular historiography, highlighting specific historical elements and experiences to produce legitimacy.

In these narratives, the long heritage as a non-governmental and autonomous organisation sprung from the masses are emphasized and this has formed a structure of democratic governance within of the civil society. These narratives highlights how the Swedish Sports Confederation was formed in the early 2000s and still today has a commission to handle national sport politics, distribute annual state funding and organize and support the work of national sport federations. This historiography is characterized by highlighting

the organization as autonomous (or at least, non-governmental), based on voluntary work, non-profit and membership-based clubs and democratic government. Furthermore, it underlines how the clubs are autonomous, controlled by the members at annual general meetings (AGMs) and organized geographically as members of sports federations and, in turn, subsumed under the umbrella-organization, Swedish sports confederation (Malmsten & Pallin, 2005). This main principle of autonomy, giving the organization the trust to administer and distribute state funding and organize the operation, is often described as *the implicit contract* (Norberg, 2011). This contract and the organisations autonomy, is often highlighted as an important part of civil society (Carlsson, Norberg & Persson, 2011). However, the historical emergence of organized sports is a complex phenomenon in the intersection between the logic of non-governmental organizations and market logic (Zethrin, 2016). Zethrin (2016) argues for the logic of competition, rather than public health or fostering, as the fundamental basis for the development of organized sports in Sweden. This premise, however, is not foregrounded in the Swedish sports confederation-story.

The Swedish sports confederation and governance

The expansion of organized sports in Sweden in the late 1900s is in many ways parallel to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. When the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1959 (albeit, as a statement of principle) this was contemporary to an expansive period for organized sport in Sweden and a period in which state funding for child- and youth sports were introduced and, perhaps therefore, initiated as an expansion of organized child- and youth sports (Norberg, 2004). Questions about children's rights and children's sport participation are a contemporary and central area in the Swedish sports movement, and hold a potential dilemma – selecting a few talents while at the same time ensuring the right for every child to participate. This problem is also part of this dilemmatic space of participation and selection,

which needs to be handled by the organization to produce legitimacy for selection in social practice. Moreover, organizational narratives of the SSC often highlight the societal benefits of sports, e.g. how the activities contribute to public health, the fostering of democratic citizens, or the integration of refugees (SSC, 2009). Historically, significantly less space in the work on legitimacy of sports in society has been done by referring to competitive sporting activities or by emphasizing competition as an environment of fostering. This historical emphasis on sports as a means for public health and as a response to social problems is also present today and provides implications for the legitimacy work of selection in relation to governmental grants (Ekholm, 2016).

It has been argued that such NGOs, with the aim of promoting social utility, are incompatible with being autonomous. Accordingly, activities based on public sector grants and subsidies have an increasing need to show societal relevance and to display operational legitimacy vis à vis both local government and as part of the welfare state at large (Fahlén & Stenling, 2015). Norberg (2011) raises the question of whether it is possible to maintain autonomy towards the state with such extensive public support and underlines that such large public funding holds a dilemma for both parties. For the state, this means balancing between offering resources and responsibility while at the same time safeguarding control over public means. For the SSC, it is about the autonomy and independent allocation of resources, as these are a prerequisite for the operation to be carried out in its present form. Such economic dependence implies a form of normative autonomy regarding the values of the operation and sporting policies rather than economic autonomy (Carlsson, et al., 2011).

In recent years, it has been argued that this implicit contract and the organizational model are challenged due to an increased professionalization and commercialization of sports worldwide (Ronglan, 2015). However, this concern for increased professionalization of sport is not new, it is an ongoing debate since the 1950s (Stark, 2010). However, this has added a new discussion about the role of organized sports in the area of sport politics and sports policy

research (Houlihan & Zheng, 2015). Government support for sports has become increasingly conditional, and the implicit contract has become increasingly explicit. The role of the SSC has rather adopted the form of a semi-public administration. Therefore, the organizational narratives have also been an increasingly central concern for the Swedish sports confederation, and this is e.g. emphasized in their policy documents (SSC, 2009).

In order to maintain and strengthen the support from society and its citizens, we must on all levels become more and more active when it comes to argue for the positive values of sport and the fact that this investment gives many times back to the community and sponsors of our activities. Through our clear stance against what is bad and destructive in society becomes our arguments more credible (SSC, 2009, pp. 19).

The SSC here highlights how legitimacy and narratives are needed. Furthermore, size and transparency are central elements in the organizational stories. By underlining how they are an open, comprehensive and large organization (including nearly 3 million people out of a population of 9 million), this legitimizes the role as a central part of civil society (SSC, 2009). Accordingly, a number of questions about child and youth selection need to be narrated by the SSC to gain trust and legitimacy both within the organization and among its participants, and more widely from sources of political authority in general. As the Swedish model for organizing sports accommodates child and youth sports on all levels, including grassroots sport as well as elite competition within mainly non-profit clubs that are primarily based on non-salaried work, this needs to be addressed. Moreover, state- and local governmental grants are a large economic provider and the securing of this funding remains a prerequisite for the activity to be carried out in its present form. This is one dilemmatic space investigated in this study (article I) and this organizational narrative of an inclusive sports movement is an important part of the discursive framework and gives implications for the interaction in article II and III.

The Swedish model as a dilemmatic space

As been highlighted in the previous section, the member-controlled organizational governance structure emphasized as specific for Scandinavian sports, and of vital importance when narrating *the Swedish model of sports*, has in the last decades been challenged by the increasing professionalization-narrative (Fahlén & Stenling, 2015). This historiography has connections to other fields of society and emphasizes the relationship between management and labor and is based on consensus and political pragmatism rather than conflict (Karlson & Lindberg, 2008). Through mutual societal responsibilities from both parts, a spirit of consensus has been developed. Moreover, this Swedish model has been connected to an expanded welfare model, in which a close collaboration between state and independent organizations has become a central element of the social structure (Norberg, 2004). This has been characterized by an assumption that a strong civil society is in general based on non-profit organizations.

In a Scandinavian research context there is a long tradition of historical studies about civil society organizations as bottom-up, grass-root movements, such as the labor movement and the temperance movement. Furthermore, an increasing research interest has also been directed towards the role of the sports movement, as one central independent organization within the civil society. However, some researchers have described SSC as a government agency, disguised as a non-profit and independent organization (Lindroth, 1974). Norberg (2004) underlines that previous historical studies often regard such organizations as positive forces in society and this has characterized much of sports research. This field of research has often tried to contribute to the development of sport, encouraging sporting activities, rather than adapting a critical starting point. Nevertheless, an organization needs to legitimize their operations and this also applies to sport.

Public debates concerning legitimacy are often based on binaries or dichotomies, such as public/private, male/female or, as in this study, commercial/non-profit and elite sport/grassroots sport (Bacchi, 2009). Such binaries, however, cannot be easily subsumed into good and bad or enable organizations to choose one alternative. Rather, this involves two desired positions that contradict or conflict with each other. In organized sports in Sweden, one such dichotomy deals with investing in young talents to develop future elite athletes, and to enable all children to participate in sporting activities regardless of competence. Another dilemmatic space involves the relationship between a grassroots sports movement and a professionalized sporting organization. This all-embracing approach, which includes both of these principles, is emphasized by the SSC (2009) as an organizational strength. The model as a success is clearly stated:

Swedish sport is successful with an impressive and long list of familiar profiles rich on medals, that for a long time have strengthened the image of both Sweden and the sports movement. The sports movement stands on a solid foundation of democratic associations, which is the heart of our Swedish sports model. This is where we conduct the activities, which are the base and the key to all success (SSC, 2014, p. 7).

The Swedish model and the dilemmatic space of selection

The internal narrative underlines this organizational model as fundamental for success. At least a couple of basic issues are at stake here. First, there is the issue surrounding the difficulties of predicting a child's capacity for elite level sports as an adult. Secondly, there is the issue surrounding legitimation, namely the need to ensure a fair process for those involved and to politically legitimize selection in a publicly funded organization with an assignment to make sports accessible to all. The organizations need to legitimize their

operations and answer to an urgent need for this form of operation, and organizational storytelling is an instrument to do this. At the same time, this often implies balancing different interests or dichotomies. Bacchi (2009) emphasizes the importance of analyzing the relationship between these binaries: how and where they appear and how they function to shape and understand an issue and are used to legitimize social practice. This dichotomy is nevertheless a key issue in the case of talent selections, when resources are to be allocated and when this practice is to be politically legitimized. In the previous section it has been shown how the historic heritage and the Swedish model are rhetorical figures used to do this. This produces an organization not only experienced, but also democratically governed and, thereby, a trustworthy administrator. In this work, the analytical concept of rationality is used to investigate the organizational binaries or problems. Rationality in this sense is not connected to a common understanding of rationality as particularly rational or good. It is used to describe how specific ways of thinking produce a particular mode of governing or legitimacy for governing (Dean, 1999; Rose, 2000).

Personal stories in a discourse of sports

There has long been a strong interest in larger cultural narratives of sport success in individual biographies, tribute publications to sports federations and every day media reports (Dahlén, 2008; Hellström, 2014). These stories are not created in a societal vacuum; they are produced within a discursive framework of time and space and build on previous narratives. The stories of success, both the personal stories and the organizational narratives, are used to support a dream of success, but they also serve as a symbol for societal values and cultural morals within a discourse of sport. However, far less attention has been devoted to personal narratives in sports during ongoing practice, such as investigating how such culturally shared narratives are used as rhetorical resources in personal stories (Grahn, 2015).

This study would like to do that and take on a narrative approach to illustrate what the young participants “do” with their talk and how they accomplish a sense of self when they are engaged in storytelling. Many formulations have been put forth to describe different kinds of stories or to encapsulate specific approaches and attempts to analyze narratives as culturally shared or individually specific. Within the narrative field of research, discussions on analytical methods and how different contexts and stories can be analyzed as societal epiphenomenon or as rhetorical elements of personal identity work, have been vital for decades (Bamberg, 2006). It has been argued that by studying, for example, autobiographical texts and life story interviews, certain culturally shared stories become visible through iterativity (Rogers, 2007). Analyzing recurrent big stories has underlined the ways in which standards and norms are produced and reproduced within discourse and how certain positions become desirable, while others are not.

However, criticism has been raised suggesting there is too much focus on big stories and arguing that these narratives do not place emphasis on narrative negotiation or different forms of everyday interactions as contextually bound genres (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). These archetypal stories are rarely explicitly expressed in everyday conversations, and such big-narrative research fails to show the heterogeneity of narratives used in every day interaction. Furthermore, it has been argued that big stories and small stories complement one another and that taken together they represent a more auspicious direction for narrative inquiry (Freeman, 2006). Bamberg (1987) illuminates the use of linguistic contrasts by pointing out that neither can narratives be explained without an exploration of the discourse function, nor can the constitution of the narratives be explained without a detailed analysis of the linguistic particulars. Accordingly, in this study the analytical purpose is to analyze the rhetorical resources in two different narrative genres, PAIs and personal stories of success, analyzed within a discursive framework sport and

selection. The analyses concern the construction and (re)production of talents in sports and how this selection is accounted for and legitimized.

Searching for talent in interaction

The importance of conversations or interviews as a means for identifying the right individuals and unveiling individual personality is a central part of contemporary society. Such interviews have been frequently used as tools for charting individual traits and as assessments of performance and potential for development. The responses provided by the interviewees in the PAI are considered to say something important about them as individuals with attitudes, characteristics, abilities or talents, as means of selection. Performance appraisal interviews have become a recurrent and standardized form in the assessment and evaluation of individuals in the selection process (Granath, 2008). These interviews are supposed to say something important about the interviewee and by engaging in such formalized conversation, the individuals' motivation is assumed to be identified and, thereby, can be evaluated in selection practices (Grote, 2002).

The first step to illuminate talent selection is to analyze how these rationales for selection are produced and legitimized in written material (article I). This illustrates the process of selecting young individuals and how this produces a legitimate rationale. It is also part of a framework for a specific set of social practices that provides the specific organizational stories' justness. Two of these social practices are studied in article two (small stories in organizational interaction) and article three (personal narratives in research interviews). To sum up, the organizational narrative, the Swedish model, emphasizes certain rhetorical elements, such as state independence, non-profit based non-salaried work, and an integrated organization that comprises elite and grass-roots sport. This narrative includes a number of dilemmatic spaces, as the analyses illustrate, and needs to be handled both by the organization at

large and by the participants in social practice. Personal narratives draw upon and build on such discursively shared narratives, as a way to produce a coherent narrative of success.

Theoretical framework

In the previous chapter it was proposed that the area of talent selection is a dilemmatic space that needs to be legitimized within the organization as well as within the Swedish welfare state at large. This has resulted in the production of an apparatus of selection, discursive rationales for a fair selection and narratives within this practice. In this chapter, the theoretical framework is presented as the basis for the analyses and the lens through which the empirical material will be studied. This chapter intends to outline the rationalities for selection and the framework for narrative interaction. The focus is on different narrative practices within the framework of selection, both in organizational narratives to legitimize practice (article I) and narrative interaction during practice (articles II & III). The chapter develops the theoretical approach introduced in the previous chapter and introduces the analytical frame and theoretical concepts that have guided the analytical work. Thereafter, the narrative approach for analyzing stories in different types of material is illustrated and the different discursive material, written or spoken, are analyzed as *text-in-context*, emphasizing both the context of the situation and also a broader discursive context (Ben-Amos, 1993).

Discourse and narrative analysis

Traditionally, to engage in discourse analysis has meant *analyzing discourse*. As identifying the constructions of discourses or discourse analysis, it focuses on speech organization or how discourses are used as flexible rhetorical re-

sources in social interaction (Burr, 1995). Within such systems specific *discursive practices* and narratives are produced as legitimate and trustworthy. When specific knowledge is given recognition and has been accepted as true, they constitute discourses of reality (Rose, 2000). Accordingly, specific narratives exist within and through discursive practice, or rather; these narratives are produced in discourse. These in-discourse-narratives produce legitimacy for a specific set of storylines and contribute to, for example, legitimizing social practice. In this dissertation, written documents, research interviews and performance appraisal interviews are highlighted as three different narrative practices.

The work reveals how the analyses of narrative practices may not be separated from its usage contexts. Instead of studying narratives as a separate form of action, it is treated as an integral aspect of discourse. The narratives cannot be explained without the exploration of its discursive function, nor can the constitution of these narratives be explained without a detailed analysis of their linguistic particulars (Bamberg, 1987). Moreover, positioning as part of the construction of identity is understood as a process rather than a product and takes shape in specific interactional occasions in which discursive work serves to negotiate the individual with the social (Georgakopoulou, 2006). Analytically, this means focusing on narrative positioning and how this is produced in the apparatus of selection as a whole, as well as how it is displayed in storytelling practices.

This dissertation focuses on how specific discursive practices are used to produce selectability and how they produce narratives and specific subject positions within this apparatus of selection. These practices are constructed within a specific framework, where particular narratives, actions and positions are co-constructed. In this work, focus is directed towards the position as selectable. However, trying to identify, select and develop the exceptionally gifted is not limited to the world of sports. This is part of a larger discursive

framework of selection and self-promotion in general. The search for the exceptionally talented is recurrent in several areas: schools trying to identify gifted children (Kreger Silverman, 2013), businesses looking for the next great leader (Epstein, 2014) or sports clubs is searching for the next outstanding talent (Bloom, 1985; Coyle, 2009). These searches for talent have been present in many historical moments, as an important part of societies and nations (Adamsen, 2016). This does not mean that all practices are identical over time or space, but they have a kinship and operate with similar rationales: by observation and through interviews identifying and selecting individuals with special abilities. In the discourse of sports this apparatus of talent selection includes selection camps accompanied by observation, tests and interviews to produce a rationale for identifying and selecting the right individuals.

The construction of a rationale

Another key part in the effort to study legitimacy for selection in narrative practice involves analyzing the rationality of a discourse and how certain stories are perceived and accepted as rational and thereby legitimate to use. However, this legitimacy cannot only be accepted as rational in terms of its correctness in selection. The process must also be legitimized as fair in terms of being ethical or humane to those participating and, moreover, the political welfare state at large. Child and youth selection is linked to the dilemmatic area of grassroots sports and elite sports within the same organization. This includes both the right to self-fulfilment and recognition for the talented individual while at the same time addressing the fact that some are deselected.

The analytical base here is to analyze accounts and actions as representations of reality, rather than mirror the sites of an individual's inner self (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). These different narratives both *construct discourse*, as producers of discourse, and are constructed within discourse, as produced by discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Therefore, this is something that indi-

viduals are bound to while at the same time constantly changing and co-constructing in narrative practice. This system is not only a separate constellation of elements of language, but also includes *ratione materiae* or material-discursive forces. The materiality is one part of discourse that affects the ways discursive practices are understood (Barad, 2003). Discourse is not solely limited to spoken or written language; it also involves physical bodies, movement, material resources and the designing of rooms. Larsson (2014) emphasizes that discourse is rather to be understood in terms of actions, as meaning making practices, rather than exclusively language and language use. In this work, for example, the construction of the ideal body for sports performance and material resources such as stopwatches, schedules and timetables, lists of physiological test results or a gym, are all parts of the discursive apparatus. Therefore, language cannot be separated from materiality. They are integrated aspects of human behaviour. For the purpose of this study, however, the analytical focus is directed to the spoken and written parts of discourse.

Within this discursive system, specific elements or discursive practices occur as patterns. The analyses are interested in identifying how specific positions become legitimate and preferred, while others are not. These patterns of rationales are not connected to a common-sense understanding of rationality as particularly wise or good. The concept of rationale here is used to describe how a specific way of thinking regulates moral accounts and produces specific narratives. Specific stories thereby become trustworthy, and particular positions desirable, within this rationale. These stories are accepted and contribute to the inclusion or exclusion of specific positions and narratives within discourse. This dissertation seeks to investigate how specific personal storylines are legitimate to use within this apparatus of selection. The analytical focus is the discursive production of legitimacy and the social practice that follows such logic. Accordingly, it addresses the ways in which the fair or unbiased talent selection is narrated and how specific subject positions are produced

(and reproduced) in this discursive practice. This enables legitimacy for dividing and classifying individuals. For example, psychiatry divides the population by means of diagnoses. In sports, the participants are divided through the selection apparatus. This means that certain criteria, or talent indicators, must be shown to appear selectable, and this is also done in interaction. As will be shown in this work, self-discipline and to turn oneself into a subject of improvement, are key narrative elements for the selectable. At the same time, the organization needs to produce a rationale for this dividing practice of selection.

The concept of apparatus

Foucault (1977) defines the term *apparatus* as a formation that, at a given historical moment, serves as a response to an urgent need. The term apparatus is used in the writings of Foucault to describe a constellation of elements and is deployed to understand how different discourses, laws, scientific statements and moral values act within a specific field to determine what can be said and what is forced to remain unsaid (Foucault, 1977). An apparatus is established between elements and through the links between these elements.

[...] a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements (Foucault, 1977, pp. 194-95).

We should understand an apparatus as a formation which at a given historical moment responds to an urgent need or a problem. In this case, it concerns the making of a fair selection of the best suited young players at selection camps.

Here, the apparatus of selection serves an organizational function by way of its practices and rationalizing selection as practice in addition to the position of “talented” or “non-talented”. This serves as a response to the organization’s dilemmatic space of giving the talents opportunity to develop their full potential while at the same time ensuring that every child participates. Bacchi (2009) emphasizes that any policy formulation, whether implicit or explicit, contains these kinds of dilemmatic spaces.

[...] if you look at a specific policy, you can see that it understands the ‘problems’ to be a particular sort of ‘problem’. Policies, therefore, constitute (or give shape to) ‘problems’. Hence, rather than *reacting* to ‘problems’, governments are *active* in the creation (or production) of policy ‘problems’ (Bacchi, 2009, p. 1).

Accordingly, to manage organisational problems and be seen as neutral or apolitical is to make the act of decision and judgment appear as if it were a technical mechanism. By referring to scientific facts, numerical figures and numbers, the act of subjective choice becomes an objective rational decision (Billig, 1996). An organization’s efforts to achieve legitimacy becomes a central issue, according to which the need to be seen as rational both in action and behaviour is crucial for credibility. The principal implication here is that institutional interaction by and within the organization then becomes self-evident and thus not subject to questioning (Brunsson, 2006).

Analytically, importance must therefore be given to the analysis of how a given problem is represented and the exercise of power as practices within this rationale. Instead of studying participants’ or coaches’ abilities, or the validity of a certain talent development program, the purpose here is to study discursive and narrative practices. Power is not only structure as reflected by the regulations, nor is it only social interaction represented in every day interaction; it is these two combined, working simultaneously. When studying organizational power or power in general, this involves that facts must be freed from

the groups where they are perceived as natural and universal and rather be studied as consequences of the discursive apparatus (Rose, 1998).

Narrative and narrative analysis

Narrative research has an increasingly high profile in the social sciences, but from different starting points. As Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2008) emphasize, the concept of narrative itself is in dispute and therefore there is a lack of self-evident categories. However, the united interest of the narrative research field is in the ways in which stories can open up new perspectives, and in empirical research this concerns the analysis of materials in a new way (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008). Benwell and Stokoe (2006) claim that we live in a story-telling-society in which life is made intelligible through the practice of telling narratives and suggesting that we should study what people are doing when they tell stories. By extension, this means we should analyze what stories are designed to do. Researchers have focused on *big stories* (Freeman, 2006), narrative structure (Labov, 1997), personal life stories (Mishler, 2004) or *the narrated self* (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Analytically, this has meant focusing on narrative components and temporality (Labov, 1997), turn-taking in every day interaction (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 1997) or analyzing narratives as *text in context* (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992). This study adopts a contextualized approach to narratives emphasizing both the context of the situation and the wider context of culture and discourse (Ben-Amos, 1993).

Analyzing narratives in context

An increased focus in narrative research focuses on the co-construction of narratives and local functions and patterns, rather than as representations of a broader culture (Andrews, et al., 2008). Accordingly, big stories become tools by which we understand the stories of others and how we understand ourselves, and they are also accordingly used as resources in personal narratives.

Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) argue that these personal stories have been taken as more or less unmediated representations of identity, rather than framed and constructed within discourse. By focusing on big stories, it is argued that we can identify discursive patterns and learn about everyday language use. The inverse relationship also applies – by focusing on small stories in local interaction, we can learn about shared cultural narratives and how people in everyday language use construct personal stories in larger and established narratives (Phoenix, 2008). Personal stories are also social and not merely individual. Personal narratives are, in effect, culturally provided stories about selves that offer resources for individuals in their interaction with one another and themselves. They are means for making a person intelligible through narratives according to demands produced in social life (Rose, 1998). However, far less attention has been devoted to how different contexts affect storytelling.

Accordingly, the personal story requires the use of cultural resources, such as shared narratives to work within a specific discursive framework. The story recruits particular storylines to be trustworthy. In this dissertation, it is illustrated how a set of shared sport-success-narratives are specific within this particular discursive, rather than being culturally specific. This produces and reproduces accepted, shared narratives in this discourse. These discourse-of-sports narratives, particularly in the discursive practice of talent selection camp, produce and reproduce a specific set of discursively shared stories. Therefore, this work will introduce the concept of *discursively shared narratives* as better equipped to analyze these personal narratives.

Analyzing narrative genres

De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) highlight a shift from narratives as *types of text* to narratives as *types of events*, as a narrative genre, and advocate a more contextualized approach to narrative data. Instead of trying to erase the

interactional context, this approach highlights how interaction is produced in a particular context, in a specific genre of interaction. This means a shift from *narrative genre as structure*, to *narrative genre as contextual framework*. This is also used to bridge the gap between personal narratives and broader social narratives and how big stories are used by speakers in a specific context. De Fina (2013) foregrounds a functional perspective on narrative and how people use stories in every day interaction. Georgakopoulou (2012) also subscribe to a more practice-based approach to small stories and self. This means analyzing research interviews, not as inferior to *natural-occurring-talk* but as another genre of interaction, with another setting, specific trajectories and different conventions of conduct. Furthermore, they underline understanding of narratives supported by field studies in a specific discourse and emphasize that narratives are to be studied as discursive practices. This genre-approach to the narrative data is a central analytical starting point in this study. I intend to analyze different types of material, written documents, research interviews and appraisals between the coaches and the young participants as different narrative practices. At the same time, these practices work within a discursive framework, using discursively shared narratives, and the analyses aim to investigate what stories that can be told and which positions that will be aspirational within this framework.

Analyzing interviews as narrative genres

Different forms of appraisals, personal appraisals and development discussions are a recurrent narrative genre in many different areas. This institutionalized interview (or talk) is often conducted to identify personal character, attitudes and goals of pupils and employees or, as in this case, the young athletes. The interviews are both used to evaluate past efforts and as a means to identify potential future development. The need for reciprocity is often emphasized and that it should not be too formal: as an examining interview, dis-

guised as every-day-talk (Granath, 2008). In sport, these interviews often target performance, or rather, are used as a tool to assess development potential. In this dissertation, *performance appraisal interviews* (PAIs) will be used. The PAIs in this work shows that this is part of a common practice of conversation, but at the same time a specific discursive practice used as an instrument for selection. Previous research on PAI has been conducted in many areas other than sport, such as in schools or in workplaces. Focus has been directed to benefits of the interviews and how these appraisals should be constructed in order to be more effective in achieving targeted organizational goals (Grote, 2002; Losyk, 2002). Moreover, organizational effects, such as creating and shaping an organizational culture (Fletcher, 2001; Scott & Einstein, 2001), or as an instrument for increasing employee's satisfaction (Mani, 2002; Roberts, 2002), have also been topics for research. The very purpose of this genre of talk is to construct a picture of who the interviewee really is. However, as Van De Mierop and Schnurr (2014) and Asmuß (2008) have pointed out, research in this area has paid insufficient attention to these kinds of interviews as narrative genres within specific discursive frameworks or practices. In these interviews, it becomes central to position yourself in relation to organizational goals and expectations. In this work, a key issue is narrative positioning to become selectable in interaction.

Positioning in narrative interaction

Stories are a central part in the construction of identity, as ways to understand our self and others. However, these stories are constructed in interaction as a part of a discursive framework. Goffman (1959) emphasizes that *the self* (or ego) is an interactional work and underlines how identities are continually produced in the interaction of daily life. Moreover, Foucault (1982) emphasized that interaction should be studied as a historically and ideologically contextualized social practice. Therefore, Foucault (1982) argues, the analytical

focus is to analyze forms by which people are led to constitute themselves as subjects. However, Foucault did not engage in how this identity work is performed on an empirical level. Rather, he uses the concept of subject position to deconstruct identity as universally and biologically fixed, focusing on the repertoires of controlling techniques. Davies and Harré (1990) highlight the concept of position as an analytical instrument and tool that is better equipped for analyzing identity work in interaction than, for instance, role. In contrast to a more solid role-concept, often emphasized in social psychology, positioning theorists underline positioning as fluid and contextual (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). This does not mean that identities are seen as momentarily fleeting and changeable or constructed anew in every situation. They may well be relatively rigid and solid, yet socially constructed within a specific discursive framework (Tirado & Galvez, 2007). Dowling Næss (2001) emphasizes that positions are produced within systems of meaning and discourses, imbued in power, and do not take place in a social or political vacuum.

Researchers have been inspired by the concept of positioning as an analytical instrument, rather than in the more abstract meaning used by Foucault (Bamberg, 1997; Davies & Harré, 1990). Many studies have emphasized the importance of studying positioning in narrative interaction and underline different levels of positioning in identity construction (Bamberg, 2006; De Fina, 2013; Depperman, 2013). The first level underlines positioning in discourse, based on stereotypes and stereotyped positions made available within discourse. The second level highlights different ways of individual positioning in relation to the discursive stereotypes and, finally, a third level where individuals try to define themselves and their personality as a stable identity, in relation to the general context as well as a specific situation.

Positioning theorists often highlight that in all forms of human interaction, implicit and explicit positioning are happening (Harré, et. al, 2009). This taken-for-granted practice, seemingly immanent, is not to be studied as per-

sonal traits but as positions discursively constructed in interaction. Breidenstein and Thompson (2014) highlight that how people position themselves within the world is dependent on discursive practices, and this makes them recognizable as subjects to others. Therefore, narrative positioning is a discursive practice and a position is co-constructed in interaction framed by discourse. Certain positions are made possible within specific discourses. Some positions become discursively possible and focus is on how these positions are constructed (Harré et al, 2009). Positioning has to be studied as discursively produced, and therefore importance must be given to try to interlink discursive work in interaction with organizationally produced written material (Depperman, 2013; De Fina, 2013). Bamberg explains:

Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts, which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned (Bamberg, 1997, p. 4).

Accordingly, this dissertation is linking the Foucauldian concept of *subject positions* and the analytical instrument of *positioning* to narrative interaction. This work considers the wider discourse of sports in general, and the discursive practice of selection in particular, as an important framework for narrative positioning. Within this framework, specific discursive practices become rational, such as, for example, selection camps, PAIs or talent development programs. Furthermore, these practices produce legitimacy for specific narratives, as important resources for positioning and the personal storytelling.

Personal narratives and positioning in sports

We live in a “talkative-society” where we are supposed to narrate ourselves and display advantages and abilities and, although in a limited and self-conscious way, display (some of) our weaknesses and shortcomings (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Studying what people do with their talk and how they accomplish a sense of self when they are engaged in storytelling has become an increasingly important part of narrative analysis (Phoenix, 2008; Bamberg, 2006). The personal narrative produced must be coherent and consistent and build on previous accepted narratives, but still be personal within such narrative framework. The personal story, out of the variety and contradictory experiences we all have, are required of us as a central part of our narrative identity as to appear understandable and uniform (Davies & Harré, 1990). In this work, I intend to analyze how specific discursively shared narratives are put to work in personal stories by these young talents. Through investigating personal stories in local interaction, as a narrative genre, this can help us understand the discursively shared narratives and how this legitimizes social practice.

Studies on positioning in narrative interaction have often focused on an institutional setting, analyzing somewhat subordinate positions, such as young men in detention homes (Gradin Franzén & Aronsson, 2013) or people participating in unemployment programs (Bacchi, 2009). This study is directed in another direction, the desirable position: the selected. To position yourself in this narrative requires rhetorical resources. This position emphasizes a self-conscious individual setting personal goals for development to improve human capital and map out a life-path to success, is a highly desirable position. Rose (2000) underlines how the *self-governing-subject* has become an ideal position in the modern Western society of liberal democracy and how this is accomplished by showing self-reflection as an element of managing personal improvement. This dissertation will elaborate on how this appears in personal narratives in sport selection in order to be selectable in interaction. Moreover,

it sets out to deconstruct these narratives perceived as rational and make the politics of talent selection (in interaction) visible.

Narrative position in an apparatus of sport selection

A central part of research on talent and identity within the field of sports presupposes that identity is to be found within the individual, as characteristics and congenital predisposition (Connaughton & Hanton, 2009; MacNamara & Collins, 2012). Therefore, the search for talent is equated with finding specific personality traits (Eysenck, Nias & Cox, 1982; Gulbin, 2008). Also discussed within sports practice today, as illustrated in e.g. the second article of this dissertation, is the importance of showcasing a set of personal traits that are emphasized as a central part of being selectable. Therefore, the young talents need to display not only sporting skills but also an adequate personality. Furthermore, these traits must be observable in action during the selection camps - when socializing with teammates, in conversations with coaches or on the pitch during training. The analytical focus is to display the process of positioning and how this is done in different narrative practices as well as show how selectability is produced by showing specific traits. However, it is not only the interviewee that is involved in positioning; this also involves the gaze of the selecting authority – the coach. The position as expert to perform adequate selection in practice is part of the apparatus of the selection and a key feature in the co-construction of this rationale.

This dissertation contributes to the body of knowledge with a focus on the organizational legitimization of selection in sports and the positioning in interaction within this specific narrative genre. This emphasis on the contextual means certain positions become possible and desirable and others unwanted and unattractive. This is mutually constructed, designed and produced by a discursive framework, shared narratives and social practice. With these positions follows ways of behavior and norms that are possible to study, not as

personal characteristics, but as expressions of subject positions within the discourse (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). As explored in the third article, specific discursively shared narratives are used to produce personal stories of success. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) also show how discourses construct specific narratives and positions and how they are negotiated and, therefore, visible in interaction. Accordingly, I propose that being talented is co-constructed by the participant and the coach, not only in interaction, using specific shared narratives, but within this particular context. Furthermore, this professional understanding of selection forms and creates opportunities for new claims and a new authoritative coach position – the selector. Different types of assessment practices are recurrent in many contexts, in school, work interviews, or medical appointments. All these practices involves an expert assessment and rhetoric work needs to be played out to become trustworthy and legitimate. The legitimacy of such position is both connected to the formal position as expert and expected knowledge, but also about producing rhetorical legitimacy by the act of convincing (Foucault, 1982). As will be shown in this work, a similar logic applies to “the talent selector”. This position is not only legitimized through the position as selector. The selection must also be supported by rhetoric convincing, both to the participants and to the system at large. This process of establishing specialized knowledge permits the authority to put forward a specific truth, but also the authority to, through observation of practice and interviews, categorize and choose the most talented. Simultaneously, the selector is part of a general discursive apparatus of selection and narrative conventions, which must be addressed to appear legitimate.

Organizational storytelling

One of the most influential social phenomena in Western societies is the organization of social institutions. This is not only a web of concrete structure;

it is also a dynamic floating web of organizational narratives. Each organization has a contemporary and a historical repertoire of narratives, divided into internal and external stories (Czarniawska, 2007). The idea of deliberately using stories to maintain a system or to increase legitimacy has several historical examples, from the royal chronicles, legends of saints and heroic tales, to idol portrayals in the media or corporate storytelling (Propp, 1968; Rehnberg, 2014). To understand the workings of institutions and organizations, the concept of *corporate storytelling* is an important practice to investigate (Czarniawska, 1997). This practice has become a central part of a corporate culture where the brand plays a key role. Fairclough (2002) underlines that products have been *semiotized* and narrative elements have become central parts of the business, claiming that many areas of society have been colonized by this economic discourse of new capitalism. Nevertheless, companies as well as political parties or non-governmental-organizations (NGOs) often emphasize their corporate storytelling as important. In this corporate storytelling, the organization often tries to build and showcase their *corporate identity*. This involves both the explicitly produced storytelling, and the implicit narrative working in the everyday life of the institution. In this dissertation, focus is directed to the representations of the organization, rather than an unveiling of an organizational identity through its stories. Therefore, the concept of *organizational narratives* will be used instead of corporate storytelling.

Several studies have emphasized an increased market orientation in the narratives within several public organizations (Fairclough, 2002; Ronglan, 2015). Rehnberg (2014) claims that there has been a corporatization of public organizations and by using the generic term of new public management the intention is to display increased efficiency. This orientation towards an increased marketization within the public sector has led to a strong focus on narrating the efficient use of resources and thereby gaining “value-for-tax-money” (Power, 1997). It seems important to tell a coherent and trustworthy story to build relations with potential and existing customers, but also to gain legitimacy for

the operations of societal benefits which gives repercussions in everyday language use.

Method and the empirical material

This work draws on field studies during the period of final selection for youth national or district team. The participants have undergone a long selection process on a local and regional level and are now part of the final section of this process. From having initially been several hundreds, there are now only a few players who reached the final cut. This means selection camps used in hockey and football and ones a week selection-training-session (during a three month period) in floorball. It involves policy documents, educational coach literature and magazines issued by the Swedish Sports Confederation (article I), 23 recorded appraisals between national team coaches and young players (article II) and 53 recorded research interviews, analyzed in article III. The researcher participated and observed the camps, made field notes and conducted the interviews with players and coaches during the camp and observed training sessions, matches and participated in lectures. The fieldwork serves as an important contextual framework, a complexifying lens for the analyses of the interviews.

In this chapter, the methodological stances of the work are outlined based on the theoretical framework of discourse-narrative analyses. Furthermore, it describes the empirical material and the setting, as this is an important part of the framework for interaction. As described, the material consists of a wide range of materials. In this way, I intend to illustrate how the apparatus of selection works in many different ways simultaneously in everyday language use, in texts and in talk. Moreover, the chapter illustrate the procedures for analyzing different types of narrative material. Finally, this part elaborates and

discusses the ethical considerations involved when conducting the study and the wider relevance of this study.

The empirical material

The data is generated by written documents, interviews and field studies during the final part of the selection for youth national team or district representative teams in three of the largest team sports in Sweden: hockey, soccer and floorball. The participants are aged 15 years. The empirical data include three main types of material: (1) text documents, (2) performance appraisals and (3) research interviews. Additionally, interviews with coaches, focus group interviews with players were conducted and field notes were made. These are part of the contextual framework and an additional understanding of this discursive practice, but they are not explicitly analyzed in the three part articles. The main dataset is linked to each article with the same figure: Article I analyzes the text documents, article II investigates the performance appraisal interviews (henceforth, PAI) and article III analyzes the research interviews. All interview data was collected during field studies in the final camps for the district teams in football and floorball and the youth national team in hockey. The written documents were taken from the SSC official website and the educational literature was provided by SSCs educational organization SISU idrottsutbildarna. In all three articles, the texts and excerpts are translated from Swedish to English by the author and presented in the results section to illustrate recurrent answers as archetypical narrative repertoires, or genre specific storylines.

Table 1.
Summary of data

Type of empirical material	Written material (Study I)	Performance appraisal interviews (Study II)	Research interviews (Study III)
	Total quantity: 22	Total quantity: 26	Total quantity: 53
	Policy documents: 3 publications, coach education literature:	Recorded time: approx 2,5 h	Recorded time: approx 6 h
	7 books, periodicals: 12 editions.		
Data/quantity	Policy documents:	Football (total: 6)	Football (total: 21)
	SSC. (2009). Sport Wills! [Idrotten vill! Idrottsrörelsens idéprogram]	Boys: -	Boys: 10
	SSC. (2012). Focus of operations 2012-2013. [Verksamhetsinriktning, 2012/2013]	Girls: 6	Girls: 11
	SSC. (2010). Swedish Sports. [Idrotts-Sverige. En presentation av Riksidrottsförbundet].	Hockey (total: 20) Boys: 20	Hockey (total: 14) Boys: 14
	Coach Education literature	Girls: -	Girls: -
	A. Course - The Platform, literature:	Floorball	Floorball (total: 18)
	Child- and youth sports coach [Idrottsledare för barn och ungdomar]	Boys/ girls: -	Boys: 9
	Basic training for children [Basträning för barn]		Girls: 9
	B. Course - Basic coach education 1, literature:		
	Age-appropriate physical education for children and adolescents		
	[Åldersanpassad fysisk träning för barn och ungdomar]		
	Talent development [Talangutveckling]		
	Exercise with the body [Träna med kroppen]		
	C. Course - Basic coach education 2, literature:		
	Training methods for sports [Träningslära för idrotten]		
	Applied sport psychology [Praktisk idrottspsykologi]		
	Journals		
	The periodical - Swedish sports [Svensk idrott]: Publications during 2012-13 (12 editions).		

The text documents

Applying a discursive approach when analyzing organizational material, such as policy documents and educational literature as narratives, means studying text in context. This material takes shape within a specific historical, national and local context (Bacchi, 2009). It is therefore important to understand the workings of institutions in guidelines for the operation and in material aiming to put this into practice. Therefore, the material consists of various types of material: policy, educational literature and magazines. In this way, I intend to illustrate how the normative framework works in different genres of text.

The first data set of text documents comprises the educational literature included in mandatory coach development courses (seven books) and policy documents within the Swedish Sports Confederation (three documents: (1) Sport wills: Aims and guidelines for the sports movement; (2) Report of Operation, Swedish Sports Confederation 2012-2013; and (3) Sports in Sweden), as well as the periodical *Swedish Sports* (publishing eight issues/year. 12 issues included, during 2012-2013). All texts are published or utilized by the Swedish Sports Confederation (SSC) and presented in detail in Table 1. After an initial search for operational guidelines from the SSC website, I decided to focus on the document constituted policies for the operation and the guidelines for the coming years' work. Additionally, in the rich flora of the coaching and leadership courses hosted by the individual sport federations, literature was singled out from the mandatory coach-courses offered by the SSCs own educational associations (SISU idrottsutbildarna). This enabled me to examine basic ideas that can be organizationally expected to be highlighted. In order to study how guidelines are manifested in everyday writings targeting coaches and leaders, I searched for coach magazines within the Swedish sports movement. After a review of the relatively few I could find, the SSC produced *Swedish sports* was chosen. As it turned out, the magazine was closed down during the study and therefore, 12 issues instead of intended 16 are included. The

texts were read through in their entirety, and sections concerning selection, screening, identification or similar topics were coded. Based on the coding the material was themed based on content or the logic of explanation. The overall themes were deconstructed and categorized into five rhetoric practices and recurrent patterns to legitimize selection were analyzed in the result section and discussed, as part of the discursive apparatus of selection in sports.

The performance appraisal interviews

A narrative approach is well suited for studies of young people in transition and studies on positioning in narrative interaction (Heath, et al., 2009). Particularly interesting was institutionalized interactional practices, where positioning as selectable was required. This organized speech-practice is a different genre than e.g. everyday conversation or research interviews and a rare material to investigate. At the same time, it is a central part in order to understand the production of legitimacy for selection.

As a standard procedure the PAIs are conducted between the coach who is responsible for the selecting and a single player and are used as an instrument in the selection process. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 6 and 25 minutes. The empirical material comprises 26 individual appraisal interviews during selection in football and hockey: 20 PAIs with male hockey players and six PAIs with female football players. Due to the small amount of female hockey players, no selection camps were carried out. Therefore, there are a larger number of interviews (both research interviews and PAIs) with boys than girls. Furthermore, it can be noted that PAIs were not conducted in the floorball selection or by coaches in male soccer. That, in itself, is an interesting observation to continue studying. For the purpose of this study, however, this will not be further analyzed. The interviews lasted from about five to twelve minutes, comprising a total of about 160 minutes.

They were conducted and recorded by the national team coaches without the presence of the researchers.

The interview guide used was in all cases the coaches' own, and there were no known examples during the fieldwork of adjusted questions or arranged interviews to fit the research situation. On the contrary, these interviews were a routine practice and a recurring element of the selection camps. This type of conversation is emphasized as of crucial importance for the selection procedure. The excerpts cited were transcribed, followed by a thematic coding. After listening to the recorded interviews multiple times, the material was indexed with respect to repeated narratives and positions. The analyses showed that a particular set of narrative practices were linked to specific positions. These narratives included a number of rhetorical resources (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1993). The identified position, the connected narrative practices and the rhetorical tools were analyzed through the theoretical framework of positioning theory and narrative genre and presented in the results section as three rhetorical acts of balance. The excerpts presented in the results section are used to illustrate archetypical narratives or specific rhetorical devices in order to pinpoint striking and recurring themes in the whole data set.

The research interviews

Research interviews have been criticized for being artificial and therefore inferior to “naturally occurring” stories, particularly in an ethno-methodological tradition (see e.g. Schegloff, 1997). However, in more recent years researchers have emphasized the interview as an interactional context and a specific genre, proposing researchers to investigate interview narratives as *types of event* rather than *types of text* (Bamberg, 2006; De Fina, 2009). They argue that the research interview is well suited for analyzing positioning, re-routings and topic shifts in a particular context. This genre of self-talk where the participants are expected to talk about themselves are a specific type of event, or

genre of talk, familiar to top athletes and a recurring element in professional sports. Talking about yourself and your performance as an athlete is part of the production the professional athlete. Accordingly, the research interview in this specific context of ongoing selection camp should be especially appropriate to illustrate legitimate narratives in this context.

This third data set, the research interviews, were conducted as a semi-structured interview between the researcher and the participating players. The corpus of data includes 53 audio-recorded interviews with players, divided into 20 females and 33 males and a total of 6 hours of recorded material. The interviews had a length of 15-35 minutes. The interviews were carried out in the pauses between training sessions or matches, in bleachers, in the dining areas or in lecture halls. The open-ended questions were thematically arranged according to different subject areas. The interviews started off with a question where the participants were asked to describe how they went from starting their sport carrier, to the point where “we are sitting here today”. This type of question is often typical to life history research, where the aim is to allow a degree of autonomy for the participant to raise events and issues that the expressed as important (Plummer, 2001). Questions drawing on events that had happened during the selection camp were also used, such as thoughts after training session, specific events during matches and training or performance appraisal interviews with national coaches. Furthermore, the interview questions involved thoughts on the selection process and what needs to be displayed in order to be chosen or considered talented. The participant’s use of recurrent storylines were identified and analyzed by the theoretical concepts of discursively shared narratives and success-stories. This was further elaborated on and discussed, as parts of discursively shared narratives in sports and within a wider context of success-stories in general.

The setting

To understand this social practice and the narratives of the young participants, attention is given to the discursive framework. Certain practices, positions and narratives become possible within discourse and displayed in discursive practice (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2002). Therefore, I argue, the selection camps can be understood as discursive practices within a larger discourse of selection in sports. Furthermore, embedded in the discursive practice of selection camps, specific ways of behaving, talking and performing become adequate. A specific set of narratives are available as rhetorical resources in interaction, but they are also produced and reproduced as legitimate and trustworthy. In this work, focus is directed towards language and language-use within two different narrative genres: performance appraisal interviews and research interviews. Moreover, the discursive framework of selection is investigated, whereas policy documents, annuals for the operation, magazines and educational literature are analyzed. In this way, several disparate materials were included, with specific ways of handling questions of talent, success and selection. The intention is to show how similar elements recur in various materials within the same apparatus: in the organizational documents, in institutionalized interaction and in personal narratives.

It has been highlighted that elite sport is a relatively closed world with low transparency, especially in social science, when it comes to study ongoing practice (Meckbach, 2016). Gaining access to research material during ongoing practice, that is, during matches, tournaments or camps is often difficult to access and, therefore, rare. Thereby, this field study and the interviews is an unusual set of data. This context was chosen as a research site for several reasons. The intention was to study selection and stories about selection “as it happens” and not in retrospect or before facing selection. First, the primary focus was narratives of the young participants' and not the coaches. Many researchers have paid close attention to the coaches, to try to pin down what makes a specific coach-behavior successful (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2002;

Krogh Christensen, 2009; Meckbach, 2016; Seamus, 2008). Secondly, previous studies often focus on retrospective narratives to identify factors that increase participation in sport, or seek to find common elements that contribute to the building of successful development systems (Carlsson, 1991; Thedin Jakobsson, 2014). In this dissertation, the analytical gaze is directed towards the construction rather than the effect.

Access to the field

The project started off with an initial settlement decision and a request to ten sport federations in order to identify interest in participating. An inquiry went out to both team sport- and individual sport federations. All federations initially showed an interest in the study, and individual meetings were held with gatekeepers such as the head of the federation and national team coaches to introduce my research interest. These were also the ones that carried out the final selections. At these meetings the focus for the study turned solely to team sports, where parameters beyond pure sporting skills were heavily emphasized. This means competences such as fitting into the team and having the right character for this kind of sport were in focus. In the individual sports a stronger emphasis was given to results, or at least, they formed the basis for the selection. For example, to be selected the participants needed to clear a pre-set time limit. One federation previously underwent a critical research review of its operations, which deflected participation after the initial meeting, and another federation also declined to participate with reference to that research report.

Finally, a decision was taken to concentrate the study on three of the major team sports in Sweden. This was based on a multitude of parameters that came into play in the screening process. These sports are all major sports in a Swedish context in terms of participants, but also often with a large audience and

heavy backing in the media. Furthermore, they also emphasized the importance of identifying adequate character and underlined preferred social skills. Moreover, an elite sporting career in these sports (primarily on the male side in soccer and hockey) means a salaried professional career. Therefore, more is at stake here, for the players, the coaches and the selection system at large, since being selected also means a potential, often well paid, profession.

As emphasized earlier the world of elite sports is often a relatively closed arena for social science and has a history of a close collaboration with the medical and physiological sciences, often focusing on measuring the effects of exercise. Creating trust and to legitimize my research became an extensive work and the field relations a central part of this. During the initial meetings I was asked about my knowledge of the structure of the sporting organization and elite sports in Sweden and more specifically my experience of selection practices in sports. My background as a previous employee at a national sports center in Sweden and my experience as coach on the national level were emphasized and made my access as a researcher more legitimate. It was emphasized that “you cannot let anybody in who does not have knowledge of elite sports”. To show knowledge of the field became a prerequisite to gain access. Holmes (2016) underlines the importance and the need for field knowledge to build legitimacy and gain access to these kinds of closed or specific fields.

Finally, there is little doubt that selection still is a central issue. It is both sensitive and debated and provides ongoing implications for social action. For example, the selection of district teams at the age of 15 in floorball was removed since this study was carried out, following a decision by the national floorball federation. Furthermore, two district federations within the national soccer federation have chosen not to send a team to participate in selection camps for the youth national team for those aged 15 years. The federations have, by referring to research, invoked the poor accuracy of this practice as one central ground for their decision (Grimlund, 2016). Moreover, the Swe-

dish football federation has also been influenced by such criticism. By invoking a *future-team*, 33 additional talents who missed the final cut have now gathered for their own, additional camp. The team-coach of the future-team, Hans Wildow, explains:

When you select players for the youth national team, it is easy to be dazzled by those who run fastest, shoots the hardest and jumps the highest. In 'the future team', we want to capture the player who has a very good understanding of the game, good technique and mental qualities, but still cannot compete physically (Sandberg, 2016, March 16).

In the empirical material in this study, this dilemmatic space of trying to identify and select the current best performers while at the same time keeping the door open for future revised selection is a key issue when legitimizing this practice.

Methodological considerations

Engaging in discourse and narrative analysis from a social constructionist perspective entails a number of methodological concepts that are needed to structure the analysis of the empirical material. The point is that discourses are also social practices that reproduce and legitimize knowledge and relations of power. Issues of, for instance power, can therefore be studied in various types of materials. Moreover, an interest in broadening the empirical material for analysis has emerged. In this study the empirical material varies from studying the discursive framework in written organizational documents in the first paper to investigating discursive positioning in small stories (article II) and focusing on the use of shared narratives in interview interaction (article III). This *systematic heterogeneity*, all part of an apparatus of selection in sports, is designed to analyze different discursive practices. Therefore, the analytical focal

point is to study the systematics of a variegated material and identify iterativity in statements, practices and positions as well as discover how these are discursively bound.

Traditionally, interviews as data depart from an idea of the possibility of collecting the biography of an individual, which can then be used as an instrument to disclose identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). This perspective resembles the efforts to grasp the informants' assumedly undistorted stories, an approach which for a long time has constituted the standard for qualitative interviews. The theoretical perspective of this dissertation is viewing interests as a topic to be rhetorically handled in interaction. Rather than treating the interaction as the participants' underlying cognition or motivations, the analysis focus on the interactional work and how the informants deal with motives and interests in the interviews (Edwards, 2005). The intention is to investigate how these young participants "do selves and others" in this specific practice of selection camps and the narrative genres produced therein. One such narrative genre is the performance appraisal interview investigated in article II; another one is the personal success story studied in article III. These interviews have discursive expectations, both as a practice for selection but also with regard to a familiar genre of sports interviews (Ferguson, 1983; Hargreaves, 2000). Moreover, the material shows how the young participants are familiar to genre expectations, often using archetypal answers recognizable from e.g. a match-interview on television or newspaper interviews. Accordingly, to understand social interaction, attention must be given to the context in which it is embedded.

This dissertation is an additional contribution to this theoretical standpoint of analyzing narratives in its discursive context. Studying both written documents and interaction gives different materials, which likewise empties into the same object of study: the apparatus of selection. In documents, general patterns of discourse are the main focus, while the narrative practice is at the

center in the interview interaction. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) underline that self-reflexivity is a central part in all sorts of field work, and he discusses the importance of the researcher to commute between the position as “having knowledge” and “being a novice”. In the interview interaction in this work, I am moving between these positions, e.g. by sometimes showing knowledge of selection practices, test-procedures and structures and being a novice with regard to the individual story or personal expressions of feelings.

Ethical considerations

Research ethics have become an increasingly central part of the research process, and ethical considerations are a natural part of the work. It concerns an apparatus of formal requirements and guidelines that should be a guarantor of ethically acceptable research that at the same time strikes a balance between research interest and the protection of the individual interests. Ethical approval was sought from the Ethical board within the Department of Child and Youth studies at Stockholm University. The study was audited and approved by the Ethical board in May 2012. The Swedish Research Council highlights how ethical considerations are largely about finding a reasonable balance between different interests that are all legitimate, and knowledge interest is one such (Swedish Research Council, 2011). In studies of children and young people, one concern is to seek approval from the child, but also her guardian. At the same time, it is also about an understandable way to inform and explain what the collection of data are to be used for and how this will proceed, so that the informant on adequate grounds can decide whether to participate or not.

In this study, all participants and guardians gave their informed consent to participate in the study after being fully informed about the purpose of the study, principles of confidentiality and channels for publication. The participants were informed that they could suspend participation at any time. Hassmén (2008) emphasizes that ethical discussions should take place during

the entire process, from planning the interviews to the publishing or reporting of results. In this dissertation, all names, domiciles and clubs have been anonymized according to the Swedish Research Council's guidelines for research practice within the humanities and social sciences with respect to information, anonymity, archiving and dissemination (Swedish Research Council, 2002). Personal data and references that could cause recognition have been removed from the transcripts and the published articles. The year and date of the data collection as well as the geographical area of data collection have been anonymized. In agreement with the methodological considerations of this study, the analyses focus on the statements and the discourses of selection and not the individuals articulating the statements. The written empirical material is in full public material. Moreover, quotes from these interviews are translated from Swedish to English by the author, which also impedes personal identification. Digital files from the interviews, transcripts and consent forms were kept in a safe deposit.

Relevance of the study

In studies of qualitative character the ability to generalize is not an assignment of this type of research. In this tradition, relevance is rather the primary focus, and relevance then mainly concerns the analyses. It is primarily about the accurate picture, where different categories can be identified and new approaches and other viewpoints can be analyzed in which an event or phenomenon can be understood from new angles or with other analytical glasses. In this case, it means turning interest from what talent really is to investigate how it is constructed and what positions are discursively constructed. More specifically, how legitimacy for these kinds of dividing practices are produced.

The main focus concerns narratives as social constructions and the discursive production of legitimacy, which includes the relevancy and quality of the

analyses, instead of generalizability (Granath, 2008). Therefore, this dissertation is not directed towards defining what correct or accurate talent traits are, but on studying talent production in different types of material, in particular discursive practices in a unique set of data: player/coach-interaction and interviews during ongoing selection. In Foucault's studies of madness, he argues that instead of focusing on what madness really is or how to diagnose "the mad", interest should be directed to the production of such a position and this calls for a different starting point.

Historicism starts from the universal and, as it were, puts it through the grinder of history. My problem is exactly the opposite. I start from the theoretical and methodological decision that consists in saying: Let's suppose that universals do not exist (Foucault & Sellnert, 2008, p. 3).

In line with this, the starting point of this work is to investigate talent as if it does not exist without discursive work and elaborate on how selection of young talents is produced and how this affects narrative identity construction and social practice. Accordingly, I argue that stories need to be investigated as text-in-context and intertwined with shared discursive narratives as a specific narrative genre. Personal 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.

I propose that this work can provide important insights on how context shapes social practice, in particular in this kind of high stakes context. Moreover, it allows both narrative researchers and sports coaches to identify the co-construction of talent within this context and contribute to the illustration of how different kinds of presuppositions become visible in this interaction. By

analyzing the apparatus for selecting, this dissertation can open up a discussion on the selection and contribute to the understanding of how the selectable talent does not solely “exist”, but is also produced (and reproduced) in a context. This means that this position is not fixed, it is under constant change and this change is intimately tied to its context.

Summaries of studies

This dissertation comprises three separate empirical studies within the framework of selection in the Swedish sports. The first study explored the repertoires used to legitimize selection in written material from the Swedish sports confederation by deconstructing and analyzing the logics and rationales of talent selection and exploring how legitimacy for such practices are constructed. By identifying patterns and rhetorical repertoires, this article shows how the repertoires are part of an *apparatus* of selection that works to construct legitimacy. The second study analyzed small-story interaction in performance appraisal interviews (PAIs), as they were employed by the coaches and the young participants during the selection camps in football and hockey. The study analyzed how the use of PAIs produced specific positions and interactive practices, and in addition, how positioning as “selectable” is produced in this narrative genre. The third paper investigated how the young participants during selection in floorball, football and hockey use a set of *shared discursive narratives* to establish their own coherent story of success. The analyses showed how specific types of storylines are recruited to produce a viable personal story within this specific genre of interaction.

Study I: Searching for talent: The construction of legitimate selection in sports

An ongoing debate in Scandinavian sports research deals with societal legitimacy, and this becomes particularly interesting in relation to practices of selecting talented children (Ronglan, 2015; Fahlström, 2011). This study analyzes talent selection within organized sports in Sweden. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which this process of legitimacy is produced in the case of children and young people. This article is based on a discourse analytical approach where policy documents, annuals, magazines and educational literature, as a key part of the apparatus, constitute the corpus of data. It explores the concept of talent selection in child and youth sports; more specifically, it analyzes how the problems of legitimizing selection are handled within the organization through the use of different discursive repertoires. The purpose is to investigate the kinds of discursive figures that the selection apparatus claims to screen with precision and high veracity in order to identify and select talent and the discursive resources mobilized and displayed when trying to do this.

The main findings show five repertoires that legitimize selection: (1) The fair selection; (2) Searching for bio-talent; (3) Searching for character-talent; (4) The technicization of sport selection: Safeguarding ideal choice; and (5) The ethical and fair selection: Safeguarding the Swedish model. These analyses highlight how the system for selection is produced and defended within the literature, and they document the ways in which the representations of a fair selection play an important role in the governing of operations. To make the process of selection appear valid, ethical and apolitical, discursive work is played out. The production of the legitimate selection works in two directions,

both individually and politically. The process of selection is rhetorically displayed as legitimate to those within the system as well as the Swedish egalitarian welfare politic at large.

A key issue for this apparatus of child and youth selection is that the system has to appear objective and fair. Talent selection is therefore dependent on two kinds of rhetorical resources: the ethical selection and the unbiased, scientific selection. Moreover, the production of the legitimate selection works both individually and politically. This problem of forecasting talent may be viewed as a general challenge for the process of selection in sports worldwide, but also as a part of research on the mechanisms for screening and selecting children on a general level. The question is what affects the legitimation practices, as highlighted in this study, entail in situated social practices – for example, on the pitch, in the gym or on the football field – when the selection of the talented child is a prominent part of the social action.

Study II: Talent production in interaction: Performance appraisal interviews in talent selection camps

In sport, talent scouting has become an increasingly significant practice. As McGarry (2010) shows, the number of young people prepared to invest in becoming professional athletes is growing, and many countries such as Canada, and Britain, have expanded the work with talent programs. Accordingly, various strategies for finding young talents have been developed, as well as debated. Issues such as the questionable accuracy of identifying young talents, as well as the social costs associated with the activity, have been critically discussed in the literature (Anshell & Lidor, 2012; Burgess & Naughton, 2010). Moreover, researchers within this field often point out that selection cannot solely be based on current capacity, but should also consider personality, ambition and capacity for development (MacNamara & Collins, 2011; Meylan et al., 2010). Therefore, different types of performance appraisal interviews (PAIs) are becoming increasingly common within the field (MacLean, 2001). Departing from the field studies of two selection camps for Swedish youth national teams in football and hockey, this study takes a closer look at the narratives and positioning in interaction in the PAIs employed during these camps. This article takes on a narrative approach, emphasizing PAI as a narrative genre and a framework for a specific form of interaction.

The findings show how selectability is performed in interaction by following three narrative practices: (1) showcasing gratitude without tipping into flattery, (2) using temporality as a way of displaying developmental potential, and (3) adopting the role of the self-reflecting subject. This genre of interviews not only produces certain practices but also preferred subject positions and narratives. Drawing on DeFina (2009), the PAIs are analyzed as a *narrative genre* where the players are encouraged to display talent in order to demonstrate their selectability.

The conformativity of interviews indicates that the individual young participants are well aware of how to talk to become selectable. Using PAIs in selection camps can be seen as a manifestation of legitimacy for a holistic idea of selection based on the individual's potential for development, rather than current capacity (Henriksen, 2010). However, the possibility to estimate and assess a young person's ability to develop into adult elite players based on these interviews can certainly be questioned. It is unclear what this form of talk is more specifically aimed at and what impact this might have on ensuring a more legitimate selection. The rhetorical practices shown in the data undeniably contribute to an understanding of how specific narratives and positions are produced in this genre of interaction.

Study III: Talents born in sports talk: Success stories in discursively shared narratives

Success stories or heroic tales are a frequently investigated genre of culturally shared narratives in many areas and, not in the least, in sports (Hargreaves, 2000; Williams, 1994). There are few other areas, if any that appear to have such an extensive need for personal success stories. However, this personal story is not produced within a societal vacuum; they are a part and product of its context. The trajectories for such personal stories are limited, and specific storylines are repeated 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. This paper will pay particular attention to shared narratives in sports – more specifically success stories as they are employed by young talent in selection camps for Swedish youth national teams in hockey and football.

The study illustrates how personal success-stories are intimately tied to the concept of shared discursive narratives and how a high stakes context constitutes a specific framework. The analyses show how these personal stories balance the dilemmatic spaces of being a humble team player while at the same time displaying outstanding individualism. The study highlights how a set of discursively shared narratives are used to produce a legitimate personal story. The material shows four narrative storylines: (1) the humble-story, (2) the hard-work-story, (3) the natural-talent-story, and, (4) the Zlatan story. The use of this set of shared narratives in interview interaction illustrates how specific narratives of success are produced to legitimize success. 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. This study shows how 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.

This paper argues that personal stories need to be investigated as intertwined with shared discursive narratives within a specific narrative genre. Analyzing 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. Personal success stories in sports thereby emerge as discursively specific, as an element within this genre of interaction. Moreover, this can contribute to important insights on how context, and in particular high stakes contexts, produce (and reproduce) specific narratives as legitimate.

Concluding discussion

This dissertation explores how legitimacy for selection is produced (and reproduced) within organized sport in Sweden. Moreover, it addresses how selectability is produced in interaction and how specific narratives are used by young talents in success-stories. The empirical material was collected in a high stakes context: the final selection camps for the youth national- or district teams. More specifically, this study investigates the discursive framework for selection and the production of a rationale for selection in interaction. The analytical focal points are as follows: (1) the discursive framework to legitimize selection, (2) the rhetorical resources used by the participants for positioning in small story-interaction, and (3) the participants' use of shared discursive narratives in personal success stories. The analyses focus on the underlying statements, the conceptions and the practices that categorize and regulate the understanding of talent and selection. The work does not focus on the fixed or try to find the essence of talent. Instead, it examines the interplay between the individual and the contextual and the sequences of practices. The focal points are the narratives and statements in organizational documents and shared narratives within this discourse and how this is manifested in interaction. To understand the interaction in this context, the discursive framework must be laid bare as a framework for a specific form of interaction.

It is emphasized that the concept of talent not only displays outstanding skills on the field but also the right character and personality (Macnamara & Collins, 2012). In fact, the coaches often argue that having adequate personality is a prerequisite for being selected (Krogh Christensen, 2009). Positioning oneself or being positioned as talented is to demonstrate a certain understanding and, thereby accept specific actions and reject others. However, this

position works within a framework and legitimizes within a wider context. The concept of talent works within a wider discursive framework, closely connected to other areas searching for individuals with special abilities. This propels the need for explanatory models. The concept must be legitimized to produce a system where the alleged individuals are accurately selected in a fair and unbiased fashion and for the good of both the society and the individual. This work shows how elements of selection appear in many different contexts and historical moments. To produce legitimacy for such selection, specific narrative accounts are recruited to do this, both by the organization performing the selection and by the participants undergoing the process. This dissertation shows how this is done in narrative interaction by using e.g. temporality. For example, potential for future development is a key position to exaggerate and also a recurring element in other practices that involve identifying the exceptional.

The purpose of the analytic approach is to examine how legitimacy for selection operates in narrative practice. This is intimately linked to a framework of normative behavior and expert knowledge. This gives specific individuals' unique positions and legitimacy to exercise power through their (perceived) knowledge (Taylor, et al., 2014). However, such an expert-position as selector has to be co-produced and legitimized. This gatekeeping position does not stand alone, but is woven into narrative conventions in an apparatus of selection. The selector, as well as the young participants, have to relate to these conventions, in order to produce a legitimate selection. Potter (1996) shows how different ways to produce legitimacy in narratives must be done by managing one's personal stake by using reported speech or using temporal identity change. This work shows how it is crucial for the young talents to produce a trustworthy story to appear selectable in interaction. The production of *the selectable individual*, as well as being the selector, are both parts of the apparatus and co-constructed within this framework.

The production of rationality for selection

Whereas Foucault (1978) shows how the European penal system and psychiatrists constructed the notion of *the dangerous individual* through their attempts to *subjectify* specific criminal acts, this dissertation highlights how the Swedish selection system in sports produces the notion of *the selectable individual*. By claiming expert knowledge within this apparatus, the coaches as selection professionals are produced as guardians of the system to be fair and legitimate. Therefore, power and knowledge are intertwined and every knowledge claim is part of an apparatus of power that makes specific knowledge legitimate and productive (Foucault, 1977). Furthermore, this establishes control over knowledge for particular positions as part of an apparatus of talent selection. This does not mean, for example, that the selecting apparatus is malicious or has hidden agendas. It means that even well-intended ideas and practices are instruments of the power within this apparatus wherein future effects are difficult to foresee.

Selection in a dilemmatic space

The discourse of sports is in many ways a space of different and contradictory ideas – a dilemmatic space. This dilemmatic space involves defending a child-equality-discourse of everyone's right to participate while at the same time arguing for elite investments in the particularly promising. Actuating in this space of dichotomous stories does not mean that one can choose one in favor of another, but rather balance contradictory narratives within this discourse. Moreover, another dilemmatic space targets the rhetorical figure of the traditional Swedish model of grassroots-sports and how this model is forced to adapt to a global marketization of sports in general and talent management in particular (Ronglan, 2015). This focus on new public management, in this case of organized sport, produces new governmental requirements of efficiency and practices that are possible to evaluate and audit (Power, 1997). Practices,

therefore, are forced to become rituals of verification and legitimacy for the process of selection rather than assessing effective and correct selection. Being selectable in this apparatus is largely about displaying behavior and actions according to discursively accepted criteria (Johansson, 2010).

In this framework of talent selection, discursive practices are produced, such as selection camps. Practices are produced as rational elements and are given legitimacy as valid, although not always particularly wise or good, effects of this rationality of selection (Rose, 1998). The debate does not target whether selection is right or wrong, rather how and when a legitimate selection is to be made. At the same time, it is emphasized that child sports shall be imbued by play and that competitive elements shall be toned down, underlining that selection should occur after puberty (SSC, 2009). This biological, maturity categorization of children and childhood differs from other areas such as chronological or juridical categories. Children, youth or childhood are thus historically and contextually relative, and depending on how this categorization is constructed, will have consequences in social practice (James, et al., 1998). In this case, it affects the process of producing a legitimate selection.

Questions about when assessment can and shall be made, and whether children up to a certain age (or maturity level) should be protected from, for example, competition, is a debated issue in many areas. For example, when grades are to be initiated in a school context or in selection to music classes (Abbott & Collins, 2002; Heller, 2004). This work shows how this involves a desire to identify puberty, as a way to legitimize selection in accordance with a principle that the selection of adolescents is legitimate, but the selection of children is not. In social practice, this has resulted in methods to identify signs of maturity, both physically and mentally, for instance by observing behaviors associated with maturity or by different forms of testing. By claiming the experts “eye for talent”, this produces an organizational need for a technicization of selection and thereby, as also Billig (1996) argues, moral judgements are draped as objective facts used to legitimize social practice. Accordingly, such

practices become rational within this specific discursive framework: they are considered natural and true and therefore hard to question (Brunsson, 2006).

The production of talent in sports talk

The production of rationalities, whether in the penal system, the prison or a selection camp, creates practices that position individuals as madmen, criminals or, in this case, selectable talents. Individuals with such outstanding skills do not emerge by themselves, there must be a social mechanism through which a particular set of individuals are collectively recognized as exceptional in a field (Adamsen, 2016). Accordingly, this position is constituted as a socially initiated nomination, as a general assembly. However, the position as a selectable talent requires both physical performances on the pitch and social interactional skills that help one appear *selectable in talk*. The use of this talent-talk, as linguistic contrasts, cannot be explained without exploring the discourse function, nor can the constitution of these narratives be explained without an analysis of the narrative building blocks (Bamberg, 1987). In this work, the field studies are used as a complexifying lens to analyze personal narratives and the use of shared established narratives. These discursively shared stories are important resources, used to illustrate discursive patterns and investigate how they are recruited in personal stories to produce a coherent and trustworthy narrative.

This discursive apparatus of sports is the framework for particular stories, and there are many stories that come into play: media stories, organizational storytelling, the audiences and especially the athletes personal stories. This produces a set of legitimate and shared narratives. Personal stories in interview interaction are a central and integrated part of this discourse and success stories are a recurrent narrative genre in sports (Dahlén, 2008). In this context, interviews are a well-known practice and the participants are accustomed to

appraisals with e.g. coaches, journalists, mental advisors or sport psychologists. Georgakopoulou (2010) illustrates how identity-claims in interview data are often actor focused and refer to personal traits and modes of conduct. In this dissertation, positioning is done by using discursively viable and preferred storylines connected to a particular rationality of being selectable.

This work shows how a set of storylines are being repeated, such as being humble, a subject under development, a team player and a hard-worker. At the same time, the personal story must show elements that highlight personal strengths in order to be selectable. This may be made implicit, e.g. it is apparent without being directly pronounced. It can also be made explicit as in the Zlatan-story example in article three. These different storylines can be used as different narrative strategies and balance interactional organizations to downgrade self-praise and display a traditional sporting ideal of modesty while at the same time promoting outstanding personal skills (Hellström, 2014; Speer, 2012). It has been argued that this is a key characteristic to display in a neo-liberal discourse of today, which pays tribute to self-promotion, improvement and being an entrepreneurial-self characterized by an urge to develop through self-reflection and hard work (Bröckling, 2016; Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2011). Accordingly, by producing a personal story, presenting you as a field for transformation, improvement and development, this creates a viable personal narrative of selectability. Moreover, self-awareness is a recurrent narrative element, and demonstrating flaws while at the same time demonstrating awareness of how to manage them produces a position as *a subject under improvement*. These storylines are all important elements within the discursive framework and are highlighted both in personal narratives and in organizational policy documents. Although different, they are all viable rhetorical resources.

The second article shows how this apparatus produces practices as rational within this field. One such practice is the performance appraisal interview used at the camps and described by both coaches and players as an important

element in the process of finding the right personality. This is an integrated element in the search for talent and goes beyond the observable. The intention is to find, not only the current best performer, but also those individuals with potential for future development. These interviews are considered to say something important about the players as individuals and their attitudes and characteristics. The very purpose of this genre of talk is to solicit information about the young athlete so as to make fair and trustworthy selection. Moreover, this narrative genre of interview interaction has increased and is now an accepted ingredient in the player-coach-interaction (MacLean, 2001; Cranmer & Myers, 2015).

These interviews have been analyzed as a discursive genre, in which a specific interactional work is played out. This work shows the conformativity of these interviews, which indicate that players are well aware of how to produce selectability in interaction. The use of PAIs is often underlined as a holistic idea of selection, based on the individual's potential for development rather than on current capacity alone (Henriksen, 2010). However, the possibility to estimate and assess a young person's attitude, personality or ability to develop into adult elite players based on these interviews can certainly be questioned. It is unclear what this form of talk is aiming for, what impact this might have on the selection and how this can ensure a more legitimate selection. However, the rhetorical practices undeniably contribute to an understanding of this genre of interaction and how it produces specific preferred narratives and positions. To qualify as selectable at the camps, it takes both performance on the pitch and interactional skills to construct *talent in talk*.

I have argued for ways in which personal stories need to be investigated in tandem with the discursive framework. This work shows how personal narratives of success are a balancing-act between discursively shared and well known narratives of success, on the one hand, and stories of the developing individual on the other. I have underscored how personal success stories, to

be convincing, must relate to previously shared narratives that are limited versions within this context. These stories are bound to context and are a specific genre of narrative interaction. Therefore, I argue that the talent position cannot be analyzed as personal traits or serve as proof of certain characteristics, as is often done in the selection process in sports. Personality traits in interviews must also be investigated as strategies of adaptation, a performative approach to produce the selectable subject. Each contemporary society offers a repertoire of cultural representations and each discourse offers a repertoire of discursive representations. It is rather to be analyzed as a constructed position within a specific rationale of practices. In order to appear selectable it takes more than physical talent; it takes talking talent.

Sammanfattning

Introduktion

Idrotten är fylld av berättelser om talanger och hur dessa har lyckats tas sig fram och bli framgångsrika elitidrottare. Samtidigt pågår en debatt om urval inom idrotten, om utslagning och svårigheten med verkligen hitta talang i unga åldrar. Denna avhandling studerar urval av unga talanger inom idrotten. Syftet är att studera hur denna kontext konstruerar urval och vilka berättelser som blir legitima.

Intresset för att identifiera de särskilt begåvade barnen eller de exceptionella unga talangerna är centralt inom många olika områden och inte minst inom idrotten (Gulbin, 2008). Sökandet efter och berättelserna om unga idrottstalanger och deras resa mot framgång är ett ständigt återkommande tema (Hellström, 2014; Lagercrantz, 2013) I denna sammanläggningsavhandling studeras talanger, urval och selektering inom idrotten. Analysen fokuserar på hur urval av unga talanger legitimeras av den svenska idrottsrörelsen och hur valbarhet och framgång produceras i ungdomarnas berättelser. Genom att i fältstudier följa och intervjua 15 åriga ungdomarna under pågående uttagningsprocess till ungdomslandslag och distriktslag i fotboll, innebandy och hockey, är avsikten att studera just detta. Syftet är att analysera på vilka sätt som urval narrativt legitimeras och hur valbarhet produceras i interaktion. Avhandlingen studerar också vilka narrativ som rekryteras i ungdomarnas egna berättelser om framgång. Avsikten är att undersöka det diskursiva ramverket för selektering och hur *rationalitet* för urval produceras i narrativ interaktion.

Den svenska idrotten har en central position i dagens samhälle och idrottsliga framgångar och beskrivs ofta vara av stort nationellt intresse (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2009). Samtidigt som talanger väljs ut för särskilda satsningar, ska idrottsrörelsen möjliggöra för alla barn och ungdomar att delta i idrotten. Den svenska idrottsrörelsen ska således hantera breddidrott och samtidigt möjliggöra för ungdomar att satsa på att nå senior elitnivå (SOU, 2008:58). Detta dilemmatiska område måste legitimeras, vilket får konsekvenser för den sociala praktiken.

I detta arbete riktas intresset mot dessa sociala praktiker: uttagningen till ungdomslandslag och distriktslag. Med utgångspunkt i en diskursanalytisk ansats inriktar sig den första artikeln på hur urval legitimeras i Riksidrottsförbundets skriftliga material, i policydokument, verksamhetsplaner, tidskrifter och utbildningsmaterial för tränare. Den andra artikeln analyserar, utifrån en narrativ ansats, samproduktionen av "valbarhet" i utvecklingssamtal mellan spelare och förbundskapten/tränare. Den tredje artikeln undersöker de unga talangernas berättelser i forskarintervjuer och hur de i sina personliga berättelser om framgång, rekryterar välkända och diskursivt delade berättelser. Avhandlingen har för avsikt att bidra till att dekonstruera de normer, värderingar och uttalanden som ligger till grund för att legitimera urval inom idrotten och påvisa hur talanger produceras (och reproduceras) i diskursiv praktik.

Jakten på talanger

Begreppet *talang* är centralt, inte bara inom den idrottsliga praktiken utan också inom idrottsforskningen. Begreppet kopplas ofta samman med prestation i relation till jämnåriga eller individens potential till framtida prestationer (Gulbin, 2008). Vissa forskare betonar talang som frukten av medfödda anlag och egenskaper, medan andra snarare understryker träningsmängd och träningskvalité som avgörande (Cote, et al., 2007; Ericsson, et al., 1993). Begreppet innefattar en mängd olika och motstridiga definitioner, ofta med en

gemensam konklusion att det är ett komplex område där flera faktorer spelar in och där samspelet mellan arv och miljö betonas (Adamsen, 2014; Henriksen, 2010). Detta ger dock lite vägledning för den praktiska verksamheten där urvalen ska göras. Allt mer betonas också betydelsen av en viss personlighet, att ha rätt attityd eller andra typer av personliga egenskaper. Dessa egenskaper används som indikatorer på talang eller betonas som förutsättningar för framtida exceptionella prestationer. Även inom andra fält har intresset för begåvning varit stort och inte minst hur dessa särskilt lovande eller begåvade ska identifieras (Abbott & Collins, 2002; Meylan, et al., 2010). I de fall där dessa individer ska väljas ut och ges särskilt fördelaktiga förutsättningar, innebär detta ofta olika former av särskiljande praktiker, som en del i en rationalitet för urval.

Tidigare studier fokuserar ofta på att identifiera individer med talang, samt hur dessa på ett adekvat och korrekt sätt kan väljas ut. Stort intresse har också lagts på metoder för talangutveckling och hur dessa individer på bästa sätt kan utvecklas till vuxna elitidrottare (Burgess & Naughton, 2010). Samtidigt påtalar flera forskare att selektering görs utifrån andra parametrar än potential eller talang. De menar att det snarare är fysisk mognad, träningsbakgrund, psykiska och sociala faktorer som bedöms vid urval (Meylan, et al., 2010; Peterson, 2011). Detta innebär att urvalet görs på felaktiga grunder och att fel individer väljs ut, samtidigt som det i förlängningen leder till att de som kan betecknas som ”riktiga” talanger slås ut i förtid (Fahlström, 2011). Trots de svårigheter som finns med att identifiera talang är det lika fullt en central del av barn och ungdomsidrotten världen över, så även i Sverige (Adamsen, 2016; Fahlström, 2011).

I denna avhandling studeras talang inte enbart som någonting som finns, utan också någonting som konstrueras i en specifik kontext. Individers egenskaper, kunskaper och framtida potential är faktorer som måste bedömas och

tillskrivas ett värde och detta görs i ett diskursivt ramverk. Med denna teoretiska utgångspunkt studerar detta arbete på vilka sätt som valbarhet samkonstrueras i text och tal under uttagningsprocessen och hur detta legitimeras.

Berättelsen om den svenska idrottsmodellen

Berättelsen om ”den svenska idrottsmodellen” är en återkommande och central del i detta legitimeringsarbete. Inte minst idrottsrörelsen själv betonar vikt av denna modell. Här understryks omfattningen, med av närmare 3 miljoner medlemmar, den sammanhållna idrottsrörelsen, förtroendet att förvalta och fördela myndighetsstöd och idrottsrörelsens politiska autonomi (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2009). Detta innebär att verksamhetens behov legitimeras både internt inom organisation och i relation till samhället i övrigt. En central del i dessa berättelser är att betona det historiska arvet och hur idrotten har organiserats i Riksidrottsförbundet regi sedan tidigt 1900-tal utifrån en folkrorelsetradition, baserat på ideal om folkhälsa och demokratisk fostran (Norberg, 2004). Vidare betonas samarbetet och hur det statliga stödet ekonomiskt och strukturellt bidragit till t.ex. tillgänglighet till idrottsanläggningar och bidragit till en omfattande barn- och ungdomsverksamheten. Den svenska idrottsmodellen blir en flitigt använd retorisk figur där principer såsom en sammanhållen idrottsrörelse av breddidrott och elitidrott, medlemsstyrning och statlig autonomi är centrala retoriska byggstenar i bygget av legitimitet och trovärdighet för idrottens rätt att selektera. Denna berättelse inrymmer ett dilematiskt fält att hantera för att upplevas som legitim, både i relation till de som deltar i urvalsprocesserna, men också i relation till det statliga uppdraget att vara öppen för alla. Det handlar här inte om att välja ett av dessa uppdrag, utan att balansera dessa uppdrag. Detta får, som denna avhandling visar, återverkningar i social praktik och i ungdomarnas berättelser.

I detta arbete riktas intresset mot hur urval inom svensk idrott legitimeras både organisatoriskt och av deltagarna. Avhandlingen visar hur vissa berättelser blir legitima att använda såväl i skriftliga dokument, som i ungdomarnas egna berättelser och på vilka sätt som legitimitet produceras.

Teoretiska utgångspunkter

Inom samhällsvetenskaperna har det i anslutning till olika postmoderna teorier vuxit fram en kritisk hållning till kunskap som universell och ”tagen för givet”. Gemensamt för dessa perspektiv är att den sociala världen förstås som konstruerad och producerad i interaktion (Burr, 1995). Människan skapar genom interaktion ett gemensamt normativt system som hela tiden är i skapande och där det finns flera samtida konkurrerande diskurser (Foucault, 1972).

Begreppet diskurs har mot bakgrund av den inledande beskrivningen också fått ett stort antal definitioner och därmed också ett stort antal olika användningsområden och ramar för användning. Utgångspunkten för begreppet diskurs är inställningen att språk har en avgörande betydelse för hur vi skapar vår sociala verklighet (Börjesson, 2003). Språket är inte enbart ett sätt att förmedla information och att omsätta tankar i begriplig kommunikation, utan med språket gör vi saker. Att arbeta diskursivt kan alltså inte enbart handla om att kategorisera språket, utan språket är del av en kontext och kan bara förstås inom den (Dean, 1999). Med en utgångspunkt i språk som handling, kan strukturerade mönster studeras i interaktion. Dessa språkliga praktiker är samtidigt del av ett diskursivt ramverk. För att analytiskt kunna arbeta med dessa behöver de förstås i sin kontext, i ett specifikt diskursivt ramverk (Bamberg, 1987). Detta ramverk innefattar både institutionell praktik manifesterade i t.ex. lagar, styrdokument och utbildningsmaterial men också i den vardagliga praktiker i olika typer av interaktion (Foucault, 1972). Dessa sammantaget utgör en *apparatus*, där vissa handlingar, berättelser och positioner betraktas som legitima

och eftersträvansvärda. Denna diskursiva apparat är central för hur makt produceras, utövas och vidmakthålls och är ett central analytiskt begrepp i denna avhandling. Inom denna apparat av selektering blir individer positionerade och positionerar sig. Wetherell, Taylor och Yates (2002) betonar att subjekspositioner kan ses som möjliga platser inom en social praktik, där människor gör sig själva till subjekt inom en bestämd diskursiv miljö. Denna avhandling visar de berättelser som blir möjliga inom detta ramverk, de positioner som blir relevanta i narrativ praktik och hur de unga deltagarna, med hjälp av olika diskursivt delade berättelser, positionerar sig som valbara.

Resultat och sammanfattande diskussion

Denna avhandling visar hur urval och selektering inom idrotten måste legitimeras både individuellt, för de som deltar i urvalsprocess och som en central del i en generell samhällelig och idrottslig politik. Den första artikeln visar hur urval legitimeras i Riksidrottsförbundets skriftliga material. Dessa praktiker blir en viktig del för Riksidrottsförbundet i syfte att producera legitimitet för selektering. I dokumenten återkommer ett antal narrativa element och specifika retoriska verktyg används i syfte att producera legitimitet för urvalet.

Denna legitimering tar sin utgångspunkt i ett antal ontologiska och epistemologiska principer. Först och främst i det ontologiska antagandet att "talang" är någonting som existerar i en population av barn och ungdomar och därmed att vissa barn har bättre förutsättningar än andra att utvecklas till vuxna elitidrottare. Det andra antagandet av epistemologisk karaktär, innebär att talang *kan* identifieras genom observation och/eller testning. Slutligen, innebär dessa antaganden att dessa, via observation och tester, identifierade individer ska ges särskilt fördelaktiga förutsättningar och resurser i syfte att nå idrottslig framgång som vuxna. Artikeln belyser en central retorisk resurs i arbetet med att producera legitimitet genom att hänvisa till; den svenska idrottsmodellen. Denna retoriska figur innefattar idrottens organisering i Sverige, där både

bredd- och elitidrott är organiserade under Riksidrottsförbundet (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2009). I idrottens egna dokument betonas idrottsrörelsens statliga autonomi, det historiska arvet av samarbete mellan stat, kommuner och idrottsrörelsen, samt ett folkrörelsebaserat arv av ideella ledare, öppen för alla i ideella och icke-vinstdrivande föreningar. Denna berättelse blir en central resurs då ett ansvarsfullt och adekvat urval ska konstrueras.

Avhandlingens andra artikel baseras på utvecklingssamtal mellan förbundskapten och spelare. I processen att identifiera och välj ut unga talanger, betonas allt oftare personliga egenskaper, attityd och karaktär som centrala element för att kunna nå framgång. Därför har utvecklingssamtal blivit en allt mer central del av selekteringsapparaten och betonas även här som ett viktigt element i syfte att ”lära känna spelaren”. Genom dessa samtal förväntas man kunna kartlägga individs drivkrafter, mål och personlighet, som en del av en helhetsbedömning av personen (McGarry, 2010). I studien undersöks hur valbarhet konstrueras i interaktion. Denna specifika form av institutionaliserat tal analyseras i artikeln som en narrativ genre (De Fina, 2009). Studien visar att det finns ett begränsat antal positioner och berättelser som måste balanseras i syfte att framstå som ett utvecklingsbart subjekt. De unga spelarna behöver balansera positionen som exceptionell talang med hög potential och samtidigt inte framstå som allt för självsäker. Detta görs i berättelserna genom att framhålla utvecklingsområden och samtidigt beskriva åtgärder för att utveckla dessa områden. Därmed framstår de som självreflekterande individer, en viktig del i produktionen är att vara under utveckling; ett utvecklingsbart subjekt (Speer, 2012). Vidare framhåller de förmågan att underkasta sig hårt arbete, samt att de har en hög målsättning med sitt idrottande. Dessa samtal är strukturellt konforma och framstår i det närmaste som performativa akter med homogena svar och uppenbart normativt rätta svar. Detta är dock oklart vad dessa samtal mer specifikt syftar till eller deras inverkan på selekteringsprocessen.

I den avslutande artikeln analyseras ungdomarnas personliga berättelser om framgång och hur de konstrueras med hjälp av diskursivt delade berättelser. I dessa personliga berättelser rekryteras välkända idrottsliga narrativ, såsom berättelser om framgång via hårt arbete eller den naturliga super-talangen. Analysen av dessa berättelser belyser hur fyra centrala narrativa element rekryteras i konstruktionen av berättelserna: (1) *ödmjukhetsberättelsen*, (2) *hårt-arbete-berättelsen*, (3) *natur-talang-berättelsen*, och (4) *Zlatan-berättelsen*. De första tre berättelserna är normativa i relation till en traditionell idrottslig hjälteberättelse och betonar ödmjukhet, lagets betydelse och tonar ner den egna agensen (Hellström, 2014). Samtidigt återfinns en icke-normativ berättelse, *Zlatan-berättelsen*, där den egna förmågan lyfts fram och där den egna agensen betonas.

Detta narrativ utmanar de traditionella berättelserna och beskrivs ofta en ny berättelse som utmanar traditionella ideal och därför kan upplevas som provocerande. Samtidigt kan detta i det närmaste självförhärligande narrativ upplevas som charmigt. Genom att medvetet överdriva eller åtminstone påtala sin egen agens och betydelse, verkar normen om ödmjukhet upphävas. Denna egocentrerade berättelse kan också ses som en ny typ av själv-promotionsberättelse, som del av en neoliberal diskurs om *det entreprenöriella subjektet* som återfinns på flera områden i dagens samhälle (Bröckling, 2016; Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2011) Denna berättelse kräver dock att den berättas från en viss position, t.ex. verkar den inte vara gångbar från en privilegierad position utan kräver ett under-dog-perspektiv.

Avslutande diskussion

Denna avhandling har visat hur rationalitet för ett legitimt urval produceras och hur detta producerar narrativ som upplevs som sanna och diskursivt gångbara. Inom denna rationalitet blir vissa positioner för valbarhet gångbara och specifika berättelser legitima att använda. Syftet är att visa hur konstruktionen

av talang är baserad på en specifik rationalitet och att selektering av barn och ungdomar kräver ett legitimeringsarbete, både på en individuell nivå och på en samhällelig nivå.

Avhandlingen visar vidare att det också krävs retoriskt arbete av de unga talangerna för att konstruera sig själva som valbara. Det krävs mer än bara uppvisande av fysiska förmågor, det krävs också att valbarhet produceras i interaktion – att tala talang. Vidare belyser detta arbete hur selekteringsprocessen är del av ett diskursivt ramverk, där vissa praktiker produceras och reproduceras som adekvata och legitima. Samtidigt reser avhandlingen frågor om talangens och urvalets legitimitet, om utvecklingssamtalet som verktyg för urval och vilka effekter detta får för produktionen av talanger i framtiden.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide in Swedish: the research interview.

Introduktion

Information om studien och dess syfte (se presentationsmaterial)

Information om procedur (intervjuförfarande, inspelning)

Godkännande av deltagande (muntligt och skriftligt), samt målsmans tillstånd.

Intervju gällande:

- Förbund
- Lag (ex. P15, F17 etc)
- Uttagning avser (ungdomslandslag, stadslag, NiU, annat)

Bakgrundsfrågor:

- ✓ Deltagare
- ✓ Ålder
- ✓ Boende
- ✓ Föräldrar (själva idrottat, deltar på träningar/matcher, skjutsar)

Frågor

Del 1

- ✓ Berätta om ditt idrottande. Berätta hur det kommer sig att du är här idag?
- ✓ Berätta om ett tillfälle då du förstod att du var duktig (i din idrott).
- ✓ Vilka egenskaper har du som gör att du kan lyckas här på lägret i helgen?

- ✓ Hur tycker du att det gick för dig på träningen/matchen idag? Vad har du fått för kritik och beröm under dagen idag?
- ✓ Om vi tittar på programmet för det här lägret, kan du beskriva vad ni gjort? Berätta om hur träningen fungerade.
Vad hände sen?
Vad gjorde du då?
- ✓ Berätta från början när ni sprang in på planen till slutet då ni avslutade träningen/matchen?

Del 2

- ✓ Berättar mer på hur du ser på hur du ser på de andra som är här idag?
- ✓ Vem tycker du är bäst? Vem har mest talang här idag? Kan du berätta om hur det märks?
- ✓ Har du någon gång hört att du har talang? Berätta om det.
- ✓ Har någon tränare kallat dig talang? Vad tror du han/hon menade när de sa så?
- ✓ Vad tror du att tränarna och ledarna letar efter? Vad tror du man ska visa upp för att väljas?
- ✓ Hur är det för dig att vara här idag, att försöka bli vald?
- ✓ Om du tänker framåt. Vad önskar du att det här lägret ska leda till i framtiden?

Avslutande reflektioner, tillägg och kommentarer.

Appendix 2.

Invitation letter to Swedish Sport Federations to take part in research.

Hej!

Mitt namn är Magnus Kilger och är doktorand vid Barn- och ungdomsvetenskapliga institutionen på Stockholms universitet. Jag håller på med en forskningsstudie som handlar om ungdomar i olika typer av urvalssituationer inom idrotten. Mitt intresse att anlägga ett ungdomsperspektiv på detta område och jag är intresserad av ungdomars erfarenheter av och berättelser om att vara i dessa situationer. Det är därför viktigt för mig att träffa dessa ungdomar i just urvalssituationer, följa dem och prata med dem under tiden. Min avsikt är också att samtala med tränare och ledare, men huvudfokus kommer att ligga på ungdomarna och deras perspektiv.

Min förhoppning är att det kommer att bli värdefullt för Er att delta och att det snarast kommer inverka positivt på verksamheten. Det kommer för förbundets del innebära att Ni får möjlighet att delta i aktuell idrottsforskning som ska berika och utveckla inte bara de enskilda individerna, utan också ge förbundet lärdomar för det framtida utvecklingsarbetet. Jag vill understryka att allt deltagande kommer att ske i samråd mellan samtliga parter och godkännas av såväl förbundet, den enskilda utövaren, samt dennes vårdnadshavare. All insamlad data kommer att avidentifierats, där personliga och kontextbundna detaljer kommer att ändras så att identifikation inte ska vara möjlig.

Jag skulle önska att jag fick möjlighet att träffa Er för ett samtal om vilka uttagningssläger, sammandragningar som just Ert förbund har och se på vilket sätt jag kan delta. Vid detta möte tänkte jag också mer utförligt beskriva hur

studien är tänkt att genomföras. För ytterligare information om forskningsprojektet eller forskning vid Barn- och ungdomsvetenskapliga institutionen går det bra att kontakta mig eller min handledare professor Mats Börjesson. Med hopp om ett gott framtida samarbete.

Vänligen,

Magnus Kilger

Doktorand

Mats Börjesson

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