



Sport d'élite e transizioni identitarie.  
Uno studio qualitativo su un ginnasta di  
classe mondiale di trampolino elastico  
Élite Sport & Identity Transitions.  
A Qualitative Study on a World Class  
Trampoline Gymnast

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**ABSTRACT**

Identity transitions out of sport represent a still unexplored research interest in pedagogy, even if identity and related existential crises has been well studied by the pedagogical literature in recent decades, thanks to the postmodern condition that has also loaded of seriousness individual and collective choice and guidance processes. Identity crisis and personal and professional existential redefinitions were just some of the issues that pedagogy intended to investigate. Among these, however, the sports context still seems to be relegated to the margins. If sport is to be considered a context with a high emotional-affective impact for athletes who live it from a young age, what happens when an élite athlete decides, voluntarily or not, to abandon sports career? What scenarios are envisioned and what opportunities are granted to athletes? To analyze the phenomenon in depth, a case study on a world class trampoline gymnast was conducted, using narrative inquiry. The qualitative research followed the athlete's identity transition out of sport process at the end of his sports career over 36 months, during which semi-structured interviews were conducted. This allowed us to reconstruct the processuality of the phenomenon, through a conceptual network that emerged from data analysis thanks to ATLAS. ti 6.0 software.

Le transizioni identitarie in ambito sportivo rappresentano una pista di ricerca ancora piuttosto inesplorata in ambito pedagogico, seppur il tema dell'identità e delle relative crisi esistenziali sia stato ben approfondito dalla letteratura pedagogica negli ultimi decenni, complice anche la condizione postmoderna che ha ulteriormente caricato di drammaticità i processi di scelta e di orientamento individuali e collettivi. Crisi d'identità e ridefinizioni esistenziali personali e professionali sono state solamente alcune delle tematiche che la pedagogia ha inteso investigare; tra di queste, però, l'ambito sportivo sembra ancora essere relegato ai margini. Se lo sport è da ritenere un contesto ad alto impatto emotivo-affettivo per gli atleti che lo vivono sin da giovane età, ci si domanda cosa accada allorquando un atleta d'élite decida, in maniera volontaria o meno, di abbandonare la propria carriera sportiva, quali scenari gli si prefigurino e quali opportunità gli siano concesse. Per analizzare il fenomeno in profondità, è stato condotto uno studio di caso

su un ginnasta di classe mondiale di trampolino elastico, attraverso l'utilizzo della narrazione di sé. La ricerca qualitativa ha seguito il processo di transizione identitaria di fine carriera dell'atleta nell'arco di 36 mesi, durante i quali sono state condotte delle interviste semi-strutturate che ci hanno permesso di ricostruire la processualità del fenomeno, attraverso una rete concettuale emersa grazie all'ausilio del software ATLAS. ti 6.0.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Élite Sport, Identity Transitions, Qualitative Study, Education, Guidance  
Sport d'élite, transizioni identitarie, studio qualitativo, educazione, orientamento

## **Introduction**

Sport is a phenomenon that has occupied an important space in every community. Even though it is presented in ways of management and control that are radically different from culture to culture, combining the sport with cultural progress is an anachronistic perspective. It is possible to recognize diversified models of contemporary sport, with reference to the structure and purposes that sport proposes to have (Heinemann, 1992), a reason that leads us to think that sport should be considered as a real social fact (Maus, 1923).

From a pedagogical perspective, it is necessary to reflect on these aspects, in order to understand under what conditions contemporary sport can be effectively educational, so that its potential can be turned on in view of an authentic sports education for everyone. A fundamental characteristic that sport and education have in common is that both do not have a positive ontological value. These phenomena, in fact, are not to be understood as human practices authentically aimed at the emancipatory development of the subject. In other words, just as it is impossible to think of an education that is good in itself, even sport cannot be defined in the same way, since both strictly depend on the intentions, methods and contexts in which they express (Hendry & Kloep, 2001).

There are several criticalities that characterize contemporary sport. Among these, how are sports policies and practices positioned with respect to the guidance processes of elite athletes? The starting point is the connection among sport, identity and turning point, in order to propose an alternative vision of the elite athletes' training. In a context so full of meaning, if it is legitimate to think that an elite athlete may already encounter criticalities in making that "long leap" useful for turning to different forms of adulthood, then it is also conceivable to think that the criticalities are further aggravated in light of the characteristics of contemporary sport. While, on the one hand, all this has given sport much higher performance standards than in the past, on the other, it seems to prepare the fertile ground for fueling tensions and conflicts that further exacerbate the identity transition out of sport of elite athletes.

## 1. **Élite Sport & Identity Transition: Which Relationship?**

During the lifespan there are many experiences that can produce a form of discomfort. Every life event is in fact able to change the subject's daily life. For this reason, each of these events could be considered as a sort of "transition". However, an identity transition can be so considered when the subject perceives it in these terms, that is, when someone is aware that he/she is experiencing a radical existential change (Demetrio, 2001). Identity transition is a process rather than a single lifespan event, where the subject changes his/her space-time positioning, adapts and grows within the surrounding environment with reference to life cycle and modifies the most salient aspects of identity.

Identity transitions call directly into question the biographical narratives, because the latter is capable of giving meaning to existence through a continuous coming and going between continuity and discontinuity, unity and fragmentation, solidity and liquidity of the Self, as well as of one's own identity (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). The peculiarity of biographical narratives is that the narration takes place along a historical-narrative path, rather than a historical-chronological one. The reconstruction of one's own history is based on the narrative memory that, through the story, reveals lights and shadows of one's own identity. The transition from an existential condition to another represents a process that unfolds within a very extended temporal space and which, only subsequently, is confined by the narrator through the act of storytelling (Bruner, 1991).

In order to deepen the identity transitions from the perspective of biographical narratives, it is also necessary to call into question the so-called turning points. Turning points allow the subject to perceive himself/herself as radically different from the past. A lifespan event can be considered as such when it is able to give a decisive change of direction to the subject's life, allowing him/her to be other than what he/she had been up to that moment (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Biographical narratives and turning points represent real access keys to the world of subjectivity that allow us to better explore the phenomenon of identity transitions from a pedagogical point of view. Both of these components confirm that the identity transition is, at the same time, crossing a condition of crisis and transformation of one's way of being.

When an elite sport career draws to a close, the athlete has to cope with a series of personal and social problems, which is to be traced back to the transition from a not-ordinary life (such as the one conducted by the athlete) to another that will present rather substantial differences in lifestyle, ties and social relationships (Stephan, Torregrosa & Sanchez, 2007).

The awareness that has been generated over time has highlighted the impossibility of considering the sport drop-out as a life event that was detached from all the other evolutionary moments in an elite athlete's career. Research produced a radical trend reversal. If the withdrawal from competitions is not detached from the other phases of the lifespan, it is necessary shift the focus on identity, with the aim of supporting a more adequate transition of the athlete's role to other areas of adult life (Stambulova *et al.*, 2009). The most current trends recognize the identity transition out of sport as a process, as well as the very strong interrelation that this process has with the other existential trajectories of the individual. Although the factors that have a certain impact on the quality of the identity transition experienced by the elite athlete are many, in some studies *athletic identity* (Martin, Fogarty & Albion, 2014), *willingness to abandon* (Lavalley & Andersen, 2000) and *avowed happiness for quality of life* (Shin & Johnson, 1978) are the three

prevalent variables that can lead to a good identity re-determination at the end of sport career.

It is almost impossible to circumscribe with a good degree of probability when the identity transition out of sport comes to an end, since abandoning elite sports can produce highly variable stress conditions. The transition process, in fact, could last much longer for some athletes than others, which is to be connected precisely to the ways in which the athlete cope with this delicate moment, both on cognitive and behavioral side. It is desirable that through a pedagogical perspective we can contribute in an original way not only to the theoretical reflection, but also to the implementation of best educational practices. Sport represents only one of the contexts that influences the construction and consolidation of one of the thousand facets that make up personal identity, which today is increasingly in need of an educational intervention of authentic care.

## 2. Epistemological Premises to the Qualitative Educational Research

The aim of a scientific research is to add a further piece to the knowledge, sometimes subverting the general epistemological horizons, in order to bring about progress both on the theoretical and empirical sides. As regards pedagogy, a certain delay in addressing the study of educational phenomena from a more “scientific” perspective should be highlighted. This is essentially due to two main reasons: if, on the one hand, some traditional pedagogical theories have led pedagogy to idealistic positions, on the other, the complexity of educational phenomena has called into question a range of knowledges aware of the solidity of its own epistemological statutes.

All this has prompted pedagogy to deal with different ways of understanding educational phenomena, a relationship that has led pedagogy to assume rhetorical and moralizing perspectives, far from a scientific study of education started from other educational sciences (Domenici, Lucisano & Biasi, 2021). If the need to embrace an experimental perspective has allowed pedagogy to acquire a certain dignity within the educational sciences, nevertheless the risk is to study educational phenomena from the perspective of scientism. Pedagogy is still to be considered an eidetic science because it is interested in identifying the most intimate meaning of human existence, through the use of a dialectical circle between pedagogical theory and educational practice that cannot be exhausted only in horizons of research of a nomothetic type. All this means that, alongside an evidence-based educational research (Coe, 2002), there is also an ideographic one, mainly interested in understanding phenomena, rather than their explanation. All this is equivalent to say that the complexity of educational research needs to refer to precise theoretical perspectives that allow the researcher to grasp the wealth of information resulting from subjective experience.

In the context of qualitative educational research there are many methodological tools that can be used to investigate these phenomena. Although these present a certain diversity of procedure and application, they all share the intention of exploring the significance of human experience through the interpretation of qualitative research data, sometimes also providing for their integration. Among these, case study (Yin, 2009), grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) are among the most widespread. Compared to the quantitative approach, the qualitative one allows educational research to go deeper into the

experiences, bringing out critical and turning points that, through other research methods, it would be impossible to uncover.

This is not to say that qualitative research does not refer to evidence, quite the opposite. In fact, the latter also needs data, with the substantial difference that these are not collected in numerical form, requiring an analysis of an interpretative rather than a statistical type. However, differing between quantitative and qualitative research seems to be quite fictitious, since both require both evidence and interpretation. A terminological difference is legitimized to the extent that it is intended to say that, while in quantitative research researcher arrives at the production of numerical data, in qualitative research significant and relevant textual corpora are basically produced (Creswell, 2002).

From this perspective, qualitative educational research is interested in deepening social facts, personal experiences and relational/communicative dynamics in the contexts in which the phenomena occur, trying not to operate forcing that could change the course of the phenomenon itself. The researcher who uses this research methodology seeks to obtain impressions and forms of individual or collective representation of human phenomena. The aim is to directly highlight visible facts, as well as highlighting the implicit, which does not require a large number of cases but, rather, the wealth of information that emerges from the subjects, which in some circumstances can even involve a unique case study.

### 3. Why a Qualitative Study?

The epistemological premises that guided the research refer to the phenomenological pedagogy (Bertolini, 2001). The complexity of identity transitions required, in fact, the integration of two great perspectives, the phenomenological and the hermeneutic one. If the phenomenological approach was considered particularly useful to find the most phenomenal components anchored to reality, the hermeneutic one has allowed us to interpret the system of meanings at the basis of the transition experienced by the subject, with the intention of proposing a critical and transformative perspective that could be useful for planning an improvement in educational and guidance practices in sport.

The theoretical and empirical dimensions intertwined, without that a dimension prevailing over the other, which allowed us to obtain a rich set of information useful to better understand the phenomenon. The use of an integrated perspective was essential, since it is thanks to the hermeneutic turning point in phenomenology (Langdridge, 2007) that it is possible to understand the reality, which is why it was necessary to directly explore the stories of the subjects who narrate their experiences.

The research here presented has a constructive perspective. During the interview between the researcher and the subject, both co-construct the object of investigation in an active and participatory way. The interpretative categories used by the subject and the lexicon used by him/her have been read taking into account both the significance of the experiences lived, giving us the possibility of adopting a critical-reflective posture towards the phenomenon. It is precisely thanks to this strictly qualitative aspect that it was possible to construct theories from below, in the sense that the process of phenomenal understanding did not refer to a set of abstract assumptions and theories detached from reality, but rather tried to give a sense to what was revealed from the personal meaning that the subject attributed to his experience

The perspectives underlying the research allowed us to refer to the grounded theory framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), thanks to which it was possible to produce a theory rooted to the data. This research methodology is particularly suitable for the scientific study of dynamic phenomena and little investigated in the literature which, starting from a first descriptive level, allows the researcher to build an increasingly articulated and complex conceptual network of data.

Starting from the general concept, the theory take shape through a process of bottom-up conceptualization (from data to research), which allows the researcher to arrive at the theory underlying the specific research contextually, through a process of reducing data into mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories.

#### 4. Aim, Research Tool & Participant

The research has deepened the identity transitions out of sport with the aim of bringing out the processuality of the transition process useful for replanning and rethinking educational practices and policies.

The research tool was the narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), because it is a useful methodology for understanding how subjects see the world of life, what terminology they use and how they capture and evaluate the complexity of subjective perceptions and experiences. The peculiarity of this tool, then, is precisely that of providing a profound framework of reference, within which subjects can express their way of feeling through their own words (Patton, 1990).

Compared to other research methodologies, the value of the narrative inquiry is precisely that of having an absence of standardization, which allows the interviewee not to be placed within pre-established schemes, making emerge its mental categories. Another aspect of structural rigor to consider, moreover, is that the relationship established between the interviewer and the interviewee is not comparable to a normal conversation, in light of the fact that the roles of the interlocutors are not symmetrical. The interviewer, in fact, guides and controls the interview, leaving the interviewee a certain degree of freedom in expressing personal opinions, prompting to assume a critical-reflective posture on actions and to express the results of the reflection (Amaturo, 2012).

It was preferred to analyze the phenomenon using the semi-structured interview that reported the issues that must necessarily be dealt with during the interview.

It took part in the research *1 FIG World Class Trampoline Gymnast<sup>1</sup>* as privileged witness and who had already taken part in a qualitative study (Bellantonio, 2018) conducted in February 2018 (T1). It was decided to interview the elite gymnast again in February 2019 (T2) and in February 2021 (T3) with the aim of following the development of the identity transition out of sport process, because at the time of first interview (T1) the elite gymnast had just declared that he was experiencing a moment of crisis which threw him into a moment of great bewilderment, having himself decided to abandon his sports career a few weeks before the in-

1 The FIG (*Federation Internationale de Gymnastique*) confers this title to all those gymnasts who, in the different gymnastics disciplines, have achieved particularly significant sporting results (such as having qualified among the group of finalists or having been medalists) on the occasion of major international competitions such as Olympic Games, World Championships and World Games. Information available at: [https://www.gymnastics.sport/site/athletes/wcg\\_view.php](https://www.gymnastics.sport/site/athletes/wcg_view.php) (last accessed 02/01/2021).



interview (T1). For this reason, it seemed particularly interesting to continue to investigate this phenomenon on the qualitative side, following its trend over time.

The interviews (T2 and T3) were preceded by some general questions, to confirm the information obtained in the first interview (T1). The interviews conducted trying to stimulate a positive and spontaneous attitude of the interviewee. As regards the ethical aspects, however, the interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participant and subsequently transcribed word for word.

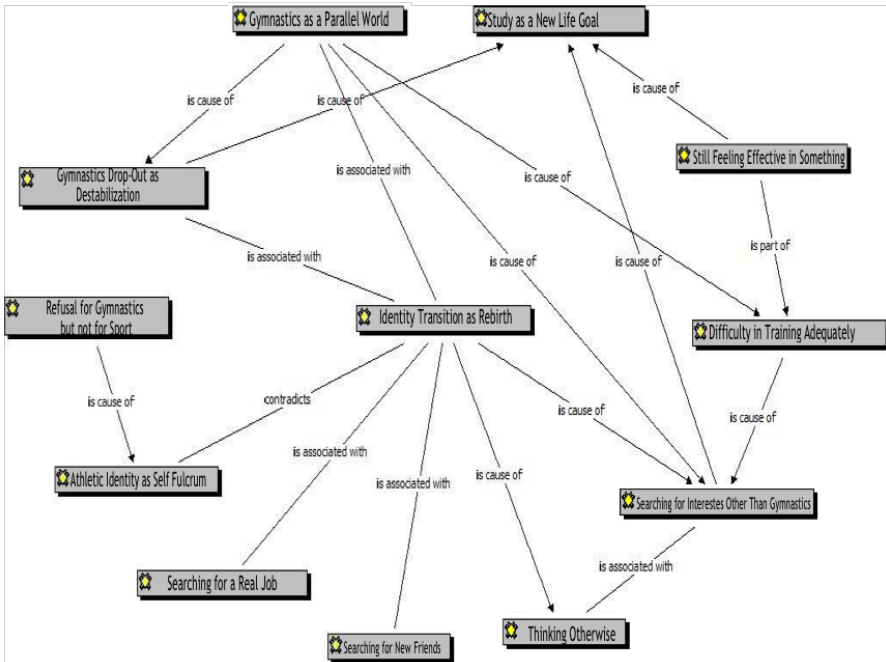
## 5. Data Analysis

The corpus of the interviews was analyzed with the content analysis through the software ATLAS-ti 6.0. The basic conceptual core of the software refers to a fundamental unit called code, which stores a direct reference to segments or text units called quotations. The citations, in turn, are labeled with the aim of serving as a categorical reference which, progressively, represents the names of the categories that emerge from the interview. It is precisely starting from this basic principle that the software allows the researcher to carry out a series of actions of aggregation/disaggregation of the codes and/or their elaborations, always maintaining the connection with the text inserted from the beginning.

The generative question was produced starting from the formula expressed by Barney Glaser (1998) *What's going on here?* which, in the case, was articulated as follows: *How did the process of identity transition out of sport appear in this Fig World Class Trampoline Gymnast?*

The analysis of the interview corpus involved a first phase of open coding, analyzing the text line by line referring to *all is data* formula, in order to identify the units of minimal significance and thematic recurrences in the form of very precisely labeled and defined phenomena. This was followed by a focused coding, which allowed us to identify conceptually broader semantic macro-categories, through a process of re-labeling, which allowed us to transform the themes that emerged from initial coding. Finally, the last phase of theoretical coding allowed us to bring out a conceptually more elaborate network, capable of integrating and articulating the main categories.

In the initial coding phase, 78 codes emerged (code map) and referred to all the concepts that emerged from the first analysis of the corpus of the text, with reference to the generative research question proposed to the interviewee in the initial phase. In a subsequent step, the codes were merged, bringing them down to a much lower number (43), given that some of them were superimposable and, subsequently, they were further reduced to 19. In the focused coding phase, then, the codes were reduced to 12 broader macro-categories, which through a conceptual work were renamed and interrelated through the use of semantic links. Finally, in the theoretical coding phase, it was possible to identify the core category, identified according to an inductive process through a conceptual work of a hierarchical nature on the categories that emerged from the data. Thanks to a conceptual work, it was possible to produce a theory on the process of identity transition object of this study and illustrated through a network thanks to the following graph (Graph 1).



**Graph 1. The Network of the Qualitative Study Emerged with ATLAS.ti 6.0 Software**

## 6. Findings

The core category has been defined as *Identity Transition as Rebirth*. This dimension refers to the processuality of the phenomenon, to be understood as a possibility for the elite gymnast to be able to experiment himself in other life contexts. As emerges from some text excerpts below, the conscious and voluntary departure from his competitive career has opened to new and desired life scenarios.

*I've never had any second thoughts about competition, no no, I haven't, and I have no regrets about the choice I made, I'm decided. I also went back to the gym, I go to training when I have time, but I am determined to stay out of the competitive environment, I feel changed, almost reborn.*

*Honestly, I no longer believed it at that moment, that is, it was not a moment, it was still a very thoughtful choice, reasoned enough, because I understood that I had stopped believing in it, fundamentally, and also for a series of a thousand problems that had accumulated between me and the coach, the federation, physical problems. I had stopped believing in it and I had understood that as I was working, I was not going anywhere. It had become a frustrating situation and, therefore, let's say that this led me to stop but, anyway, I wanted to do something else and feel different. I want to be reborn again.*

*I feel good for what I am able to do today, to achieve what I want, these are still things that interest me and I am with people I feel good with. I am fine with my teammates, we have a good group, we go out often, however I feel satisfied, I'm much calmer than before. When you interviewed me, almost three years ago, I had stopped for two months and I felt lost, I didn't know who I was anymore. This went on for many months, it was terrible, but now I have a new goal in University, I feel like a child on the first day of school.*

*I'm no longer a real athlete competing, but that's the spirit. Today I feel different, like a new boy and I owe this only to myself and to the sport that taught me so much. But today I have overcome the crisis I feel different.*

**Fig. 1 - Examples of Text Excerpts from the core category *Identity Transition as Rebirth***



Around the core category there are 11 other macro-categories connected through semantic links, which allow us to describe and make sense of the cause/effect connections that occurred in the identity transition process experienced by the gymnast. The categories that emerged are the following:

- *Thinking Otherwise*
- *Searching for Interests Other Than Gymnastics*
- *Difficulty in Training Adequately*
- *Still Feeling Effective in Something*
- *Study as a New Life Goal*
- *Gymnastics as a Parallel World*
- *Gymnastics Drop-Out as Destabilization*
- *Refusal for Gymnastics but not for Sport*
- *Athletic Identity as Self Fulcrum*
- *Searching for a Real Job*
- *Searching for New Friends*

*The Identity Transition as Rebirth* (core category) is cause of the category *Thinking Otherwise*, that is to say by the subject's need to be able to try himself also under other aspects of his identity and which seem to be poorly supported during his stay in the sport context. From this perspective, gymnastics seems to have been an existential experience with a high emotional impact that poorly contributed to the construction of other aspects of the Self. The core category is also cause of the category *Searching for Interests Other Than Gymnastics* and *Searching for New Friends*. From this point of view, the almost total dedication of the élite gymnast to his sport career has polarized his attention almost exclusively to the sport practice, distracting him from other interests which, instead, over time have begun to emerge in a rather important way.

This last category is cause of the categories *Gymnastics as a Parallel World* and *Difficulty in Training Adequately* since undertaking an elite sports career goes hand in hand to an almost exclusive dedication to training activities, which took up most of the days of the interviewee's life. The scarce possibility of experimenting life outside of gymnastics is associated with the category *Thinking Otherwise*, therefore to that possibility of the élite gymnast to imagine himself other than in the past and, consequently, to feel equally competent in domains that are not attributable almost exclusively to the sport universe.

As regards the educational aspects, *Still Feeling Effective in Something*, therefore recognizing himself and being recognized as a competent individual also in other areas of life, is part of the category *Difficulty in Training Adequately*, in the sense of not being able to adequately reconcile formal training with sports one, which is a direct consequence of the category *Gymnastics as a Parallel World*, that could be cause of a poor articulation between sport and school.

For this reason, the élite gymnast intended *Study as a New Life Goal*, a concrete possibility to continue to have clear and definitive goals on the evolutionary side. From this perspective, in fact, the category *Gymnastics Drop-Out as Destabilization* seems to be the cause of the category mentioned above, which seems to us to be a harbinger of an authentic change of the interviewee.

Although the category *Identity Transition as Rebirth* seems to us – after about 12 months from the first interview (T1) and about 36 months from the second (T2) – as the core category emerged from data analysis, it should be noted, however, how this category contradicts with the category *Athletic Identity as Self Fulcrum*. Although the identity transition out of sport followed in 36 months from the first interview seems to have headed towards a rethinking of the way of being and be-

coming, the fact that the gymnast still defines himself as an athlete should not be overlooked, albeit with different characteristics than when he was actively involved in gymnastics. This category, then, seems to be linked to the category *Refusal for Gymnastics but not for Sport*, in the sense that if, on the one hand, the interviewee declared that he had absolutely no rethinking about his choices, on the other hand, he still feels the need to play sports, even if no longer in the field of gymnastics but, rather, experimenting himself in other disciplines. To highlight the elite gymnast's strong sense of athletic identity is also the link between the category *Searching for a Real Job* and the core category *Identity Transition as Rebirth*, in light of the fact that the interviewee has declared to be employed today in a job, albeit seasonal, in which he had the opportunity to spend the motor skills developed through the many years of training.

From this perspective, the gymnast process of identity transition out of the sport seems to move between a present and a past that are intertwined in an adaptive way, which seems to us to be particularly significant because he has been able to competently manage the construction of his life project, even if the criticalities of transition, accompanied by the more normative ones typical of adolescence, were not lacking.

### Conclusions and Limitations of the Case Study

Referring to the data analysis, as well as from the literature review, *The Identity Transition as Rebirth* represents the main and most ramified category derived from the in-depth interview of the elite gymnast. The crisis experienced by the athlete, reported by him during the first interview (T1) seems to have been the harbinger of a transition process deliberately desired and planned (T2 and T3), which seems to us to be in line with what has been found in the literature review. A certain degree of abandonment planning, in fact, is positively associated with the quality of the transition experienced by the athletes (Warriner, Lavalley, 2008). An adaptive coping strategy of this type, then, includes precisely a preparation on the psychological and pedagogical side before the sporting career ends, as well as having a clear life goal outside the sporting context and that, in this case, was oriented towards the continuation of university studies, as emerged in the category *Study as a New Life Goal*.

It is impossible to define when the identity transition out of sport comes to an end, since abandoning competitive sports can produce highly variable stress conditions. The identity transition out of sport, in fact, could last much longer for some athletes than others. In this case study, in a period of about 36 months the elite gymnast has found the adequate personal resources to be able to direct his interests towards activities different from gymnastics, which makes us think that he was able to use adaptive strategies to switch to other forms of adult life, largely detaching from sport, as emerged from the categories *Searching for Interests Other Than Gymnastics*, *Searching for a Real Job* and *Searching for New Friends*.

However, a certain sense of subjective representation closely linked to the sport still seems to be present, as shown by the category *Refusal for Gymnastics but not for Sport*. This assumption is also supported by the fact that some of the macro-categories identified – including *Athletic Identity as Self Fulcrum*, *Gymnastics Drop-Out as Destabilization* and *Gymnastics as a Parallel World* – seem to highlight the great bond of the elite gymnast to the sport context, more generally.

It is conceivable that the image of a ridge between a life before and after sport

has been prefigured, as also emerged in a similar study (Bellantonio, 2019), but in this case, it has pushed the athlete not to continue his sports career, like emerged in the categories *Thinking Otherwise*, *Searching for Interests Other Than Gymnastics* and *Still Feeling Effective in Something*.

The will to achieve new goals has arisen, as emerged from the category *Study as a New Life Goal*, which could be understood as a probable task-oriented coping strategy, supported, in turn, by strategies of social diversion, as confirmed by the categories *Searching for a Real Job* and *Searching for New Friends*. It would be interesting to verify the coping strategies used by the gymnast with specific research tools and which obviously call into question the psychological mechanisms underlying the coping with critical events and stress. Regarding the latter aspects, although there is no evidence that certain coping strategies are more functional than others, it is interesting to note how the task-oriented strategies, which, in this case, have been aimed at searching for new interests and different career developments, has proved to be of help to the identity transition. In this sense, the search for new interests is significantly linked to an adaptive process, since this is the prelude to an authentic change of role at the end of the sport career.

Case study presents limits of transferability to similar cases because an in-depth research like this aims at understanding a phenomenon, rather than knowing it. Nevertheless, through the case study here presented we intend to add a piece to the complex identity transitions out of sport phenomenon, to be understood as an evidence-based designing method for education in sport. All this requires a holistic approach to the dual career of athletes able to take into account both the psychological processes involved and the natural existential drives aimed at change, which see elite athletes as active protagonists of their choices during the entire lifespan, inside and outside sport.

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