

Ideologically Produced Authenticity of Athletes: Meanings and Contradictions of Conquering Self



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TABLE OF CONTENT

Chapters	Content	Page No.
	Abstract	09
	Abbreviations	11
	Tables and Figures	12
	Chapter 1	
1	Introduction and Background	14
1.1	Concept of Authenticity in Philosophy	15
1.2	Concept of Authenticity in Psychology	17
1.2.1	Humanist View on Authenticity	17
1.2.2	Determinist view on Authenticity	19
2	Authenticity Frameworks	20
2.1	Person-centred Concept of Authenticity	20
2.2	Multicomponent Model of Authenticity	21
3	Trait and State Authenticity	23
4	Authenticity at Work	25
4.1	Experiencing Authenticity at Work	27
5	Theoretical Underpinnings	28
5.1	Self-concordance Model	28
5.2	Attachment Theory	29
5.3	Self Determination Theory	30
5.4	Existentialist View on Authenticity	32
6	The relevance of Authenticity for Sports	33
6.1	Evolution of Sports as Business	33
6.2	Current Challenges in Sports and the Relevance of Research on Authenticity	34
7	Research Gap and Contribution of the Current Study	37

8	Theoretical Positioning of the Thesis	40
9	Constitution of the Thesis/Dissertation	42
	Chapter 2	
1	Methodology	45
1.1	Sampling	49
1.2	Interviewing Technique and Questions	49
1.3	Interview Protocol	51
1.4	Interview Durations	51
1.5	Mode of Interaction	52
1.6	Use of Supplementary Data Sources	54
	Chapter 3	
1	Introduction	57
2	Literature Review	60
2.1	Evolution of Neo-Liberal Sports	60
2.2	The Becoming of a Champions and Authenticity	61
3	Methodology	66
4	Findings	69
4.1	Authenticity as an Enraged Champion	69
4.2	Authenticity as a Lonely Resilient Conqueror	75
5	Discussion & Conclusion	82
	Chapter 4	
1	Introduction	89
2	Literature Review	93
2.1	Aesthetic and Managerial View of Sports	93
2.2	Authenticity, Tensions and Sports	96
3	Theoretical Underpinnings	99

4	Methodology	101
5	Findings	105
5.1	The Precariousness of Belongingness-Sports versus Management Perspective	105
5.2	Fantasies of Belongingness-Sportsperson Versus Managers	111
5.3	Sports Imaginations of Team Versus Management Imaginations of Team	114
6	Discussion and Conclusion	117
	Chapter 5	
1	Connecting the Dots...	121
	References	127
	Tables, Figures & Appendices	155

ABSTRACT

Humans have innate tendencies to seek an optimum balance between 'who they are' and 'what is expected from them' (Brewer, 2011). In other words, even though we as humans are associated with each other through social groups which are operative in our lives, we do not entirely give away individual distinctiveness. Brewer stated that the motivation to seek such optimal balance results from the fear of 'being too unique and true to self' which can result in our exclusion from the social groups, a situation which is perceived undesirable by humans. It is equally unpleasant to be 'too similar to others' because then it would result in a lack of true self, i.e. authentic self (Brewer, 1991).

The idea of authentic self or the experience of authenticity has its roots dated back in the Greek philosophy (Harter, 2002). In ancient times, it represented a state of optimal human functioning. Over time, this understanding of authenticity has undergone several changes, and the definitions and boundaries of authenticity are more complicated now. For example, the contemporary work on authenticity understands it as the "subjective experience of alignment between ones' internal experiences and external expressions" (Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009). Here, the subjective experience denotes an individual's thoughts, feelings and beliefs. Similarly, the external experience refers to the verbal and non-verbal behavioural disclosure.

This study responds to the recent calls (Gino & Kouchaki, 2020; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2020; Hicks, Schlegel & Newman, 2019) to pay more attention to the importance of the concept of authenticity by enhancing our knowledge of its subjective meanings and tensions ascribed in the personal and professional space of individuals. Although, prior studies have examined authenticity in the context of traditional work settings, and its importance for social and political thinking (Taylor, 2007), has been duly acknowledged; sports, as a context has been largely ignored. In the backdrop of recent sports scandals, doping cases and eroding of the

emancipatory and liberative values of sports, an understanding of the subjective meanings and tensions of authenticity for athletes has become crucial. This is because findings of prior studies suggest that an authentic self is capable of addressing issues pertaining to mental health, social adjustments and concerns related to the overall wellbeing of individuals. The distinction in beliefs, thoughts, ideas and perceptions shaped by the cultural, social and political environment, different individuals are expected to have a different connotation for what authenticity stands for them. Further, the quest for attaining an optimal balance between ‘authentic self’ and ‘accepted self’ should generate tensions is detrimental for the individual’s wellbeing. This dissertation explores the imaginations and meanings of authenticity for athletes and the nature of challenges in the form of tensions that obstructs the realization of these meanings of authentic for them.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first two chapters introduce the concept of authenticity, its literature and the methodology followed for the current study. Chapter 5 of the thesis summarizes the finding and discussion drawn from the two essays. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of the dissertation are the two essays which explore and examines the subjective meanings and tensions of authenticity, respectively. Data for the dissertation was collected through Semi-structured and free association narrative interviews (FANI) of 43 athletes from 7 countries and 17 major sports. Findings of the study highlight the historical situatedness of the subjective meanings and tensions of authenticity which an athlete experience in his or her life.

ABBREVIATIONS

OVP	Organismic valuing processing
P-C-C-A	Person-centered concept of authenticity
SAFE	State authenticity as a fit to the environment
SDT	Self-determination theory
GDP	Gross domestic products
FANI	Free association interviewing technique
TAC	Thesis advisory committee
EPL	Everest premier league
MD	Managing director
EOCCS	Elite, organized, competitive, commercial sports
ODT	Optimal distinctiveness theory
KCM	Kaleidoscope career model

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Detail of the informants

Table 2: Detail of the autobiographies

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Multicomponent model of Authenticity

Figure 2: SAFE model of Authenticity

Figure 3: Sample theme generation (chapter III)

Figure 4: Sample theme generation (chapter III)

Figure 5: Sample theme generation (chapter IV)

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Sample field notes

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Appendix 3: Sample narratives for subjective meanings and tensions

Appendix 4: Details of the pilot test

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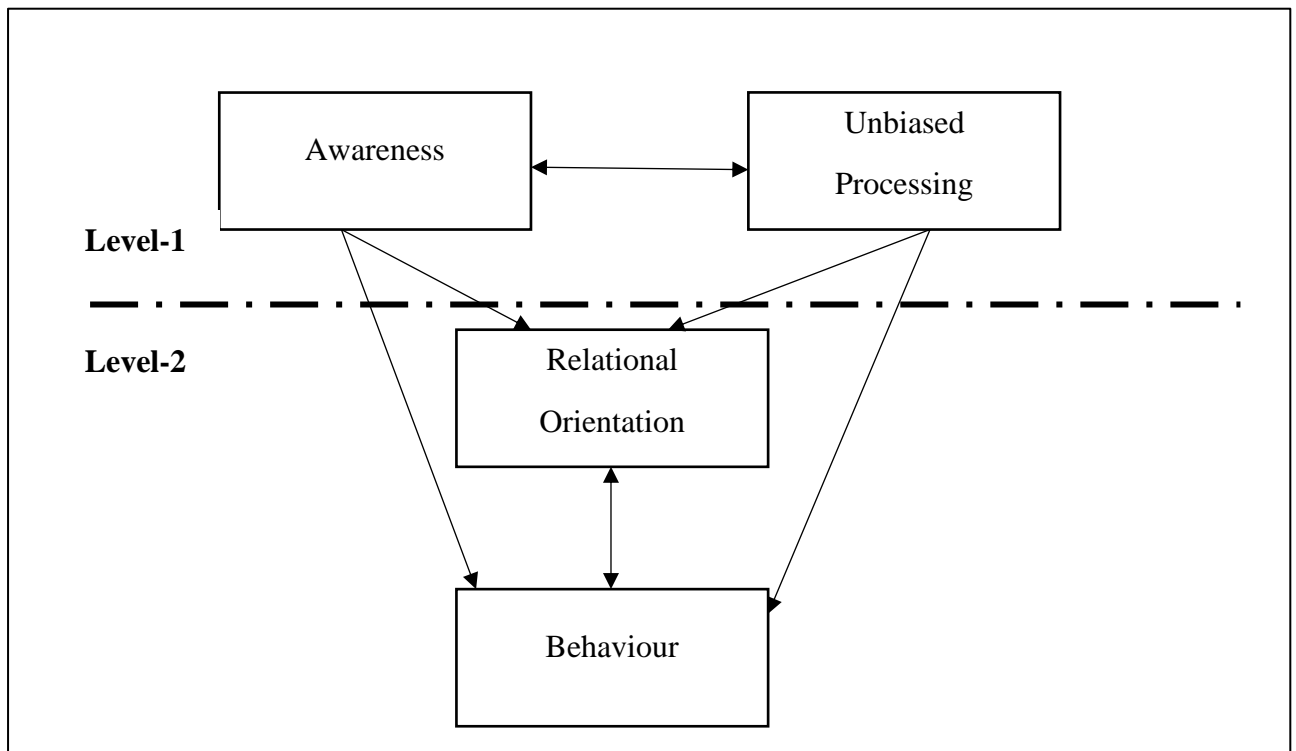
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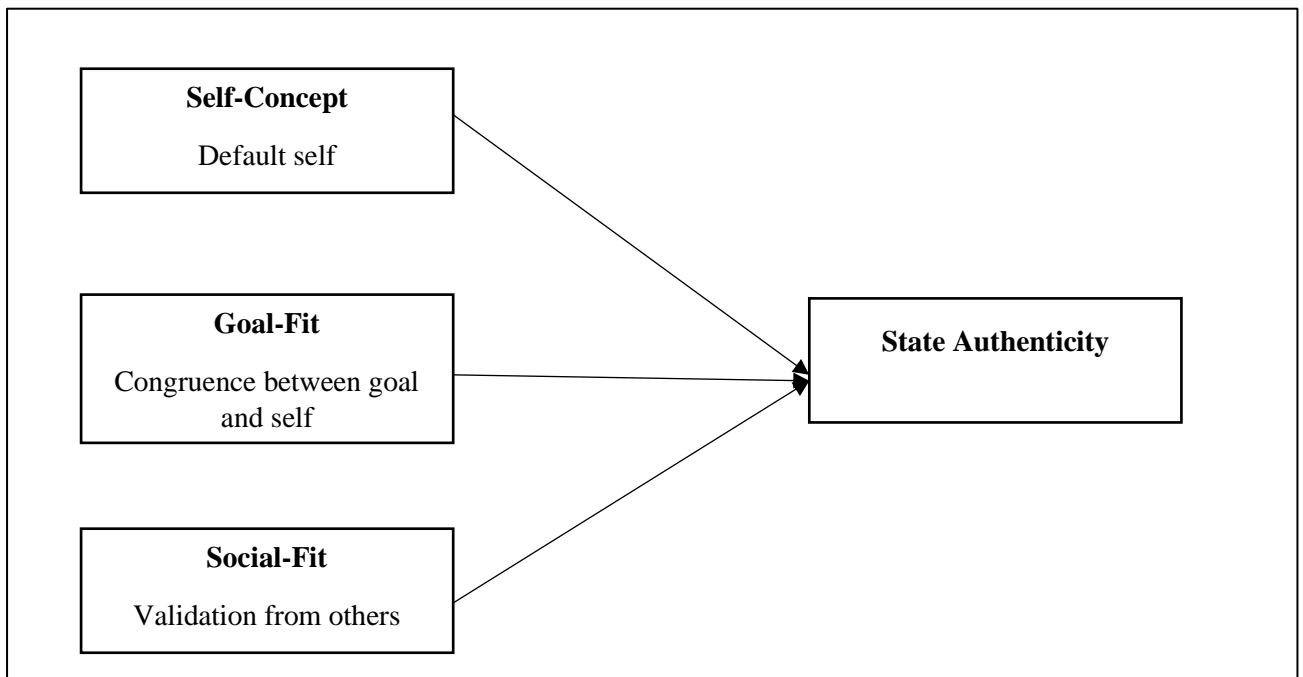
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Table, Figures & Appendices

Figure 1**Figure 1: Multicomponent model of Authenticity**

Drawn from Kernis & Goldman (2006)

Figure 2**Figure 2: SAFE model of authenticity**

Source-Schmader & Sedikides (2017)

Figure 3

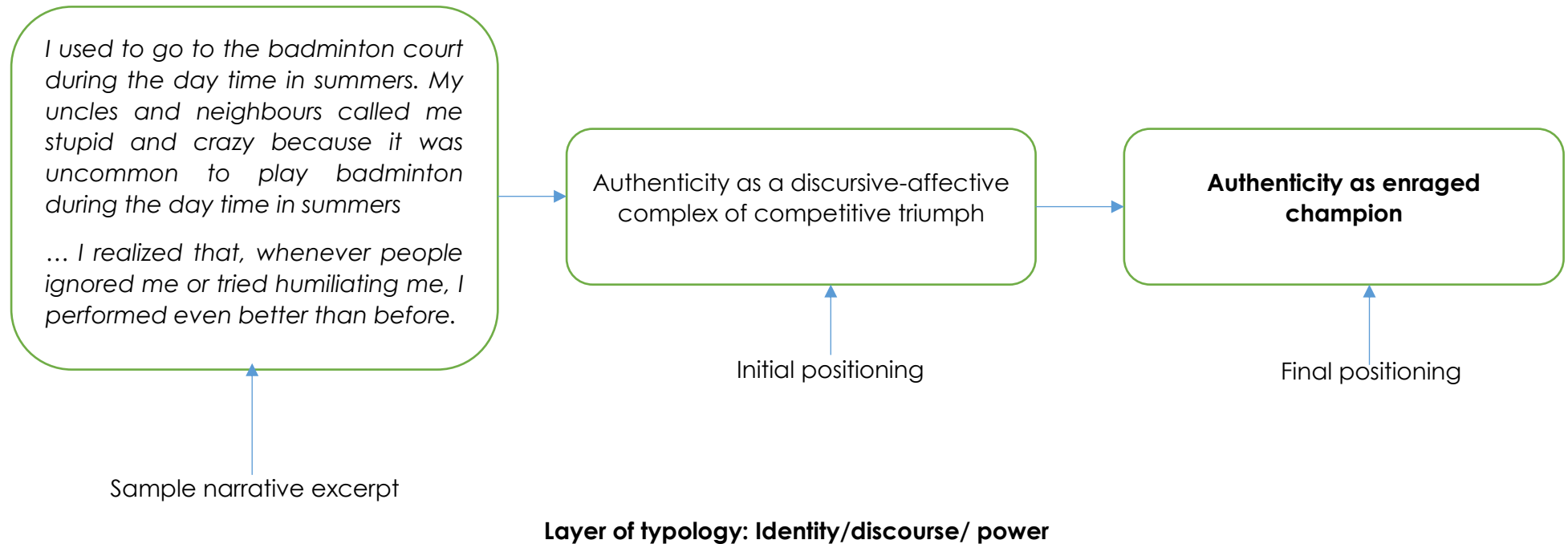


Figure 3: Sample theme generation

Figure 4

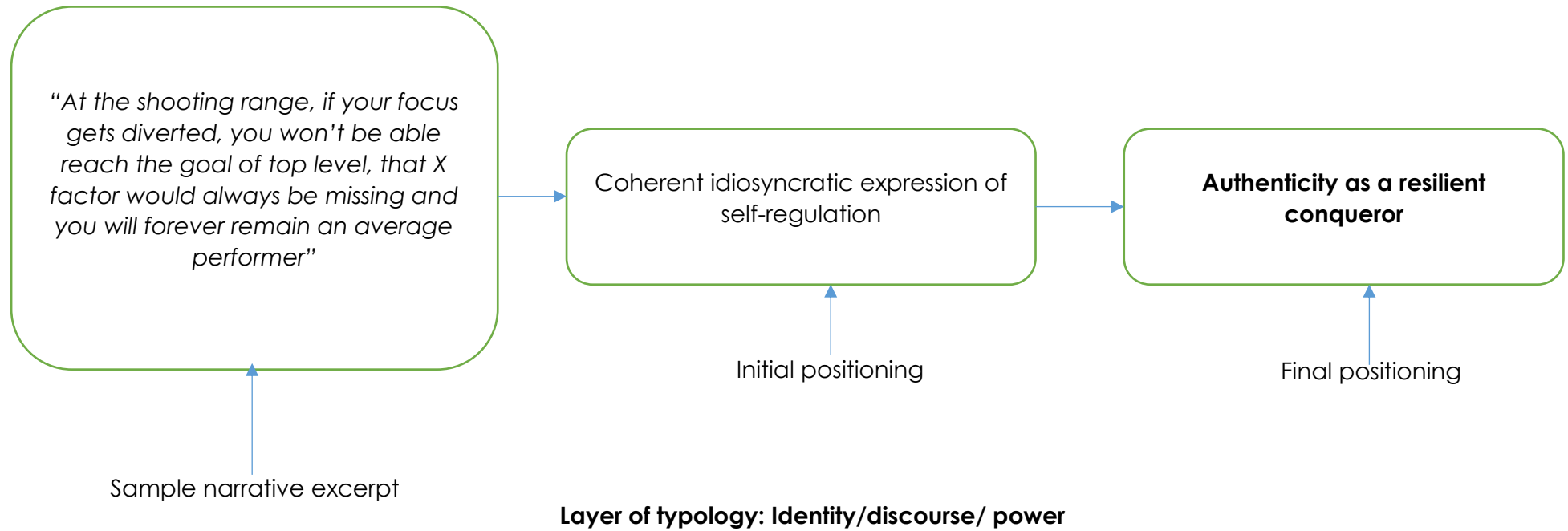


Figure 4: Sample theme generation.

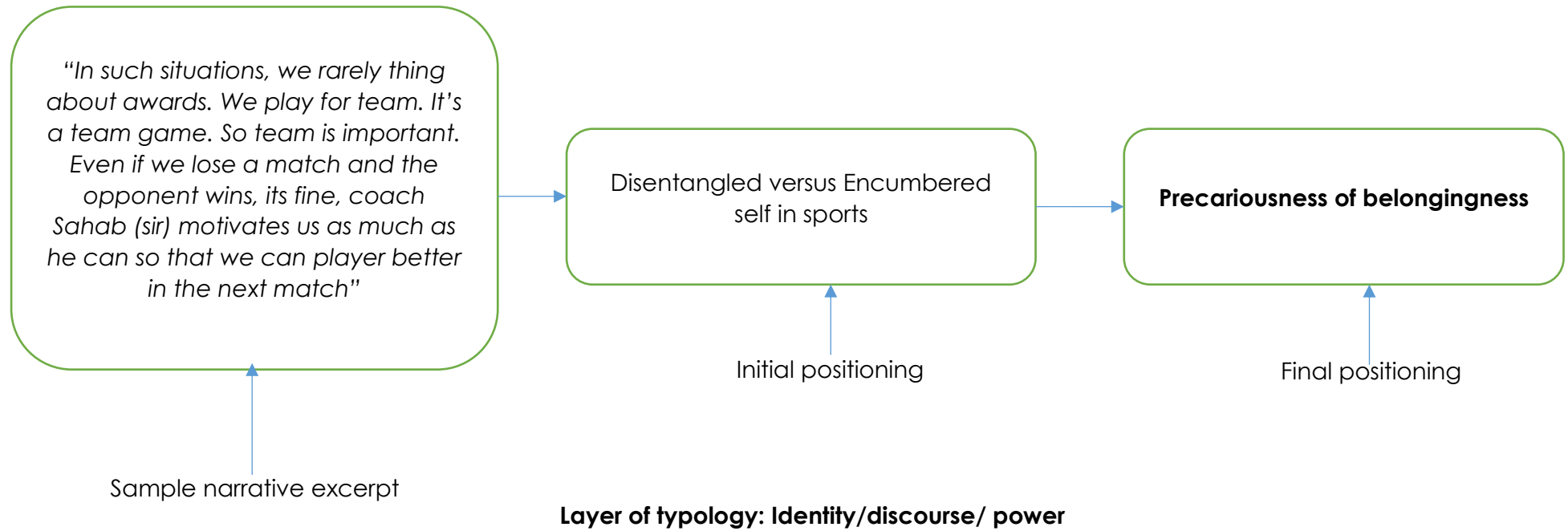
Figure 5**Figure 5: Sample theme generation.**

Table 1: Details of the informants.

R*	Sports	Age	Level of representation	Major achievements	Abled body/differently-abled	Nationality	Total Interview duration (in minutes)	No of interviews
1	Cricket	32	International	ODI, T-20, IPL, Test	Abled body	India	44	1
2	Cricket	26	Domestic	Ranji team, State team captain	Abled body	India	38.17	1
3	Cricket	21	International	T-20, IPL	Abled body	India	52.10	1
4	Cricket	44	International	Former member, Indian cricket team	Abled body	India	87.19	2
5	Cricket	30	International	Test match, IPL	Abled body	India	120 (approx.)	2

6	Cricket	38	International	Former U-19, Ranji team and U-19 Selector	Abled body	India	92.05	2
7	Cricket	42	International	ODI, Test,	Abled body	Sri Lanka	78.22	1
8	Cricket	28	International	ODI, Test, T-20	Abled body	New Zealand	102	2
9	Cricket	30	International	ODI, T-20, EPL	Abled body	Ireland	67.22	1
10	Cricket	22	International	ODI, T-20, EPL	Abled body	Nepal	92.05	1
11	Cricket	16	International	ODI, T-20, EPL	Abled body	Nepal	38.15	1
12	Cricket	27	International	ODI, T-20, EPL	Abled body	Nepal	70 (approx.)	1
13	Cricket	27	International	ODI, T-20, EPL	Abled body	Nepal	54.11	1
14	Cricket	39	National	Former ODI, T-20 player	Abled body	Nepal	291	6

15	Cricket	49	International	Former ODI, Test player, coach (Nepal, Canada and US cricket team)	Abled body	Sri Lanka, Canada	76 (approx.)	1
16	Cricket	26	International	ODI, T-20, EPL	Abled body	Hong Kong	111	1
17	Rowing	22	International	Asian championship	Abled body	India	157.37	4
18	Rowing	25	International	Asian championship	Abled body	India	65.18	1
19	Taekwondo	22	National	Three times National champion	Abled body	India	39.05	1
20	Swimming	22	International	Asian game medallist, South-Asian champion	Abled body	India	45.32	2
21	Swimming	34	International	World champion in S category	Differently abled	India	64.25	1

22	Archery	30	International	World no.1 , selected for Tokyo Olympic	Differently abled	India	50.13	1
23	Archery	19	International	World No- 3 (junior wing), selected for Tokyo Olympic	Abled body	India	111.04	1
24	Archery	35	International	Asian games medallist, world championship	Differently abled	India	41.36	3
25	Sailing	40	International	First Indian to complete solo, non-stop circumnavigation of the world	Abled body	India	41.08	1
26	Boxing	24	International	Silver medallist- AIBA world championship	Abled body	India	48.20	1

27	Kabaddi	21	National	Kabaddi premier league	Abled body	India	41.01	1
28	Kabaddi	33	National	Kabaddi premier league	Abled body	India	123.27	3
29	Kabaddi	40	National	Kabaddi premier league	Abled body	India	52.10	1
30	Badminton	27	International	World no. 1 in doubles , selected for Tokyo Olympic	Differently abled	India	71.04	2
31	Ball-Badminton	21	National	Former National champion	Abled body	India	125.53	1
32	Karate	22	International	National champion	Abled body	India	40.23	1
33	Javelin	25	International	Para-Olympian, world record	Differently abled	India	116	1
34	Club throw	34	International	Para-Olympian	Differently abled	India	39 (approx)	1

35	Cricket	37 (Appox)	International	Former Nepalese team member , coach EPL	Abled body	Nepal	46.55	1
36	Basketball	51	International	Formal Nepalese volleyball team member	Abled body	Nepal	50 (approx)	1
37	Cricket	NA	International	Nepalese cricket team	Abled body	Nepal	47.01	1
38	Cricket	36	International	Irish cricket team member	Abled body	Ireland	102 (approx)	1
39	Volleyball	NA	Domestic	EPL Team owner, former domestic volleyball player	Abled body	Nepal	114.08	1
40	Basketball	NA	International	National woman para basketball champion, model	Differently abled	India	65	1

41	Short-put	36	International	Woman Para-shotput world champion, Olympian, KBC winner	Differently abled	India	41	2
42	Sprinting	27	International	Three times Asian medallist, Arjun awardee	Differently abled	India	47.52	1
43	Long Jump	33	International	Asian games long jump champion, Arjun awardee	Differently abled	India	59.12	1

*R=Respondent's disguised name (e.g., R42 represents male, para-athlete sprinter from India).

Table 2: Details of the autobiographies.

S No.	Title	Athlete	Sex	Sports	Nationality	Pages
01	“Coming Back to Me”	Marcus Trescothick	Male	Cricket	United Kingdom	356
02	“Just for Kicks”	Kenny Logan	Male	Rugby	United Kingdom	404
03	“Not a Game”	Allen Iverson	Male	Basketball	USA	311
05	“Head On”	Ian Botham	Male	Cricket	United Kingdom	384
06	“Unbreakable”	Mary Kom	Female	Boxing	India	155
07	“Playing to Win”	Sania Nehwal	Female	Badminton	India	118

Appendix 1: Sample field notes.

I believe while sharing his childhood experience, the participant was aggressive and upset at the same time. I can sense a feeling of anger, guilt, humiliation and revenge in his narratives.

[He seems to be reluctant to accept that the world compromises of both good and bad people. Not everyone can be labelled as bad]

A possible change of mood can be perceived when I asked him about his achievements. Respondent is excited about his victory and guilty of his loses. I think, as an athlete winning becomes critical in keeping his morale and confidence high. Especially for differently abled athlete, such winning can give them more acceptance in a society or community which seems to be biased towards differently abled and able bodies.

Accepting ones weakness and putting efforts to improve those weakness seems to be an essential characteristics of an athlete. An athlete's life is filled continuous self-introspection of his or her performance, trust for mentor and commitment to walk extra miles to succeed.

In a way [name hidden]'s behaviour aligns with a person who has reached top position in his life, has all the success, name, fame and recognition but no companion or friend. I felt like talking to a lonely wolf!

Our social space can strongly define our attitude and behaviour towards our professional space. What we experience in the former, is the mirror for the latter. In the case of respondents, being suppressed continuously, has not demotivated him to give up, instead it has generated anger and aggression to fight against that suppression. In the course of overcoming that suppression, his anger has intensified to such an extent that anything other than success in sports is meaningful to him.

Field note for respondent R.30 (Male, Para-Olympian, badminton)

Appendix 2: Interview protocol.

Area of Investigation	Aim of narrative interviewing	Example probes
Self-awareness and information processing	Understanding of Self- understanding one's strength and weaknesses.	<p><i>“Tell us about yourself. What are your likes and dislikes, what all you enjoy doing or avoiding?”</i></p> <p><i>“What is a performance for you? Tell us about the importance it holds for you?”</i></p> <p><i>“We all have some strengths and weakness, and both play certain roles in our lives. Would you like to tell us about those aspects that define your strengths or weakness? ...We would love to hear more about it.”</i></p>
Relational behaviour	To understand social ties, relationship, bonding and attachments.	<p><i>We are interested in knowing about the people who are associated with you in your personal and professional life. Tell us about them.</i></p>

		<p><i>Any particular person to whom you are more closely attached?</i></p> <p><i>What role did your family, friends or acquaintance played in your sporting career?</i></p> <p><i>Can you share some experiences to help us know more about their roles in your life?</i></p> <p><i>Tell us about your life when you were a child.</i></p> <p><i>About the place and people you grew up with.</i></p>
Autonomy	To understand autonomy and freedom in thinking, planning and actions.	<i>How do you plan your decisions? Can you elaborate on the role of others play in your decisions or actions?</i>
Anger, suppression and exclusion	Understanding the factors resulting in humiliation, anger and exclusion.	<p><i>What angers you the most? Did you come across situation when you were humiliated?</i></p> <p><i>Can you tell us more about the background?</i></p>

Imaginations of sports	Examining the meanings and comfort ascribed to engagement with sports.	<i>Tell us about the role sports plays in your life. How do you resonates with sports? What was your motivation to become sportsperson?</i>
Tensions in sports	Understanding the challenges and barriers in sports.	<i>Can you talk about the difficulties of being an athlete? Does the team and individual sports works differently for athletes? Tell us your experience of being part of a team sports/individual sports events.</i>

Interview protocol (second draft)

Appendix 3: Sample narrative on subjective meanings and tensions of authenticity (retrieved from autobiographies).

S No.	Narrative form	Example	Page
01	<p align="center">Subjective meanings of Authenticity</p>		
a.	<p><i>Loneliness and nomadic existence</i></p>	<p>“My instant thoughtless reaction was ‘no’, I can’t. Whether it was an inability to face up to the situation, or my feeling that, as English captain, that came first and everything else second, I can’t tell. Was my response motivated by selfishness, by a sense of duty that now seems almost comically warped or just by not wanting to confront what I might find when I got home? ...forget the match, forget the English tour, and forget everything else. I should have got on the next plane and gone home to look after my wife. I am ashamed I did not”</p>	<p>p. 181 (Marcus Trescothick)</p>
b.	<p><i>Lonely champion</i></p>	<p>“I would look into the distance, where children were playing in the village grounds. I was envious, I admit. Which child wouldn’t be? But looking back, it was that sustained toil that prepared my body for boxing. My strength and stamina continues to be my stronger points even when I fight bigger opponents in the ring...I was</p>	<p>p.14 (Marcus Trescothick)</p>

		worried about my sibling. I wondered if I was being selfish, with my parents now having to do all the work, even the share I took care of. But I also felt that I was making the right move”	
c.	<i>Enraged champion</i>	“I had no money. Reluctant to borrow from friends, I cycled four hours to Kangathej and brought back rice...it [struggle] give me the freedom to concentrate on my sport. My drive to succeed was so strong that it drove away all fear and apprehension...All I wanted to prove that being young, a girl and small statured would not keep me back”	p.29 (Mary Kom)
	<i>-Do-</i>	“I was told that she said ‘Mary will not bring any medal in the 51 kg, but I was unmoved. I have always had a strong heart and that helped me cope. Criticism only bring out the fighter in me”	p. 109 (Mary Kom)
02	Tensions of authenticity		
a.	<i>Sports belongingness</i>	“You heard of people who eat, drink, sleep and dream cricket. For a large part of my life, that was me. My earliest memories are not of teddy-bears, bows, and arrows, mud pies or ray guns, but of bats and balls, and mainly bats. ...I can’t recall when I first picked one up, but I have retained a fuzzy memory of what happened	p.17 (Marcus Trescothick)

		when I did. It felt great, and even better when I hit a ball with it. That feeling has never left me”	
		“I also took out time to talk to X [fellow athlete] who is also from Manipur and a talented young boxer. When, he lost, I counselled him, ‘a game is a game’. One wins and one loses. You are young and you have a promising career ahead of you. Don’t be disheartened”	p.117 (Mary Kom)
b.	<i>Fantasies of belongingness</i>	“My earlier promotion ...had not materialized, but the Olympic bronze helped this one come through quickly...paperwork for the allotment of land for my academy has been finally completed...I want to give them [next generation] the platform that I had to fight for, and nurture their talent...only after my students started getting medals did the academy come to recognized”	p.124 (Mary Kom)

Appendix 4: Details of the pilot study.

S No.	Details of the athletes		Sample Interviews questions/approach
01	Sports	Cricket.	<i>We are glad that you agreed to appear for this interview. Can you tell us more about how you started yourself?</i>
02	Roles	Batsman, bowler, mentor and endurance & conditioning expert.	<i>How did you start your sports career? What factors motivated you to pursue sports?</i>
03	Average age	32 years.	<i>How your family and peers reacted to your decision of having a career in sports?</i>
04	Nationalities	Nepal, Australia and India.	<i>What sports means to you? How about other fields such as working with a business firm?</i>
05	Average duration of the interview	40 minutes.	<i>Tell us about the qualities which are expected to be there in an athlete.</i>
06	Period	December, 2018.	<i>What are challenges of being part of sports? Did you too face these challenges? Tell us about your experience.</i>