
Interpretative repertoires of performance Shaping gender in swimming*

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Abstract

This article deals with the way in which various views of performance are used in talking about youth competitive swimming during adolescence. Making use of interviews with competitive youth swimmers and coaches, the study explores the interpretative repertoires used to discuss performance, and how these repertoires influence gender construction. The analysis of the interview data shows that boys are positioned as performing athletes and girls as stagnating in their athletic progress. These positions are consequences of the interpretative repertoire of performance as outcome, framing time and personal records as the most central aspect. Since girls are perceived as not breaking personal records, they are also positioned as the ones with deteriorating performances during adolescence. Alternative interpretative repertoires discovered in the interviews are performance as a process and as doing one's best. These repertoires were less connected to gender and enabled more athletes (both girls and boys) to be viewed by themselves and others as performing athletes.

Key words: gender, performance, interpretative repertoires, swimming, subject positions

* This research was funded by the Swedish National Centre for Research in Sports.

The issue of how to achieve peak performance is central in competitive sports, and both scholars and sports coaches make great efforts to develop methods that will enhance athletes' performances. However, the main focus of sports, winning and breaking records, has also been criticised. Carless and Douglas, for example, have formulated a critique of what they call the performance perspective, i.e. winning at all costs, as the primary measure of success in elite sports. They argue that this one-sided view of success may negatively affect both well-being and identity construction (Douglas & Carless, 2009; Carless & Douglas, 2012; Douglas, 2009). A critical perspective on values related to performance is particularly relevant in the context of youth sports, and it has been argued that youth sports, just as professional and Olympic sports, draw on a performance rather than a developmental discourse (Ingham, Chure, and Butt, 2002). Attaining good results while maintaining health and well-being is portrayed as a balancing act (see Grahn, 2014), and it is important to investigate what kind of performances athletes strive for, since views of performance shape the inherent values of sports (Dionigi & O'Flynn, 2007). However, we know little about how performance is viewed by competitive youth athletes and their coaches.

A second important issue is how different views on performance may shape perceptions of gender. This is an under researched area, but it has been addressed in a study of textbooks used in Swedish youth coaches' education programs (Grahn, 2008). The result showed that when performance was viewed as enhancement in bio-motor abilities (conditioning, strength, and durability) girls were described as stagnating in their athletic progress. Boys on the other hand, were described as functional and performing athletes. Since no studies on the subject have been conducted in sports practice, there is a need to further explore how diverse views on performance may affect gender construction. This article contributes to the knowledge about how coaches' and athletes' views on performance may define gender through an analysis of athletes' and coaches' linguistic resources (interpretive repertoires) of performance, using analytical tools from critical discourse psychology (Edley, 2001; Edley & Wetherell, 1999, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

The aim of this article is two-fold: to explore the interpretative repertoires used to discuss performance, and to analyze how these repertoires influence gender construction. Using interviews with competitive youth swimmers and coaches, the study explores (a) interpretative repertoires used when coaches and athletes talk about performance in interviews

about youth competitive swimming, (b) how different interpretative repertoires influence perceptions of girls and boys as performing athletes, and (c) which subject positions these interpretative repertoires may offer.

The interviews were conducted as part of a larger research project on the construction of gender in two sports, swimming and rhythmic gymnastics. In this article, interviews with coaches and athletes in swimming will be used to show the diversity of performance repertoires, and how, depending on which interpretative repertoire is used, gender differences are accentuated. I argue that this will have consequences for the subject positions available for competitive youth swimmers to draw on in their individual gender construction.

To frame the context of the study, swimming is first described as a record sport and the focus on outcomes such as winning and breaking records are discussed. Further, results from a previous study will be presented, suggesting that certain views of performance may affect how gender is constructed, and some of the main patterns of how coaches and athletes talk about performance will then be analyzed. It will be shown that the interviewees ways of reasoning about performance can be divided into three interpretative repertoires, which all contribute to gendered and non-gendered subject positions. The paper is concluded by a discussion of the impact of different views of performance and how these may affect gender identities among swimmers.

Background

Swimming as a record sport

Depending on the type of sport, dominant perceptions of what performances are may vary. This variation can be explained by Loland's (2001) division of sports into record sports, quasi-record sports, and games, including different frames and measurements of sports achievements. Swimming is considered a record sport, meaning that it includes a standardized framework, such as the 50-meter pool, and an exact measurement of achievement, such as minutes and seconds. Loland problematizes record sports from a sustainability perspective, and a basic point of his critique is that the ability to break new records requires constant development of bio-motor abilities. According to Loland, future athletes will not have the same chance to break records (without external

technological innovations or performance-enhancing drugs), making record sports unsustainable. Placing and time are fixed ways of measuring achievements, potentially limiting the ways athletes interpret performance, which will be discussed in the next section.

The problem of a narrow focus on winning and records

Douglas and Carless discuss the risk of prioritizing outcome goals, such as winning, since these types of goals may lead to a “single-minded dedication to sport performance to the exclusion of other areas of life and self” (Douglas & Carless, 2009:215). In a study of experiences among athletic girls, the emphasis on performance outcomes, tied to ideas of athletic development as a fixed path, was one aspect noted (Clark, 2012). To be considered a performing athlete, you are expected to continuously develop your bio-motor abilities and break new records. Further, it is suggested that the focus on measurable outcomes might “negate the possibility of other learning-oriented goals such as bodily pleasure, social experiences, and even personal development” (Clark, 2012. p. 1189).

Alternative views on performance

A participatory and developmental discourse could be an alternative to the performance discourse in sports, including equality, cooperation, and caring (Ingham et al., 2002). For example, in an interview with successful diving coach Andy Banks, he described how he used goal-setting strategies, including learning, having fun, and pride, instead of solely focusing on results. Banks worked to turn bad results into good results by focusing on the process rather than the outcome (Dixon, Lee & Ghaye, 2012).

Elite athletes' views on success have also been researched and these studies too suggested alternative interpretations of success, rather than just achieving outcome goals, such as winning. Even though these alternative views are seldom expressed explicitly, the elite athletes appreciated values such as effort and application, positive embodied experiences, and the importance of relationships and networks to feel successful in sports (Carless & Douglas, 2012; Douglas, 2009). Even though the focus of these studies was views on success, not performance, the research gives a clue regarding alternative views that may be connected to performance in sports.

Performance discourse and construction of gender

Research on textbooks used in Swedish coaching education showed that discourses relating to performance contribute to constructing gender differences (Grahn, 2008). Performance was most commonly defined in terms of enhancing bio-motor abilities, such as conditioning, endurance, and muscle strength. Drawing on this discourse, boys are described as developing bio-motor abilities during puberty and girls, in contrast, are described as developing a body that counters these abilities (by gaining weight or additional body fat). When performance is defined as enhancement in conditioning, strength, and endurance, girls are described as stagnating in their performance development. Textbooks include a positive description of boys' performances and a negative description of girls' performances, explained by differences in physical development. The impact of performance discourses on athletes' and coaches' views of girls' and boys' performances is an under-researched area, and more knowledge is needed regarding what kind of linguistic resources coaches and athletes draw on to define performance and how different ideas of performance affect gender construction.

Theory and research method

This paper draws on gender theory and the theory of discourses, viewing language as important in constructing gender. In line with critical discourse psychology (Edley, 2001; Edley & Wetherell, 1999, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), attention is directed to "patterns in collective sense making" (Edley & Wetherell, 1999:182). To make sense of the world, people draw on discourses. These are part of the power relations that make them central in gender construction (cf. Connell, 1987). Sports and physical activities are powerful in the gendering of social practices, and have particularly been regarded as a masculinizing arena (Coakley & Pike, 2014). Gender is often perceived as a natural fact although it takes considerable day-to-day efforts to maintain gender differences (Connell, 1987). Gender is 'made' in social interaction, drawing on available discourses (Edley, 2001; Paechter, 2007). From this perspective, the interaction between coaches and athletes is important for shaping gender in sports.

In sports, discourses that emphasize gender differences have dominated and have influenced views of femininity and masculinity as opposite

and complementary (Coakley & Pike, 2014). This binary view of women and men can be exemplified by a perceived gender gap in sports performances. In general, this gender gap is explained by men's greater physical capacity. This situation is seen as problematic, for example by Capranica et al. (2013), who suggest that gender differences in sports performance should be analyzed from a socio-cultural perspective as well. A socio-cultural framework is an important complement to previous research on performance, since a view of performance built solely on bio-motor abilities results in a one-sided interpretation of women's and men's performances.

The term "interpretative repertoire" can be used to understand how gender is shaped by language in social interactions, in text and in everyday discussions. Interpretative repertoires are local discourses that are (re-) produced in a specific context, such as a conversation or an interview. In other words, the language that is used to talk about performance, as well as about girls and boys as performing athletes, makes up interpretative repertoires. Such repertoires limit, as well as enable, different ways of talking about and making sense of the world, and are made visible as recurring patterns in talk (Edley, 2001; Edley & Wetherell, 2001).

When drawing on interpretative repertoires, people also make certain identities possible. Subject positions are shaped in relation to interpretative repertoires, making some social identities more desirable than others. For example, research by Edley and Wetherell (2001) shows how men draw on interpretative repertoires to shape different masculine identities. They have also shown how men shape diverse subject positions when talking about masculinity in relation to male athletes and non-athletes (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). These studies show the importance of analyzing linguistic resources when exploring gendered subject positions and gender identities.

Interviews with swimmers and coaches

For the interviews, groups of swimmers from three different clubs located in southern Sweden were included. Clubs were chosen based on having competitive adolescent swimmers. Three girls, Jenny, Julia and Susanne, and three boys, Eric, Linus and Thomas, aged 13-16, as well as their coaches, Christopher, Eva, Michael and Hans, were interviewed. In all three training groups, the coaches were men. In one club, the swimmers were also coached by a woman, and therefore four coaches were

included in the study. The coaches were asked to select swimmers based on age, competitive level, and gender.

The study focuses on data from semi structured interviews that concerns performance and gender. The interviewees were asked versions of the question: “how would you describe performance?” Further questions were designed to explore which linguistic resources coaches and athletes used to describe performance. Questions were thus asked both to explore interviewee’s views on what performance is and to enable analyses of their talk about swimming, being a high-competitive swimmer or coaching swimmers. Two interviews were conducted with each person to deepen the understanding of the topic of interest. The second interview included more explicit questions about gender. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The research project was given consent by the ethical advisory committee of the University of Gothenburg. All swimmers and their parents gave their consent in writing. Pseudonyms are used in the results. Interview quotes are taken from verbatim transcriptions, but small adjustments were made to make the quotes more reader-friendly without altering the meaning.

Analyses of interpretative repertoires and subject positions

At the first reading of the transcripts, interesting aspects were noted and commented upon. The transcripts were coded by themes (the body, training, and performance) and key words were noted (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). For the purpose of this paper, interpretative repertoires of performance were analyzed by considering recurrent language use, but also varied expressions. When patterns started to emerge, they were labeled as interpretative repertoires, noted in a specific document, and were supplied with quotes to support each repertoire, making it possible to move back and forth between larger patterns in the interviews and details in language use. These details were analyzed, focusing on specific expressions, metaphors, and/or grammar, such as modality (Edly, 2001; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wahl, 2007). Modality was analyzed by looking at how the interviewed person framed her/his statements as more or less factual, by using different modality markers, such as “is/are” (high level of modality markers, i.e., “X is a fact”) or “maybe” (low level of modality markers) (Grahn, 2008; Wahl, 2007; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Interpretative repertoires also shape subject positions, defined as “identities made

relevant by specific ways of talking” (Edly, 2001:210). The positions of female and male athletes were analyzed by exploring what the interview statements said about a person or groups of persons, making it possible to analyze how the interviewees used interpretative repertoires to position themselves and express identities.

Results

Views on performance expressed by the swimmers and their coaches divides into three main interpretative repertoires: *performance as outcome*, *performance as a process*, and *performance as doing one’s best*. These repertoires shape more or less gendered ways of talking about young swimmers’ performances, which in turn makes different subject positions available for the swimmers to use in shaping their individual gender identities.

Performance as outcome

The dominant interpretative repertoire in both coaches’ and athletes’ interviews is the view of performance as outcome, i.e. swimming to meet certain time standard, breaking a personal record, a championship record or a qualification time. Coach Michael explains: “Well, it is a measurable sport, so you can’t escape personal records [...]. A lot of it is about time, that is the norm.”

According to Eric, to perform is to “pressure oneself and to push the times, and to become as good as possible. As I have said, that is what swimming is all about, to be able to swim as fast as possible, to move forward as fast as possible through water.”

Time and records are considered the most central aspect of performance, emphasized by the use of the modality marker “is/are”, stating that breaking a record *is* to perform. Language use frames these statements as facts.

Performance as outcome can also include placing, i.e. winning or taking a medal. These competitive elements were particularly brought up by the swimmers. However, while winning seems important to the swimmers, a negotiation took place between “winning” and “swimming to achieve a specific time.” When it comes to placements and winning, the coaches and the athletes seemed to differ in their views: while the swim-

mers highlighted winning and medals as admirable, especially in championships, the coaches expressed that winning is secondary to swimming to achieve a good time.

The coaches even accentuate winning as something not to be greatly emphasized:

It is less important who is number one, two, or three; the important thing is, at all times, to feel that you are getting better and better. [...] It is not much fun to win if you do much worse than you are able to. It is better to come in third place and make a great performance (Coach Eva).

Coach Eva continues: “It is fun to win a lot of prizes too, but then it should be in combination with a performance that you think is a good one.” I interpreted this as Coach Eva being aware of the athletes’ enjoyment of external rewards, but from her perspective, it is not quite valid to view winning as a performance if it is not combined with a good race or time.

The swimmers use the same arguments when discussing winning: “It is not really important [to win], but it is fun, and you feel happy” (Linus). However, the athletes legitimize winning as a performance by stating that it is more important at championships. The outcome of a good performance is phrased in terms of taking gold in the Olympics or being number one in the world ranking:

Therese [Alshammar] has been good for a very, very long time and she has been number one in the world at butterfly and free style some years and that is, after all, a huge performance. And Phelps, he achieved eight Olympic gold medals during one Olympic game, I think (laughing), there is no one else that has done that before (laughing) (Susanne).

When the swimmers talk about their performances in championships, such as the Swedish Swimming Championships, it seems legitimate to view winning as a performance:

You don’t think so much of winning in the minor competitions, but when you get to the Swedish Championships or the Swedish Youth Championships, then you want to win major competitions, then you want to be the best (Julia).

Records shaping gender differences

In the interviews, the idea of performance as outcome has consequences for how girls and boys are perceived as performing or non-performing athletes. This is especially the case when the interviewees talked about performing during adolescence. Adolescent girls are described as having a stagnating performance development, since they are not breaking records or reaching good results. This stagnation is described with words like “standstill”, “get stuck”, “stop”, indicating that girls do not progress. This is explained by Coach Christopher: “It is the development of results that drives a swimmer and a coach, and often girls get stuck at this age.” Boys, on the other hand, are described as swimming faster and breaking records, and they are therefore perceived as performing athletes. “[The boys] get a different position in the water and they get better, and they swim faster” (Coach Hans).

Coach Michael describes how the focus on breaking personal records can affect girls’ feelings of being good or bad at swimming:

When girls are about 15-16 years of age, they don’t succeed because they are growing [...]. They start to think that they are poor and the reason that they think so is because they don’t break their personal records.

These ways of viewing girls’ and boys’ performances are founded on the idea of a constant development of bio-motor abilities that will increase swimming speed. Deviations from constant progress are defined by worsened results. For example, one study of athletics performed by adolescent girls has shown how performance outcomes were emphasized and performance development was viewed as a fixed path (Clark, 2012).

Girls’ and boys’ performances are compared in the interviews, which in turn reproduce gender differences by constructing boys as performing and girls as stagnating athletes. Julia exemplifies this comparison: “Yeah, all of a sudden they [the boys] are much better than you are. Previously, I was better than some of the boys. While the girls stop a little [stagnating], they [the boys] get better and better all the time (laughing).”

Alternative interpretative repertoires of performance

In addition to a focus on time, there is an interpretative repertoire of *performance as a process* and of *performance as doing one’s best*. The focus on process is often explained as an emphasis on executing something, such

as a correct movement/technique, tactics, or swimming more effectively. It is common for the interviewees to view such factors as a means of accomplishing better times:

You can always say that you swim with a better technique, and so on, that is also good, but in the end it is what is written on the leader board when you finish the race that counts you know (Coach Eva).

Technique, tactics, and efficiency are viewed as secondary to time. This is shown by modality markers such as “you can say” when Coach Eva talks about technique as performance, compared to using “is/are,” when talking about time/records as performance.

However, performance as a process can also be interpreted as an alternative view to performance as outcome. In this case, the accomplishment of something, such as swimming with a correct technique, is viewed as a performance in and of itself. This is especially the case if the swimmers fail to reach a specific time. Coach Michael explains that he tries to identify good aspects of a race even if the swimmers do poorly: “It can be to look at how they have executed the race and one can point out that ‘the last part of the race was particularly good compared to the earlier part.’”

Coach Michael uses language like “search,” “can be,” and you “find something new” to explain how he tries to find positive aspects in the race. He continues: “So you try to find other performances in a way.” This use of language shows how the accomplishment of technique, efficiency, or tactics is an alternative measurement of performance, compared to outcomes.

The swimmers use this interpretative repertoire in a similar way as the coaches. Susanne explains: “If you perhaps swim on the same time, but use less arm strokes, then it is like ‘yeah, you performed well on that’”. She says “that is also kind of a performance in itself.” Julia has a similar way of describing performances during the race:

Since it is hard to measure the times that you do at minor competitions, when you are training hard, against times that you do at the major competitions, you can settle for some seconds over your personal best [at the minor competitions], but you accomplished a certain part well. You need to consider the details, pick the good parts. (Karin: What is it you are focusing on then?) How the technique works, rotations, the start. Those are the things you look at.

Some of the swimmers and coaches point at the *process as an achievement in itself*. Coach Michael talks about the process of preparing and carrying through a competition. Coach Christopher talks about the process of changing technique:

When you change technique, you often swim slower because you have to think when you are carrying out the movement. It is not automatized yet, and that makes it complicated, and that in itself costs energy. The performance itself is to be goal-oriented and of course interested in changing something, to get better in the long run.

The last quote shows how time is negotiated against a good technique. In this case, carrying out a movement correctly is superior to meeting a certain time during a period of change.

Some of the swimmers also emphasize serious training and the significance of keeping motivation during training: “Performance, I guess, a performance can be to do everything seriously during training, to really do it, thus being good, and so on” (Susanne).

A second, alternative interpretative repertoire is *doing one’s best*. This can be exemplified by giving your best at every point: “Even if it is in a small competition [...] you should perform exactly as if you are at the World Championship” (Linus). It can also be about doing your utmost and challenging your limits. As Linus puts it: “If you feel on top and don’t feel sick or anything, then I think that you should swim until you come up from the water and puke or something.”

Doing one’s best is also perceived as performance by the coaches: “To do your best in the moment” (Coach Christopher). According to Coach Hans, it can also be to challenge yourself: “Sometimes performance is about daring to do something new, daring to go into a competition, or to do a somersault from the one meter diving board that you have never done before”.

Alternative repertoires shaping non-gendered athletes

Performance as a process enables more athletes to be considered performing athletes, and connections to gender are fewer than when performance is viewed as an outcome.

This repertoire is sometimes used to talk about altering girls’ views on their performances. Two of the coaches explained how performance as a process can be emphasized when girls lack results, such as personal

records: “Then you have to try to find other components, or ways to get around this [not breaking personal records]” (Coach Michael).

Coach Eva suggests focusing on performance parameters other than personal records during this period:

Sometimes, you can see it like this; when girls have a hard time because they are not getting better, you can get them to perform a more tactic race, they can feel that they have succeeded by focusing on themselves, and on doing a better performance, without the result getting better.

Similar reasoning can be found among the swimmers. As an example, Susanne talks about structuring her race in a certain way: “You can’t be dissatisfied if the race is too slow, if it was the structuring of the race that went wrong.” When time is not crucial for performance, more swimmers can be positioned as performing athletes.

In some interviews, execution of a good technique or tactics is associated with girls. As Eric puts it: “If you swim 100 meter free style or something, then the girls are more precise with the details, such as kicks in the rotations, good starts.” Or, as Coach Eva says: “It is like this; girls swim technically better at a younger age than boys do.” This way of reasoning about boys and girls was also found in an interview with a football coach coaching co-ed football in a school sports initiative. Girls were perceived as more detailed and good at technique (Grahn & Berggren Thorell, 2014). However, in the interviews with coaches and swimmers, there were few statements that explicitly suggested that girls were better at performing technique work than boys.

Finally, viewing performance as doing one’s best is not explicitly linked to gender. This interpretative repertoire is used by both girls and boys when talking about performance. In the interviews with coaches, nothing indicates that this interpretative repertoire is used to differentiate between girls and boys.

The view of performance as doing one’s best enables more swimmers to become performing athletes. “Dare,” “try something new,” (Coach Hans) or “as long as you do a good thing for yourself” (Thomas) creates space for swimmers to feel successful even if they do not break a personal best or win a medal.

*Girls' and boys' positioning of themselves
and others as performing athletes*

Different interpretative repertoires offer different subject positions. One subject position for girls is the position of a stagnating athlete. A subject position for boys is an achieving athlete in constant development. These positions are shaped by the language use of coaches and swimmers. Both boys and girls emphasize that boys become faster and that they are better than girls:

Girls are usually better when they are younger. But then, when boys get hormones and the body starts to develop, the boys get more muscles, and that helps them swim faster. For example, now the boys are much better than the girls. But the girls are still good [...] (Eric).

Eric says that girls are still good, but even so, a common view is that their swimming development has slowed down and results are weak. However, even though girls, in general, are positioned as stagnating, not all of the girls in the study identified themselves as stagnating athletes. When the three girls talked about themselves, it was mainly one girl who talked about herself in line with the subject position of a stagnating athlete: “Yeah... now I have had some problems with my swimming, because I have sort of come to a standstill, and I have not been improving my personal best” (Julia). As seen in the quote, Julia describes that her “standstill” leads to a lack of personal records. This is described by Julia as a result of bodily changes: “One [girls] gets heavier when one reaches puberty”; she also compares herself against boys who are described as “they just builds muscles and get stronger and faster”. In Julia’s description of a “stand-still”, and not improving her personal best, she uses the subject position as a stagnating athlete to position herself. By identifying with other girls who also experience stagnation, Julia normalizes herself. She tells me about a conversation with one of her coaches:

[Coach] Eva, she told me about two girls who have been swimming, and who were really good. She told me that the situation was similar for them. They gained weight, and all of a sudden they ceased to progress, and didn’t break their personal records in four years. That this happens to all of the girls, so I know that I am not the only one, but there are more girls that go through this. So that makes it easier for me.

The coach's story offers the subject position as a "normal" girl. Stagnation is regarded as part of every girl's experiences, which is stated as a fact by using modality markers such as "it happens to everyone" and "I am not the only one." The other two girls that were interviewed did not bring up this subject position in the same way. Jenny talked about declining results because of injuries, and Susanne explained: "It is like I have never had real setbacks." She does not explicitly relate the fact that swimmers' progress is not linear to girls' lack of development, but instead to the expectation that setbacks will occur during a swimming career. This shows that the interpretative repertoires on the one hand were used to position boys and girls (as groups) as performing/non-performing (i.e., stagnating) athletes, but that girls also take up other subject positions. Thinking of girls as stagnating athletes seems to be a temporary position associated both with the age around puberty and the idea of performance as outcome.

As shown, both coaches and swimmers talk about boys as performing athletes, also the boys themselves. Not only do they talk about boys as a group of performing athletes, but they also identify themselves individually with being part of this group by referring to themselves as a collective "we": "Like in our group there are some [girls] that can't take as much training as the boys, we boys can push ourselves a little more, because we have a little more muscles, kind of ..." (Eric) or "we boys, have caught up, and gone past [the girls]" (Thomas). In this way, boys can use the subject position as a performing athlete to shape their gender identity.

Discussion

This study shows different ways of interpreting performance among coaches and athletes in competitive youth swimming. In contrast to the findings of previous research (e.g. Carless & Douglas, 2012), swimmers and especially coaches toned down the importance of winning. The dominant way to describe performance was in terms of time, such as setting a personal record. The interviewees also described performance in terms of doing one's best and as a process. The study suggests that these diverse interpretative repertoires offer different subject positions. An interpretative repertoire of performance as outcome positions boys as performing athletes and girls as stagnating athletes. This is in line with

previous results showing that performance based on bio-motor abilities contributed to differentiating girls from boys (Grahn, 2008). Even though both swimmers and coaches define performance as much more than a result when talking about *what* performance is, they use a more narrow definition of performance when they talk about girls' and boys' performances during adolescence, limiting the views of performance to only one interpretative repertoire, which, in turn, affects how gender is constructed (cf. Grahn, 2008).

The view of girls as stagnating and boys as performing athletes was normalized by the way coaches and athletes talked about swimmers and their performances during adolescence. These positions were shaped by comparing girls' and boys' physical development and performances. Emphasizing divergences is a powerful way to reproduce gender differences according to a binary classification model (Coakley & Pike, 2009). However, it is not certain that girls shape gender identities in accordance with these positions. Since only three girls were part of the study, more research is needed to gain knowledge of whether girls identify themselves as performing or stagnating athletes during adolescence. Since femininities are performed (Paechter, 2007), girls may use these positions in diverse ways in different contexts and situations.

Furthermore, this study shows alternative interpretative repertoires of performance that have fewer associations with gender. The diversity of these repertoires is important for understanding how sports may be understood and valued (Dionigi & O'Flynn, 2007). The ideas of performance as a process or as doing one's best can be compared to ideas about goal-setting and working towards achieving (Dixon et al., 2012). These alternative ways of viewing performance also challenge a one-sided focus on measurable outcomes and viewing athletic development as a fixed path (Clark, 2012). These interpretative repertoires should be of importance for coaches that wish to counter the perception of girls as stagnating athletes. Focusing on process and doing one's best can broaden perceptions of what performance is and who is perceived to be an performing athlete. In a process, for example, both girls and boys can be perceived as performing athletes. Widening perceptions of performance may be important to reduce a one-sided view of how to succeed in sports. As Carless and Douglas (2012) have shown, focusing too much on the outcome might lead to identity and health problems. A one-sided view of performance also makes sports unsustainable, making it less likely for individuals to develop their various talents. According to

Loland (2001), this may be a particular problem in record sports, which do not build on a social system that is complex enough to shape diversity. To contribute to complexity, Loland suggests that sports should contain technical, tactical, and bio-motor abilities. As has been argued here, there is a great deal to gain by including and emphasizing the first two abilities as performance factors in swimming. Focusing on the process may be a more sustainable way of coaching (Grahn, 2014), and according to the results of this study, this may also mean that gender differences are less of an issue, since both girls and boys can be viewed as achieving athletes in the performance process.

This study is restricted to a few athletes and coaches in three Swedish swimming clubs. A limitation may be that the swimmers were selected for the interviews with help of the coaches, since there is a risk that the coaches selected athletes that express opinions similar to their own. Although the results should be viewed in the specific context of record sports, it is also important to realize to what extent they contribute to learning more about how interpretative repertoires of performance influence ideas of gender.

Conclusion

This paper shows the importance of including analyses of language to gain knowledge about ideas of sports performance, which may influence subject positions and gender identity. Analyses of interviews show that the interpretative repertoire of performance as outcome shapes gender differences. In contrast, alternative views of performance construct less gender-segregated views of athletes.

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