

Article

Dad as a Coach: Fatherhood and Voluntary Work in Youth Sports

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Abstract: One central issue in sports is the role of informal learning in organized child and youth sport in contrast to learning in the school context of physical education (PE). In Scandinavia, the model for organizing sports include an independent sports organization that organizes child and youth training on many levels, including the grassroots level and elite competitions organized within non-profit clubs and based on non-salaried voluntary work. In contrast to the public schooling context where physical education is led by educated and professional PE-teachers, organized child and youth club sports are based on parental engagement. Drawing on ten interviews with male coaches training their own children, this study examines how fathers are handling learning in the dual position as a father and a coach. This narrative analysis focuses on the theoretical concept of *dilemmatic spaces* in interviews and shows how shared cultural and societal storylines are used by the parental coaches in their personal stories. The results illustrate three dilemmatic spaces of learning that the participants must rhetorically handle. The first dilemma illuminates the dual position of both being a father, and at the same time acting as a coach. In the second dilemma, the fathers are seeking to balance between care of their child and increasing performance development. The third dilemma is balancing the training as child/parent quality time and the need for children to develop autonomy. The results show how the dual position of being a father and a coach can be both an asset in the relational building but also highly problematic and, in any case, involves a relational identity change. Learning in this dual position means that the fathers cannot act entirely as a coaches and disregard or override their parental position.

Keywords: informal learning; voluntary work; child and youth sports; fatherhood; narrative analysis

1. Introduction

In Sweden, half of the adult population is involved in voluntary work and the largest proportion of voluntary work is done within child and youth sports [1]. Organized child and youth sport is by far the largest non-governmental organization and the vast majority of all children (an estimated 90%) are, or have been, participating in organized sports during their childhood [2]. With more than 20,000 sport clubs and more than 600,000 voluntary workers across the country the organization is often highlighted as an important part of the civil society [1]. Research on voluntary work in sports in Sweden has also shown a stronger connection between having children participating in sport activities and the willingness of parents to engage in voluntary work than in other non-governmental organizations [1]. One central issue in sports as an educational arena is the relation between learning in organized sports and learning in the public school context of physical education [3,4]. In Scandinavia, the model for organizing child and youth sports includes an independent organization educating participants on all levels, including grassroots sports and elite competitions, primarily organized within non-profit clubs and based on non-salaried voluntary work [1]. In public schooling, PE is led by educated and professional PE-teachers, while organized child and youth sport is based on parental engagement and, thereby, managed by people who do not necessarily have an educational

profession [4]. Many researchers have emphasized how this environment constitutes a different learning context [3–6]. However, little attention has been devoted to those conducting the learning—the voluntary parental coaches. Voluntary work in sport is highlighted as a way for parents to maintain a close connection to their child, build pro-social bonds and also be able to share a common interest [6,7]. This is especially emphasized when children are getting older and find their own interests and, thereby, families do not share the same interests. Traditionally, volunteering has had, and still has, a majority of women engaged and the teaching profession in primary and secondary school has become increasingly dominated by female professionals [1,8]. However, the role of sports coach for children does not follow these gender patterns: it is in most cases a father [5]. Researchers have also emphasized sports as a traditional arena for masculine socialization and argued that this is convenient context for fathers to be engaged in [6,8]. It is a safe-space to negotiate masculinity and at the same time meet contemporary social and cultural expectations of gender equality through parental involvement [6]. This study will investigate fathers as coaches in the context of child and youth sports and more specifically fathers coaching their own sons. Moreover, it will explore this specific educational context as well as what learning and knowledge are highlighted in interviews with the coaches [9]. In short, what do the fathers highlight as important to learn in sports and what are the potential dilemmas of being both a father and a coach? This area of voluntary child and youth coaching constitutes a specific educational context of informal learning, central in the understanding of supplementary education outside public schooling [4]. Drawing on interviews with male coaches training their own children, this study examines how fathers are handling the dual position as a father and a coach and the dilemmatic spaces this educational area entails [9]. The study is seeking to investigate what motivates the father-coaches to be engaged and what forms of learning they are highlighting as important in this area of informal learning. In doing so, learning in voluntary sports can be highlighted and, moreover, illustrate the specificity of voluntary leadership and learning in child and youth sport [4,9].

2. Previous Research

Previous research has emphasized how voluntary work is often motivated by the hope of a future career in a specific field, such as music, arts or as a professional coach [10]. Others have highlighted the altruistic side to voluntarism and the aspiration to “do good” [11]. Moreover, in recent years, the importance of being part of something “bigger” and voluntary work as a sense of belonging has been increasingly underlined [12]. In contemporary western societies, children’s sports have become an increasingly important part of family life and an important educational area for physical education outside school [1,4]. Organized sports as a context of supplementary education is often emphasized as an area that offers not only physical activity, but also motor skills learning, health knowledge and democratic values [2]. Moreover, the arena also involves both friendship and an opportunity for families to spend time together [2,7]. In the last decades, the importance of learning in and through organized sport during childhood is increasingly emphasized by parents [5,6]. Child and youth sports seems to be more important to families than ever, but, somewhat paradoxically, the importance of sports in children’s own lives seem to be unchanged since the 1980s [6]. Even though sports today still enjoy high status in youth culture it has not been ascribed an increased importance by the children during the last two decades [2]. Instead, Coakley [6] argues, having a sports active child seems to be a valuable social resource for parents indicating good parenting. This is part of a wider contemporary *child-at-the-center* discourse that has permeated preschools, schools, and family life worldwide [13]. Within this discourse the child is put at the very center of family life, when the child’s interests are high priority and the child’s activities and performances become a key issue in displaying good parenting. Accordingly, parental involvement in children’s sports education has increased since the 1990s and is now a prerequisite for sport participation [14,15]. Children and young people who have parents involved also seem to be more physically active and likelier continue with sports for a longer time [1]. At the same time, this requires a great deal of commitment from the parents in terms of time, financial resources, and motivation. Maerthz and Griffith [16] illustrate eight primary motives, or motivational

forces, for voluntary work and underline how the normative force of meeting perceived social and cultural expectations of salient others outside the organization is one central element for engaging in voluntary work [15]. As I show below, this motivational force to act in accordance with normative ideals of responsible parenting is highly applicable also when it comes to parent-coaches in child and youth sports coaching.

In Sweden, the voluntary work in organized child and youth sports encompasses everything from team coaches, administrators, and match officials to club treasurers and chairmen. Over the last decades, this voluntary work has changed character—from being a number individuals club enthusiasts, to parents of the participating children [1,14]. This has contributed to structural changes for the local clubs as well as the conditions for learning in organized child and youth sports. First and foremost, this has meant that the voluntary assignment in sports often has a distinct time limit. Traditionally, voluntary work as, e.g., coach was performed by the devoted club enthusiast and was an assignment that went on for a long time, often a lifelong commitment. In contrast, the parents' involvement as coaches today is bound to their own child's participation and usually extends over a shorter period and the engagement rarely continues after their own children stop playing [1,5]. Accordingly, contemporary voluntary work in sports are often limited to a shorter period and often restricted to working with one specific team within the club. This has contributed to a large turnover of coaches, leaders, and other administrative changes, forcing clubs to spend a significant amount of time on educating new volunteers [1]. At the same time, parental involvement is a prerequisite for the activity to continue in its present organizational form [14,17,18]. For example, many contemporary clubs in Sweden are starting teams for children at the age of five or six with a requirement that parents must continue to run the operation after a short initial start-up period organized by the club. This work can involve numerous tasks, including planning and conducting training sessions, reporting participation to local government, and purchasing sporting equipment for the team. Even if this is considered a voluntary assignment, there is significant social pressure on the parents [6]. If they cannot volunteer, there will be no activities. Thus, this implicit requirement of voluntary work has come to appeal to a specific group of parents with the time and resources to enable children to play sports in their leisure time.

Fatherhood and Informal Learning in Sports Coaching

For the last decade, parenthood and the involvement of fathers in the fostering of children have been given increased attention by many social scientists [19–23]. Family life and the expectations on fathers to actively participate in the education and fostering of their children has changed dramatically for the last three decades [5,6,21,24]. Many scholars have been focusing on parental support and have shown how misdirected parental behavior can pose problems for the child, the coach, and the opponents [20,21]. Far less attention has been devoted to an increasingly common situation in child and youth sports worldwide: the parental coach. In contrast to other areas of volunteering, as highlighted in the Introduction, parental participation in sports primarily involves the fathers [5,6,21]. There are, of course, many reasons for the predominance of male coaches but this highlights an interesting societal and cultural intersection of voluntary work and fatherhood [15,17]. In contemporary society, fathers are expected to take responsibility for the development of their children [6]. This is, at least in a Scandinavian equality context, seen as a matter of course. Therefore, acting as a coach for your own child can be one way to gain an intimate relation with your child or at least ensure time together [20]. Previous research has also emphasized how fathers engaged as coaches have their own strong sporting capital, i.e., they are quite familiar with the context of organized competitive sports. They are in a way re-entering into familiar terrain [9,21]. Consequently, such familiar terrain and competence within the field makes the role as a coach a safe space where they can feel competent as good fathers [5,6]. Accordingly, being part of a child's everyday sporting life shows a responsible and present father, a normative ideal that attributes high social and cultural value in contemporary western societies [6,21].

The field of sports has sometimes been highlighted as an arena producing distorted, orthodox, and hegemonic masculinity [5,8,22]. In his classic book, Connell explains how hegemonic masculinity is to be understood as the idealized way of being a man [23]. This position includes specific actions, values, and norms and this idealized hegemonic masculinity require others to respond and relate to these norms. In sports, such orthodox masculinity is associated with performance, competitiveness and technical development manifested by tough jargon and the ability to handle harsh criticism from coaches. At the same time, recent studies have shown how this hegemonic, orthodox masculinity has been challenged by inclusive masculine norms and ideals [16,19]. Especially in child and youth sports this inclusive masculinity is rather than associated with caring, emotional support, and well-being characterized by coaches encouraging continued participation than focusing on the development of sporting skills [4,22]. The emergence of such inclusive masculinity is, of course, attributed to several sociocultural factors such as new expectations on father involvement in family life and a wider societal acceptance for non-normative traditional ideals of masculinity. Gottzén and Kremer-Sadlik [8] emphasize that fathers as coaches are also struggling to balance such orthodox masculinities characterized by traditional macho ideals and norms, with more inclusive masculinities focusing on alternative ways of being a man. By investigating the role as father-coach in these interviews, I aim to illuminate the specific accounts, norms, and suppositions produced (and re-produced) in social interaction.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Theoretical Considerations

This study is informed by narrative analysis. Narrative analysis refers to a group of methods for integrating oral, written, and visual texts [25]. The analytical approach in narrative inquiry is to interpret the ways in which the informants perceive reality and make sense of their everyday lives, make moral judgements, and perform actions. This paper focuses on personal narratives in research interviews. The starting point is that shared cultural and societal narratives or storylines (parts of the story) are used by speakers in personal storytelling in order to create a trustworthy and legitimate personal narrative about coaching and learning in sports [26]. The personal story builds on accepted societal master narratives and in the interview this is co-constructed within a specific site of engagement and within a specific discourse [27]. Therefore, the aim is to investigate how the participants make sense of events, actions, and relationships in this specific context. Accordingly, the concept of discursively shared narratives is used to illustrate how shared master narratives are rather discursively shared (within the specific discursive context), than culturally shared [26]. Moreover, personal stories in interview interaction often involves dilemmatic spaces that need to be handled and legitimized [9,26]. Traditionally, dilemmas are understood as specific situations where people react to conflicting norms or commitments where there is no right way to act. The theoretical concept of dilemmatic space enables a more complex understanding of dilemmas. Instead of focusing on a specific situation which contains a dilemma, dilemmatic spaces regard dilemmas as ever-present in people's everyday lives [9]. In contemporary societies, child and youth sports have become an arena for men to meet the social and cultural expectations of being involved in their children's leisure activities [8]. Traditionally, volunteering has a majority of women engaged, but the role as sports coach are primarily fathers [1,5]. Accordingly, this seems to be a safe place for many fathers to be engaged in. In this paper, I take a closer look at how this dilemmatic space of learning and fostering is handled in interviews with fathers coaching their own sons. As is shown in the results, one such dilemma deals with the dual position of being a father and, at the same time, a coach. Another one is balancing the dichotomy of care (as a father) and performance (as a coach). The aim of the analysis is to understand and analyze talk in its discursive context as a specific narrative genre of self-presentation (narrative genres, see [28]; for a narrative genre analysis, see [29]). Accordingly, this study focuses on personal stories and the use of discursively shared narratives in the local interaction of sports and voluntary work as a specific narrative genre. This approach can help researchers to identify the use of discursively shared

narratives in personal interviews and show how norms and ideals are produced (and reproduced) in storytelling [30]. This approach can also illuminate how shared normative accounts are used by the interviewee to produce culturally accepted stories [30].

3.2. Empirical Material

In this article, I focus on the position of being both a father and a coach through research interviews with fathers coaching their own children. The analyses are seeking to illustrate how the interview participants are describing informal learning in sports and coaching and, thereby, adopt a contextualized approach to the interviews [30]. Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate both the parents' motivation for voluntary work and learning and illuminate fatherhood in a youth sports educational context. By focusing on interviews in this local interaction, as a narrative genre, this study tries to bridge the gap between master narratives about voluntarism, fatherhood, and informal learning in sports and personal stories as a site to investigate the dilemmatic space of the father-coach learning [28].

The empirical material comprises ten individual, semi-structured interviews with male coaches, all coaching their own son (or sons, as some participants were coaching several of their children). Since sports federations and clubs do not have formal lists of such criteria, the empirical material was collected using purposive sampling where I announced for participants in social networks of child and youth sports and also contacted informants that I personally knew met the criteria of being active as father-coach. Subsequently, the selection of participants was also made via snowball sampling where participants gave suggestions of further informants [31]. Thereafter, the interviews were audio recorded during the fall of 2019 and lasted from about 29–43 min, comprising together about 5 h of recorded material. The individual interviews took place in a variety of settings including lunch restaurants, at the office of the author, in the sport club representation area and one interview via phone. The interview guide was based on the aims and research questions and on common themes from previous research regarding voluntary work and parental involvement in sports [1,8,9,17]. The narrative approach educed a conversation which revolved around fatherhood, learning in sports and the specificity of coaching your own child, but did not limit the participants from highlighting other issues. The coaches were all involved in local sport clubs in two cities in Sweden. They were engaged as coaches in football (9), hockey (1), athletics (1), gymnastics (1), and basketball (1). Most of them were engaged as a coach in one sport and three of them were coaches in two sports. The coaches were 35–61 years old and trained children aged 10–15 years. This study provides a rare dataset and the analyses are illuminating a central contemporary issue, illustrating the wider debate about parents as coaches and especially the co-construction of father–son relations in this specific context. Analyzing the father–son relation in interviews with the fathers, as in this paper, can also provide important in-depth examples from contemporary discussions and enables an illustration of everyday norms and ideas in a real life context rather than presenting general overviews and abstract principles [31].

After repeated listening of the whole dataset, the audio-recorded material was categorized based on recurrent themes and dilemmatic spaces raised by the interviewees. A thematic content analysis was used to identify and analyze the types of stories the participants used [25]. Repeated storylines were analyzed with regard to shared discursive narratives and thematically structured. The excerpts cited were transcribed verbatim, using a modified version of Jefferson's transcription conventions [32] and thereafter translated from Swedish to English by the author. In this analysis, the concept of storyline is used to describe narrative elements in the interviews. The analyses focus on recurrent storylines and how the participants build their personal story by using a number of dilemmas (about, e.g., fatherhood or sports coaching) [9,29]. The recurrent storylines are investigated by analyzing how these shared discursive narratives are used to produce a personal story in this site of engagement [33]. The excerpts presented in the results section are used to illustrate archetypical answers and dilemmatic spaces from the whole dataset. Accordingly, the chosen examples from the interviews are based on an analysis of the entire corpus of data, illustrating typical storylines [30]. Institutional ethical approval was attained

and this study follows the guidelines for ethical research practice within social sciences established by the Swedish research council [34]. This includes that all coaches were informed about the project in advance and had accepted that the interviews were to be recorded. Participation was voluntary and the participants had the opportunity to decline participation both before the onset of the interviews and afterwards. Pseudonyms are used for each participant and for any city, club, or person referred to by name during the interview to ensure that identification would not be possible.

4. Results

The following analyses seek to investigate the narrative storylines and dilemmatic spaces articulated by the participants during the interviews. The personal narratives are investigated as part of a wider context and the trajectories for personal stories are limited and contextually specific [25]. During the interviews in this study, particular storylines and dilemmas are repeated and the findings illustrate how the participants handles dilemmas of learning, coaching, and parenthood. The findings include three of these recurrent practices trying to balance among various positions and thus, in light of the theoretical and methodological starting point, described as dilemmatic spaces [9,28]. In this section these dilemmas will be illustrated using typical examples from the entire empirical material. The analyses yielded the identification of three recurrent dilemmas: (i) the dual position (being a father and being a coach); (ii) balancing between care and performance; and (iii) coaching as quality time and the autonomous child.

4.1. *The Dual Position: Being a Father and Being a Coach*

Coaching your own child is, of course, part of the relationship between father and son, but it is also part of a wider pattern of changing sociocultural expectations [6]. The area of child and youth sports is a site that offers parents good opportunities to be engaged in their children's life. Since the 1950s, this area has provided fathers with a context where they can be involved in the fostering of their child without challenging traditional norms of masculinity [6]. In contemporary western societies, many areas of child fostering, from pre-school to upper secondary school, has been increasingly feminized and carried out by female professionals. However, organized sports are still today considered a masculine enclave, to a large extent controlled and governed by men and where traditional gender ideologies are reproduced [6]. The context of sports has often been highlighted as a convenient site for men to be involved in and, thereby, a suitable for area for fathers to enter without having to deal with the dilemma of balancing between a traditional orthodox masculinity and a more caring and inclusive masculinity [8,23]. Unlike many other child caring practices, in sports, fathers are taking the primary responsibility and seems to be eager to participate [1,6].

In this study, a recurrent dilemmatic space deals with the balancing act of juggling the dual positions of being a father and a coach [17]. This produces a dilemmatic space of relational identity change and a grey zone where seemingly contradictory ideals of caring for one's own child may threaten the overall idea of every child's right to be treated equal. In the example below, Andy describes how everyday conflicts are hard to separate from the training session and how this at times can put the child in a problematic situation.

Excerpt 1: Putting everyday conflicts aside

Magnus: If you should highlight, like, particular challenges of being the coach of your own child. What would that be?

Andy: (1) ah (1) yes, it's that you are also a parent (1) ah, and (1) to a child, this can be pretty hard to differentiate, when you act as a father and when you act as a coach, sort of. Sometimes, at least. That's, that's a pretty big challenge. Particularly in relation to your OWN child. Like, during training and matches and stuff. And stuff like that. Like, not favor [your own child], but rather think that he's just one in the team, along with everyone else.

That's a challenge, I think. And then to (2) To not step in. When you're a coach, like, not step into the same conflicts on the training pitch that you can have at home. About the same (.) to bring a lot of nagging and conflicts on to the training and stuff like that. To really try to (.) cut that off when you start the training or the match. Now it's the team in focus and the things we discussed earlier as father-son, that's something to deal with afterwards. That can be, it IS definitely a challenge I think.

In this example, Andy is emphasizing the complex relationship between everyday problems as a father and his position as a coach. The example highlights the dilemma of place and relational identity change. When the training starts, the relationship changes and previous discussions must be put on hold. When entering the coach position, this means focusing more on technical ability and less on care or fathering. In line with previous studies addressing parent-child relations in sports, this illustrates how family relations are reconstructed when children are entering sports and how parental behavior are affected [17,19,20]. In this case, the father-son relation is paused and changes into a more performance based and informal coach-athlete relation. The participants are also emphasizing that this can be both a good or a bad thing. For example, the training session either can cause everyday conflicts to cool down, but conflicts can also be pushed away and not be dealt with. Conflicts linked to the child's general behavior and relationship to other peers is often a central issue. Behavior that may be perceived as difficult but manageable in an everyday context can become highly problematic in an athletic context. In another example, Freddy describes how this dual position is hard to separate and how it tends to overlap one another.

Excerpt 2: Father-coach position as a grey-zone

Magnus: I'm thinking that (.) How does being a parental coach effect your relation? How does it effect, like, the child-parent relation?

Freddy: It is effected (1) I'm in a grey-zone [mm] In that I (.) can also see in our everyday life. Ah, like you have to eat, because you have to practice. Like, that's a parental part but it is also a coach part. Like, I know you're going to be tired during practice, you won't be able cope with this. Because I have seen you there if you haven't been eating. So, at home it is everything. So, I'm a coach at home also. That's what I've always done. We are a sports family. I don't know how I've been (.) if I haven't been their coach. But I think I'm always somewhat their coach. Always. Even at home. I know that – now you have to eat, now you need this because your about to go to practice soon and I don't want you to be as prepared as you can, because I know what happens if you are not. But, I think I'm always acting a little bit as a coach. That, that's tough (.) or tough and tough, yes (1) I'm not sure we're you can draw the line but. Between parent-, because I know too much about what they are doing and that results in me poking on what they are doing instead of just giving them praise. Like, that's good, that was funny. Did you have fun? (1) Like, I already know what happened during practice (.) all the time.

In this case, Freddy talks about being in a grey zone and emphasizes that the dual position is hard to distinguish from the position as father. He also underlines how he is always, to some extent, acting as a coach. In line with previous research, this further highlights how children's sports are an important part of family life. Accordingly, Freddy defines the family as "a sport-family". Children's sports participation is central not only as an activity or as a context of informal learning, but as part of family identity. Throughout the interviews, sport is emphasized as an important part of family identity. For this group, sports are an important common leisure time interest and, thus, a central part in the construction of the family identity [20]. In addition, the fathers are often emphasizing that it is difficult for the child to decode when they act as coaches and when they act as fathers. However, even if this issue is frequently underlined in the interviews, this difficulty is left vague and unproblematized.

4.2. *Balancing between Care and Performance*

Being involved as a father in your children's sporting activities are recognized as a field for men to meet sociocultural expectations of participating in child care [6]. Fatherhood and the role as an involved father have changed in many ways the last decades and particularly regarding young boys in sports [3,5]. It is often emphasized that there are two contrasting cultural models of masculinity to balance: an orthodox competitive, hard, and performance-based masculinity and an inclusive masculinity characterized by caring, emotional competence, and nurturing [8,23]. Traditionally, sports have been (and in many aspects still are) a highly competitive area also when it comes to child and youth sports. This is also highlighted as an educational area permeated by a logic of skills development. That is, children participating in organized sports are expected to not only participate, but to develop athletic skills. At the same time, the field of child and youth sports has been criticized for being an arena producing distorted norms of masculinity [23]. However, when the participants are explicitly asked about whether they can identify or have had any problems in their teams with troublesome norms of masculinity, they stress that, although this is a problem in sports generally, it is not a problem in their particular group. Some of them emphasize that they have met such problems from opponents. Despite this, a central issue still seems to be the relationship between care and performance. The next example illustrates a dilemma that shows how the father-coaches are struggling with balancing ideals of caring (an inclusive masculinity) and sporting skills and athletic performance (an orthodox masculinity). This dilemmatic space is recurrent in the material and it is this dual position that is highlighted as especially challenging. In the next excerpt, Freddy describes a typical example of how this dilemma is intertwined.

Excerpt 3: A tricky position

Magnus: Are you any different towards him ((your son)) at home in contrast to football training?

Freddy: (8) Ah (2). That was tricky (2) yes, I am the coach at football practice so to speak and I am a father at home. But, as I said before, it's a grey zone. I have them both in gymnastics and football practice. I'm coaching them three times a week in football and in gymnastics two. So we're together all afternoons and evenings. Just in different environments. If we're at home, well that's one environment. But, but it's hard to separate (ha-ha) I have all the boys at my house anyway so. Ah (3) I'm trying to be more close and more loving at home than during practice. There I'm maybe more technical and more objective. (3) less feelings in practice than at home, I think (2). Trying. It's probably hard. It is.

This example again illuminates how space and behavior are interwoven. The storyline illustrates the difficulties in separating the dual position and how behavioral expectations change. At the same time, they float into each other in everyday social practice and produce the position of "always being a coaching father". Freddy shows how the roles involve different behaviors as the father position includes "being more close and loving", while the coach role means "being more technical, more objective". This division is also underlined as tricky. In conversation analysis, pauses are central to the story often indicating that what is going to be narrated is a difficult or contested area [33]. In this example, this is also explicitly confirmed by the speaker ("that was tricky" and "I'm trying to [...]"). In line with previous studies about fatherhood in sports, this shows the dilemma of balancing care and expectations and to separate the coach role from the father role and how this is difficult to distinguish [6,20]. The position as coach includes an (implicit) requirement to treat everyone equally, while the fatherhood position demands (implicit) requirements on special care for your own child. In the entire empirical material, the first requirement frequently prevails or is at least considered. One does not want to appear as someone who improperly favors his own child and, thereby, downgrades the demand for equal care. This central dilemma involves balancing between favoring your own child or being overly harsh on them. Previous research has also illustrated how

this is a recurrent dilemma to balance in many different areas [9,17]. This is interconnected to the normative idea that children should be treated equal as a central part in many areas of contemporary society, which is found in school curriculums worldwide emphasizing equivalent education or in the UN Convention of the rights of the child. This is also in many ways the core principle of child and youth sports and, thereby, an important principle to balance [2]. Moreover, this is a dilemmatic space where the father-coach has to manage having a stake in their own child's best. Potter [33] illustrates how people rhetorically have to handle stake and interest to create legitimacy. A specific way of acting could be undermined if the person can be shown to have a vested interest in the particular action they provide. In this case, running the risk of appearing to favor one's own child is a significant risk to one's legitimacy as a coach. The parent can be seen to have a stake in the matter, thus undermining the objectivity of their actions. In the next example, Luc is hoping that the system with parental coaches will end when the children turn 13 years old and explains:

Excerpt 4: The parental coach as one-sided and biased

Luc: [. . .] but, but now he's XX ((year the child is born)). So I see that next year, I hope that they don't have any parents as coaches. But we will see.

Magnus: What, what (.) What is it that makes you hope for that?

Luc: Like, I think it is (.) partly it is. It is ALWAYS that. It doesn't matter what people say! Like either you are too kind or you are too hard (HA-HA (Appendix A)) on your son, or something like that. It's like that.

Even if most of the participants do not in the same explicit way as Luc claim that it is impossible to find a balance, they are all in different ways highlighting the risk of favoritism as a problematic space. This is something to be aware of and to avoid in order to evade potential problems of appearing biased towards your own child. Thereby, having an apparent interest in the matter runs the risk of undermining the objectivity of the coach's actions and must be handled in order to gain legitimacy [33]. In this case, the coach's interest (in the best for their own child) is so obvious that many of the informants are emphasizing that they overcompensate with formal (and informal) regulations in interaction with their own child. In another example, Dick emphasizes that they have discussed discipline and the dual father-coach position.

Excerpt 5: Things in order—just like at home

Magnus: Have you talked about it. Or is it something you-

Dick: -we have, like. I little bit, like what he thinks. About me holding the training sessions. And I can ask him a bit about, like, what he thinks. If I'm too harsh.

Magnus: and what does he answer?

Dick: Ah (2) Yeah, but he can say that I can be tough, sort of. Like, in training. But (.) he is so used to it. Maybe more than other kids are. A bit more maybe, things in order. Like, if there's a training, it doesn't work if everyone's in a pile. Ah, because training time is ticking, sort of. That's how (.) I live at home also, sort of. Somehow, that's. No, but that is how we have discussed a bit. And I KNOW he thinks it's good when I attend the training.

Another learning dilemma in the balancing between care and performance is how to handle selections for matches, tournaments, or first teams. For decades, sport has been an important marker of social status and being good at sports still generates high status in today's youth culture [2,6]. In selection practices, much is at stake and the parental coaches are well aware of this. Moreover, in a Scandinavian sports context, there is a strong narrative emphasizing problems with early specialization,

underlining that talent selection should be made after puberty. This is also supported by a strong research discourse questioning both the accuracy of early selection and the moral implication of selecting the (potentially) gifted children at an early age [18,29]. Many national sports organizations, including the Swedish Sports Confederation, are now proclaiming that they explicitly oppose early specialization and instead recommend children and clubs to encourage a multitude of sporting activities during adolescence in so-called sampling years [26]. The results show that the participants are aware of this recommendation, which makes selection a contested area. At the same time, heterogeneous groups can create conflicts as the interest in the sporting activities are shifting. This is a central educational dilemma for the coaches in the interviews. Another recurrent way of handling this is by emphasizing how this could be a problem, but in the particular case their own sons are among the best in the team and, therefore, the legitimacy of the selection is given (e.g., for their child to play in the advanced division rather than the easy division). Thereby, it is framed as an obvious selection that is hard to question, at least not on the basis of sporting skills. This dilemma is exemplified in the next example.

Excerpt 6: I don't want to say weak

Freddy: Well, some kids who wants to play. While we have two groups, they are easy-players ((referring to the division level they are playing at)), but the parents wants them to play in hard, but they are not at that level. Then we're trying to explain to them that we are not dividing the team so that the better get better, but for the easier to have an easier environment. But they don't understand that. They think that we have selected the best and then there are these left. But I would say that it is the other way around [...]

Magnus: The goal is care for the weak?

Freddy: I would say, I don't want to say weak. They haven't got as far. They have another interest and another goal [...]. I don't want to say that they are worse or better. They have these three different levels that are different than those how (.) so that's interest, skills and goalsetting that are different. And then we have chosen these different parts.

This is a recurrent way of rhetorically handling a dilemma where two seemingly contradictory parts are handled as if they were assets. In this example, leveling (grouping within the team based on skills level) is done within the group, but done out of care of the weaker rather than for the stronger to develop at a higher speed. At the same time, some words seem to be highly contested or problematic to use in this learning context. One cannot speak of some children being inferior, worse, or weak. Instead, this group is categorized as "less interested", "the ones not yet at this level", or "those who have not got as far yet". At the same time, the term can be used to explain, but this must be managed rhetorically through concession—I am using this categorization, but I would rather not. In conversation analysis, concessions are often explained as accounts used by speakers when they explicitly acknowledge potential counter-claims [33]. The position the speaker occupies seems to be more reasonable and trustworthy since they appear to have considered both side before accepting such categorization. Thereby, the speaker presents himself as both balanced and informed.

4.3. Coaching as Quality-Time and the Autonomous Child

One of the main reasons for the fathers to volunteer as coaches is a desire to spend more time with their child and to build strong social bonds through sports. Instead of letting the child spend (even more) time on their own, perhaps in front of a screen or with friends, spending time with your father during training is considered quality father-son time. Paradoxically, sports participation is a way for children to build autonomy and draw boundaries about levels and types of involvement. Young people can be seen as subjected to parental involvement but also as active in the co-construction of this relationship. In this study, the participants are primarily highlighting learning in terms of growing social bonds with their child. For example, Dick explains:

Excerpt 7: Competition as building social bonds

Magnus: Do you think that your relation has changed (.) by you being coach?

Dick: Ah (4) No, but I think it has strengthened (.) even more. Because I know that he appreciates when I'm at the training (.) and holding the training than if I'm not.

Ah, and you know each other inside and out, sort of, like that. So I can see if they are excited ((in Swedish: taggade)) or not as excited. Like, in training. You can talk about it afterwards and sort of, like (.) No, I was tired or I had a sore throat or (.) Sort of like that. So it has only been strengthened and it's been more now since we started playing more and more matches. So, so that's fun to feel. When you feel like, like his competitive instinct. And just that, fuck we were good! We won, or we did a good game or (1) we lost but, like, fought. So, so it has definitely been strengthened. It is only positive.

In the example, Dick is repeating how the relationship is strengthened by his engagement as a coach. In the material, the position as coach is often emphasized as a builder of social bonds and the joy of seeing their child in a competitive environment. It is underlined as quality time together apart from the home environment, often explained as "just time together" (or rather in the same area). The results are in line with previous research that shows how involvement as a parental coach is explained as a way to ensure time together but also a way to build a close relation [17]. In addition, this is done in the sporting context where the fathers are feeling both secure and skilled. In the example above, Dick is showing a common answer from the entire empirical material, by emphasizing how acting as a coach is the best way for spending more time together. This is further illustrated by the next storyline that emphasizes the own child's participation as a prerequisite for voluntary coaching.

With one exception, all the coaches underline that their engagement in voluntary work in sports is conditional upon their own child's participation. As exemplified by the examples from John and Leon, it is unthinkable to continue without one's own child. Even if the majority of coaches are highlighting a strong interest in sports and an emphasis on sports as an important area in fostering good citizens, they are unwilling to continue without their own child. In addition, a recurrent storyline emphasizes that the position as a coach in child and youth sports can contribute and be of great importance for the participants. Nevertheless, even if the coaches find their involvement rewarding on a personal level, it is not enough to keep them involved if their sons are not engaged. In many areas of voluntary work, the reward of "doing good" or "making a difference" is often highlighted, rather than acting for your own good [1,11]. In contrast, this study shows that the father-son relationship seems to be more central for engagement than a general interest in sports or making an effort in a general fostering and care assignment. For example, John and Leon reply in the following examples to the question if they would continue coaching even if their own child quit playing.

Excerpt 8: Not without my child

John: [...] and if he no longer want to play? I would step down from the coach's role (.) immediately.

Excerpt 9: Not a chance!

Leon: NOT A CHANCE! I would quit directly. Then there are a lot of other things to spend time on. Not a chance that I should continue!

These examples show how this voluntary assignment is intimately connected to the own child's participation and their interest rather than solely the coach's own interest. In contrast to previous research showcasing altruistic premises for voluntary work and an aspiration to "do good", these results show that it is rather to do good for your own child that is at the center here. Thereby, parenthood is

primarily concerned with enhancing the life changes of your own child [10,21]. Moreover, this means changing condition for voluntary work in sports and gives implications for the clubs. For the parental coaches, the focus is on educating for “the good of the family” rather than “for the good of society” [12]. These examples also illustrate a wider child-at-the center discourse, central to many areas of contemporary western societies [13]. Moreover, these changes also contribute to altering the ways in which traditional non-profit sport clubs function. In such scenario, coaches are temporary and their engagement is linked to one specific team under a limited time and, accordingly, they are team coaches rather than club coaches [10]. Previous studies also illustrate the structural changes and new conditions for voluntary work and learning in organized child and youth sports [1,12,16,17,21].

5. Discussion

This paper adopts a narrative approach to interviews about fatherhood and voluntary work in sports. In doing so, the analytical concepts of storylines and dilemmatic spaces are used to illustrate how the participants experience and talk about learning and the position of being both a father and a coach in the informal educational context of sports [26,27]. In line with previous research illustrating how coaching in organized child and youth sports holds a number conflicting interests [4,17]. The findings show a number of educational areas where inconsistent and sometimes conflicting learning interests, ideals, and norms must be balanced. This includes the dual position of acting as a father and at the same time being the team coach. The dual position has also been underlined by previous studies, highlighting that coaches have to juggle contrasting norms and ideals, and are seeking to strike a balance in this potential dilemma [8,17]. This dilemma concerns the balancing act between child care and sports performance. The results in this paper underline the conflicting relationship between acting for your own child’s good and for the common (or team’s) good. Previous studies show how voluntary work and learning in sports follows traditional gender patterns where fathers act as coaches and mothers focus on administrative support rather than coaching [6,8,21]. In line with research by Coakley [6], this study illustrates how fathers as coaches are entering a familiar terrain of learning as sports are often part of their zone of competence. Furthermore, the majority of the coaches also highlight their own personal experience and interest in the field of sports as a key factor for engaging in voluntary work. In addition, this experience and knowledge, they argue, makes them better suited to do this than the average parent. Not very surprisingly, this is especially emphasized by those parents who work in the areas of, e.g., schooling, social work, or within organized sports. Many of the coaches also have a long history of their own sports participation, but not always experience of sports coaching. Traditionally, *proven experience* (often one’s own) has been something that coaches’ relied on in sports, rather than emphasizing research on sports coaching [3]. Moreover, the dual position of being a father and, at the same time a coach, is producing a space of relational identity change. As a coach, you cannot entirely act as a father, but you cannot disregard or override the parental position. In line with previous studies, this potentially dilemmatic space of managing the authoritative position as coach can be both an asset and a problem [17,18]. It can limit one’s latitude as a coach, but it also enables more individualized learning. It may appear somewhat paradoxical, as most of the coaches emphasize that learning in a sports context is primarily about other things than technical sporting know-how, such as fostering and encouraging individuals to grow as humans.

In this paper, I underscore how learning in the position as father and coach is intimately tied to a number of dilemmatic spaces and how these spaces needs to be rhetorically handled [29]. The participants in this study are all well aware of and reflective of the potential challenges and problems. At the same time, the Scandinavian sports organization is primarily based on voluntary work from parents [1]. Even if this is a context of informal learning, organized child and youth sports holds a democratic assignment, maintained by non-profit parental leaders [2] or, simply put: without the parents’ voluntary commitments, the activities cannot be run in their present form. Therefore, the voluntary work of the sports cannot only be understood as voluntary work by those parents who want to be engaged, but also includes an implicit requirement of the parents [6]. Furthermore,

one must consider the consequences of such an implicit requirement and what effects this will have on volunteer participation and especially those children whose parents cannot allocate time or possess the sporting capital. Otherwise, organized sports talk about being open to all children runs the risk of becoming empty rhetoric and, instead, becomes an arena for children with engaged parents. In recent years, as this study also shows, child and youth sports have become of increasing importance for the family's social life. Children's sports have become an important part of family life and are attributed an increasingly important part of family life in contemporary middle class families [21].

Finally, this paper illuminates a number of central dilemmas of learning in the voluntary sector of child and youth sports in Scandinavia [1]. In most cases, this involves the fathers. The study illustrates an interesting cultural phenomenon in voluntary work where, in contrast to most other areas, primarily men are involved [6,8,21]. The analysis illustrated dilemmas linked to both masculinity and sports, and the balance between care and performance [8,23]. The results also highlight the changing structure for voluntary assignments in child and youth sports and probably in many other areas of voluntary work, where parents act as leaders to be able to offer their own children good activities [20]. In addition, the analyses illuminate the parenting position as voluntary worker in child and youth sports and the challenges associated with this dual position. This paper focuses on a small sample to exemplify a contemporary issue in child and youth science. Accordingly, the aim is not to map the field of voluntary work in organized sports. In line with previous research, this study illustrates that the position as father-coach must balance between care (bonding) and performance [8,17]. This balancing act involves that the fathers can encourage perform as long as this is complemented with a caring and supportive parenting [8].

For further research, I would like to encourage researchers to direct attention to a child and youth perspective, focusing on the young boys and girls who are coached by their parents and investigate if they would highlight the same dilemmatic spaces or if they are raising completely different issues. Moreover, I urge scholars in the field of masculinity studies to direct more attention to fatherhood in the area of sports. This traditional context of hegemonic masculinity seems to be under social change and, therefore, an interesting field to investigate contemporary normative transformation. Finally, it would be intriguing to perform expanded ethnographic fieldwork and investigate not only how parental coaches *talk* about this dual role, but how they *act* in social practice and the interplay between parent/coach and child.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Transcription notations.

:	prolonged syllable
[]	overlapping utterances
(.)	micropause, shorter than (0.5)
-1	pauses in seconds
(x) (xxx)	inaudible word(s)
(no)	unsure transcription
◦ ◦	speech in low volume
NO	higher amplitude
(())	transcriber's comments
no <u>no</u>	underlining for emphatic stress
-	cut-off sign; self-editing
ha-ha	laughter
HA-HA	loud laughter

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