



The role of adolescent athletes' task value patterns in their educational and athletic career aspirations[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the stability and change in task value patterns that Finnish student-athletes ($n = 391$) show during their first two years in upper secondary sport school and the extent to which these patterns, and changes in them, are associated with students' future educational and athletic career aspirations. By using latent profile analysis, three different and highly stable motivational patterns were identified among adolescents: (1) a dual motivated pattern, characterized by high value placed on both school and sport; (2) a low academically motivated pattern, characterized by a high value placed on sport but a low value on school; and (3) a relatively low sport motivated pattern characterized by a lower value placed on sport than was typical for the sample. The results further showed that the task value patterns and the changes in them over the two year study period were related to the students' educational and athletic career aspirations even after controlling for the impacts of their grade point average, gender, type of sport, and level of sport competition. Compared to the other students, those showing a dual motivated pattern were more likely planning to continue their studies at university after upper secondary school than might be expected by chance. The students who showed a low academically motivated pattern, in turn, were less likely than the others to aim for university and were more likely to plan to have a professional career in sport. Those who showed a relatively low sport motivated pattern were under-represented among those who planned to make sport their professional career.

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been increasing societal expectation in Nordic countries that athletes will simultaneously succeed in sport and at school (Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Ryba et al., 2016). However, previous research on dual careers in sport and education has shown that succeeding in both is highly demanding due to, for example, time constraints, overlapping schedules, and conflicting goals (for a review, see Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015). Moreover, student-athletes tend to prioritize sport over school (Adler & Adler, 1985; Cosh & Tully, 2014; Simons, Rheenen, & Covington, 1999), which may diminish not only their possibility of succeeding in academics but also narrow their thinking about and planning for their future education and vocational career. However, thus far, there has been a lack of systematic longitudinal research on the development of student-athletes' values and future aspirations. Little is therefore known about the kind of value patterns student-athletes show when constructing a dual career, and how these patterns are reflected in their educational and career aspirations. Consequently, the present study aimed to examine the

patterns of task values that student-athletes have at the beginning of upper secondary school, how stable these patterns are across the first two years of upper secondary school, and how these patterns are related to the student-athletes' future educational and athletic career aspirations.

The term “dual career” refers to the athlete's challenge of combining an elite sporting career with education/work (EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, 2012). From the developmental perspective, athletes face unique challenges throughout their sporting lifespan, which include psychological, social, academic/vocational, and financial challenges. As conceptualized by the Holistic Athletic Career model (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004; Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013), and adapted to the Finnish context by Ryba et al. (2016), athletes' developmental transitions in sport are in concurrent and reciprocal interaction with transitions occurring in other life domains, such as their educational and vocational development. The promotion of dual careers to ensure that young athletes receive education and vocational training together with their sporting training reflects the Europe 2020 Strategy, which emphasizes the prevention of school dropouts, a larger

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number of graduates from higher education, and better youth employability.

In order to successfully manage a dual career, students have to be motivated toward both education and sport. This is evident as motivation has been shown to play an important role in task engagement and persistence both in sport (Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Brière, 2001) and in education (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Pintrich, 2003); whereas a lack of motivation has been shown to increase the risk of dropping out from sport (Jöesaar, Hein, & Hagger, 2011; Sarrazin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier, & Cury, 2002) and from school (Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997). Although the early literature on dual career research includes some evidence of a negative association between high performance in sport and academic success (Adler & Adler, 1985; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982), more recent studies suggest that talented athletes tend to be highly motivated to do well in both domains (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Lupo et al., 2015; Lupo et al., 2017a; Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006). A limitation of the earlier research is that it mainly focused on examining the dual careers of university-level athletes (e.g., Adler & Adler, 1985; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Lupo et al., 2015; Simons et al., 1999); thus, less is known about the challenges of talented and elite youth athletes in combining sport and education during the earlier stages of their development (Stambulova, Engström, Franck, Linnér, & Lindahl, 2015a, 2015b). Because many athletes experience a transition in their competition level from junior to senior level during the time of their transition to upper secondary education—and this transition is known for its high dropout rate from sport (approximately 70%; Bussmann & Alfermann, 1994)—this period might be assumed to be crucial in determining the successful dual career development of athletes.

One widely used theoretical framework for motivation is the Eccles' Expectancy-Value model (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), according to which students' achievements and task choices are determined not only by expectancies for success but also by subjective task- or activity-related values, that is, the values individuals attach to a specific option. According to the model, the value of a specific task or activity can be differentiated into three components: *attainment value* refers to the personal importance of doing well on a task/activity; *intrinsic* or *interest value* refers to the simple enjoyment one gets from engaging in an activity; and *utility value* refers to the short- or long-term importance and usefulness of a specific task/activity. The model further theorizes that the value a person places on a certain task or activity predicts his or her future engagement with that activity.

In line with the model, students' task values have been related to various achievement outcomes, such as level of performance, persistence, amount of effort put into learning situations, and course choices relative to population-based samples (Bong, 2001; Eccles, 2005; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In addition to these short-term consequences, students' task values may, however, also contribute to the ways in which they think about and act upon their future lives, particularly in the domains of education and career (Lazarides, Viljaranta, Aunola, Pesu, & Nurmi, 2016; Lupo, Mosso, et al., in press a). This kind of thinking about and planning for the future are important developmental tasks during adolescence (Nurmi, 1989; Nurmi, Seginer, & Poole, 1995). In previous research using population-based samples, students' task values have been shown to play an important role in their educational plans and aspirations (Eccles, 2005; Eccles, Vida, & Barber, 2004; Lazarides et al., 2016; Viljaranta, Nurmi, Aunola, & Salmela-Aro, 2009; Watt, Shapka, Morris, et al., 2012) as well as in their occupational aspirations and career choices (Eccles, 2005; Eccles, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1998; Viljaranta et al., 2009). For example, in the study by Viljaranta et al. (2009), 16-year old adolescents with high task values across school domains, or in mathematics and science in particular, were over-represented among students who selected the academic track after comprehensive school and under-represented among students who selected a vocational track. Similarly, in the study by Lazarides et al. (2016), when compared with secondary school students

who demonstrated a motivational pattern characterized by high values placed on practical subjects at school, those students who showed a highly motivated or math-motivated pattern (as defined by subjective task values) were more likely to aim for a degree from a university.

Although task values might be assumed to play an important role among adolescent athletes when they construct their identities and plan for their future, little is known about their task value development and the role of task value patterns in student-athletes' future goals and aspirations when they are constructing a dual career. The few studies carried out have focused mainly on the academic motivation and aspirations of tertiary-level student-athletes (e.g., Fortes, Rodrigues, & Tchanchane, 2010; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Lupo et al., 2015; Lupo, Brustio, et al., in press a). However, planning for the future is seen as an important developmental task, particularly during adolescence (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Nurmi, 1989; Nurmi et al., 1995). Moreover, because secondary education is typically viewed as an inevitable part of youth in most industrialized nations (Pless, 2014), many adolescent athletes involved in secondary education may find it difficult to persist at school if their life goals, dreams, and career aspirations are disconnected from their education (Ryba, Stambulova, Selänne, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2017). Consequently, the aim of the present study was to discover the patterns of task values that student-athletes show in upper secondary school, how these develop over their years at school, and how these patterns are related to their educational aspirations, on the one hand, and to their athletic career aspirations, on the other. To identify these patterns, a person-centered approach on the data was utilized. This approach made it possible to identify subgroups of student-athletes who show different patterns of task-values. Whereas a variable-centered approach applies a single model to the whole sample to estimate a single set of parameters, a person-centered approach is able to relax the assumption of homogeneity in the population through the estimation of a distinct set of parameters applicable to the various subgroups present in the sample (Mäkikangas et al., in press). In addition to identifying subgroups of student-athletes who demonstrate different patterns of task-values, the person-centered analysis provided also other benefits compared to variable-centered approach, including information about the proportion of the sample belonging to certain identified subgroup.

The present study was carried out in Finland. In the Finnish educational system, after completing 9 years of basic education, at the age of 15 or 16, adolescents make a decision regarding their secondary education. Secondary education comprises upper secondary (considered to be an academic track that prepares students to apply for higher education in university) or vocational high school (professional preparation). After upper secondary school, students may apply to universities or to polytechnic schools. After vocational school, students often transit to work or continue in polytechnic schools. Talented and elite youth athletes in Finland often pursue secondary education within the national talent development program that structurally enables the construction of a dual career pathway. Specialized sports upper secondary schools (“urheilulukiot” in Finnish) collaborate with athletic clubs and sport federations to arrange morning practices for athletes, offer the possibility of extending the 3-year academic curriculum to 3.5 or 4 years, give some study credits for sport, and assist with dual career planning. Currently there are 13 upper secondary sport schools in Finland, labeled sport high schools by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The admission to upper secondary sport schools is competitive, and in addition to the students' grades in their secondary school reports, in order to be accepted, the students must demonstrate strong potential in their own sport. Because of the competitiveness of admission to upper secondary sport schools, students accepted to these schools have, on average, higher level of school achievement in comprehensive school in terms of grade point average (GPA) than students in regular upper secondary schools.

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