



**INSTITUTIONEN FÖR KOST-  
OCH IDROTTSVETENSKAP**

**‘I will always be a figure skater,  
that is who I am’:**

**Three former figure skaters’ experiences of life after sport**

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Bachelor degree essay 15credits

Program: Sports Coaching

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Supervisor: Natalie Barker-Ruchti

Examiner: Göran Patriksson

Report number: VT16-05



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### **Abstract**

Retirement in elite sport has been researched from different perspectives, and could be seen as either a transition through phases or movement within social contexts. Athletes often experience their retirement as difficult, including feelings of void, confusion and decrease of self-esteem. However, the outcome of retirement varies depending on the individual athlete, and could even lead to an increase of life satisfaction. Women's artistic gymnastics and figure skating is both artistic sport with similar characteristics. Research into retirement from women's artistic gymnastics indicates that gymnasts may experience further difficulties post retirement because these characteristics. There are no scientific literature regarding retirement and life after a figure skating career.

The aim of this thesis is to address the lack of knowledge about figure skaters' retirement experiences. To do this, using a narrative approach, three former elite figure skaters were interviewed. Douglas & Carless' (2006) performance narrative theory was used to create understanding of the three skaters' careers. All three skaters adopted the performance narrative throughout their career. Post retirement, the skaters experienced confusion without the figure skating status. They also experienced void, and searching their way back to the ice. 1-2 years after retirement, figure skating was still an important part of the skaters' lives, both mentally and physically. Further research is needed to create a broader understanding of how figure skaters' experience elite sport retirement.

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# 1. Foreword

This thesis meant a lot to me. Not only because it was my finishing work after three years of University studies, but during the time I developed this thesis, I also ended my own sporting career after 14 years. For me, the retirement was difficult. It felt like I left my whole life behind, and I did not know how to deal with my feelings. My own retirement made me realize how important the subject was. While writing this thesis I learned a lot, but I also created an understanding of my own thoughts and feelings, which helped me cope with my own sport retirement.

I really want to thank my supervisor Natalie, who has helped a lot throughout this thesis. She has given me great support and has really encouraged me to challenge myself. I also want to thank the three skaters who participated within this thesis, and who shared their stories with me.

## 2. Introduction

Athletes may experience the process of retiring from sport and adjusting to life outside of sport, as difficult (Lavalée, Gordon, & Grove, 1997; Willard & Lavalée, 2016). An elite athlete usually retires at the age of 20 to 35 years old, depending on the sport (Ryba, Ronkainen, & Selänne, 2015; Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009). Up until then, the athlete has been fully dedicated to the sport and his/her performances. Ending a sporting career could affect the athletes in several ways. For instance, according to psychological researchers, some athletes experience identity loss at the point of retirement (Lally, 2007), including feelings of being lost and alone in a world without the sporting career. Retirement can also lead to decrease in self-esteem, due to the loss of social status (Fortunato & Marchant, 1999; Stier, 2009). Lastly, physical self-esteem may also decrease when athletes lose their body control and body composition, which could result in eating disorders and disturbed eating behaviour post retirement (Kerr, Berman, & Souza, 2006).

In contrast to negative consequences, retirement can also be an unproblematic event (Fahlström, Patriksson, & Stråhlman, 2014), and even lead to an increase in life satisfaction (Martin, Fogarty, and Albion, 2014). This indicates that retirement is a complex procedure, with outcomes depending on the individual athlete and the situation (Coakley, 1983). Nonetheless the experience of sport retirement is life changing event and could lead to either a crisis or a relief (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Stråhlman, 2006).

A number of scholars from different disciplines have examined retirement from sport (e.g., Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lally, 2007; Barker-Ruchti & Schubring, 2016). The subject has received international attention, but sport retirement has also been examined among Swedish elite athletes (e.g., Stråhlman, 2006; Stier, 2009). The subject of retirement has mainly been researched by psychologists, but has also been examined by sociologists and pedagogues. According to psychological researchers, athletes that have successfully developed an identity outside sports experience an easier adaptation to life after retirement (Lally, 2007). Failure to acquire an identity outside the sport during the career can thus complicate the retirement phase (Torregrosa, Boixadós, Valiente, & Cruz, 2004). Researchers within the sociological perspective do not focus on identity loss, but rather the athletes' characteristics, which they develop during the elite career. Researchers within the sociological perspective demonstrates that the phase of retirement is due to how well these characteristics suit the new context, outside of sport (Barker, Barker-Ruchti, Rynne, & Lee, 2014).

Women's artistic gymnastics is a sport that has been researched regarding retirement. Retirement can be considered extra problematic in this sport due to its characteristics (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). Gymnastics is a technical sport, demanding complex coordinated movements (Stambulova et al., 2009), and high intensity training is considered necessary to meet the

technical requirements of the sport. The sport thus includes early specialisation and a young population (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007), and early retirement (Stambulova et al., 2009). These characteristics are also found in the sport of figure skating. Both women's artistic gymnastics and figure skating are artistic sports which are evaluated by a panel of judges, and the score is based on the performance and perfection in movements. Early training, high investment during childhood, which is likely to build WAG/figure skating identities. It is feasible to hypothesise that figure skaters encounter the same problems post retirement as gymnasts.

Even though the subject of sport retirement has been explored, even in Sweden, it is necessary to study transitions in different sporting contexts in order to create a better understanding of the problem and the effect athletes may encounter (Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Park, Lavalley, & Tod, 2013). So far, there is no scientific literature regarding retirement, and life after a figure skating career.

## 2.1 Purpose and objectives

The aim of this thesis is to address the lack of knowledge about figure skaters' experiences of retirement and life after sport. To achieve this, I will trace the retirement journey of three Swedish figure skaters. Specifically, my thesis aims to explore:

1. How the figure skaters' careers evolved up until retirement.
2. How the figure skaters' experienced the time immediately following retirement.
3. How the figure skates' developed their lives after retirement.

I will use narrative methodology (Markula & Denison, 2005) and the performance narrative theory (Douglas & Carless, 2006) to create a broader understanding of the retirement from elite figure skating. This thesis begins with a background, followed by a method section. Finally, a result and discussion section will be presented. A research stories writing style with an essayistic approach (Markula & Denison, 2005) will be used to present the result.

## 3. Background

In this section, I present a background to the topic retirement from elite sport. The background is divided into the following sections: a) Assumptions about retirement; b) Research about elite sport retirement; c) Gaps; d) Theoretical perspective; and e) Narrative writing style.

### 3.1 Assumptions about retirement

Sport scientists have given retirement from elite sport more attention during the last three decades (Park, Lavalley, & Tod, 2013). An earlier study in the subject was done by Coakley (1983). During the 21st century, the subject has developed rapidly (e.g., Barker et al., 2014; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Stråhlman, 2006). Scholars from psychology (e.g., Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lally, 2007; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007), sociology and pedagogy (e.g., Barker et al., 2014; Barker-Ruchti & Schubring, 2016; Cho, 2012) have explored the subject. However, the majority of the articles in the area are from the psychological perspective. Even though scholars examine the same phenomena, a difference exist in the way researchers from the various perspective look at retirement and transition out of sport.

From a psychological perspective, researchers view retirement as a transition between different phases. Transition is “an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behaviour and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). The psychological perspective outlines the disparity between self-identity, and the identity that has been created through sports. The athlete has to leave current sport identity and develop a new self-identity in order to successfully retire from sports (Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Martin et al., 2014). In this matter, an internal change has to emerge after retirement. According to Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, and Delignières (2003) an increase in well-being usually occurs 8-10 months after a transition out of sport. This period of time has been compared within the “5-step model of grief” by (Kübler-Ross, 1970), where athletes’ experiences (a) denial, (b) anger, (c) bargaining, (d) depression and (e) acceptance (Fortunato & Marchant, 1999). The extent of the retirement phase is, according to psychological scholars, depending on the sport identity status and how well the athlete has prepared for the retirement during the elite career (Torregrosa et al., 2004).

Researchers from a sociological and pedagogical perspective describe retirement as “moving out” of sports, rather than transferring between phases (Barker et al., 2014; Barker-Ruchti & Schubring, 2016). Athletes develop characteristics during their career and will bring these characteristics into the non-sport contextual environment (Barker-Ruchti & Schubring, 2016). Cho (2012) stated that the difficulties an athlete might experience, is because of “social mobility” post retirement. Attending sports for a long time shapes the athlete to function within that setting, that is, developing characteristics that will be beneficial for sports. These

characteristics will be more or less suited to the new environment outside of sport, depending on the demands of such settings. An external change is in this case going to occur when leaving sports context, and personal changes could happen because of the new social context outside of sports.

## 3.2 Research about elite sport retirement

Both assumptions of retirement – transition and movement – have been employed to study retirement from sport. In this section, a number of recurrent subjects in the sport retirement literature will be presented, primarily having the artistic sports in consideration. These are: a) Sport identity; b) Social support; c) Control & decision-making; d) voluntarily retirement; e) coaching; f) Learning through sport.

Sport identity, social support, control/decision-making, and voluntarily retirement has mainly been researched by psychologists with the understanding of transitions. Coaching after retirement has been addressed from both psychological and sociological researchers. While learning through sport has mainly been acknowledged by scholars from the Sociological and pedagogical perspectives.

### **Sport identity**

According to psychological scholars, athletes' experiences identity loss after the retirement. An athlete's single-minded dedication to sports develops a sport identity. If the athlete also has failed to develop a sense of self outside of sport, it could lead to identity confusion (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Willard & Lavallee, 2016). Retired gymnasts express their retirement as following: "when I retired I think you kind of lose yourself." (Willard & Lavallee, 2016, p. 6). The athletes do not know who they are without the sport since they have been athletes for a great amount of time. Gymnasts described it as they had "grown into their gymnastic identity" (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007, p. 130). The gymnast even considers themselves as gymnasts even after retirement, having a hard time to let the sport identity go (Stirling, Cruz, & Kerr, 2012). The degree of sport identity upon the retirement phase is seen as a significant factor to how the retirement phase turns out (Lally, 2007; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007).

### **Social support**

Some gymnasts experience loneliness and sadness when the sporting career comes to an end (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). Gymnasts often build their social network around the sport, and some experience that they lose this network along with their retirement (Warriner & Lavallee, 2008). However, in a study by Willard and Lavallee (2016), dancers are reported to have experienced that they were able to keep their sport network after retirement, and the social support helped them during the retirement phase. The support from the coach and the federation was in general limited when the athlete ended the sports career. This emerge further feelings of



abandonment and loneliness (Fortunato & Marchant, 1999; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). According to Lavalley and Robinson (2007), gymnasts were “treated by the coach as though they were a dispensable tool” (Lavalley & Robinson, 2007, p. 129). This created negative feelings towards the coach post retirement which could result in further difficulties in the retirement process (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000).

According to Stirling et al. (2012), in addition to feeling abandoned by the coach and federation, athletes also experience deficient support from their still active club mates. Social support is important during the athletes’ career but also when retiring from elite sport (Fahlström et al., 2014). Some athletes also experience lack of support from friends and family outside of sport, since they do not really understand the extent of ending a sports career and what the athlete is going through (Fortunato & Marchant, 1999).

### **Control and decision-making**

Gymnasts have been found to experience loss of control after retirement (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). The coaches in artistic sports are presented as demanding and autocratic (e.g., Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Stirling et al., 2012; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008; Willard & Lavalley, 2016). The athlete is therefore used to have their life controlled by external forces, such as coaches. Gymnast described the lack of control as following: “As an 18-year-old you’re treated like a 12-year-old . . . you’re always told what to do” (Warriner & Lavalley, 2008, p. 307). Once gymnasts retire they experience the feeling of control as non-existent. They are forced to to be responsible for their own decision-making, which is the opposite of what they are used to. Stephan et al. (2003) argues that athletes need to be part of the decision making during their career to develop autonomy. An uneven power relationship between coach and athlete could be a reason for difficulties in the transition process (Willard & Lavalley, 2016).

In addition to losing control over life, gymnasts also experienced losing control over their body. Gymnasts are used to experiencing control when performing body movements. Retirement is implying loss of muscle strength and a change in body composition (Stirling et al., 2012). The gymnast can no longer perform movements and activities they did before, which evolved to negative feelings along with a decreased self-esteem (Stephan et al., 2003; Stephan, Torregrosa, & Sanchez, 2007).

### **Body image**

The culture of athletic sports has created an ideal that involves small and premature bodies (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). High-level gymnasts train long hours, have restricted diets, and have to endure constant weigh-ins and receive comments regarding their bodies (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Stirling et al., 2012). This has been acknowledged as an issue within the elite career, but also after the career ends. After retirement, some gymnasts experience weight gain, loss of body control, and dissatisfaction with their bodies, and this could lead to disturbed eating patterns

and negative emotions (Stirling et al., 2012). Kerr et al. (2006) found that 73% of the retired gymnast participants, experience disturbed eating behaviours, which actually is far more than among the active gymnasts. In a study by Warriner and Lavalley (2008), the gymnasts experienced a fear of no longer looking like a gymnast nor be recognized as one. Gymnasts were eager to keep their appearance in order to continue to be perceived as a gymnast, in context to themselves and others.

## **Voluntarily retirement**

Some psychological articles argue that athletes who end their career voluntarily experience less distress (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Martin et al., 2014). According to Stråhlman (2006) 85% of the athlete ended their sport career voluntarily, also stated that gradually ending the career after a voluntarily retirement would be optional for the athletes wellbeing. However, what is to be considered as voluntarily retirement is hard to define. Ending a career because of an injury is considered to be involuntarily. However, Barker-Ruchti and Schubring (2016) present a case where the participant saw getting injured as a ticket out of elite sport. Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) also discussed the matter of voluntarily retirement, and argue that it cannot be assumed that athletes who voluntarily decides to end their career are not going to face difficulties.

## **Coaching**

Some athletes choose to become coaches after their own sporting career ends. The majority of elite athletes have some connection to the sporting community after retirement (Fahlström et al., 2014). According to Shachar, Brewer, Cornelius, and Petitpas (2004), athletes who stay in sport as a coach perceive their sport identity, while the sport identity will decrease regarding athletes that take a non-sport related profession. However, leaving the sporting environment can be hard, according to Cho (2012), leaving could be especially hard for athletes that have been devoted, and who have developed self-efficacy connected to the sport. The high training intensity causes difficulties to study, develop a career and social life outside of sports. Because of that, athletes have a hard time developing necessary life skills outside of sport. The athlete then develops fear of other contexts, different from the sporting context. Thus, a career in coaching will be considered as an easy choice (Cho, 2012). Some athletes chose stay in sport and start coaching post retirement in order cope with retirement (Lavalley et al., 1997). In contrary, some athletes try to cope with retirement by distance themselves from the sport (Lavalley & Robinson, 2007).

It has been argued that coaching could be a coping mechanism in order to make the transition out of sport easier (Lavalley et al., 1997). However, gymnasts who starting to coach alongside their old coach post retirement, experienced distress due to the changing body composition and feared the coach's reaction on the matter (Stirling et al., 2012).

## Learning through sport

Athletes not only learn sport specific skills while practicing sports. The learning also includes development of athletes' characteristics. The characteristics an athlete develops is favour the sporting career (Barker-Ruchti, Rynne, Lee, & Barker, 2014). According to Lavalée and Robinson (2007) gymnasts develop tendencies to be perfectionists and to be overly critical. In an article by Barker et al. (2014), one athlete embodied egotism, while another athlete had become highly structured because of her sport. These characteristics are described to have become a part of the athlete, even after the point of retirement. Some of these qualities developed from sport are beneficial for life outside of sport, while some characteristics need to be reconstructed in order to work in new settings outside of sport (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2012). In an article by Cho (2012), the athletes are reported to have experienced difficulties in settings outside of sport because of the limitations in the characteristics they had developed. The retirement could then become extra problematic when moving from one social context to another.

### 3.3 Scientific gaps

Even though retirement in sport has been researched widely, I can identify three scientific gaps. First, the amount of literature from the sociological perspective is rather limited. The psychological perspective has been given far more attention, and to create a broader understanding all perspectives need to be acknowledged.

Second, the existing body of literature has not covered the sport of figure skating. Figure skaters are a population that may experience additional difficulties when retiring. Studies made on artistic gymnastics show that gymnasts may encounter extended difficulties because of the characteristics of the sport (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). The similarity between the characteristics in the sport of gymnastics and figure skating, outlined in the introduction, could be a reason that the specific target group needs further attention.

Third, the number of studies made with a narrative approach is quite limited in terms of retirement from elite sport. Especially research that describes how the narrative of athletes' careers could affect life after sport is missing (Ryba et al., 2015). Douglas and Carless (2009) argue that more research with a narrative approach would be fruitful to understand how different sporting contexts shape lives after sport.

### 3.4 Theoretical perspective

Through this thesis, I aim to address the lack of knowledge about figure skaters' retirement experiences. To achieve this, and in consideration of the limitations I have outlined above, I have chosen a theoretical perspective that allows me to hear skaters' stories from their

perspective. Narrative theory (Johansson, 2005) is a perspective that generates such insight.

Narrative theory is not just one theory; it consists of numerous ways of using stories or narratives to create understanding of how individuals understand themselves, during lifetime or a specific period of time. It is based on interpretations of stories within social processes, to understand how individual construct self. The narrative theory is used when identity and subjectivity is of interest, and individual experiences are at the centre of the research aim (Johansson, 2005).

Narrative theory is not frequently used when exploring retirement from elite sport. However, the latest decade, some scholars have noted the importance of understanding athletes' historical backgrounds in order to make sense of how retirement in elite sport could affect the athlete (e.g., Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009; Ryba et al., 2015). By adopting narrative research with a narrative approach, an understanding is created about how psychological characteristics are formed by the athletes' sociocultural interactions. (Carless & Douglas, 2009). Carless and Douglas (2009) also stated that understanding social processes is important in order to understand athletes' experiences.

Moreover, by adopt the narrative approach, a meaning and understanding to the present will be created. Thus, in order to understand behaviour and actions of individuals, ordering and connect actions in the past, will create an overall understanding of the present (Chase, 2005). The narrative of an athlete's career may differ from other life stories. Douglas and Carless (2015) present different narratives that could describe an athlete's career. The performance narrative story is the story that most athletes tell, when talking about their career, and could therefore be seen as the dominant narrative in regards to elite sport.

## **Performance narrative**

Performance narrative is according to Douglas and Carless (2006) the narrative that describes athletes' careers, including "single-minded" focus on the sport. The single-minded dedication includes regulations of other non-sports context, and the sacrifices that has to be made in order to proceed the career (Douglas & Carless, 2015). Performance narrative theory also outlines that athletes' experience their self-esteem to be connected with their achievements. "When performance is going well the person is going well" (Douglas & Carless, 2015, p. 98).

This "single-minded" dedication could be problematic, and a decrease in wellbeing could occur when the athletes' narrative no longer matches the experience, for instance, at the point of elite career retirement (Carless & Douglas, 2009). Cho (2012) show that single-mindedness could lead to difficulties when ending a career, because it creates limited learning opportunities outside the sporting context. While psychological researcher shows that the single mindedness and total investment will create difficulties because of the preserved sport identity at the point

of retirement (Lally, 2007). Regardless, “performance stories – sooner or later – tend to end badly for the teller” (Douglas & Carless, 2015, p. 73)

The performance narrative theory could be one way of understanding how athlete’s experiences retirement and how they adapt to life after sport. Performance narrative theory (Douglas & Carless, 2006) will be used in this thesis in order to create understandings of elite Swedish figure skaters’ experiences their sport career and retirement.

## **Narrative writing style**

Narrative writing is about retelling stories about personal experiences (Johansson, 2005). It is important to display individuals action in the past, to create an understanding of the present (Chase, 2005). For instance, athletes’ experiences of their career needs to be presented in order to create an understanding of their experiences of retirement and life after sport. By presenting the career, and telling the athletes’ career stories, the actions in the past can be connected, and could create an understanding of the athletes’ actions and experiences in the present (Chase, 2005). There are different ways to present a narrative story. This thesis will conduct ‘the research stories’ writing style with an essayistic approach, presented by Markula & Denison (2005). This writing style acknowledges other peoples’ relocations of their life and present their life story using the same characteristics as an essays. The short stories are trustworthy and simple, and aim to create understanding of the participants’ experiences. The narrative writing style was used in order present the figure skaters’ experiences, and to present them in manner that is simple and clear.

## 4. Research methods

This thesis is an explorative case study with a qualitative retrospective approach. A narrative design will be used throughout this thesis. A narrative method will also be conducted, having used retrospective interviews.

### 4.1 Sample criteria and recruitment

Three different criteria were used in the selection process: a) age; b) time since retirement; c) competition level. First, the participants needed to be at least 18 years old at the point of retirement. It was to diminish the risk that the experiences of retirement would be because of identity confusion in relation with puberty, which creates further difficulties (Kerr and Dacyshyn, 2000). At an age of 18, the skaters are also considered adults, and old enough to reflect upon their own career. Second, it was of interest that the participants had been away from the sport for no longer than 3 years, but no shorter than 3 months. This timespan was set because it was crucial that the athlete had experience life after retirement, but still remember important details about the career and the retirement phase. Finally, the skaters needed to have been competing at the highest level or second highest level in Sweden. Only elite skater was included in order to examine that specific target group, and because elite sport have high demands which may affect the retirement experience.

The Swedish figure skating community consists of a small number of skaters. As a retired figure skater myself, I have had the opportunity to meet a lot of skaters who are/were competing at a high level. I picked out a sample of eight possible participants after my own recollection. Three skaters were then selected and confirmed with statistics from Svenskkonståkning (n.d.), based on the selection criterial. Goal-oriented selection is often occurring in qualitative research (Bryman & Nilsson, 2011), and the technique is beneficial when examining a small sample. The participants were contacted through social media, and where happy to talk to me about their retirement from elite sport. A letter of information was sent to each participant before the interviews. Informing them about the thesis, the conditions for participation and the ethical safeguarding. A meeting was then organized, at a place suitable for the participants.

The final sample consisted of three retired Swedish figure skaters. The participants were women, aged between 20-24 years old. The time since retirement was between 1-2 years. Today, the three figure skaters either studying or working. The participants had all competed in Sweden's national League. They started skating at an age of 4-7 years old, and have been practicing figure skating 14-18 years. During the skaters' career, they trained between 16-21 hours per week. To preserve the skaters' identity, pseudonyms will be used.

## 4.2 Data production

The data was collected through retrospective semi-structured interviews with narrative approach. Open questions were raised, which invited the participants to tell their story in regards to the social world around them (Johansson, 2005). Four main blocks of questions were asked and the participant was encouraged to give a substantial answer. The blocks were: a) Career progression; b) Progressions outside of sport; c) Retirement phase; d) Life following retirement. Open questions were raised, which gave the opportunity for the participant to tell a story. For instance, I asked: “How did your career progress?”; “How did you experiences your retirement from elite sport?”; “How is your life today?”. Each skater was interviewed once. Two of the interviews were conducted in person, while one interview was held through skype. The interviews were voice recorded and lasted an average 68 minutes.

## 4.3 Data analysis

Data analysis followed a narrative framework, specifically based on the work by Markula and Denison (2005). The first step of the analysis begun during the interviews, since the interaction between the interviewee and the participant is an opportunity for broader reflection and understanding of the narrative for both the interviewee and the participant (Markula & Silk, 2011). The interviews recordings were carefully listened to, which created a perception of patterns and themes in the data. The text was transcribed and read through, which lead to further appreciation.

The second step of the analysis was to draw out themes in the text to form an understanding of the skaters’ career. The themes were drawn out by highlighting relevant data sections. Theming is a common method when analysing data, and to this point, the narrative analysis does not differ a lot from other qualitative analysis methods (Markula, & Denison, 2005). Thirdly, the themes that has been drawn out from the existing data were constructed in to an arranged timeline to create a structure in data (Markula, & Denison, 2005), and to create” a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions over time” (Chase, 2005, p. 656). The timelines will be presented in the result (see figure. 1,2,3).

The fourth part of the analysis differed a lot from other qualitative analysis methods. A story is created, which is built on description of the case, but also interpretation, as the subjectivity is important in the narrative analysis of data (Markula, & Denison, 2005).

## 4.4 Ethical considerations

The four ethical principles outlined by Vetenskapsrådet (2002) were taken in consideration throughout this thesis. The participants were over 18 years old and accepted their participation. All participants were informed by a letter about what their participation would involve, the

possibility to withdraw at any time, and my assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. They were further informed that during the interview, they could refrain from answering any specific question. The information about the thesis and ethical safeguarding was repeated to the participants before the interview. The participants' names and any other trackable information is concealed, using names which is pseudonyms. The data will be used solely for the purpose of research.

## 4.5 Method discussion

According to Bryman and Nilsson (2011), the qualitative research approach has been critiqued in different areas, including a) Subjectivity; b) Replicability; c) Generalizability. The subjectivity in qualitative research has been viewed as problematic, and it has been argued the result of quantitative studies partly is built on the researchers' interpretation. Thus, the researchers' personal experiences and values will influence the result. The qualitative researcher is also in charge of how the data is collected. For instance, the researcher chooses the supplementary questions during a semi structured interview, and what is noticed during an observation. This makes the qualitative research hard to recreate. The small number of participants has also been viewed as a disadvantage with the qualitative research, because it makes it hard to generalize the result to the whole population.

One could argue if this criticism is accurate, or if it could be considered as an advantage, depending on the aim. For instance, if the purpose is to explore athletes' experiences, quantitative research would be far too general. A qualitative approach would instead be preferable, to create a depth in the data. In order to do that, generalizability has to be put to side. The subjectivity in the qualitative research is even considered to be an important part of narrative research. For instance, when conducting a narrative approach, it is common that the voice of the researcher is included in the story in order to create understanding of the researcher's values, and the reason to her interpretation of the situation (Markula & Denison, 2005). The subjectivity will always be a part of the qualitative research, since it is a part of social interactions.

Retrospective interviews were used when gathering the data. The narrative approach requires a story which often is based on recollections of the subject or the researcher's previous experiences (Markula & Denison, 2005). One problem that can be considered is recall bias, which occurs when the participants do not remember details, and tell the story incorrectly (Bryman & Nilsson, 2011). Remembering the whole career could be difficult, in particular when the athletes have left the career behind. Selection criteria implied that the participants should not have been out of sport for more than three years. Even if the issue remains, the selection criteria increases the probability that the essential part will be retold correctly.



## 5. Result and discussion

In this section, I present the results and discuss them. The first part is (a) the elite career, which include the skaters' narrative from the beginning of their skating career, up until the retirement from elite sports. This section will be based on performance narrative theory (Douglas & Carless, 2006). The skating career is followed by (b) Outcomes of retirement, and (c) adaption to life after sport. The result will be presented using 'the research stories' writing style with an essayistic approach (Markula & Denison, 2005).

### 5.1 The elite career

#### **Malin**

*Malin was introduced to figure skating by her mother who is a figure skating coach. Malin has been at the rink as long as she can remember, but started organized skating at the age of four. Malin practiced other sports along with figure skating up to the age of 10. After that, participation in other sport was no longer possible due to the fact that Malin, at that time, had reached the highest competition level in her age group.*

*Even if Malin made progress, she felt uneven in her performance and did not really believe in herself. This changed at an age of 15, when Malin become a junior. The progression and the results came along with the decreasing pressure by being a first year junior. Malin started high school and was able to increase her training load, skating mornings as well. She liked school and had no trouble managing school alongside with her figure skating career. She also liked hanging out with her friends from school, but figure skating was always first priority, and she refuses to miss a training session. During this time, Malin competed her first Swedish national championship. She developed both mentally and physically and she felt more secure in her skating.*

*The progress Malin experienced persisted until she was 17 years old, when she broke her leg. Malin was determined that she was going to find her way back to figure skating. People questioned Malin ability to skate again, because of her age at the time of the injury, but Malin never doubted that she would return. After a while, Malin was able to skate again but had some problems with injuries. These problem would consist on and off for about three years. Malin finished high school and the year that followed, she only focused on the sport, without either job or school as distractions. This was not the perfect setup for Malin, because of the absence of other areas in life, her wellbeing was dependent on how she performed on the ice. All day was a preparation for figure skating practice and if the practice did not go as well as Malin hoped, the day felt meaningless. After one year, Malin started university, which had the perfect setup for her figure skating career, because of the fact that Malin could structure the studies in*

a way that suited her. In the same time Malin also started working as a strength coach to earn some extra money, this was also beneficial for the career since she got a lot of strength training and endurance from working, which favour the sport. Even if Malin had a lot going on, she still always put the sport first. Malin changed club at the age of 20, because her mom got a job as coach in another club, Malins mom had been her coach from the start so Malin followed her to the next club. Malin was now free from injuries and continued to progress as a skater. Even if Malin performed well, she started to feel more and more detached from the sport. She had always loved figure skating but the feeling she once had was starting to fade. She had no motivation left. She continued skating but realized after a while that it was time to end her skating career.

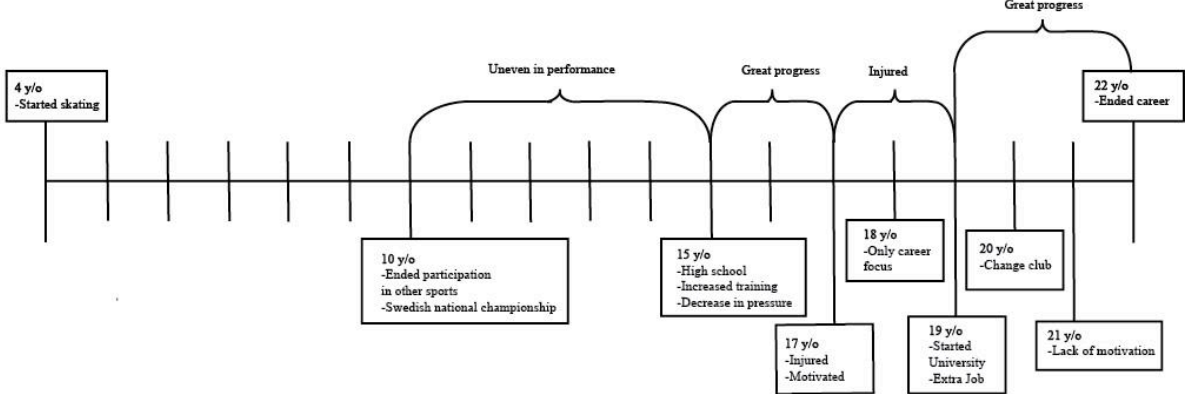


Figure 1. Malins career- timeline

**Lovisa**

Lovisas mom thought it was important to learn how to ice skate and registered Lovisa and her brother for skating lessons. Lovisa was four years old when she first started skating and after a year of skating she still liked it and wanted to stay in the sport. The progress went fast in the beginning, and at the age of seven, Lovisa started to have goals with her training, she wanted to be the best.

Lovisa competed at Swedish national championship for the first time when she was nine and continued to experience great progress. At the age of 12, Lovisa was in top ten in Sweden in her age group and she started to realize that she was a promising figure skater. She ended her participation in the other sports that she was involved in, mainly focusing on figure skating. She continued to practice gymnastics mainly because it was beneficial for her figure skating career. Lovisas progress started to stand still for a while at the age of 13, not going forward as it did before, but she was still as dedicated. She started to train in two different clubs to get more time on the ice. Lovisa had lots of friends outside of sport, and she hated missing out on things because of the sport. Even if Lovisa prioritized figure skating above everything else, she still tried to make her life conform around her training schedule. She regulated her friends and family’s life to be able to be a part of many aspect of life as possible.

At the age of 14, Lovisa changed club and trainer because her club closed down. During this time Lovisa also hit puberty and that affected her body image. She had always seen herself as a “stick”, but the weight gain resulted by puberty, made her insecure about herself. She trained in her new club for one year, but at the time she was supposed to start high school she asked her family if she could move to another city to practice figure skating. Her parents approved, with one condition, she had to do well in school. Lovisa moved and started high school in a new city, leaving her family, friends and her old skating club behind. Lovisa really thrived in her new city, and her new club. She started to experience great progress once again. She liked her coaches and her club mates and they become her “new” family. She spent most of her time in the ice rink, and due to the increasing amount of training hours, the remaining hours was used to study. Lovisa did great progress during her high school years, and she was at her peak when she reached her senior year. Half way through, she started to get sick, getting high fevers. She did not get any better so she trained anyway, which made her worse. She was sick on and off for several months. Lovisa loved to compete even more than she loved to train, so she competed anyway, lying to her coaches telling them she felt better than she actually did. After one competition she got really sick and it turned out to be mononucleosis. She was put to bedrest for three weeks and then she had to wait a long time before she could engage in any sort of physical activity. During her time away from sport, Lovisa decided to retire from figure skating. She was afraid that it would take too much time to find her way back to her former level. She was also starting university and she thought it was a good time to quit, being at the top of her career.

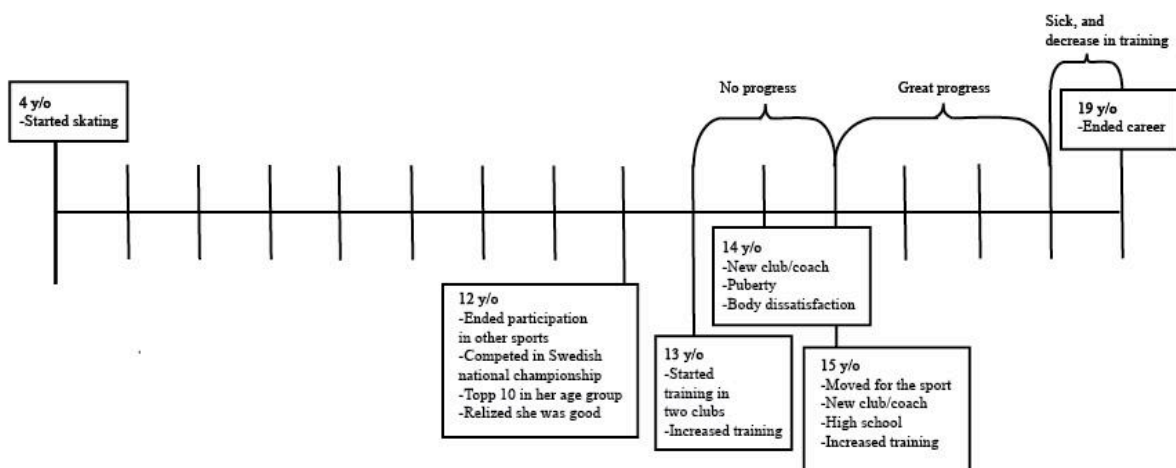


Figure 2. Lovisas career- timeline

## Ronja

Ronja started practicing figure skating when she was seven years old because her parents

wanted her to be able to skate. No one ever told Ronja that she had to continue skating, but she thought that that was implied because of the sacrifices her parents had to make in order to keep her in the sport. At an age of ten, Ronja moved to a new city with her parents because her father got another job. Ronja started in a new skating club, and her elite career begun. Ronja was practicing other sports as well, but ended her participation to mainly focusing on her skating career.

Ronja started to experience great progress, but that did not imply that she was happy. Her coach was strict, and Ronja was being psychological abused and insulted daily. After two years, Ronja at the age of 12, left her club. She started in a new club, still experienced great progress. Compared to her old coach, the new coach was not that bad, but she still was mean to the skaters, letting them take the hit if she was in a bad mood. Ronja continued to experience progress, and at the age of 13, she reached a level which gave her the opportunity to skate in Sweden's national team. She started to skip school in order to keep up with the increasing demands of the sport, and her education suffered because of that. However, her figure skating career was going really well, she started collecting medals on Swedish national championship and participated in international competitions. Even if Ronja competed and performed well, she hated to compete. Three weeks' prior a competition, Ronja was an emotional wreck, the jumps did not work like they used to do and she was really stressed up. She just wanted to cry, and she secretly hoped that she would be physically hurt, so she did not have to skate at the competition.

At the age of 15, Ronja changed coach again, because she felt like the old coach did not work for her. At that time, Ronja was starting high school and she choose her school with her skating in mind, a high school that offered training during the school day. Ronja experienced high school as a great period of time, but she still had to miss a lot of school because of trainings and competitions. Even if Ronja enjoyed high school, her time in the new club was not that pleasant. The skaters were afraid of the coach and the club was like a sect. The club mates were telling on each other in exchange of approval from the coach. The coach punished the skater who acted in a way that she did not approve of. Ronja was going along with this for a while, but started to react on how she was treated. She put her foot down, and was because of that ostracized from the group.

Ronja competed at Junior world championship and Youth Olympic games when she was seventeen. Ronja hit puberty the same year and that changed her body, resulting in skating difficulties. She was no longer able to do the jumps, that earlier was easy to her. This resulted in lack of motivation. Ronja still trained for a coach she despised, but she also took lessons for another coach in another club. Ronja had not experienced joy in her skating for a long time, but with this other coach she felt happy and she liked skating once again. But according to Ronjas head coach, this was considered a betrayal and she refuse to train Ronja in the

upcoming season. No one spoke to Ronja the remaining time in the club and her club mates, that once was her friend, ignored her and acted like she did not belong there. When Ronja once again changed club she got a coach that did not care about her progress, forcing Ronja to practice by herself at hours no other wanted, late at night and early mornings. For one year Ronja practically coached herself, but to her own surprise, experienced great progress during this time. She changed club again at the age of 18, to what was going to be her final coach. For the first time, Ronja had a coach that she really liked and she got along great with her club mates. However, an injury in her back prevented her from perform her best and she was therefore kicked out of the national team. Ronja experienced relief when got the notice. She was happy to no longer be a part of the national team. Thus, because of the national team, her injury, the lack of motivation and the fact that she was going to start studying at university, Ronja decided to quit figure skating.

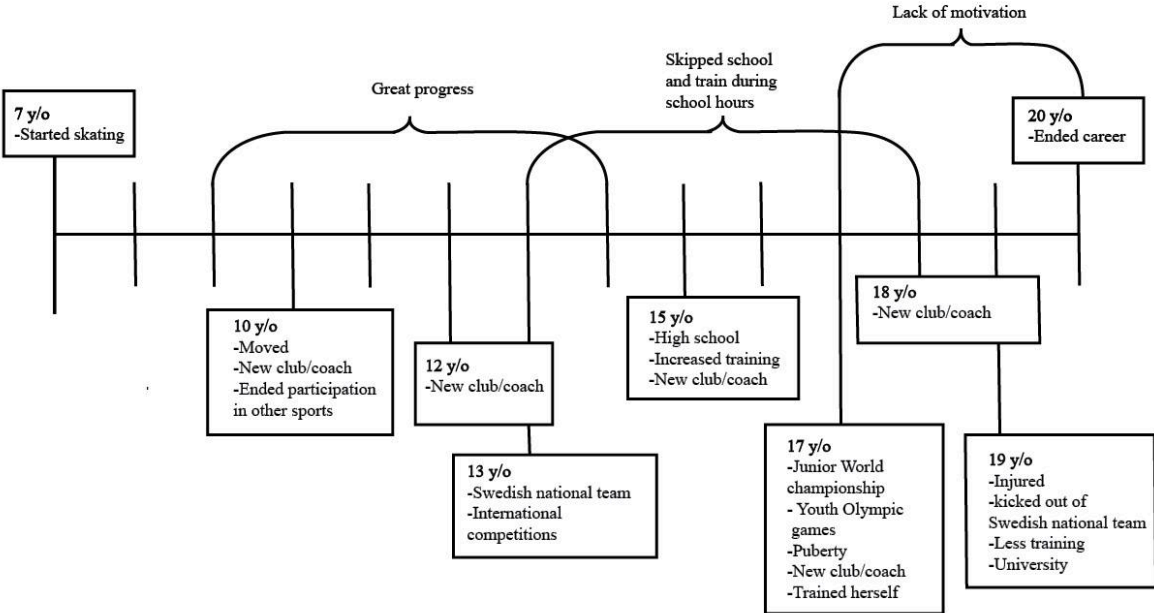


Figure 3. Ronjas career- timeline

All three skaters started practicing figure skating because of their parents’ influence, and in the beginning they all participated in other sports alongside with figure skating. Later on, the demands increased, and they felt as though they had to end their participation in other sports to mainly focus on their figure skating career. Figure skating became the highest priority at an age between 10-12 years old. This was the point when the skater realized that it was not possible to proceed an elite career without committing fully to the sport. A single minded dedication to figure skating was created, which is in line with the performance narrative theory by Douglas and Carless (2006).

After the skaters had committed to figure skating, the training hours and the demands started to increase. All three skaters realize that sacrifices and regulations of life outside of sport needed to be made in order to proceed an elite career (Douglas & Carless, 2015). First of all, time was sacrificed since the demands of the sport required a lot of training hours. Malin started training both mornings and afternoons and Lovisa started training in two different figure skating clubs, in order to get more time on the ice. Secondly, school was sacrificed and regulated to fit the skating schedule. Lovisa and Ronja selected schools that would be beneficial for their figure skating career. Lovisa moved to another city to start high school there, just to be able to skate in the club she wanted. Ronja chose a high school that encourage elite sport and skipping school to be able to train and compete on regular basis. Malin, postponed her university studies to be able to focus mainly on her figure skating career. Thirdly, Relationship were not considered a priority and was regulated to the skaters training schedule. Malin always put skating above being with her friends, and would never skip a training session. Lovisa left her friends and family behind in order to pursue her career in another city, and she also tried to control her surroundings, planning her friends and families lives rather than skip a training session. Finally, one could also argue that Ronja sacrificed her wellbeing during her career, putting up with psychological abuse, going from one coach to another just to be able to peruse her career.

The performance narrative theory also outlines how athletes' self-confidence depends on their performance (Douglas & Carless, 2015). This subject was raised by Malin, who specifically described one part of her life where her self-esteem was really dependent on her figure skating performance. It was one year between high school and University, when she mainly focused on her figure skating career. During this time, she had no other areas in life that could make her feel good about herself. If the training session did not go as planned, it could ruin her day. The pressure increased and she did not feel good about herself.

Athletes' careers and their performance narrative may differ (Douglas & Carless, 2015), but it is safe to say that the skaters in these stories has sacrifices and regulated their lives outside of sport, in order to peruse their elite career. According to the Swedish figure skating requirement profile and the development ladder (see appendix), the skater should develop in to be an "around the clock- athlete", in order to become an elite skater. This is implying always thinking and acting in a way that is beneficial for the career (Svenska konståkningsförbundet, 2010). The Swedish figure skating association encouraging skaters to develop a performance narrative, with single minded dedication to the sport (Douglas and Carless, 2006). According to Douglas and Carless (2015), to adopt the performance narrative fully could create bad consequences for the athlete, especially at the point of retirement. A total lack of other areas in life could be devastating for the athlete. The three skaters adopted the performance narrative to a certain degree, but not all the way, and they still had other areas in life that they considered important, even if figure skating always were prior one.

## 5.2 Outcomes of Retirement

### **Malin**

*Malin retired from elite sport when she was 22 years old and had a hard time adjusting to the idea of retirement. She has always loved figure skating and thought about retirement as something she was going to be forced to do. So when she no longer felt the motivation to skate anymore, she did not want to realize it. She tried to deny it for a while, but being on the ice just did not make her happy anymore. She tried to convince herself that the feeling was due to a demanding year of figure skating, but her coach/mom told her what she had known all the time; it was time to quit. The retirement was an emotional time for Malin, and she experienced sadness and emptiness because of the void that occurred without figure skating in her life. Malin tried to quit all together but after one month without skating she missed the ice deeply. She started to skate again, and gradually increased her training hours. Soon Malin trained almost as much as before and even started competing again, but on a lower level. Now she skated because she loved it, without pressure. She could miss a training session if school was to demanding, something she never would have done before. She trained and competed for one year just for fun, but after one year she realized that she was satisfied. She wanted to quit skating again and this time she did not experience any negative emotions and she was happy with her decision.*

### **Lovisa**

*Lovisa was 19 years old when she retired. Lovisa never planned her retirement during her career, she always focused one season at the time. When she got sick she started to reflect on retirement, and during her long way to recovery, she took the decision, not to return to the sport. Lovisa never experienced the ending as problematic. She had a long time to make her decision as she could not skate because of her illness. However, she made the decision partly based on the fear of not reach the same level once again. Lovisa was happy with her decision to retire, but she was also left with the question of how good she could have been if she continued skating and gave it a second chance. She also felt sad missing the last competition, which have been her goal the whole season. Lovisa started university shortly after she retired from figure skating and she experienced a hard time presenting herself without her sport. Lovisa could no longer say that she was a figure skater, because that was no longer true. Lovisa found this distressing but came to the conclusion that she still could be a figure skater because that was still her greatest interest.*

### **Ronja**

*Ronja retire when she was 20 years old. She lost her place in the Sweden's national team, had an injury and lacked motivation. She just wanted out. She told her coach that she wanted to quit, but the coach did not want to understand it. She had to distinctly tell her coach several*

*times before she understood that Ronja actually was going to end her career. Ronja experienced her retirement as painful. She did not really know who she was anymore. She started to skate again just for fun. Being on the ice felt familiar and safe. She started skating four times a week, but the number decreased and soon she was only skating once a month. She also started to coach. Even if Ronja had retired from figure skating she was telling people about her goal to compete for Sweden in the European championship. It was her dream and her objective before she retired and she did not want to let go of that dream, and to accept that she never was going to be able to peruse it. People told her she was not going to compete, but she still insisted that she would. It took some time for Ronja to realize that she had to let go of her dream. Ronja started university right after she retired. It was arranged that Ronja should finish her degree working on half speed, but since she quit figure skating, she started school on full speed. She had some problem to present herself when going in the new class. She used to be a figure skater but she was not anymore, however, she still wanted to be recognised as one. She started to present herself as figure skating coach instead, still getting the figure skating status.*

All three skaters considered the retirement to be a difficult process and experienced void and confusion when the career came to an end. This was in line with the Gymnasts' experiences, who also experienced void, along with feelings of confusion and disorientation post retirement (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007).

Similar to gymnasts, figure skaters put a lot of time, energy in the sport during their career. Confusion and disorientation occur post retirement, when this no longer was the case (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). The skaters had a hard time knowing who they were and how they should define themselves without figure skating. It was important for the skaters to be able to identify themselves with the sport, and they struggle with the idea if no longer be able to call themselves figure skaters. The skaters then found other ways to continue to be able to recognizing themselves as a figure skater, and argued that they still could define themselves as one even if they not were an elite athlete anymore, since it still was their biggest interest. This is in line with Stier (2009), who noticed that the athletes wanted to be recognized with their sport post retirement, and that they find ways to make it possible. Gymnasts also wanted to continue to be recognized as a gymnast post retirement. Gymnast wanted to keep their gymnast appearance in order to be able to be recognised as a gymnast. This created further difficulties for the gymnast since, at the time of retirement, the gymnast often experienced weight gain and had a hard time keeping their appearance (Stirling et al. 2012). The figure skaters in this thesis did not mention body dissatisfaction as an issue, even if both figure skating and gymnastics similar body ideal.

All three skaters searched their way back to the sport shortly after retirement, Both Malin and Ronja were back after less than a month, just training for fun. Lovisa did not have the opportunity to go back because of her illness, but later on, she was back on the ice again as well. The result in a Swedish report, by Fahlström et al., (2014) shows that athletes often re-enters the sport after ending the career.



The reason for re-entering could vary. The fact that the skaters in this thesis continued to train several hours a week could be seen as an attempt to keep the figure skating appearance, in similarity to the gymnasts. Even if the skaters did not mention any body dissatisfaction, returning to the sport and continue training, could be seen as a way for the skaters to avoid losing their skating appearance. Another reason for why the skater searched their way back to the ice could be to manage the retirement. Malin explained that she needed the additional time in figure skating in order to cope, and that she would not be able to accept the retirement without being able to end the career gradually. Malins statement match the result of Stråhlman (2006), who showed that gradually ending a career would be beneficial, and an easier transition for the athlete. Malins statement could also be compared to the gymnasts, who also experienced problems to abrupt end their career. Remaining in the sport of gymnastics after ending the elite career helped some gymnast to deal with retirement (Lavalley & Robinson, 2007).

Even if the skaters ended their participation gradually they had a hard time accepting the retirement, and two of the skaters try to deny their retirement. For instance, Malin did not want to understand that it was time to retire, while Ronja, after she retired, still had the goal to compete for Sweden in European championship. It was hard to realize that the career was over, and it was hard to let go of the goals and the dreams. Denial is one step in the "5-step model of grief" by (Kübler-Ross, 1970) that some researcher presents as a part of the retirement phase (Fortunato & Marchant, 1999). It took a while for Malin and Ronja to accept the situation and to realize that they had to let go of their career.

Some researchers argue, that voluntarily retirement that has been planned as a process would create less difficulties at the point of retirement (e.g., Martin et al., 2014; Torregrosa et al., 2004; Stråhlman, 2006). Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000) also discuss this issue, but question what could be considered as voluntarily retirement. In this thesis, Malin had no motivation to continue, and did not find it rewarding to skate anymore, which could be seen as a voluntary retirement. Yet, she experienced negative emotions, and tried to deny the retirement. She did not want to skate anymore, but she wanted to continue skating. No one forced her to quit, but her loss of motivation made it impossible for her to continue. However, Lovisa become sick and could not continue skating. One could then argue that it was involuntarily, but she took the decision to retire all by herself, choosing not to continue skating after she got well. It is hard to determine whether the retirement is voluntarily, and to plan the retirement phase. Lovisa stated that she only planned one season at the time, and she could not allow herself to plan any further. She needed to be in the moment in order to perform. The performance narrative and the single-minded dedication to the sport do not leave much room to plan the retirement (Cho, 2012). An elite career is always changing and taking unexpected turns and it is hard to plan something that is unpredictable. Malin always were motivated to skate and loved skating, she always saw retirement as something that she was going to be forced to do. She could not even imagine that she would lose motivation, and end her career because of that.

## 5.3 Adaptions to life after sport

### **Malin**

*Almost two years post retirement, Malin is working full time with administration work. She always thought that she was going to be a choreographer, since she has been working with it occasionally, and she is hoping that she will be more involved in figure skating in the future. Malin still loves figure skating and she follows the competitions on the television and keeps track of skaters' scores. She misses figure skating occasionally but she is not motivated to go back. Even if Malin has other areas in her life that makes her happy, she believes that she never again will find something that makes her equally passionate. She still sees herself as a figure skater, and so do people around her.*

### **Lovisa**

*It has been almost one year since Lovisa retired from figure skating. Lovisa have moved and is living with her boyfriend. She studies to become a PE-teacher and works part time as a figure skating judge, judging high level competitions. She really likes to judge and has thoughts about advancing to the highest level of competitions in Sweden. Lovisa is also skating for an ice show and whenever she is visiting her old city, she goes skating with her old club mates. She really likes to skate if she gets the opportunity, she misses the ice and she wants to maintain her skating ability. Even if Lovisa has left figure skating she still feels like she is a part of it. Lovisa likes to be a part of the skating community and she still considers figure skating to be her greatest interest.*

### **Ronja**

*Today, one-year post retirement, Ronja still misses the ice. She regularly looks for open ice rinks just to be able to feel the ice under her blades and experience the feeling of being secure and in control. However, Ronja would never want to pursue an elite career again. Ronja thrives in her school, studying sport science. She is still a coach and dreams about changing the figure skating community for the better, being the coach that she never had. She also thinks about continuing studying and maybe become a researcher in the future. Ronja has always dreamt about skating on a Caribbean cruise, and she is thinking of trying out for the crew. Ronja has new friends from University but she still sees her old club mates from her latest club. She has a boyfriend now, and she really enjoy spending time with him, doing things together that she did not have time to do before, traveling, camping, bowling. Ronja still consider herself as a figure skater, and she believes that she always going to see herself as one.*

Today, Lovisa and Ronja has been out of elite sport for about one year, and Malin ended her elite career two years ago. According to Stephan et al. (2003), an increase in well-being usually

occurs 8-10 months after retirement. All the skaters recounted that they are happy with their situation today, and that they have adjusted to a life outside of sports. They all have new occupations, and they have new dreams, unrelated to their elite career. However, both Ronja and Lovisa kept a big part of figure skating in their life by choosing work and school related to sports. And even if their goals did not concern the elite career anymore, it still was centred around figure skating. Shachar et al. (2004) results show that athletes who hang on to the sport after retirement, coaching, will keep their athlete identity. The skater has been away from the elite figure skating for about 1-2 years, but they never really left the sport. They wanted to be part of the skating community and still liked being associated with figure skating. Malin who have been away from figure skating for a longer time, and who chose an occupation unrelated to the sport, have more distance to the sport, even if she also still considers herself to be a figure skater.

One could argue that the skaters have a hard time to let go of the sport, and need to have the sport close to them to feel secure. When Ronja talked about figure skating she stated: “It just flows, you know who you are, and what you are supposed to do (on the ice). It is something that I am good at”. One-year post retirement, figure skating is still the area in life that they consider themselves to be best at. According to Barker-Ruchti et al. (2012) the characteristics that are developed through sport, may or may not be suited for the other contexts outside of sport. An elite career could limit the the learning, and make the athlete insecure about other areas in life. Especially if the athlete adopts the single-minded dedication of the performance narrative throughout the career (Douglas & Carless, 2006). To stay in the sporting context will therefore feel like a safer choice, and other areas in life can be seen as intimidating (Cho, 2012). This could be the reason of why both Lovisa and Ronja stayed in the skating/sports context and why Malin wished to return. They know how to act within this context, and avoided to reconstruct their learning to a new setting, which could be necessary moving in to a new context (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2012). Keeping figure skating close post retirement, could be a reason of why they still see themselves as figure skater 1-2-year post retirement (Shachar et al., 2004).

## 6. Conclusions

Through this research, I aimed to address the lack of knowledge about figure skaters' experience of retirement and life after sport. Specifically, I aimed to trace three figure skaters' career up until retirement, how the figure skaters' experienced the retirement, and how the skaters' lives developed after retirement. The three skaters' careers can be understood in relation to the performance narrative theory (Douglas & Carless, 2006). The skaters had a single-minded dedication to the sport, and made sacrifices and reconstruction in their life outside of sport in order to pursue the elite career. The skaters experienced void when the career ended, they tried to deny the retirement and searched the way back to the sport in order to cope with retirement. The skaters experienced confusion, and did not know who they were without the sport. The life after sport continued to centre around figure skating, thus the skater chose occupations related to the sport. They still want to be associated with the sport post retirement, and to continue to see themselves as figure skaters.

Further research is needed in the subject of figure skating retirement. The figure skating population has not previously been explored in regard to retirement and life after sport. No general assumptions can be drawn, therefore, the body of literature has to increase to create a broader understanding of figure skaters experience of retirement and life after an elite career. This thesis is retrospective, but it would also be beneficial to explore this subject prospective. Further research is also needed on men's figure skating retirement. Men's experiences of retirement are missing from the gymnastics literature as well and has to be recognized in future research.

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# 8. Appendix

## Svenska konståkningsförbundets Utvecklingstrappa för singel för att nå världselit

Observera att denna utvecklingstrappa endast är en del i SKF:s Kravanalys för att nå världselit. Denna bild beskriver endast en "tänkt" utveckling där åkaren når världselit vid 19 år.

	Minior		Ungdom		Junior	Senior
	5 - 8 år	9 - 10 år	11 - 13 år	14 - 15 år	16 - 18 år	19 år -->
<b>Träningsbelastning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Is: 3-8 tim/v</li> <li>* Fys: 2 tim/v</li> <li>* Sommarläger 1-2 v</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Is: 8 tim/v</li> <li>* Fys: 1-2 tim/v</li> <li>* Dans: 1 tim/v</li> <li>* Sommarläger 2-3 v</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Is: 10-12 tim/v</li> <li>* Fys: 2 tim/v</li> <li>* Dans: 1-2 tim/v</li> <li>* Sommarläger 3-4 v</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Is: 12-15 tim/v</li> <li>* Fys + Dans 4-5 tim/v</li> <li>* Morgonspass</li> <li>* Dubbla pass 1-3 ggr/v</li> <li>* Sommarläger 5-7 v</li> <li>* Is 10,5 - 11 månader/år</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Is 15-18 tim/v</li> <li>* Fys + Dans 5-6 tim/v</li> <li>* Sommarläger ca 7 v</li> <li>* Is 10,5 - 11 månader/år</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Kvalitetsträning, timantal individuellt</li> <li>* Is 10,5 - 11 månader/år</li> </ul>
<b>Mental Utveckling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Känna träningsglädje/uppmuntran</li> <li>* Lära sig känna igen positiva tankar och ord</li> <li>* Positiv självbild</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Träningsglädje/få lyckas</li> <li>* Positiv självuppfattning</li> <li>* Positivt tankemönster</li> <li>* Modellering/bra åkare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Känna egen kompetens</li> <li>* Systematisera MT</li> <li>* Visualisera</li> <li>* Inre samtal</li> <li>* Integreera kunskap på träning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Ansvar för egen utveckling</li> <li>* Fokusering</li> <li>* Självbild/självförtroende</li> <li>* Integreera</li> <li>* Visualisera (assat/dissat)</li> <li>* Avslappningsmodeller</li> <li>* Tävlingsglädje</li> <li>* Stor tävlingsmotivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Känsla, tillstånd-kunskap</li> <li>* Självinsikt (vad behövs)</li> <li>* Mentala redskap</li> <li>* Rutiner</li> <li>* Bäst när det gäller/tuffhet</li> <li>* Visualisera</li> <li>* Öka trygghetszon, våga</li> <li>* Stor tävlingsmotivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Utvecklas optimalt mentalt möjlighet till "flow"</li> <li>* Integreering</li> <li>* "24-tim idrottare"</li> <li>* Utv. Visualisering</li> <li>* Rutin</li> <li>* Stor tävlingsmotivation</li> <li>* Medveten om kompetens</li> </ul>
<b>Idrottslig utveckling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Kamratskap</li> <li>* Gruppvana</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Utveckla sociala relationer med klubbkompisar</li> <li>* Utveckla träningsvana/beteende</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Involveras i målsättning</li> <li>* Föra enkel träningsdagbok</li> <li>* Ta eget ansvar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Utveckla eget ansvar</li> <li>* Träningsplanering</li> <li>* Utveckla träningsdagbok</li> <li>* Känna ansvar för positivt träningsklimat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Detaljerad målsättning/träningsplanering efter GAP-analys</li> <li>* Utvärdera/analysera sin träningsnivå/utveckling m.h.a dagbok/resultat</li> <li>* Individanpassad träning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Tränar individanpassat efter optimerad träningsplanering</li> <li>* Förmåga att utvärdera och förändra träning</li> </ul>
<b>Stöd</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Intresserade föräldrar</li> <li>* Pedagogiska ledare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Positivt engagerade föräldrar i barn och förening</li> <li>* Hälsokontroll (skola)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Stöttande föräldrar</li> <li>* Klubb/SDF med elitverksamhet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Stöttande omgivning</li> <li>* Hälsa/kost information</li> <li>* Kombination skola/träning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Resurspersoner</li> <li>* Ekonomisk stöttning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Anpassad "vid sidan om" verksamhet</li> <li>* Ekonomisk trygghet</li> </ul>
<b>Träningsmiljö</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Engagerade tränare</li> <li>* Positiv känsla av att visa vad man kan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Möjlighet till tävling lokalt/regionalt</li> <li>* Stöttande, utbildade tränare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Möjlighet till tävling lokalt/regionalt/centralt, internationell klubb tävling</li> <li>* Möjlighet till tr.utvärdering (fys-analys)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Internationella tävlingar, mästerskap</li> <li>* Rörelseanalys</li> <li>* Video, dattfish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Internationellt träningsutbyte</li> <li>* Anpassade träningstider</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Kvalitetssäkrad träning</li> <li>* "Idottsproffs"</li> </ul>
<b>Tränarkvaliteter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Steg 2-utbildad tränare</li> <li>* Stort engagemang</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Steg 3-utbildad tränare</li> <li>* Känna sin kompetens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Steg 4-utbildad tränare</li> <li>* Möjlighet till fortbildning</li> <li>* Kunskap om tr.planering GAP-analys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Högskoleutbildning eller annan högre tränarutbildning</li> <li>* Möjlighet till heltidsanställning</li> <li>* Stor kompetens i: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tr.planering</li> <li>- tr-lära</li> <li>- prestationspsykologi</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Anpassad anställning</li> <li>* Stor vilja till utveckling</li> <li>* Utveckla sin coachande förmåga: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- kommunikationssätt</li> <li>- "fingertoppskänsla"</li> </ul> </li> <li>* Ingå i elitnätverk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Vara i allians med den/de aktiva</li> <li>* Kryta nya kontakter</li> <li>* Mediaträning</li> <li>* Stor kommunikationskompetens (coachande samtal)</li> </ul>

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