

**A Community-Based Approach to Exploring the Experiences and Perspectives of
Elite/International and World-Class Runners who are Pregnant and/or Parenting**

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THESIS

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Abstract

Several researchers as well as high-profile female athletes have recently challenged the longstanding view that pregnancy/motherhood mark the termination of an elite athlete's career in sport. While these conversations have sparked change concerning the degree to which pregnant/parenting athletes are accepted within the sport industry, elite athletes continue to face discriminatory policies and practices as they navigate parenthood alongside their elite athletic pursuits. My thesis is presented in the publishable papers format. In my first paper, I used new masculinities theory, community-based participatory research, and semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of 10 elite/international and world-class male athletes (9 fathers, 1 expectant father) and the impact of children on their athletic careers. Through critical discourse analysis, I found that fatherhood both improves and impedes elite athlete-fathers' athletic performance. In my second paper, I used feminist poststructuralist theory, feminist participatory action research, and semi-structured interviews to explore the perspectives of 21 pregnant and parenting elite/international and world-class athletes (11 women, 10 men) on the developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics. Through critical discourse analysis, I identified that, despite considerable recent advancements, there is still a need for increased acceptance of pregnant/parenting athletes. Taken together, these two papers advance understandings regarding athletes' perspectives on the current shifts surrounding parenthood and athletics. Further, the recognition of fathers' involvement in childcare underscores how male athletes represent an untapped resource for allyship for female athletes. My findings also call for significant continued change and action to better support pregnant/parenting athletes.

Dedication

To my parents, Jan MacNair-Smith and Russ Smith, and to my sister, Olivia Smith, I dedicate this thesis to you. The countless ways in which you have supported me have carried me through every single phase of this journey. Thank you for giving me the roots to a family that is united through love and a tremendous degree of encouragement, while also helping me find the wings to fly and to pursue my sporadic ambitions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There is currently a severe lack of support and policy geared towards maternity leave, pregnancy, and parenthood for elite-level athletes. On May 12, 2019 (otherwise recognized as Mother's Day in numerous countries including Canada and the U.S.A.), *The New York Times* published an opinion piece that was written by track and field Olympian and mother of three Alysia Montano (2019). In her article, titled "Nike told me to dream crazy, until I wanted a baby," Montano detailed the numerous challenges of combining pregnancy with elite running. By sharing and drawing on her own experiences as well as those of Kara Goucher, another professional female runner who was sponsored by Nike, Montano underscored how the reality for a sponsored athlete is one that is far from the accounts that are typically advertised and portrayed to the public by sponsors. While Nike and other major athletic apparel brands seem to celebrate female athletes, motherhood, and gender equality, Montano exposed the financial predicaments as well as physical and mental health concerns that many (particularly female) athletes actually face as a result of the significant lack of support offered by corporate sponsors for maternity leave, postpartum recovery, or parenthood in general.

A mere 10 days after Montano's article was released, *The New York Times* published a second piece that fueled the backlash that was just starting to catch fire around this absence in support. This second article was written by the most decorated track and field Olympian in history and mother of one, Allyson Felix (2019), who, at the time, was also sponsored by Nike. Her story highlighted one major unanswered question concerning this issue: If Felix, one of the "most widely marketed athletes" (Felix, 2019, para. 10) of one of the largest athletic corporations to ever exist, was unsuccessful in her fight for maternity protections, then what could this possibly mean for other elite athletes?

Since the release of these two articles, numerous discussions and actions have occurred within the media as well as across scholarly research and, importantly, these conversations have begun to spark change within the sports industry. For example, such changes have been made evident by the fact that each of the webpages for these two prominent *New York Times* articles have both been modified to include the same “update statement” presented in bold text at the top of each piece:

Following this report, after broad public outcry and a congressional inquiry, Nike announced a new maternity policy for all sponsored athletes on Aug. 12. The new contract guarantees an athlete’s pay and bonuses for 18 months around pregnancy. Three other athletic apparel companies added maternity protections for sponsored athletes. (Felix, 2019; Montaña, 2019)

While this statement offers a glimpse into the positive shifts that are beginning to take place concerning the degree to which pregnancy and parenthood are accepted and supported within elite-level sport, several matters and questions remain unanswered. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic marked the onset of an unprecedented slew of concerns, including when athletes’ family members were banned from attending the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, and there were no policies in place to recognize the detrimental effects that such rulings could have for athlete-mothers who were breastfeeding during that same timeframe (Dichter, 2021).

Moreover, through a recent news media and grey literature framing analysis, Scott et al. (2022) reported a major discrepancy between how pregnant/parenting elite runners present their relationships with corporate sponsors compared to how these relations are promoted and framed by the companies themselves. These findings further emphasized the issues that Montaña and Felix bravely brought to light with regard to the inconsistency in the level of support that

sponsors claim to provide for pregnant/parenting athletes compared to the degree of support that these athletes seem to actually receive. In addition to these concerns, the voices of male athletes who are fathers have been largely absent from all of these discussions. Though, certainly, the complexities of pregnancy, motherhood, and elite sport are far different from those related to fatherhood, the failure to incorporate athlete-fathers into conversations around parenthood furthers the deeply entrenched societal perception that perpetuates parenthood as primarily a woman's responsibility.

With this in mind, the objectives of my thesis research were two-fold: First, I aimed to explore the fatherhood experiences of male elite/international and world-class athletes and the impact of children on their high-performance athletic careers. Second, I aimed to explore the ways in which pregnant and parenting¹ elite/international and world-class athletes perceive the developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics. By centring my research around these two main objectives, I was able to attend to some of the major gaps that exist in the literature in this area – notably, the lack of acknowledgement of elite athlete-fathers' experiences as well as the overall current need for research to be able to further understand elite athlete-parents' perspectives on the shifts that are currently occurring surrounding parenthood and elite-level athletics in particular.

I conducted this research as part of a larger community-based participatory research (CBPR) project that was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada. Of note, throughout the entirety of this thesis, although I use the terms “I” and “my” to describe the various stages of this research process, all of the elements that are

¹ The language that is used throughout this thesis is representative of our athlete participant sample and is thus in line with a binary classification of gender (e.g., mother/father, female/male, and women/men). We recognize that this stands both as a significant limitation to our research as well as an important opportunity for future research to be more inclusive of gender-nonconforming individuals and to be presented using gender-neutral language.

comprised within this thesis were carried out with continued guidance, assistance, and mentorship from both of my co-supervisors, Dr. Francine Darroch (Department of Health Sciences, Carleton University) and Dr. Audrey Giles (School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa) as well as in collaboration with our community advisory board (CAB; which I will expand on in further detail below).

Though the challenges of pregnancy and parenthood span the entire elite-sports industry more broadly, the overarching goal of our larger CBPR project (and hence my thesis research as well) was centred around the experiences of pregnant and parenting elite/international and world-class middle- to long-distance runners. A key contributing factor in this decision was the pivotal role that professional track and field athletes Montaña (2019) and Felix (2019) played in spearheading the widespread conversations, changes, and emerging social movement that are currently taking place with regard to pregnancy, maternity, and parenthood in elite-level competition. Our rationale for this athletics-focused research was further grounded in the many aspects that distinguish middle-/long-distance running from other professional sports, such as the unique yet challenging circumstance that a female runner's age range for competitive peak performance (Allen & Hopkins, 2015; Hollings et al., 2014) typically coincides with that of childbearing years (Duncan et al., 2018; Mirowsky, 2002; 2005).

In addition to this, as professional runners are treated as independent contractors (Butler, 2021), the financial structure for elite running also spurred our inclination to explore the experiences and perspectives of these elite athletes. Runners typically rely on sponsorship deals with athletic apparel brands such as Nike or New Balance and, thus, unlike other professional sports, they do not earn a salary from a league (Montaña, 2019). Indeed, while there are similarities between this type of funding structure that is used in running compared to other

individual sports such as tennis or golf, such parallels are blurred by many of the details around pregnancy and maternity. For instance, within elite athletics, there is no tangible equivalent to the women's-only international organizing bodies that are seen in other sports, such as the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) or the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA). To add to this, the governance of any pregnancy/parenthood-related policies have progressed at extremely different rates across these sports. For example, as of January of 2019, both the WTA as well as the LPGA had announced changes to their respective maternity policies to ensure that players were no longer penalized for taking maternity leave (Mell, 2019; Neal, 2018). The elite athletes competing in the WTA and the LPGA had hence seen changes in maternity policies several months before the articles written by Montaña and Felix were even published in *The New York Times* and had yet to elicit the ensuing public outcry.

For the purpose of this research, it was therefore important to focus on the current shifts concerning pregnancy and parenthood within elite athletics in particular. My research is presented in the format of two publishable papers, which can be found in chapters two and three of this thesis. Although I make reference to similar scholarly sources throughout each of these chapters, this "Introduction" chapter is reserved for a description of the broader context in which my research is situated. To this end, in this chapter, I first present a literature review of scholarly work concerning motherhood, fatherhood, and parenthood and how they relate to elite-level competition. Next, I describe the various approaches that I used in my research including an idealist ontology, a subjectivist epistemology, a new masculinities theoretical framework, a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework, community-based participatory research (CBPR) methodology, feminist participatory action research (FPAR) methodology, semi-

structured interviews, and critical discourse analysis (CDA). I conclude this chapter with an overview of my thesis format.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I explore the several areas of scholarly work that relate to my two primary research objectives of this thesis, which were, first, to explore the fatherhood experiences of male elite athletes and the impact of children on their high-performance athletic careers, and, second, to explore the ways in which pregnant and parenting elite athletes perceive the developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics. In this section, I first examine the changing role of motherhood and pregnancy in relation to elite-level competition, followed by a similar investigation with respect to athlete-fathers. The contrast in the literature available concerning motherhood and fatherhood in elite-level competition highlights the prevalence of discussions concerning elite athlete-mothers and the lack thereof concerning fathers. Lastly, it is critical that I acknowledge how parenthood currently fits (if at all) into elite-level athletics, given the central role that this plays in my research objective. I thus conclude my literature review with an examination of parenthood in elite-level competition as an example of gender inequality in sport and how members of the sports industry are beginning to recognize the need to summon change surrounding this issue. An investigation in this regard emphasizes not only the need for further research to understand how elite athlete-parents themselves perceive the recent shift in conversations and calls to change policies around parenthood and elite athletics, but also that we are currently at a critical moment for such research.

Motherhood and Elite-Level Competition

Until recently, primarily in Western culture, it was virtually unheard of for the terms *motherhood* and *elite athlete* to be found together, as if these two roles were parallel lines that

could never intersect. This seemingly incompatible match was rooted in the elusive, lingering perception that has continuously condemned female athletes to the dominant discourse of sport versus pregnancy – that is, a woman can be either an elite athlete *or* a mother, but not both (Cosh & Crabb, 2012; Darroch et al., 2019; Davenport et al., 2022; Jackson et al., 2022; McGannon et al., 2017; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Findings from Tekavc et al.’s (2015) study are among those that have provided evidence of this implied decision, as the authors found that motherhood marked the termination of several elite female athletes’ professional careers in sport. The work of scholars has also shown that elite female athletes have, at the very least, been discouraged from continuing their athletic careers if they wanted to have children (Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Pedersen, 2001). Significant decreases have also been documented in terms of women’s general participation in sport following pregnancy (Darroch et al., 2019; Miller & Brown, 2005).

Despite the multifaceted challenges that elite female athletes face when combining athletic pursuits with those of parenthood, an increasing number of elite female athletes have actively challenged this discourse that motherhood contradicts elite athletics through their successful and publicly-documented pursuits of both high-performance sport and motherhood (Bø et al., 2016; Darroch et al., 2016, 2019; Massey & Whitehead, 2022; McGannon et al., 2012; Scott et al., 2022; Thompson-Radford & Skey, 2021). As it has become increasingly common for elite female athletes to continue their careers in sport even after giving birth (Bø et al., 2016; Darroch et al., 2016, 2019), narratives such as being a “superwoman” (McGannon et al., 2015, p. 54) have been used in the media to describe elite female athletes who have continued to train and compete after having children, suggesting that it requires some sort of unnatural or extraordinary power to be able to be both an athlete and a mother.

McGannon et al. (2017) emphasized the impact of these narratives in the construction of meaning around female athletes' postpartum returns, portraying such a feat as an "unbelievable myth" (p. 25) as mainstream gender ideologies construct motherhood as reproductively incompatible with elite sport (Cosh & Crabb, 2012; McGannon et al., 2015). Similarly, as new mothers encounter new identity constructions (Kane et al., 2013; Krane et al., 2010; McGannon et al., 2012), discourses that are reinforced through the media can influence the ways in which society perceives elite female athletes, as well as how these athletes perceive themselves (McGannon et al., 2015). For instance, portraying elite athlete-mothers as "superwomen" can result in psychological distress for female athletes owing to the problematic reinforcements of this unattainable ideal (Choi et al., 2005; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; McGannon & Schinke, 2013; McGannon et al., 2015) or "cultural illusion" (McGannon et al., 2015, p. 57). This stress for female elite athletes may also be reflected in and accentuated by the power dynamic that typically resides within relationships that athlete-mothers have with their corporate sponsors.

Darroch et al. (2019) highlighted the lack of support that elite female runners in particular experience from their corporate sponsors during pregnancy, and they found that this absence of support leads to added stress in their careers. This stress was illustrated firsthand by the series of articles that were published by *The New York Times* concerning several elite track and field athletes, including Montañó (2019) and Felix (2019), who had been financially penalized by their corporate sponsors during pregnancy (Austen, 2019). Additionally, Scott et al.'s (2022) news media framing analysis is also a key study in this realm as the authors reported a significant incongruence between the ways in which corporate sponsors promote their unwavering support for female athletes compared to how athletes themselves publicly framed their experiences. Specifically, Scott et al. argued that corporate sponsors framed themselves as companies that

empower and support female athletes through pregnancy and motherhood, meanwhile sponsored female athletes framed their relations with sponsors as primarily exploitative and absent of any policies or practices that were analogous to those that were marketed through company advertising. The sum of the various challenges that these women face contributes to the heightened stress and uncertainty that female athletes must endure, which their male counterparts do not (Darroch et al., 2019).

Fatherhood and Elite-Level Competition

Though the growing body of researchers who have explored the many aspects of motherhood and elite athletics (e.g., Darroch et al., 2019; Massey & Whitehead, 2022; McGannon et al., 2015; Palmer & Leberman, 2009) have illustrated the stark biological differences that female athletes face when becoming a parent compared to their male counterparts, it is nevertheless critical to recognize that the career of an elite athlete-father can, too, be affected by parenthood. There are many aspects that distinguish a career in professional sport from other lines of work. Not only is the length of a career in sport typically much shorter (in large part due to the fact that it is driven by a very narrow age window of peak performance; Allen & Hopkins, 2015), but it also signifies a career path that is highly demanding in numerous ways. From the high-intensity physical requirements (Wylleman & Reints, 2010) and the psychological demands (Souter et al., 2018) to the imperative attention that must be paid towards nutrition (Garthe et al., 2013), recovery, sleep (Bird, 2013; Simpson et al., 2017), and extensive traveling (Waterhouse et al., 2004), elite sport is a work environment that is built upon an industry that “emphasizes commitment, preaches sacrifice, [and] demands long hours” (Graham & Dixon, 2017, p. 288). These components hence shape elite sport as a career with which it is

rather difficult to balance other life elements, including family. Notably, this goes for *all* athletes – including male athletes who are, or desire to be, fathers.

The distinct lack of existing literature on male elite athletes who are fathers insinuates that men are uninvolved in parenting (McGannon et al., 2018) and consequently reinforces discourses that convey caregiving duties as predominantly feminine tasks (Doucet, 2006). These perceptions are likely steered by the socially constructed teeter totter between involved fatherhood and masculinity. Societal pressures laden with masculine norms promote an expectation on fathers to subdue emotional expression and showcase strength (Doucet, 2004; Finn & Henwood, 2009), meanwhile, the contemporary concept of the new father prescribes men to be more engaged in and dedicate more time to parenting, childcare, and housework (Petts et al., 2018). This can create challenges for elite athlete-fathers in particular by creating experiences of uncertainty in how men may see and situate themselves within fatherhood (Lewington et al., 2021) as they are subjected to the assumption that fatherhood is a distraction to men's athletic performances (Cohen, 2016; McGannon et al., 2018).

The limited scholarly attention that has been paid towards fathers in a sport context has included the ways in which children's sport participation may be influenced by their fathers' involvement (Coakley, 2006; McGannon et al., 2018; Pot & Keizer, 2016) or how sport coaches and athletic trainers navigate fatherhood alongside their careers within a high-performance sport environment (Graham & Dixon, 2014, 2017; Rynkiewicz et al., 2021). Notably, none of these studies provided extensive insight into how elite male athletes specifically construct their own perspectives or experiences of parenthood in relation to elite-level competition. Importantly, however, turning to the field of sport psychology, McGannon et al. (2018) carried out an examination into the news media constructions of athlete-father identities concerning one British

professional tennis player, Andy Murray, who became a father in 2016 during his career in elite-level sport.

While the findings reported by McGannon and colleagues (2018) provided significant contributions to areas of literature where sport psychology meets media research, these authors equally emphasized the need for future scholars to further explore social constructions of fatherhood in relation to elite sport. There is thus value in recognizing that this lack of representation of male athletes' actual experiences and perspectives – that is, constructions of fatherhood and sport that are beyond those that are created through the media – regarding parenthood and elite-level competition is a form of silence that indeed speaks volumes. Some researchers have noted the impacts that fatherhood can have on men's lives, such as sleep deprivation (Gay et al., 2016) and increased stress (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007; Knoester & Petts, 2017), but there is a lack of knowledge around how such elements may play a role in athletic performance specifically. Further insight into how children may impact an elite athlete-father's athletic career and sport performance, including how such experiences may differ or coincide with those of athlete-mothers, could inform sport policies around parenthood to be able to better support male athletes through fatherhood.

The Currently Developing Degree of Acceptance of Parenthood in Elite-Level Competition

Pregnancy and motherhood have been framed amongst the array of disadvantages in sport to which elite female athletes have continuously been subject (Darroch et al., 2019; Fink, 2016; Hoeber, 2007, 2008; Kane, 2011). Corporate sponsors and athletic governing bodies have typically conflated pregnancy with injury, triggering contractual clauses such as an athlete suspension due to the inability to compete for 180 days, for instance (Darroch et al., 2019). Pregnancy unambiguously represents a very different case than injury and merging these two

events under the same policies considerably disadvantages athletes who are pregnant (or who are planning pregnancy). Additionally, Darroch et al. (2019) found that if corporate sponsors and governing bodies did not explicitly consider pregnancy as one and the same as injury within contracts, the alternative was to assume that an athlete's choice to have children equally corresponded to the decision to retire from elite sport. Such an approach indicates the lingering traces of discourses that paint pregnancy with the same brush as retirement from an athletic career (McGannon et al., 2012; Nash, 2011; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Pedersen, 2001; Spowart et al., 2010).

Notably, the assumption that pregnancy marks the end of a female athlete's career in elite-level competition is one that has recently begun to shift. Scott et al. (2022) highlighted how this change has become particularly noticeable within the elite running community and has emerged in the form of recent changes in policies within athletes' contracts to reflect more concrete maternity protections. These changes that have begun to take shape are thus significant in contributing to addressing some of the inequalities that female athletes face in the sports industry – a movement that has effectively been led by female athletes including Alysia Montaña (2019) and Allyson Felix (2019) through their aforementioned articles published in *The New York Times*. Scott et al. (2022) also noted that the publishing of these two articles merely marked the beginning of these athletes' calls for change, as illustrated by the new development of the non-profit organization, *&Mother* (2021), of which Montaña is a co-founder and Felix is a Board member. To “set a new gold standard for gender equity in sports,” the overarching goal of this organization is to actively support women's pursuits in both their careers and motherhood by “enabling women to become the driving force changing a working world that has historically

discriminated against, dismissed, and undervalued motherhood, starting with professional athletics” (&Mother, 2021, para. 4).

As the degree to which parenthood is accepted within elite-level competition begins to develop, it is warranted that both athlete-mothers’ and athlete-fathers’ perspectives on these shifts be explored. The recent changes in elite athlete-mothers’ sponsorship raise important further questions concerning other policies and support measures not only for these female athletes, but also for elite athlete-fathers. The ways in which parenthood is regarded and accepted within elite sport are significant to both parenting groups and by not considering the ways in which parenting can affect fathers, corporate sponsors, governing bodies, and the sports industry as a whole may miss essential opportunities to support male athletes who are fathers.

Therefore, as the sports industry progresses to create space for parenthood within elite-level competition, there are gaps in the academic literature about parenthood in elite sport that must be addressed, especially for these changes to occur while keeping both mother- and father-athletes’ experiences in mind. It is important to hear the voices of the athletes themselves to understand their perspectives on the developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite-level competition as such research can provide nuanced understandings of comparisons between mothers’ and fathers’ viewpoints, potentially leading to the identification of areas in need of advocacy or support as well as an understanding of the impact that Olympic-level athletes can have on parenting policies or guidance for long-term partnerships with athletes and organizations.

Ontology

My research was situated within an idealist ontology. An idealist position rejects the notion that there is one single reality and rather entails that there are indeed multiple realities,

which are constructed and interpreted by multiple individuals (Smith, 1983). The multiple realities that exist are thus, according to idealism, socially and psychologically constructed (Slevitch, 2011). Notably, the level of acceptance that is extended to pregnant/parenting athletes within elite athletics is not a concept that is considered to be static; rather, it represents a dynamic process that is constantly changing, as evidenced by the numerous related shifts that have recently occurred in the sports industry. Thus, the experiences and the perspectives of elite/international and world-class athlete-parents that I aimed to explore throughout this research are only representative of the small yet significant moments in time when I was given the opportunity to interview each participant.

This form of continuous transformation is captured within an idealist ontology as reality is constantly recreated by individuals according to their own unique understanding of reality (Hellström, 2008). To this end, the multiple realities of the degree to which parenthood is accepted within elite athletics as depicted by the athlete-parents who participated in this research had “no existence” prior to my investigation into their perspectives and “cease[d] to exist” (Slevitch, 2011, p. 77) upon the closing of this study (Smith, 1983). Situating my research within an idealist ontology indicated that the only means for gaining insight into the realities of the degree to which parenthood is accepted within elite athletics was through exploring the participants’ perspectives (Sale et al., 2002), which are influenced by their own beliefs, views, and interests (Putnam, 1981). An idealist ontological view therefore further informed the epistemology in which my research was situated, which was subjectivism.

Epistemology

My research was situated within a subjectivist epistemology. Subjectivists claim that an object does not contribute to the generation of meaning; rather, according to subjectivism,

meaning is imposed by a subject onto an object (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, in line with an idealist ontological position wherein there are multiple realities which are constructed and interpreted by multiple individuals (Smith, 1983), within a subjectivist epistemology, knowledge is completely centred around a multitude of subjects' perspectives (Patel, 2015).

Through my research, I sought to explore the fatherhood experiences of male elite/international and world-class athletes as well as the perspectives of both pregnant and parenting elite/international and world-class athletes on the degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics. I thus examined how these elite athletes collectively ascribed meaning to parenthood, how it relates to elite running, and how the degree to which parenthood is accepted within elite athletics has recently developed. Taking a subjectivist stance thus allowed me to make room for detailing how the participants' diverse array of individual experiences shaped their perceptions (Moon & Blackman, 2017) of parenthood in relation to elite-level athletics. Importantly, a subjectivist epistemology informed my use of both new masculinities as well as feminist poststructuralist theoretical frameworks.

Theoretical Framework

I used two theoretical approaches in my research: new masculinities and feminist poststructuralism. I employed a new masculinities theoretical framework for my first publishable paper (Chapter 2) and first research objective, which was to explore the fatherhood experiences of male elite/international and world-class athletes and the impact of children on their high-performance athletic careers. I used a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework for my second publishable paper (Chapter 3) and second research objective, which was to explore the perspectives of pregnant and parenting elite/international and world-class runners on the

developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics. In this section, I describe each of these two theoretical frameworks.

New Masculinities

The term *masculinity* alone denotes a form of practice that is taken up by members of society and is structured based on gender relations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Importantly, the concept and practice of masculinity opens the door to a wide range of social categories that are continuously dynamic and never static through time (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). New masculinities, as articulated by Lund et al. (2019), refers to the “increased involvement of men in caring practices and especially in fathering” (p. 1380). A new masculinities framework therefore aligned well with my research as I sought to explore the experiences of elite male athletes through fatherhood and the impact of children on their athletic careers, particularly in the context of the prevalent and recent increases in men’s involvement in childcare (Machin, 2015; Wall & Arnold, 2007) and shifts in societal perceptions of fatherhood (Meleagrou-Hitchens & Willig, 2022).

Despite recent shifts in gender roles in parenthood (Oláh et al., 2021), dominant discourses of masculinity continue to prevail and perpetuate the notion that fathers are secondary parents to mothers (Stevens, 2015; Sunderland, 2000; Wall & Arnold, 2007) and are thus either less involved or completely disengaged from parenting responsibilities. Earlier iterations of research on men and masculinities were often viewed through a theoretical lens guided by hegemonic masculinity and focused on social problems concerning the gendered privilege to which men had access (Anderson & McCormack, 2018).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was first articulated by Connell (1987, 1995, 2005) in the 1980s, and it has since been widely cited by various scholars across a diverse range

of areas who have collectively contributed to (re)shaping discussions around men, gender, and social hierarchy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell (1995) defined hegemonic masculinity as the “configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 77). Many scholars have also come to associate (particularly Western) hegemonic masculinity with attributes including competitiveness, aggression, and independence (Leader, 2019; Marshall et al., 2020). Despite these seemingly fixed characteristics, hegemonic masculinity is destined to change and transform in that it remains rooted within socially defined dynamic processes of gender relations (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This potential for change therefore played a critical role in laying the groundwork for other, non-hegemonic, and new masculinities to challenge the social justification of gender inequalities (Messerschmidt & Messner, 2020).

The practice of hegemonic masculinities alone carries very little meaning – indeed, it is the relationship with femininity and with non-hegemonic masculinities that fuels its social implications (Messerschmidt, 2019). The role of feminist scholarship in challenging elements of hegemonic masculinities (Brown & Ismail, 2019), as well as the significance of men’s engagements in feminist movements (Messerschmidt & Messner, 2020; Scheibling, 2020), are fundamental to the development of new masculinities. As a key objective of a new masculinities framework is to challenge the notions of hegemonic masculinities, new masculinities theorists are able to draw particular attention to the potential for men to disrupt unequal gendered practices through their increased participation as involved fathers (Lund et al., 2019), including in relation to parenthood and elite sport.

Kaplan et al. (2017) detailed the main tenets of new masculinities theory, which give way to a lens that positions men not according to masculine norms or specific gendered practices but rather in a light that reflects a nurturing perspective with a particular focus on the degree to which men “value authenticity, self-realization, and self-growth” (p. 401) within and outside of their family life and career. Adopting a new masculinities framework generally entails a focus on advocating for gender equality. Scholars who have employed a new masculinities lens to examine men’s experiences with fatherhood in a sport context have underscored the significance of sport as a means for fathers to be involved in their children’s lives (Doucet & Merla, 2007), to develop and deepen emotional relationships with their children (Harrington, 2006; Jenkins, 2009; Kilger, 2020), and to take on an influential role model position for their children (Gottzen & Kremer-Sadlik, 2012). That being said, the majority of these findings have been conveyed as a result of investigations into fathers’ involvement in their children’s participation in youth sports (Gottzen & Kremer-Sadlik, 2012; Kay, 2007). Hence, my employment of a new masculinities theoretical framework was a novel approach in this area of research and aligned well with my first research objective to explore male elite athletes’ experiences through fatherhood and the impact of children on their elite athletic careers.

Feminist Poststructuralism

Informed by a subjectivist epistemology, a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework positioned me well to address my second research objective in exploring the perspectives of pregnant and parenting elite athletes on the developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics. Feminist poststructuralist theorists require that precise attention be paid towards language for language is situated within societal relationships – particularly relationships of power (Crotty, 1998). Researchers who adopt this theoretical approach contend

that socially constructed reality is not only informed by language but also by language that “supports a patriarchal worldview” (Hussain et al., 2022, p. 507), and those who hold masculine traits may thus exercise power (Tickner, 2004). In line with a subjectivist epistemology, feminist poststructuralist theory provided me with a lens to examine how the meaning that elite athlete-parents ascribed to parenthood in relation to elite running may have been influenced by language, power relations, and/or dominant discourses (Weedon, 1988).

A feminist poststructuralist view posits that language constructs meaning (Weedon, 1988, 1997) and, importantly, any consideration of the relationship between language and meaning calls for equal examination into discourse. Indeed, St. Pierre (2000) asserted that if we “try to get to the bottom of language and meaning, we find that we are lost in the play of discourse” (p. 477). The sports industry is shaped by an array of gendered discourses (Scruton & Flintoff, 2002) and discursive practices that, despite recent significant increases in women’s participation in sport, contribute to a gender hierarchy that exists between male and female athletes (de Haan & Knoppers, 2020). Feminist poststructuralist theorists aim to deconstruct such discursively shaped perceptions of reality by unpacking gender hierarchies and exploring how one’s perceived positioning within a socially constructed hierarchy may contribute to an individual’s own sense of self in relation to the world (Randall, 2010).

Notably, elite athletes who are pregnant or parenting are subject to an array of dominant discourses, including those that may be found at a crossroad between gendered discourses related to sport as well as those related to parenting. Thus, by using a feminist poststructuralist approach, I was able to better understand how the degree to which parenthood is accepted within elite athletics may be influenced by or be a reflection of dominant gendered discourses in society, such as the idea that pregnancy implies retirement for elite female competitors (McGannon et al.,

2012), that involved fatherhood poses a direct distraction to elite athletic commitments (Cohen, 2016), or that women are assumed to be the ones who predominantly handle childcare responsibilities (Locke & Yarwood, 2016).

These important elements of feminist poststructuralist theory lay the groundwork for the key tenets of this theoretical approach: namely, that language represents the foundational building blocks for the articulation of meaning (Weedon, 1988, 1997) and that an individual's experiences in and interactions with the world are largely shaped by social relationships of power (Crotty, 1998) and interrelated discourses (Weedon, 1988). These principles guided me as I sought to gain insight into how traditional gender discourses in relation to athletics and societal parenting roles may have contributed to or influenced participants' perspectives on fatherhood, motherhood, and the overall extent to which parenthood is currently accepted within elite/international and world-class athletics. Importantly, the key tenets of new masculinities and feminist poststructuralist theories informed my use of both CBPR and FPAR methodologies.

Methodology

My methodological approach was guided by the larger CBPR project of which my thesis research was a part. The principles of CBPR were well suited to inform my approach for my first research objective concerning the fatherhood experiences of male elite athletes. For my second research objective concerning the perspectives of pregnant/parenting elite athletes on the degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics, I used an FPAR approach, which is a branch of CBPR (Wallerstein & Duran, 2017). In this section, I provide an overview of the key tenets of CBPR followed by those of FPAR. Next, I describe some of the shared principles of CBPR and FPAR and ensuing strengths and weaknesses of these two methodologies. I conclude this section

with a description of the community advisory board that guided both my thesis research as well as the larger project of which my thesis research was a part.

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

For my first publishable paper (Chapter 2) wherein I address my first research objective, which was to explore the fatherhood experiences of male elite athletes and the impact of children on their high-performance athletic careers, my use of a new masculinities theoretical framework informed my CBPR methodological approach. Collaboration is integral to the success of using a CBPR approach, which Viswanathan et al. (2004) underscored in their definition of this methodology:

Community-based participatory research is a collaborative research approach that is designed to ensure and establish structures for participation by communities affected by the issue being studied, representatives of organizations, and researchers in all aspects of the research process to improve health and well-being through taking action, including social change. (p. 5)

CBPR is thus particularly well suited for research concerning groups that experience marginalization (Baum et al., 2006; Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Tremblay et al., 2018) or, at the very minimum, populations who may be ignored or dominated (Reid, 2004). This draws attention to the distinct absence of scholarly understanding of male athletes and fatherhood and, in turn, shines light on how a CBPR approach aligned well in tandem with my employment of new masculinities theory to illustrate how the disruption of dominant discourses of gendered practices in relation to high-performance sport may contribute to the experiences of male elite athletes through fatherhood.

The key tenets of CBPR are not encompassed within a fixed set of principles to be employed within any research context concerning any type of group of participants; rather, the fundamental underpinnings of a CBPR approach are designed to guide and instruct scholars throughout their CBPR efforts (Anderson, 2004; Israel et al., 1998). Included among the key tenets that Israel et al. (1998) described regarding CBPR were the importance of facilitating “collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research” (p. 178), integrating “knowledge and action for mutual benefit of all partners,” promoting a “co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities” (p. 179), involving a “cyclical and iterative process,” and disseminating “findings and knowledge gained to all partners” (p. 180).

CBPR scholars have also highlighted a major distinction that must be made when using this collaborative approach in that the concept of “community” encompasses a “social and cultural entity” (Israel et al., 1998, p. 177) as opposed to the notion of conducting research within a physical community setting (Israel et al., 1998). Hence, it was important for me to identify that, for the purpose of my research and my CBPR efforts in addressing the first research objective of my thesis, “community” entailed elite/international and world-class athletes who fundamentally shared the commonalities of parenthood and a career in high-performance athletics. For the second research objective of my thesis, I used an FPAR methodological approach.

Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR)

For my second publishable paper (Chapter 3) wherein I address my second research objective, which was to explore the perspectives of pregnant and parenting elite athletes on the degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics, my use of a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework informed my FPAR methodological approach. Indeed, the four primary

pillars that form the foundation of an FPAR approach are marked by the very name of this methodology: feminisms, participation, action, and research.

Feminisms provide the stability that is often overlooked with the use of traditional methodologies by requiring that a researcher adopting an FPAR approach place gender and women's various experiences at the centre of the research process (Chakma, 2016; Reid et al., 2006; Reid & Gillberg, 2014). Importantly, feminist scholars have underscored the importance in recognizing that feminist thought implies pursuing an understanding of a range of experiences and perspectives regarding people of all genders (i.e., not just those concerning women; Frisby et al., 2009; Reid & Gillberg, 2014). In line with Maguire's (2001) claim that action researchers should focus on how gender may shape the lives of not only women, but also those of men and individuals who may identify as non-binary, my use of FPAR methodology was consistent with my feminist poststructuralist theoretical approach in creating space for all participants' voices to be heard. Frisby et al. (2009) have also added to this position as they emphasized that FPAR can, and should be, used to help men see "how gender influences their actions and those around them" (p. 15), on the premise that socializations and gender expectations can have just as much of an impact on men and boys as they do on other individuals.

As similarly discussed with regard to CBPR, the *participation* portion of FPAR denotes the importance of active collaboration between the researcher and the participants, who are often individuals from groups or communities that experience oppression or marginalization (Frisby et al., 2005; Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Maguire, 1987; Reid & Frisby, 2008). The collaboration between participants and researchers captures the essence of FPAR as an approach to research that is accomplished with, rather than for, research participants (Frisby et al., 2005; Maguire, 1987; Ristock & Pennell, 1996). Therefore, while the participation element of FPAR requires

that participants be involved in all aspects of the research process with the intent that it is their perspectives and knowledge at the centre of exploration (Frisby et al., 2005), the feminism element ensures that the focus of these perspectives is on gender, women's, and men's diverse experiences and the obstacles they confront (Reid & Gillberg, 2014). Closely linked to these core components is *action*, which cannot emerge without participation (Reid & Gillberg, 2014).

Reid et al. (2006) highlighted the importance of distinguishing the concept of action from the notion of "social change." Although the two are closely related, the former can involve taking steps towards addressing community members' personal troubles, while the latter is typically reserved for broader and structural issues only. Action is thus a catalyst for the positive change that can be created by using the findings from a study that is guided by FPAR (Reid & Gillberg, 2014), with a particular focus on improving the lives of those directly involved in the research (Maguire, 1987). Meaningful action can also elicit awareness and foster one's learning of how the world works (Reid, 2004; Reid & Frisby, 2008), which is notably connected to the fourth primary practice of FPAR: *research*. The knowledge that stems from research steered by FPAR is unique in that it is constructed upon the four FPAR pillars, each of which individually caters to the success of the utilization of this methodology. Yet, the key asset of FPAR is ultimately grounded not in what each of these four components stand for as individual markers but rather in how they come together.

Strengths and Weaknesses of CBPR and FPAR

Given that FPAR is a branch of CBPR (Wallerstein & Duran, 2017), there is a territory of common ground within the close relation between these two methodologies that hosts a number of shared key principles. Included among these elements is the explicit involvement of community members, which is often exemplified in the form of a community advisory board

(CAB; Viswanathan et al., 2004); democratic decision making between researchers and participants (Frisby et al., 2005; Reid et al., 2006; Reid & Frisby, 2008; Reid & Gillberg, 2014); and deliberate management of (Frisby et al., 2005) and attentiveness to (Reid & Gillberg, 2014) the balancing of power among those involved in the research process. Having a CAB comprised of community members who help guide all aspects of the research is integral to the success of employing both a CBPR and an FPAR framework by way of empowering these individuals to take action toward promoting social justice within their own lives (Frisby et al., 2005; Reid, 2004). While a key element of these two methodologies is ensuring that participants co-lead the knowledge that is generated through research, there are some concerns that can arise from such collaborative efforts.

Frisby et al. (2005) noted a few issues that can stem specifically from the research relationships that may form as a result of the collaborative efforts that are characteristic of CBPR and FPAR. These authors described the abundant time and effort that the managing of power issues can take, particularly with regard to determining research questions and data collection. The utilization of either of these methodologies requires that there be balance in these decisions, which may be difficult in the event that those involved in the research have differing – and sometimes competing – agendas (Langan & Morton, 2009). Issues surrounding research relationships may further spark ethical concerns, such as matters surrounding increased vulnerability of participants as they open up to researchers (Frisby et al., 2005; Tom & Herbert, 2002), as well as questions about whether research actions are indeed meaningful and significant to all those involved (Reid & Gillberg, 2014), and how this significance is measured.

The potential difficulties that can come from research relationships in either CBPR or FPAR can be monitored by way of engaging in researcher reflexivity (Reid et al., 2006; Reid &

Frisby, 2008), otherwise recognized as a means for bringing awareness to the ways in which research relationships may be shaped by differences in privilege and power (Brydon-Miller, 2004; Frisby et al., 2009; Reid & Gillberg, 2014). Tett (2005) claimed that these differences in privilege and power can be addressed by engaging in the identification of ways in which power can be shared among those involved in the research, also referred to as a *power-with* stance.

Frisby et al. (2005) emphasized the importance of reflexivity, as they highlighted that the goal of a researcher using CBPR or FPAR is not a total elimination of power differences but is rather an engagement with participants that is authentic and meaningful.

Community Advisory Board (CAB)

To meet the requirements of the vital collaborative principle of CBPR and FPAR, both my thesis research as well as the larger project to which it was related were carried out with the guidance of a CAB that was comprised of five elite/international to world-class distance runners who are all parents (two fathers and three mothers). Collectively, these five CAB members have competed at six Olympic Games and six World Championships and, combined, have 12 children. We were able to work closely with this athlete CAB throughout the entire research process, which included constructing, detailing, and finalizing interview guides (see Appendix A); recruiting participants; as well as collecting and analyzing data. In accordance with best practices in community-based research for continued community engagement (Newman et al., 2011), we compensated our CAB members in recognition of the time and expertise that they contributed.

The research team was also collectively well positioned to conduct this research: I am currently a national-level track athlete, one of my supervisors competed as a varsity runner at the national level (Giles), and my other supervisor is both a mother and a former world-class runner (Darroch). However, as I am not a parent, and I identify as a white, straight, and cisgender

woman, the insight that the CAB members provided – as both athlete-mothers and fathers – was paramount to the success of my thesis research. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to work with this CAB. As they drew on their own lived experiences of navigating a career in elite-level athletics alongside parenthood, their guidance vastly enriched this research process.

Methods

With help from our athlete CAB, I used a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques to recruit athlete-parents (Bowling, 2014; DeCarlo, 2018) who met the study inclusion criteria: understand and speak English, current or expecting parent, and currently (or within the last five years) of elite/international to world-class caliber in any middle- or long-distance running event in accordance with McKay et al.'s (2022) classification framework. Specifically, the athlete criteria for classification as Tier 4 (Elite/International Level) includes that they are currently competing or had competed at the international level, top 4–300 in world rankings, and/or have achieved within 7% of world-record performance. Classification as Tier 5 (World Class) includes that they are/were Olympic and/or World Championship medalists, world-record holders (or within 2% of world-record performance), top 3–20 in world rankings, and/or top 3–10 at an Olympics or World Championships (McKay et al., 2022).

We recruited 21 participants (see Table 1); 12 were Tier 4 (Elite/International Level) and nine were Tier 5 (World Class). The 21 participants included 11 women ($n = 9$ mothers, $n = 2$ pregnant) and 10 men ($n = 9$ fathers, $n = 1$ expectant father). They have represented four countries in international competitions and, combined, have competed at 26 Olympic Games and 31 World Championships. I assigned all participants a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics (N = 21)

Category	Pseudonym	Classification	Partner/Spouse
Pregnant	Lauren	World Class	Yes; Male
Father	Colin	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Mother	Abby	World Class	Yes; Male
Father	Zach	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Mother	Elaina	Elite/International level	Yes; Male
Mother	Taylor	Elite/International level	Yes; Male
Mother	Kate	Elite/International level	Yes; Male
Father	Phil	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Father	Jonathan	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Mother	Liv	World Class	Yes; Male
Father	Brian	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Mother	Alexandra	Elite/International level	Yes; Male
Father	Dennis	World Class	Yes; Female
Mother	Libby	World Class	Yes; Male
Father	Jake	World Class	Yes; Female
Mother	Mary	Elite/International level	Yes; Male
Father	Remy	World Class	Yes; Female
Mother	Hailey	World Class	Yes; Male
Father	Cameron	World Class	Yes; Female
Expectant Father	Eric	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Pregnant	Becca	Elite/International level	Yes; Male

Data Collection

To explore my research objectives for this thesis research and, in turn, work towards amplifying the voices of athletes who are pregnant and/or parenting, I conducted semi-structured interviews. The utilization of semi-structured interviews aligned well with my use of new masculinities and feminist poststructuralist theories as well as CBPR and FPAR by way of creating space for the understanding of the participants' experiences, as well as the meanings they ascribed to these experiences (Adams, 2010). Moreover, my use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to identify the language that the athletes used throughout the interviews to detail their experiences and how such language is positioned in relation to discursive productions of parenthood, gendered parenting roles, and relations of power (Bauer & Giles, 2022) in an

elite-level sporting context. Below, I examine some of the strengths and weaknesses that are associated with utilizing semi-structured interviews.

As the name alludes to, a semi-structured interview is found, both in theory and in practice, somewhere in between an unstructured and a structured interview. While adopting the conversational ease and use of open-ended questions that are characteristic of an unstructured interview, an interviewer utilizing a semi-structured approach may also draw on traits of a structured interview by incorporating closed-ended questions (Adams, 2015). This allows for the interviewer to rely on the key efficiencies of both unstructured and structured interviews, which is notably one of the strengths of using semi-structured interviews in research.

The semi-structured interview is versatile and flexible (Kallio et al., 2016), rendering it an ideal method of data collection in qualitative research. By adopting this method, I was able to establish a focused but flexible guide for the interviews (Adams, 2015) that was pertinent to my two main research objectives (Adams, 2010), while also creating space for the interviewees' perspectives of reality to be expressed in their own words (Blee & Taylor, 2002). My use of this method thus provided me with the opportunity to gain direct insight into the participants' thoughts and perspectives on parenthood and how it fits into elite-level athletics (Schostak, 2006), but not in a way that adhered submissively to "verbatim questions as in a standardized survey" (Adams, 2015, p. 493). With this, using semi-structured interviews to collect data also gave me the freedom and flexibility to veer away from the interview guide by asking follow-up questions, which are, as noted by Rubin and Rubin (2011), typically asked to either spontaneously explore a path insinuated by the interviewee or to derive nuanced understanding. This highlights another strength of using interviews, as Adams (2010) described a semi-structured interview as a space for interviewees to speak freely without worry. The benefits of

this practice are thus a two-way street and are not solely directed towards the interviewer.

However, the extent to which the advantages of this method are realisable is contingent on an interviewer's awareness of the potential limitations of a semi-structured interview.

The use of semi-structured interviews in qualitative research has been primarily criticized for the assumption that an interviewee's choice of language is a direct depiction of their present or past perceptions (Silverman, 2017). Through their analysis, researchers seek to construct reliable interpretations about an individual's behaviour as it relates to a situation other than that of the interview alone; a task that is, as noted by Hammersley (2008), "impossible" (p. 94). A major factor upon which Hammersley's point is premised is the minimal regard that is deliberately given towards the numerous ways in which an interviewee's responses may be shaped by the interview context or the interviewer's influence. Rapley (2016) echoed this critique and indicated that an interviewee may present themselves according to a specific type of identity that is narrowly relevant to the issues being discussed – a form of presentation that could very well be alienated from the interviewee's conscious mind.

Although these potential disadvantages associated with semi-structured interviews are important to consider, they do not represent unmanageable barriers, nor do they outweigh the many benefits of this method. Semi-structured interviews allow a researcher to access an individual's understandings in a manner that cannot be achieved through alternative methods (Byrne, 2004). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) captured this notion perfectly: "interview research is a craft that, if well carried out, can become an art" (p. 15). I was thus committed to developing my skills so that I could engage with the semi-structured interview in an artful manner, which was ultimately attained through careful practice, particular planning, and high-quality data analysis (Silverman, 2017). For example, prior to conducting any interviews on my own, I was

given the opportunity to listen and observe as one of my supervisors conducted an interview for research purposes so that I could learn this craft in real time. One of my supervisors was also in attendance as I conducted my first semi-structured interview for this thesis research, which allowed me to receive concrete feedback and advice as I learned how to carry out this practice as efficiently as possible.

Utilizing semi-structured interviews was particularly ideal for my research as I sought to create and foster an environment in which I could not only develop an understanding of elite athlete-parents' experiences and perspectives, but also develop a space in which these athletes felt comfortable sharing such thoughts. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to open the door to exploring the participants' perspectives surrounding specific questions related to parenthood and elite running, while also making room for these athletes to share any experiences, thoughts, or memories (Blee & Taylor, 2002) within the periphery of the direct questions that I posed.

The interviews lasted between 45-95 minutes. To thank participants for their time, each individual received a \$25 honorarium in the form of a gift card. Due to COVID-19, all interviews were conducted via Zoom. It is worth noting that the use of videoconferencing invited a possible sampling bias owing to the fact that the recruitment of participants was limited to those who have access to the internet as well as the necessary technological equipment (Cook, 2012; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; O'Connor et al., 2008; Padgett, 2017). While, certainly, internet accessibility is much more prominent today and was therefore not expected to pose as significant of a challenge as it may have in earlier years (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019), this did not eliminate the likelihood of having to navigate technical difficulties. Since difficulties of this nature are unique to online interviews, these may have presented added distractions that would otherwise not have

been present during face-to-face interviews, potentially causing a shift in a participant's focus (Irani, 2019), and hence disrupting the flow of the discussion (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). Having conducted all interviews online may have, at times, also compromised my ability to understand or take note of a participant's nonverbal cues, gestures, or expressions (Cater, 2011; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; O'Connor et al., 2008; Seitz, 2016), which could have led to a loss of data (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). It was therefore critical for me to allot added buffer time for the interviews in the event of technical issues (Patel et al., 2020) and to explore any necessary clarifications that may have been missed through the absence of nonverbal cues or gestures.

Despite these potential challenges, online interviews have been deemed as viable alternatives to face-to-face interviews (Irani, 2019), with Zoom in particular having been rated above other platforms given that it is user-friendly, cost-effective, and offers numerous security features (Archibald et al., 2019). This method of interviewing can in fact present noteworthy opportunities, specifically when research participants are parents. Through their study that explored the experiences of using online interviews for qualitative research involving pregnant and parenting participants, Mirick and Wladkowski (2019) identified the significant strengths for this method, including that participants do not have to allocate additional travel time for the interview and that they are able to participate from the comfort of their own homes. Not only can this foster additional relaxation for the participant (Irani, 2019), but it also allows for parenting participants to take part in the interview alongside their "caregiving responsibilities" (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019, p. 3063). Needless to say, this is especially important to note in the context of my research given that I conducted interviews with athletes who are parents.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I returned the interview transcripts to each participant for any clarifications they may have deemed necessary. One of the

fathers requested that his transcript not be sent to him as he did not feel that he would have any revisions to make and, of the remaining 20 participants, none made requests for any changes. I also assigned a pseudonym to individual participants for the purpose of protecting their identity. Importantly, this method of data collection was, of course, contingent on not only having approval from our athlete CAB but ethics approval, as well.

Ethics

This study received approval from both the University of Ottawa Office of Research Ethics and Integrity (Ethics File Number H-11-20-6298) as well as the Carleton University Research Ethics Board-B (CUREB-B) at Carleton University (Ethics Clearance ID: Project # 114444; see Appendix B). To protect the identity of participants, I omitted specific identifying details where necessary throughout my descriptions of my findings and research process. This included assigning all participants a pseudonym in addition to removing other identifying information such as the names of participants' spouse/partner and child(ren) or any specific details related to competition and/or training camp locations, for example.

Furthermore, prior to each interview, I shared a copy of the oral consent script (see Appendix C) with each participant, which I also read out loud to each participant at the beginning of the interview. Each interview did not begin until consent was given. Importantly, included in this script was a reminder to participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose to not take part or to skip any of the questions throughout the interview. Additionally, each participant was also informed that if they chose to withdraw from the study after the interview, their responses would be removed if they notified our research team within one month after the interview had been completed.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

I analyzed my data using CDA, which allowed for a nuanced approach to analysis with regard to the role of language in relation to society (Fairclough et al., 2011) and the ways in which the participants implicitly and explicitly ascribed meaning to parenthood relative to elite-level competition. Within an idealist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology, my use of CDA enabled me to focus on both the similarities and the differences between the participants' multiple constructions and interpretations of realities by way of locating their various constructions within wider discourses such as those related to sport (Caldwell et al., 2017), gender, and parenting (Miller & Brown, 2005). Through my analysis, I was able to explore the athletes' varying parenthood experiences and the ways in which these findings related to dominant discourses related to motherhood, fatherhood, and work-family balance.

McGannon (2016) described discourse as a primary means for social action, which compels a researcher to focus on what is being “done” with words – such as to blame or to justify. To put it a different way, a researcher should prioritize not the content of language but rather the “*process and outcome* of language” (McGannon, 2016, p. 231). McGannon also highlighted that, though self-identity is a product of social and cultural discourses, the conception that discourses act as building blocks for one's self-identity does not insinuate that there are infinite possibilities for the construction of identity. Given that discourses are situated within social practices and institutions, McGannon stressed that the construction of self-identity is limited by the very element that shapes it: discourses. When particular discourses are more prevalent, and thus often dominant (Willig, 2008), this may reproduce unequal relations of power (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; McGannon, 2016), while also rendering the pursuit of novel discursive resources – or building blocks for self-identity construction – to be a much more difficult endeavour (McGannon & Schinke, 2013).

CDA as an approach to analysis has been subject to some scholarly criticism. A key limitation of discourse analysis is the degree of emphasis that is often placed on the discourse and the lack thereof placed on the speaker. Willig (2014) described CDA as an exceptionally practical tool for generating insights into *how* different people may express various discursive objectives through the use of language. Yet, this approach falls short in allowing one to determine *why* an individual conveys particular discursive resources over others and, more specifically, the motivation that may lie behind such inclinations (Willig, 2014). Additional challenges can arise in the employment of CDA in research when looking specifically at the “critical” aspect of this analytic tool. Fairclough et al. (2011) interpreted CDA as an approach that can fail to take into account the variability that exists from one culture to another and may hence lead a critical discourse analyst towards “culture-centrism” (p. 6).

To navigate these potential challenges, I followed Willig’s (2008) six-stage approach to CDA. Parker (1992) emphasized the need for critical discourse analysts to not merely identify discourses according to a given set of criteria, but to also consider the varying roles of power, institutions, and ideology. Therefore, while Willig’s (2008) framework was rigid enough to provide me with an adequate level of guidance, it was also flexible enough to allow me to maintain a degree of analysis that could be tailored to and was appropriately in line with my research objectives, the research participants, as well as my theoretical frameworks. Indeed, my use of new masculinities and feminist poststructuralist theories informed my employment of CDA. Whereas a new masculinities lens aims to challenge the notions of hegemonic masculinities, feminist poststructuralism aims to deconstruct gender hierarchies through understanding how knowledge may be produced through language as an incubator for patriarchy (Hussain et al., 2022).

To be able to work towards challenging either hegemonic masculinities or gender hierarchies (including those in relation to parenting roles as well as athletics), practices of patriarchy and discursive formations of “taken-for-granted assumptions” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 486) must first be located. Therefore, informed by my theoretical frameworks, Willig’s (2008) six-stage approach to CDA exposed me to several layers of analysis as I sought to explore how the participants’ discussions related to dominant discourses on pregnancy/parenthood and gender and how these sentiments contributed to their ascribed meanings and knowledge within an elite-level sport context.

The first stage of analysis, *discursive constructions*, involved transcribing each of the recorded interviews, which allowed me to familiarize myself with the data and to identify the different ways in which parenthood in relation to elite-level competition was both implicitly and explicitly constructed in the text. During the second stage, *discourses*, I focused on the similarities and the differences between these constructions by way of specifically locating them within wider discourses such as those related to sport (Caldwell et al., 2017), gender, and parenting (Miller & Brown, 2005). The third stage, *action orientation*, prompted me to further reflect on how parenthood in elite-level competition was constructed at particular points in the text and how this positioning was associated to the other discourses. During the fourth stage, *positionings*, I considered the context and positioning of the research participants themselves in relation to the discourses on sport, gender, and parenting. Building on this, the fifth stage, *practice*, led me to explore whether the different participants’ positions had potential to provide opportunities for action, such as contributing to the development of better support for elite athletes who desire to be parents (and not at the expense of their careers in sport). Lastly, the sixth stage of analysis, *subjectivity*, guided me to reflect on the subjectivity behind the research

participants' positionings within the discourses. To heighten my understanding with regard to each of the participants' individual perspectives on parenthood in relation to elite athletics, I thus considered what they might have felt or thought amid the various experiences that they described.

Thesis Format

My thesis consists of two publishable papers. In the first of these two papers, which is presented in Chapter 2 of my thesis, I describe my research process and findings regarding my first primary research objective: to explore the fatherhood experiences of male elite/international and world-class athletes and the impact of children on their high-performance athletic careers. Specifically, in this first paper, I discuss my results from conducting a critical discourse analysis of 10 semi-structured interviews with male elite/international and world-class athletes. In the second publishable paper, which is presented in Chapter 3, I describe my research process and findings from my second primary research objective: to explore the ways in which pregnant and parenting elite/international and world-class athletes perceive the developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics. In this paper, I discuss my results from conducting a CDA of 21 semi-structured interviews with female and male elite/international and world-class athletes who are parents or pregnant/expectant parents. I close my thesis with a conclusion chapter wherein I reflect on some of the key implications of both of these papers with regard to theory, methodology, and policy development that could significantly benefit high-performance athletes who are pregnant/parenting. In this final chapter, I also address some limitations of my research and provide considerations for future avenues of research.

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Chapter 2: Fatherhood in Elite Athletics: Sacrifice, Selfishness, and Gaining “Dad Strength”

Abstract

The degree to which parenthood is accepted within elite-level sport has recently begun to shift due to the growing body of scholars and athletes who have explored and publicly discussed the many aspects of parenthood and elite athletics. These actions have brought many concerns and issues to light including the lack of support and resources that are (un)available for pregnant/parenting athletes. Yet, the experiences of male elite athletes who are fathers have been largely absent from scholarly discussions. I used new masculinities theory, community-based participatory research, and semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of 10 elite/international and world-class athletes ($n = 9$ fathers, $n = 1$ expectant father) and the impact of children on their athletic careers. Through critical discourse analysis, I found that fatherhood both improves as well as impedes elite athlete-fathers' athletic performance. Recognizing the impact of children on male athletes' athletic careers may lead to better support for athlete-fathers while also contributing to diminishing the expectation that women are primary caregivers to children. These findings thus add important nuance to a body of literature that, to date, has ignored male athletes.

Elite athletes are required to constantly manage various expectations from athletic performance to nutrition, sleep, and recovery, which can trickle into “life-consuming territory” (Boniface, 2017, para. 3). Though a career in professional sport leaves little room for other major life events – such as parenthood – this is not to say that this type of balance is an impossible feat. Indeed, numerous scholars and athletes have recently explored and publicly expressed several elite athlete-parents’ successful journeys as they have pursued parenthood amid a career in elite-level sport. Such actions have brought many concerns and issues to light including the severe lack of support and resources that are (un)available within the sports industry for pregnant/parenting elite athletes – particularly athlete-mothers.

There is a scarcity of attention concerning the experiences of male elite athletes who are fathers. Notably, this gap in understanding of athlete-fathers’ experiences coincides with recent shifts in men’s roles in childcare (Machin, 2015; Wall & Arnold, 2007) and thus underscores the need for further research into the ways in which male athletes are affected by fatherhood and dominant discourses that portray fathers as secondary parents (Stevens, 2015; Sunderland, 2000; Wall & Arnold, 2007). The purpose of this study was therefore to explore the fatherhood experiences of male elite/international and world-class athletes and the impact of children on their high-performance athletic careers.

In this chapter, I present my review of the relevant areas of literature, my use of new masculinities theory, community-based participatory research methodology, semi-structured interviews, and critical discourse analysis. Next, I present my results of this study. I then close this chapter with a discussion of my findings and reflect on some of the limitations of this study, recommendations for future research, and my conclusion.

Literature Review

Men's Roles in Parenting

There has been a substantial shift over the years in societal perceptions of fatherhood (Meleagrou-Hitchens & Willig, 2022) as well as gender roles in parenthood (Oláh et al., 2021). Particularly in Western societies, the longstanding “traditional” role of a father has been denoted by an idealized ability to protect and provide for one’s children and family (Buchler et al., 2017), while the “new” father insinuates an expectation for men to be more nurturing than in the past and to care for their children both physically and emotionally (Tichenor et al., 2011; Wall & Arnold, 2007). A major caveat within the shifting of parenting roles is that fathers are discursively produced as falling into one of two classifications: the traditional father versus the new father. Reducing fatherhood to two mere classifications can be problematic given that men tend to fluctuate between these two classifications at different points in time (Lewington et al., 2021). Scholars have thus recently advocated for fatherhood involvement to be considered along a continuum (Bataille & Hyland, 2022). Importantly, regardless of where a father may fall within such a range, fatherhood represents an immense transition period that is packed with a myriad of changes within many men’s lives.

Impacts of (Involved) Fatherhood on Men

Fathers who are involved (to any degree) in caring for their children face numerous life adjustments, including varying forms of emotional changes (Chin et al., 2011) and sleep disturbance (Wynter et al., 2020). The many ways in which fatherhood impresses upon men are often overlooked given the significant focus that is placed on mothers’ experiences, which can leave fathers feeling ill-prepared for the transition into parenthood (Condon et al., 2004) and with a lack of resources geared towards them (Baldwin et al., 2018; Darwin et al., 2017).

An element of particular concern is the level of stress that fathers experience. The stress felt by fathers can be especially exacerbated by modified sleep patterns that are characteristic of new parenthood (i.e., a lack of sleep as well as poor quality and/or quantity of sleep). The combination of these factors can have severe impacts on fathers' mental health and wellbeing (Da Costa et al., 2019; Philpott et al., 2019). It is equally as important to note that a significant number of men also experience many positive changes through their transition into fatherhood, including newfound feelings of confidence (Kotila & Kamp Dush, 2013) and motivation (Keizer et al., 2010), as well as improved emotional, mental, and even physical health (Astone & Peters, 2014; Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006; Knoester et al., 2007; Kotila & Kamp Dush, 2013). However, a potential barrier to realizing the benefits of involved fatherhood are the challenges that can arise when balancing family with career.

Fathers' pursuits towards work-family balance are often hindered by conflicting expectations, which can leave fathers in a position where they might experience feelings of guilt (Gonçalves et al., 2017) for decreasing work hours to spend time with children (Moran & Koslowski, 2019) or for sacrificing time with their children to attend to work-related matters (Machin, 2015). Regardless of the approach to parenting, there are various difficulties in establishing work-family balance, and these complexities are furthered within a work environment that is as intense, demanding, and emotional as high-performance sport (Taylor et al., 2019).

Elite Athletes as Fathers

A career as an elite athlete represents a work environment with which it can be difficult to balance other life elements, including family. There is a growing body of researchers who have explored the many aspects of motherhood and elite athletics; however, there is a lack of

research aimed at recognizing not only that the career of an elite athlete-father can, too, be affected by parenthood, but also understanding how such a significant life change may impact male athletes. The limited representation of the experiences of professional male athletes as fathers may be seen as a reflection of the view that women are primary caregivers (Locke & Yarwood, 2016; McGannon et al., 2018), which can, in turn, restrict the development of gender equity. The limited research that has focused on fathers in sport has included fathers' influence on youth participation in sport (Coakley, 2006; McGannon et al., 2018; Pot & Keizer, 2016), how fathers construct and enact the meaning of a "good father" within the context of sport and leisure (Park & Kwon, 2019), or has been in relation to either fathers as high-performance sport coaches (Graham & Dixon, 2014, 2017), or as athletic trainers (Rynkiewicz et al., 2021).

McGannon et al. (2018) did, however, explore the media representations of one male athlete's journey as both a father and high-profile athlete and identified two major identities, both of which were shaped by one central narrative of involved fatherhood: the "good father" and the "new and improved athlete father" (p. 676). Additionally, Tekavc et al.'s (2015) study, in which three of their 12 participants were men who became fathers during their professional athletic careers, provided a glimpse into athlete-fathers' experiences of added fatigue, feelings of guilt, as well as how having children represented an "additional source of motivation" (p. 36) towards their sport performances.

Though these scholarly works represent significant additions to the literature, there is still a gap with regard to understanding the complexities of the crossroad where fatherhood meets a career in elite athletics, especially in light of developing cultural meanings of "the new fatherhood." My main objective was thus to contribute to attending to this body of knowledge by

exploring how male world-class and elite/international-class athletes in the sport of athletics experience fatherhood and the impact of children on their athletic careers.

Theoretical Framework

I employed a new masculinities theoretical framework to examine how masculinities as well as subsequent contemporary views of fatherhood contribute to elite male athletes' experiences of fatherhood. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) defined masculinity as “a configuration of practice organized in relation to the structure of gender relations” (p. 843). Gender relations are driven by human social practice, which differ and fluctuate across social settings and throughout time. Hence, masculinity is also varied and constantly changing, giving way to multiple social constructions within such a configuration. In turn, it is not one single *masculinity* that is encompassed within this framework but rather multiple *masculinities* (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Lund et al. (2019) described new masculinities as broadly referring to the “increased involvement of men in caring practices and especially in fathering” (p. 1380). Importantly, involved fatherhood can develop men's sense of masculinities (González-Calvo, 2019) and their embodiment of new masculinities can fashion how they perceive as well as how they manage work-family balance (Cooper, 2000). There is very little research that engages with a new masculinities framework to look at men's experiences with fatherhood in a sport context. Scholars who have engaged with this area of research have primarily focused on fathers' involvement in their children's participation in youth sports (Gottzen & Kremer-Sadlik, 2012; Kay, 2007). Thus, my use of new masculinities theory in this regard is novel.

Methodology

I used principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR) to inform my approach to this study. Rooted in a participatory research framework, CBPR is suited for exploring research objectives that are geared towards supporting men, women, or groups who may be ignored or dominated (Reid, 2004). CBPR is centred on the collaboration between two main parties: a research team and members of a community which the study is focused on (Roberts, 2013).

In accordance with the central collaborative tenet of CBPR, this study involved working closely with a community advisory board (CAB). Conducting CBPR in partnership with a CAB empowers community members and leads to opportunities for research that can directly benefit the study community (Roberts, 2013). Our CAB was made up of five elite/international to world-class distance runners who are all parents (two fathers and three mothers), which enabled for our entire research process to be guided by our CAB members' lived experiences as elite athlete-parents. In addition, I was also well positioned to conduct this research as I am currently a national-level track athlete who is intimately familiar with the sport. However, I am not a parent, and I identify as a white, straight, and cisgender woman. It is important to note that my positionality may have had an effect on this research as I explored the experiences of male athletes who are fathers.

Methods

This study received approval from both the University of Ottawa as well as the Carleton University Research Ethics Boards. With guidance and help from our CAB, I drew a purposive sample of athlete-participants, complemented by snowball sampling techniques (Bowling, 2014; DeCarlo, 2018) to recruit participants who met the study inclusion criteria: understand and speak English, current or expectant father, and of the elite/international to world-class caliber according

to the classification framework defined by McKay et al. (2022). I recruited 10 participants ($n = 9$ fathers, $n = 1$ expectant father; see Table 1) for this study. In accordance with McKay et al.'s (2022) criteria, six of the participants were Tier 4 (Elite/International Level) and four were Tier 5 (World Class). The 10 participants have collectively represented three countries in international competitions and, combined, have competed at 14 Olympic Games and 15 World Championships. I assigned all participants a pseudonym to protect their identity and omitted other identifying details where necessary.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics (N = 10)

Category	Pseudonym	Classification	Partner/Spouse
Father	Colin	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Father	Zach	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Father	Phil	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Father	Jonathan	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Father	Brian	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Father	Dennis	World Class	Yes; Female
Father	Jake	World Class	Yes; Female
Father	Remy	World Class	Yes; Female
Father	Cameron	World Class	Yes; Female
Expectant Father	Eric	Elite/International level	Yes; Female

I conducted semi-structured interviews to gather data. My use of this method allowed me to ask specific questions while also making room for each athlete to share any other thoughts (Blee & Taylor, 2002) concerning the questions I posed. I asked participants specific questions related to their own experiences of navigating a high-performance athletic career with fatherhood and what this balance might look like for them with family responsibilities, training camps, competitions, and day-to-day training. I conducted the interviews virtually through Zoom, an online video platform, between April 2021 and January 2022. The interviews lasted from 45 to

95 minutes. To thank participants for their time, each individual received a \$25 gift card. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I sent each participant their transcript and allowed them the opportunity to omit or clarify any text, if they deemed this necessary. One participant requested that his transcript not be sent to him as he did not feel that he would have any revisions to make, and none of the remaining nine participants asked for any changes to their transcripts.

Analysis

I analyzed my data using critical discourse analysis (CDA). While a discourse is broadly defined as a “system of statements which constructs an object” (Parker, 1992, p. 5), a critical discourse analyst considers language in particular as playing a central role in the construction of social reality (Willig, 2008) and the maintenance of societal power relations (Willig, 2014). In line with new masculinities theory, through my analysis I was able to explore the participants’ representations of varying approaches to fatherhood amid their high-performance athletic careers and the ways in which representations related to socially constructed discourses of fatherhood, work-family balance, and masculinities.

I followed Willig’s (2008) six-stage approach to CDA, which was assisted through my use of NVivo 12TM, a qualitative data management software package. The beginning stages of this phase of the research process involved transcribing, reviewing, and coding each interview transcript. Some examples of the codes that I identified included “fatherhood as motivation,” “fatherhood as distraction,” “balancing responsibilities,” “sleep,” “sacrifice,” “traveling,” and “guilt.” The next steps of analysis involved identifying both the differences and similarities between participants’ constructions of discourses on fatherhood, family, and elite-level athletics and the ways in which participants positioned themselves in relation to these discourses. With

guidance from my CAB, this analysis led to the construction of three discourses, which I describe below.

Results

My CDA led me to identify three discourses: (1) fatherhood improves elite athlete-fathers' athletic performance; (2) fatherhood impedes elite athlete-fathers' athletic performance; and (3) elite athlete-fathers experience a trade-off between athletic performance and fatherhood responsibilities. The juxtaposition of the first two discourses sheds light on the importance of acknowledging the tensions that exist between them, which are further highlighted within the third discourse and, in turn, contribute to understanding the varying experiences of male elite runners as they navigate fatherhood.

Fatherhood Improves Elite Athlete-Fathers' Athletic Performance

All participants asserted that becoming a father was a life-changing experience, which had positively contributed to athletic performance. Remy described his introduction to fatherhood as “the best thing that has ever happened to me, that’s for sure.” He welcomed the new responsibilities that came with parenthood: “Athletics is a very small bubble ... it’s nice to escape it once in a while and having a child definitely makes you do that.” Brian also explained that he had a newfound understanding of what it meant to gain “dad strength”: “I think having a kid definitely gives you something else to work for beyond yourself ... and something to maybe think about when things get hard in a race or a workout or whatnot.”

Dennis echoed these sentiments when he described a shift in his approach to workouts after becoming a father:

Every run ... was much more important ... I had to maximize my time. ... It was like, okay, I’m missing whatever amount of time away from [my daughter], this has to be

important. And from [the year my daughter was born] on, I think were the best four or five years in my career.

Similarly, Jake noted that having to navigate new challenges is worth the significant rewards brought on by fatherhood: “I’m struggling somewhat ... but for me, [fatherhood is] worth every second of it ... it gives you a drive and purpose and perspective on life that you wouldn’t have without a child.” Jake also added that having his daughter in attendance for competitions would be an “added motivational boost” to his athletic performance. Zach expressed an analogous position: “When my family is there, I feel like it’s less stress ... I think having your family there ... it takes that sort of edge off ... I think it could propel me spiritually.”

Phil shared how improvements to athletic performance that stem from fatherhood may be rooted in his position as not just a father but also as a role model:

I do think that there’s something valuable in [my son watching me train]. Like motivation-wise for me. ... Like hopefully those things start to register and like what goes into what we do [as elite athletes] and that would be, I think, pretty powerful.

Fatherhood thus played a very important role in stimulating significant feelings of motivation towards training, competing, and overall athletic performance for the participants.

Fatherhood Impedes Elite Athlete-Fathers’ Athletic Performance

Several of the fathers underscored some of the major adjustments that they endured upon becoming fathers, many of which provoked impediments to performance. Some of the fathers especially expressed concern with regard to substantial disruption to their sleeping patterns. Zach stressed that, “before kids ... getting a bad night’s sleep might happen once a month. And then with kids ... it can happen five nights in a week.” Jonathan described how these poor sleeping patterns can accumulate: “the moment you get into a deficit, the moment you have one bad

night's sleep ... you're playing catch up and you never get it back." The overall exhaustion that many of the fathers faced impeded their athletic performance in various ways. Jake noted:

[The] first four weeks of becoming a dad was bloody hard. ... It was sort of surviving on ... six hours [of sleep] on a good day ... it was really, really difficult. ... And I think I tore my calf through lack of sleep ... and then I was expecting to sort of train twice a day ... I was just so beat up and run down. ... I was just mentally, just really drained.

Cameron echoed a similar sense of exhaustion when he shared that his son was born "right in the middle of track season." He elaborated on the challenges that came with navigating this experience:

It was exhausting. And, honestly, it probably kept me from making the World Championship team [that year]. ... [My wife and I] got home from the hospital [after our son was born] at like midday, and I got a flight to LA that next morning to race the day after. And my body was just shocked ... that summer [season]. I was just toast the whole time.

Several of the participants also explained how daily parenting responsibilities can hinder athletic performance in small yet consistent ways. For example, when discussing efforts to fit in training as well as other athletic-related routines (e.g., stretching or recovery practices) amid a full day of parenting duties, Zach claimed that "things are just a bit more rushed" or "I just don't do [the exercises]." Indeed, having to repeatedly neglect small parts of training sessions can, over time, have severe effects on overall performance. Jonathan also outlined the lifestyle adjustments that are required to be able to adapt to the daily duties of parenting, which involve having to "let go of some of our old habits," including "routine" and "set time[s]" for eating, sleeping, and recovery. Colin also discussed these issues in the context of travel:

Prior to being a parent, if I decided I wanted to go to a training camp ... I could just go. I [could] literally just pick up, pack my car or buy a plane ticket, and go. I didn't really have any responsibilities to anyone else. ... [Now,] it just takes ... a lot more planning, a lot more organization.

For many of the fathers in this study, there were thus varying means through which fatherhood could impede athletic performance.

Elite Athlete-Fathers Experience a Trade-Off Between Athletic Performance and Fatherhood Responsibilities

In balancing athletic commitments with fatherhood responsibilities, the fathers in this study emphasized that improving their performance in one of these areas often meant having to diminish their level of involvement in the other. While this trade-off was felt by all the fathers, each of them expressed a slightly different approach to having to “divide up your energy” between fatherhood and athletic performance.

Many of the fathers in this study emphasized “selfishness” as a key element in decisions around the trade-off between fatherhood and athletic performance. Dennis acknowledged, “We’re in a sport where track is very selfish, right? It’s you against everyone else. You have to take you first. ... When you’re in season ... everything is about you.” Many of the fathers described the act of making selfish decisions as the ticket to reaching full athletic potential, but that this comes at the cost of missing out on fatherhood involvement. On the other hand, choosing to diminish the degree of selfishness to prioritize family is essentially the same as choosing to sacrifice athletic performance. Jonathan explained, “I wouldn’t want to have a child when I was at the top of my game because it’s very selfish up there.” He further noted how becoming a parent amid an elite athletic career implies that “you do have to let go a little bit of

your kind of 100% ability in the sport.” Of note, some of the fathers described this trade-off as a series of experiences, decisions, and an ebb and flow between these two extremes that were dependent on an array of factors such as the time of year in relation to competitive season, their child(ren)’s age(s), or future goals and/or previously accomplished career milestones (e.g., qualifying for an Olympic team), as evidenced below.

For many of the fathers, travelling on their own without their family was a way for them to prioritize their athletic commitments, especially around important competitions. Cameron, for example, preferred to travel on his own for major competitions:

When it came to major championships like World Championships and Olympics ... I would’ve preferred for [my family] not to be there because it ... would’ve just been one more thing for me to think about. ... If they’re there, I’m gonna be thinking about them being in the right spot at the right time, making sure their tickets are fine, making sure they’re safe. And so it adds another level of stress ... it’s another stressor that I’m not prepared to deal with.

Phil shared a very similar view:

There’s a risk ... with, you know, what if [my child] does have an odd bad night and it’s two nights before [a competition]? I wouldn’t want to risk that. And you know, this is how I make a living ... and I work really hard to get to this point. So, it just wouldn’t make sense to put that at risk.

A few of the fathers highlighted the advantages (to athletic performance) of traveling on their own not only for competitions but also for training camps, especially during the months leading up to a peak in their athletic seasons. Dennis shared that his daughter was six weeks old when he “packed up the bags and went to [training camp] for six months ... to train and get

ready for the Olympics.” He further elaborated on the importance of these types of decisions to mitigate the impediments to athletic performance that can be brought on by fatherhood:

I love my kids and I’m happy I had them during my career, but, at the same time, I was fully race mode. So, when I was away on training trips or training camps, the last thing I’d want to do is bring a two-year-old screaming kid and take my focus off that ... I didn’t want to take away from what I was doing [athletically].

However, Dennis also reflected on the difficulties that came with this decision: “That was a choice I made to have kids while I was competing, knowing that it was still going to be pretty hard for our family, with me being gone probably four to six months a year.”

Jake discussed what it was like leaving for his training camp nearly seven weeks following the birth of his daughter:

[My coach and I] made the decision to go away on [a training] camp ... The first week was probably the hardest, probably the most emotional I’ve probably ever been ever, I think, being away from [my partner and child]. ... I think looking back, I regret going away on [the training camp] only because of [my daughter’s] age. And it’s quite a lot on my partner to have to do everything else. However, it’s short-term sacrifice for long-term goal ... that’s what I keep telling myself, anyway.

Jonathan touched on how today’s technology (e.g., FaceTime or video calls) can help to minimize the hardships of being away from family and loved ones; however, he stressed how these techniques are just “not the same, especially with that [young] age ... [the child] can’t engage.” He provided a specific example of how “it was weird” when he realized that, upon his return home following the Tokyo Olympic Games, his young son’s “voice had changed a little bit,” and he felt like he had to readjust to being around his own son. These fathers exemplified

how their children's ages can play an important part in the emotional toll they experienced and, in turn, a significant component to the trade-off between parenting and athletics.

Additionally, for some of the fathers, the emotional toll that they experienced came in the form of guilt, particularly because leaving for long periods of time meant that they were leaving the majority of parenting duties to fall on their partner/spouse. Colin said,

If I were to go away for any more than 10 days or two weeks, I think it would be too much of a burden ... for my partner to be able to continue to do her job and to organize childcare for our children [because] our roles as parents are quite equal. And so ... that additional burden on her ... even if she said that she could take it on, I just wouldn't feel comfortable. ... I would just feel too guilty.

This same participant noted that it is simply not worth going through these forms of added stress to be able to fully prioritize athletic performance, in large part due to past accomplishments and the milestones that he had already accomplished throughout his running career: "I don't think I'll have many regrets based on having already been to the Olympics and stuff ... if, you know, maybe I'm cutting a few corners and it doesn't work out. I'm not that concerned."

All the fathers in this study emphasized that both athletics and fatherhood not only represent two very significant areas in their lives, but that they are also two areas in which there are differing expectations to perform. These differing expectations contributed to these fathers' experiences of having to negotiate their performances as elite athletes versus their performances as fathers.

Discussion

My findings make important contributions to literature on the experiences combining high-performance athletic careers with fatherhood. While the results support other scholars'

work on men's experiences with fatherhood in a sport context (e.g., Coakley, 2006; Gottzen & Kremer-Sadlik, 2012; Graham & Dixon, 2014, 2017; McGannon et al., 2018; Pot & Keizer, 2016; Rynkiewicz et al., 2021), as well as on the experiences of elite athlete-parents (particularly mothers'; e.g., Darroch et al., 2016, 2019; Massey & Whitehead, 2022; McGannon et al., 2015; Palmer & Leberman, 2009), they also add novelty and nuance.

Elite Athletics, Fatherhood, and New Masculinities

Lund et al. (2019) argued that new masculinities holds a “promise” for “disrupting and changing gendered practices” (p. 1389). My use of new masculinities enabled me to highlight the ways in which the three discourses that I constructed in this study challenge dominant discourses about gendered practices in relation to high-performance sport and, more specifically, elite male athletes as fathers. Although elite female athletes have recently been placed within discourses concerning athlete-mothers, elite male athletes are almost never discursively constructed as athlete-fathers, even if they have children (de Haan & Knoppers, 2020).

This construction of differences in gender and parenting upholds discourses that portray women (including female athletes) as the primary caregivers to children (Locke & Yarwood, 2016; McGannon et al., 2018) and men as remaining career-oriented and occupying the “distant economic provider role” (Bryan, 2013, p. 71), including within the field of sport (de Haan & Knoppers, 2020; Graham & Dixon, 2014). These are in stark contrast to discourses of new masculinities, which associate fathers with traits that have been largely associated with mothering and femininity (Bauer & Giles, 2019; Brandth & Kvande, 2009; Doucet, 2006), including emotional care and nurturing (Tichenor et al., 2011; Wall & Arnold, 2007). The contrast in these discourses thus places male athletes who are involved fathers in positions of

conflict and uncertainty in how they may simultaneously be good athletes and good fathers (Lewington et al., 2021).

The three discourses that I constructed in this study produce elite male athletes as not only fathers, but as *involved* fathers – despite the first two discourses contrasting one another (i.e., fatherhood improves versus impedes elite athlete-fathers’ athletic performance). The fathers in this study exhibited differing approaches to balancing their fatherhood and athletic commitments, but none of the participants alluded to their parenting as a responsibility that they would ever disregard nor as something that is to be entirely attended to by their female partner/spouse. Rather, many of the athletes attested their commitments to being involved fathers and welcomed the new emotional experiences, from guilt to gratitude, that came with this pursuit.

In this study, the athletes’ constructions of themselves as involved fathers are in line with scholarly discussions around redefining masculinities through men’s more frequent involvement in fatherhood (Scheibling, 2020). These findings support men embracing new masculinities as a prevailing approach in disrupting gendered practices (Lund et al., 2019; Randles, 2018) by way of challenging the ever-present discourses that support orthodox and hegemonic masculinity in sport (Adams et al., 2010; Stick, 2021). By illustrating that men can indeed be both involved fathers and elite athletes, these sentiments specifically contrast the dominant “part-time father” discourse, which positions men as secondary parents to women (Stevens, 2015; Sunderland, 2000; Wall & Arnold, 2007).

Elite Athletes as Fathers: Gaining “Dad Strength”

My findings provide a novel perspective from the viewpoint of elite male athletes as many of the fathers in this study emphasized how their athletic performance was positively

influenced by the motivation, or the “dad strength,” gained from becoming a father. My results pertaining to how fatherhood can improve elite athlete-fathers’ athletic performance also challenge role conflict literature wherein some researchers have argued that men are especially subjected to negative role conflict as a result of family interfering with work (Ali & Ashraf, 2021; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Kulik et al., 2016). The view that family interferes with or is a burden to men’s work responsibilities is supported by the traditional gender role model that produces the work domain as being “more important for men than for women” (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018, p. 2) and is rooted in the dominant social discourses that insinuate that men and women differ in their innate abilities with regard to work and household responsibilities (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). The athlete-fathers in this study not only demonstrated the capacity for men to be actively involved in family – and thus in roles that are beyond those directly related to being the “breadwinner” (Doucet, 2009, p. 89) – but they also showed how such involvement can foster positive life enrichment rather than conflict for men who are navigating both work and family roles.

High Performance as an Athlete vs. High Performance as a Father

A major finding in this study is that all the fathers emphasized a trade-off between their performances as an athlete and their roles as a father. Many of the fathers’ descriptions of this practice of give-and-take, where one side must be compromised for the other, were congruent with McGannon et al.’s (2018) results from their ethnographic content analysis of British professional tennis star Andy Murray’s journey as both a father and high-profile athlete. When the expectation of being a “good father” is constructed as a threat to athletic identity, elite athlete-fathers may experience what McGannon and colleagues referred to as a “push-pull” (p. 677) between work and family, which is often steered by differing expectations of masculinity in

both areas (Doucet, 2004; Finn & Henwood, 2009). Such differing expectations are entrenched within traditional gendered discourses that characterize men as both better suited to work and more likely to be involved in sport (de Haan & Knoppers, 2020), which discursively produce elite male athletes as, first and foremost, full-time athletes and, secondly, part-time fathers (Stevens, 2015; Sunderland, 2000). The pressures and expectations brought on by such discourses can limit the ways in which elite athlete-fathers manage the trade-off between fatherhood and athletics (Kangas et al., 2019).

My findings place elite athlete-fathers in positions to be able to resist discourses that reproduce the idea that fatherhood only impedes and does not improve athletic performance and, hence, that involved fatherhood is incompatible with high-performance sport (Cohen, 2016; McGannon et al., 2018). My results also provide important nuance, as many of the participants in this study described the trade-off between fatherhood and athletic performance as a dynamic process that is dependent on a multitude of factors that contribute to an ebb and flow of priority and time management between fathering and athletic commitments. Among these factors were child(ren)'s age(s), future goals and/or previously accomplished career milestones, and time of year in relation to competitive season. While similar elements and the challenges associated with navigating parenthood as an elite athlete have been previously highlighted in the literature (e.g., Darroch & Hillsburg, 2017; Darroch et al., 2019; Davenport et al., 2022; Massey & Whitehead, 2022; McGannon et al., 2015; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Tekavc et al., 2020), all of these studies were in relation to motherhood only. My study underscores the need to recognize the involvement of male elite athletes in parenthood and both the challenges as well as the benefits that children can bring to elite athlete-fathers' careers in high-performance athletics.

There are important limitations to this study that must be considered. First, all interviews that were conducted for this research took place amid the COVID-19 pandemic. While this marked a period of time when both parents and elite athletes in general experienced varying levels of perceived stress (Adams et al., 2021; Darroch et al., 2022; Washif et al., 2021), it also limited the interviews to being conducted virtually due to restrictions on gatherings. There was thus also the possibility of a sampling bias as participants were limited to those who have internet access (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Padgett, 2017). Additionally, given that the athletes who participated in this study are elite distance runners from three high-income countries and all had a partner/spouse, are abled-bodied, and all but one are white, my results lack geographical and cultural diversity. Further research that explores the different challenges and experiences of athletes who may not have access to the same resources or support, who may be subjected to different discursive practices (e.g., fathers who are single, racialized, or members of the LGBTQIA2+ community; Carroll, 2018), and/or who may compete within a different sport context is recommended.

Additionally, in line with my methodological approach, future directions that stem from this work should also focus on the dissemination of research findings through the use of language that is both widely understandable as well as accessible (Israel et al., 1998). Thus, I am actively working with members of the CAB to co-author an article to be published in *Runner's World* (a popular running magazine) or *The Conversation* to highlight the findings of this work. Further, with my research team, we are working to develop and present a policy brief to Athletics Canada to underscore the importance of incorporating athlete-fathers in policy provisions for pregnancy/parental leave.

Conclusion

Male elite athletes' experiences have been largely absent from research on the complexities of parenthood and high-performance sport. The results of this study contribute to challenging dominant discourses concerning gendered practices in relation to elite male athletes, including that athletic performance is hindered by participation in childcare and parenting (Brandth & Kvande, 2009; Stevens, 2015). My findings also challenge discourses concerning men's work-family balance that portray fathers as part-time parents (Stevens, 2015; Sunderland, 2000) whose work roles conflict with fathering (Kulik et al., 2016).

Overall, my findings presented in this chapter contribute to the literature on parenthood and elite sport and underscore the need to recognize the involvement of male elite athletes in parenthood as well as both the challenges and benefits that children can bring to athlete-fathers' careers in elite sport. While there have been significant calls for a more profound emphasis to be placed on gender within discussions around parenthood and elite sport, the majority of scholarly attention has been directed towards female athletes, pregnancy, and maternity. In the name of concrete gender equity, it is important that athlete-fathers are included within these conversations, too. Recognizing the ways in which fatherhood can impact male athletes and their high-performance athletic careers may not only lead to better support for athlete-fathers but can also work towards diminishing the expectation that women are primarily involved in childcare responsibilities and, in turn, can alleviate the significant challenges with which elite athlete-mothers have been frequently burdened through discriminatory policies and practices in elite sport (Scott et al., 2022).

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Chapter 3: Pregnancy and Parenthood in Elite Athletics: “There’s a Lot to be Said for the Shifts That are Happening, But There’s a Lot of Work Still Yet to be Done”

Abstract

An increasing number of female athletes have recently taken steps to challenge the longstanding perception that pregnancy and parenthood (particularly motherhood) denote retirement for elite-level athletes. Despite the resulting change that has occurred in how parenthood is considered within elite athletics in particular, pregnant/parenting elite athletes continue to face discriminatory policies and practices as they navigate parenthood alongside their athletic pursuits. I used feminist poststructural theory, feminist participatory action research, and semi-structured interviews to explore the perspectives of 21 pregnant and parenting elite/international and world-class athletes (11 women, 10 men) on the developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics. Combined, these participants have competed at 26 Olympic Games and 31 World Championships. Through critical discourse analysis, I identified that, despite considerable recent advancements, there is still a need for continued change in the degree to which pregnant/parenting elite athletes are accepted and supported in the sport of athletics.

The perception that parenthood – especially motherhood – is no match for a career in elite sport is one that has been manifested through a series of expectations that are primarily targeted towards female athletes, including that the combination of vigorous exercise with pregnancy is cause for apprehension (Jette, 2011; Kardel, 2005; McGannon et al., 2015) or that mothers should sacrifice their own needs for those of their families (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Darroch & Hillsburg, 2017; McGannon & Schinke, 2013; Miller & Brown, 2005). These expectations have, over time, compounded to form dominant discourses that suggest that a woman can be either an elite athlete *or* a mother, but not both (Cosh & Crabb, 2012; Darroch et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2022; McGannon et al., 2017; Palmer & Leberman, 2009).

Recently, an increasing number of female athletes have taken significant steps to challenge these perceptions, as evidenced by both the growing number of female athletes returning to an elite level of competition after pregnancy (Bø et al., 2016; Davenport & McHugh, 2022; International Olympic Committee, 2016) as well as by the several high-profile female athletes who have publicly shared their maternity and postpartum journeys amid a world of elite sport where pregnancy has been described as the “kiss of death” (Austen, 2019; Felix, 2019; Montaña, 2019) for female athletes. Among the small yet eminent group of women who initially spoke out against the lack of support for pregnant and parenting elite athletes were Allyson Felix (2019), the most decorated track and field Olympian in history and mother of one, and Alysia Montaña (2019), a track and field Olympian and mother of three. While the need for further recognition, acceptance, and equity for pregnant/parenting elite athletes seeps far beyond the confines of athletics alone, Felix and Montaña drew attention to the many unique aspects of elite running that accentuate these issues, including sponsorship and funding structures (Darroch et al., 2019; Montaña, 2019; Scott et al., 2022), as well as the fact that childbearing years for a

female runner (Duncan et al., 2018; Mirowsky, 2002; 2005) typically coincide with those of peak performance (Allen & Hopkins, 2015; Hollings et al., 2014).

The ground-breaking steps that athletes like Felix and Montaña have taken, and the public backlash that has emanated as a result, have sparked multifaceted responses and reactions from the sports industry. Despite large companies such as Nike having adopted new approaches to better support athletes through parenthood (e.g., the introduction of new policies to protect pregnant, sponsored athletes; Kilgore, 2019; Rodriguez, 2021), Scott et al. (2022) noted that pregnant/parenting elite athletes continue to face discriminatory policies and practices. Scott and colleagues conducted a media analysis and underscored a disconnect between how members of the elite sport industry have perceived and reacted to calls for change and how the athletes have actually experienced the resulting adjustments. Further insight is thus necessary to address what Davenport and McHugh (2022) called the “urgent need” for sport policies to be updated to “reflect the fact that pregnancy and parenthood no longer mean the end of an athletic career” (para. 7). Specifically, there is a need for further understanding of the perspectives of elite athlete-parents themselves, particularly beyond those that are depicted through the media.

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of pregnant and parenting elite/international and world-class runners on the developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics. In this chapter, I first present my literature review, in which I examine how motherhood and pregnancy are viewed in relation to elite athletics, followed by a similar investigation into fatherhood. I conclude my literature review with an overview of recent changes that have occurred within elite athletics with regard to shifts in parenthood becoming more widely acceptable in this sport context. Following my literature review, the subsequent sections of this chapter include my descriptions of my use of feminist poststructuralist theory,

feminist participatory action research (FPAR) methodology, semi-structured interviews, and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Next, I present my results. I then close this chapter with a discussion of my findings and reflection on some of the limitations of this study, followed by a conclusion section wherein I propose directions for future research in this area.

Literature Review

Motherhood and Elite Athletics

To date, scholars have detailed two main underlying factors that contribute to the presence of the dominant discourse that women must choose between elite-level competition and motherhood: first, the impression that there is a physical and concerning conflict in the combination of vigorous exercise with pregnancy (Jette, 2011; Kardel, 2005; McGannon et al., 2015; Weaving, 2020); and, second, the societal view that women should actively sacrifice their own needs for those of their families (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Darroch & Hillsburg, 2017; McGannon & Schinke, 2013; Miller & Brown, 2005). Notably, such sacrifices could include sleep, training, and/or competition regimes, any of which are viewed as being at the expense of elite female athletes' athletic goals. Indeed, these key elements are further aggravated by not only the lack of research, policy, resources, and support that are (un)available for female athletes who are – or desire to be – mothers (Darroch et al., 2019; Davenport et al., 2022; Gaston & Cramp, 2011; Pereira et al., 2007), but also by the media (McGannon et al., 2012, 2015, 2017; Scott et al., 2022).

Female athletes who are pregnant and/or mothers are thus left to navigate an abundance of different barriers from managing breastfeeding, if they decide to do so (Giles et al., 2016), to media portrayals (Coche, 2017; Kane et al., 2013; McGannon et al., 2012, 2015; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018), all while maintaining their training for Olympic-level performances. As a result,

media narratives such as being a “superwoman” (McGannon et al., 2015), “super mum,” or “golden girl” (McGannon et al., 2017; Thompson-Radford & Skey, 2021) have been ubiquitous in describing elite female athletes who have continued to train and compete at a high-performance level after having children. Though researchers who have recently explored the complexities of motherhood and elite athletics have drawn attention towards the numerous experiences that are unique to female athletes, it is critical to recognize that the career of an elite athlete-father can, too, be affected by parenthood.

Fatherhood and Elite Athletics

Elite male athletes who are fathers do not face the biological experiences that impact performance in the ways that pregnant and postpartum elite athlete-mothers do; however, this is not to say that their perspectives on the role of parenthood in elite sport are irrelevant or that their experiences should remain unexplored. The significant lack of scholarly analysis on elite athlete-fathers contributes to discourses that insinuate that fathers are not involved in parenting responsibilities (Locke & Yarwood, 2016; McGannon et al., 2018). Reinforcing these discourses not only further constructs caregiving duties as being primarily feminine (Doucet, 2006), but it also depicts male athlete-fathers as seemingly less affected by parenthood and thus able to continue their athletic pursuits with minimal disruption. Notably, despite the absence of a focus on athlete-fathers in academic literature, there are a limited number of researchers who have looked at fathers as either sport coaches (Graham & Dixon, 2014, 2017) or as athletic trainers (Rynkiewicz et al., 2021). Though the experiences of coaches and athletic trainers differ from those of athletes, these studies’ findings are pertinent to contributing to a foundation of understanding of the complexities of fatherhood and high-performance sport.

Graham and Dixon (2017) described sport as a work environment that is both demanding and inflexible. This poses great difficulty for balancing fathering responsibilities with athletic commitments (Graham & Dixon, 2017; Rynkiewicz et al., 2021), especially as male athletes are simultaneously either subjected to the expectation that fatherhood should not impact athletic performance (McGannon et al., 2018) or are typically only acknowledged for their athletic identity, even when they are also fathers (de Haan & Knoppers, 2020). Though, if men are positioned as both fathers and athletes, McGannon et al. (2018) reported that elite male athletes are commonly represented according to two major identities: the “good father” (p. 676), which may insinuate work-family tension as a result of fatherhood posing as a distraction to athletic commitments (Cohen, 2016), and the “new and improved athlete father” (p. 676), which offers resistance against traditional discourses that portray fathers as uninvolved in childcare. Beyond these accounts, there is a scarcity of literature available concerning fatherhood and elite-level sport.

An Emerging Shift in the Acceptance of Parenthood in Elite Athletics

The view that pregnancy implies retirement for elite female competitors within the athletics industry has recently begun to change. This shift has been marked by changes in policies and contractual protections for pregnant/parenting elite athletes and the development of non-profit organizations, including *&Mother* (2021), that are designed to specifically support female athletes’ pursuits of both motherhood and elite sport (Scott et al., 2022). Such shifts have occurred in large part due to the pivotal roles that high-profile female athletes like Allyson Felix, Alysia Montano, Serena Williams, and Paula Radcliffe have embraced in summoning change surrounding issues such as gender inequality in sport, especially around pregnancy and parenthood (Davenport et al., 2022; Massey & Whitehead, 2022; McGannon et al., 2012; Scott et

al., 2022; Thompson-Radford & Skey, 2021). By speaking out against the many complexities of motherhood and elite sport, these women have begun to elicit change and, as major apparel company Nike (2019) put it, they have created an “important opportunity for the sports industry to evolve” (para. 3) to acknowledge and create space for parenthood within elite-level sport.

A major gap in the literature still exists, however, with regard to how elite athlete-parents perceive and experience these changes – that is, both female *and* male athletes. It is crucial that the voices of athlete-fathers be heard in tandem with those of athlete-mothers as the ways in which parenthood is regarded and accepted within elite-level competition is significant to both groups. Given the importance of both of these perspectives in exploring the overall relation between parenthood and elite athletics, through this research, I sought to explore how pregnant/parenting world-class and elite/international-class athletes perceive the developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics.

Theoretical Framework

I employed a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework to examine how language, discourse, and power relations contribute to elite athlete-parents’ perspectives on the degree to which parenthood is accepted within elite-level competition. Feminist poststructuralism requires that language be viewed as a means for the construction and articulation of not only meaning (Weedon, 1988, 1997) but, more specifically, a “plurality of meanings” (Gavey, 1989, p. 462) because individuals use language in their own unique ways to “word the world as we know it” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 483). The feminist component of this theoretical framework incorporates insights into the complexities of the relationships between gender and power (Hoerber, 2008; Kenway et al., 1994), particularly concerning how gender may be transformed or influenced by existing power relations (Weedon, 1997).

Hoeber (2008) asserted that acknowledging the “multiplicity of meanings” (p. 59) within a feminist poststructuralist framework is central to exploring gendered assumptions that may operate within organizations, including the sports industry. My engagement with a feminist poststructuralist lens thus allowed me to consider the ways in which the multiple voices and perspectives of athlete-mothers may differ from or coincide with those of athlete-fathers (Schoeman & Fardon, 2010). Importantly, in line with my use of feminist poststructuralism, I used feminist participatory action research methodology to inform my approach to this study.

Methodology

While the findings presented in this thesis are more broadly part of a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project focused on exploring the experiences of elite/international and world-class level pregnant and parenting athletes, the methodological approach that I applied for the research presented in this chapter was FPAR. My use of FPAR, which is a branch of CBPR (Wallerstein & Duran, 2017), enabled me to place gender at the centre of my research process (Frisby et al., 2005; Reid, 2004; Reid & Gillberg, 2014) and, in turn, aligned well with my use of feminist poststructuralism to examine how gender inequities within existing relationships of power (Hoeber, 2008; Kenway et al., 1998) may influence how elite athletes perceive the level at which they are accepted as they navigate pregnancy and/or parenthood.

There is a common misconception that the term *feminism* implies the centring of women’s experiences only. It is thus important to note that feminist inquiry can create space for understanding the perspectives of all individuals who seek to challenge gender-based discrimination (Hopkins, 1998). My employment of this methodology alongside feminist poststructuralism ensured that the perspectives of all athlete-parents (both mothers and fathers alike) were recognized throughout the entire research process, while also exploring how

language and discourse may shape the socio-political contexts in which such perspectives are embedded (Bauer & Giles, 2019; Weedon, 1988).

Importantly, a central tenet of FPAR calls for active collaboration between researcher(s), participants, and community members (Frisby et al., 2005; Maguire, 1987; Ristock & Pennell, 1996). The participatory nature of FPAR complements feminist poststructuralism (Cahill, 2007) by providing participants a platform for creating “new forms of knowledge and ways of knowing” (Kesby, 2005, p. 2042). Therefore, both this study as well as the larger CBPR one of which it was a part were conducted in line with the guidance of a community advisory board (CAB). The CAB was made up of five elite/international to world-class distance runners who are all parents (two fathers and three mothers). Working closely with a CAB allowed for the entirety of the research process, including participant recruitment as well as data collection and analysis, to be guided by these athlete-parents and their lived experiences of navigating parenthood amid a career in elite-level running. In addition, I was also well positioned to conduct this research as I am currently a national-level track athlete who is thus intimately familiar with the sport; importantly, however, I am not a parent. I also identify as a white, straight, and cisgender woman.

Methods

Prior to commencing recruitment and data collection, this study received approval from both the University of Ottawa as well as the Carleton University Research Ethics Boards. With the help of my CAB, I used purposive sampling, which was complemented by snowball sampling techniques (Bowling, 2014; DeCarlo, 2018) to recruit individuals who met the study inclusion criteria: understand and speak English, current or expecting parent, and of elite/international to world-class caliber according to McKay et al.’s (2022) classification

framework. A Tier 4 (Elite/International Level) classification includes athletes who are competing at the international level, top 4–300 in world rankings, and/or have achieved within 7% of world-record performance. A Tier 5 (World Class) classification includes athletes who are Olympic and/or World Championship medalists, world-record holders (or within 2% of world-record performance), top 3–20 in world rankings, and/or top 3–10 at an Olympics or World Championships (McKay et al., 2022).

I was able to recruit 21 participants (see Table 1): 12 were Tier 4 (Elite/International Level) and 9 were Tier 5 (World Class). The 21 participants included 11 women ($n = 9$ mothers, $n = 2$ pregnant) and 10 men ($n = 9$ fathers, $n = 1$ expectant father). They have represented four different countries in international competitions and, combined, have competed at 26 Olympic Games and 31 World Championships. I assigned all participants a pseudonym to protect their identity. Other identifying details have also been omitted where necessary.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics (N = 21)

Category	Pseudonym	Classification	Partner/Spouse
Pregnant	Lauren	World Class	Yes; Male
Father	Colin	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Mother	Abby	World Class	Yes; Male
Father	Zach	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Mother	Elaina	Elite/International level	Yes; Male
Mother	Taylor	Elite/International level	Yes; Male
Mother	Kate	Elite/International level	Yes; Male
Father	Phil	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Father	Jonathan	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Mother	Liv	World Class	Yes; Male
Father	Brian	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Mother	Alexandra	Elite/International level	Yes; Male
Father	Dennis	World Class	Yes; Female
Mother	Libby	World Class	Yes; Male
Father	Jake	World Class	Yes; Female
Mother	Mary	Elite/International level	Yes; Male

Father	Remy	World Class	Yes; Female
Mother	Hailey	World Class	Yes; Male
Father	Cameron	World Class	Yes; Female
Expectant Father	Eric	Elite/International level	Yes; Female
Pregnant	Becca	Elite/International level	Yes; Male

I utilized semi-structured interviews to gather data. The flexible and versatile nature of a semi-structured interview aligned particularly well with feminist poststructuralism as well as an FPAR methodological approach. Notably, feminist poststructuralism prescribes meaning to be constructed and generated by language (Bauer & Giles, 2019; Weedon, 1988) and a fundamental objective of this theoretical approach is hence to recognize the multiple meanings that may contribute to reinforcing or challenging both dominant and non-dominant discourses (Hoeber, 2008). Additionally, an FPAR approach informed by feminist poststructuralist thought provided me with the opportunity to understand how the research participants perceived and expressed their individual experiences (Cahill, 2007) as athlete-parents.

The interview guide, which was co-constructed with my CAB, included questions related to the athletes' experiences of navigating parenthood with a career in high-performance athletics and how the participants perceived the degree to which pregnant/parenting elite athletes are (or are not) accepted and supported within elite-level athletics. Interviews ranged in length from 45 to 95 minutes, and I conducted all of them through Zoom, an online video platform, between March 2021 and January 2022. Each participant received a \$25 honorarium in the form of a gift card following the interview. I transcribed each interview verbatim and reviewed all transcripts for accuracy prior to sending each participant a copy of their own transcript. This step in the process gave participants the opportunity to omit, clarify, or change any text if they deemed it necessary. One of the fathers requested that his transcript not be sent to him as he did not feel

that he would have any revisions to make. Of the remaining 20 participants, none made requests for any changes.

Analysis

CDA has been widely used by researchers across the social sciences in analyzing “text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 250) to examine the ways in which language and discursive processes contribute to shaping social meaning (Phillips & Hardy, 2002) and constructing social reality (Willig, 2008). The concept of *discourse* denotes a “system of statements” that represents a product not of an “individual’s set of ideas” but rather “of social factors [and] of powers and practices” (Hollway, 1983, p. 231). The *critical* component of CDA signifies the means for breaking down, evaluating, and changing the social phenomena upon which a discourse is built (Fairclough et al., 2011). van Dijk (1993) underscored that critical discourse analysts must focus on the use of language in (re)producing and/or challenging dominant discourses, whereby the concept of *dominance* is understood as the “exercise of social elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality, including ... gender inequality” (pp. 249–250). Importantly, this integral relationship between language and discourse represents a fundamental underpinning of feminist poststructuralism. Gavey (1989) affirmed that language, according to feminist poststructuralism, is “always located in discourse” (p. 463). CDA therefore aligned well with my theoretical framework.

I analyzed the data using Willig’s (2008) six-stage approach to CDA, which I carried out with the assistance of the NVivo 12™ qualitative data management software package. During the beginning stages of analysis, I reviewed and coded each of the interview transcripts as a preliminary investigation into the ways in which the participants constructed discourses on motherhood, fatherhood, family, and elite-level athletics. Some examples of the codes that I

identified for analysis included “current acceptance,” “changes in degree of acceptance,” “factors that contributed to changes,” “ideal level of acceptance,” and “female athlete empowerment.”

The next steps of analysis involved identifying and exploring the ways in which these constructions compared to one another and the athletes’ differing approaches in how they positioned themselves within the discourses. With the help of my CAB, these considerations led to the construction of two primary discourses, which I describe below.

Results

Through CDA, I constructed two primary discourses: There have been considerable advancements in the acceptance of elite/international and world-class level pregnant/parenting athletes; and, despite such advancements, there is still ample room for continued progression of the degree to which pregnant/parenting elite athletes are accepted and supported in high-performance athletics.

There Have Been Considerable Advancements in the Acceptance of Elite/International and World-Class Level Pregnant/Parenting Athletes

When asked to describe their perspectives on how parenthood fits (if at all) in relation to elite athletics, all participants described various positive shifts that they have either observed or personally experienced, each of which has contributed to considerable advancements in the acceptance of pregnant/parenting athletes who are of the elite/international and world-class level. One of the mothers, Elaina, stressed that though “parenting athletes have been treated differently and not fairly for lots of years,” positive changes have occurred in large part due to “awareness” on the matter having recently “exploded.” The participants concurred that the emerging degree of acceptance that is apparent today represents a significant step away from past ways of thinking,

which insinuated that parenthood (particularly motherhood) was incompatible with high-performance sport. Eric described this view:

Back in the day ... 10 years ago, 20 years ... it would've been, okay, [a female athlete who's pregnant], she's done. She's gone. Like, she's out of the system. We can now use [her] funding to support somebody else. [But] now it's very much changed.

Libby described the level of acceptance of pregnant and parenting athletes as having “changed a lot over the last few years,” and how this shift positively influenced her approach to parenthood during her athletic career: “When I was in my early twenties, I would never have thought that I would be in a position where I would have a kid and want to come back to compete [at the elite level].”

Hailey drew attention to how the increased acceptance has taken shape through changes in language among individuals who are involved in elite-level athletics:

It's no longer acceptable for a meet director to say you can't bring your kids or your agent to say, well, you shouldn't, that's a bit of a distraction. Like you can't say that anymore. So no longer, like, is it dominated by that kind of language.

While this remark certainly bears significance for both father- and mother-athletes, Hailey emphasized the importance of changes in women's empowerment in contributing to this shift:

You know, women can stand up for themselves and say like, “No, no, no, that's not right.” And so there is a culture now that there's more pushback and it's okay. Instead of this old boys' club where you're feeling like it's all men sitting at the table, you know, nobody's thinking like women.

Each participant was asked to describe whether they felt there was a pivotal moment, factor, or event that may have sparked recent changes in the acceptance of pregnant/parenting

elite athletes in athletics. Jonathan noted, “athletes are [now] having longer careers,” which was similarly expressed by Lauren when she described that longer careers in sport imply the increased likelihood of parenthood overlapping with and being incorporated into an athlete’s athletic career:

I think sports used to be less of a career and people wouldn’t stay in them long enough to really have to worry too much about parenting. ... Now, you know, we’re finding ways to stay in sport longer, and it really does become more of a career. So, like with any job ... the work-life balance and parenting and maternity leave, now it’s coming into the conversation.

Brian was also among the several participants who drew parallels between a career in sport, alternative lines of work, and the presence – or lack thereof – of support for individuals who are parents:

I think ... things are changing. ... There’s no longer this expectation that you go have your running career and then you have kids afterwards. It’s now more and more okay to have kids throughout your career. And ... people ... are more willing to put up a fight if they feel like women, particularly who have given birth, are facing some kind of discrimination within their [running] contracts that doesn’t mimic how they would be treated in any other kind of workplace environment outside of athletics.

When identifying factors that contributed to the recent positive shift in the recognition of elite athlete-parents, 20 of the 21 participants (all but one father) mentioned the significance of female athletes such as Allyson Felix and Alysia Montaña having publicly shared their experiences with navigating pregnancy amid their athletic careers. Felix and Montaña’s open expressions brought necessary attention to issues concerning the lack of maternity support within

elite athletes' contracts. The participants emphasized that no changes seemed to be in motion to address this "backwards" and "ruthless" absence of support until Felix and Montaña broke their nondisclosure agreements with their corporate sponsors. Jake described Felix as the "torchbearer in leading and paving the way." Jonathan noted that "certainly, 20 years ago, not only [Felix's] voice probably wouldn't have been heard, I'd say she would not have carried on in the sport." Cameron remarked that "now, we're kind of really pushing forward on that [female] empowerment side of things," and Eric noted that, today, we are "finally at a ... stage in society where there [is] pushback." Mary argued that these shifts have enabled athletes to be able to step "into their real voice" and ensure that their experiences of lack of support are heard.

The "courage" and "boldness" that female athletes like Felix and Montaña have displayed has resulted in what Elaina described as "changing the expectations and the norms" when it comes to elite athletes combining parenthood with their careers in athletics. She also expressed that "it took ... one or two athletes [to speak out], and then it was a domino effect." Alexandra shared a similar perspective:

I think there was a time ... where it was hush hush ... no one talked about contracts, especially when it came around pregnancy. But then ... as soon as someone speaks out, that gets the door open for other people to start having conversations comfortably [and] honestly to say, you know, "no, I got screwed too."

While the increasing prevalence of these discussions around the lack of maternity protections is crucial to better support female athletes who are pursuing motherhood, some of the athlete-fathers reported on how such conversations concerning parenthood and athletics play an important role for male athletes, too. Colin noted,

I think that all the conversations and the advocacy that's happened around mothers and their contract reductions around being pregnant and stuff like that has been a big area that we've seen a lot of positive movement in the sport. ... I think that's something that is just gonna continue to evolve in a positive way ... certainly for mothers, but, you know, potentially for dads, too. ... These are conversations that are happening ... not just amongst athletes ... but ... I would say almost everyone in the sport is more aware of it now ... even at the sport organization level.

Recognizing how shifts in expectations around parenting and elite athletics can also impact male athletes is pertinent when considering the “stigma” that Jonathan identified: “There might’ve been a stigma of, you have a child ... whether you’re the female or the male ... of the male has to go and get a stable job and the female can’t come back from a birth.” Notably, as more women are now returning to an elite level of sport postpartum and men are now more involved in parenting practices, Jonathan pointed out how “that stigma, I don’t think is there as much.” Such changes have hence created space for athlete-fathers to also position themselves as role models for other athletes, which Jonathan illustrated with a personal example:

Even the fact that two weeks ago, I was discussing with two very young [world-class level] athletes [who are about to become parents] ... about how they’re going to negotiate the next while. And I’m just giving them little bits of what I’ve experienced so far.

Recognizing this growing awareness and these discussions that are taking place is especially important to be able to continue the progression in the degree to which elite athlete-parents are accepted and supported.

There is Still Ample Room for Continued Progression of the Degree to Which Pregnant/Parenting Elite Athletes are Accepted and Supported in High-Performance Athletics

All participants identified a need for continued progression in the degree to which pregnant/parenting elite athletes are accepted and supported in high-performance athletics because, in Kate's words, "there's a lot to be said for the shifts that are happening, but there's a lot of work still yet to be done." Dennis argued,

The changes that I've seen are just ... discussion. So, people are talking about it now. ...

It's more public and more accepted that female athletes are going to have children, but I don't know if I've seen ... widespread ... change.

Liv shared that the discussions that have occurred by no means represent the be-all and end-all of solving the issues, particularly for female athletes:

I think we're between ... a preliminary stage and being accepted. I think a lot of stuff is changing right now in society and especially around ... sport in general. And so I think very much sport allows parents to compete at a high performance level – to some degree. ... More specifically for men. If you're a woman, I don't know if it's as widely accepted.

Elaina proposed an underlying factor in the differences in treatment between female and male athlete-parents:

It feels to me like when I have my kids with me that there's an expected ... burden.

[T]hat it's going to detract from my athletic performance ... whereas with a guy ... [if] a [male athlete is] with his children and his wife, it's assumed that she [the wife] is, you know, taking over all the childcare duties.

Many of the participants still underscored the value that would come from increasing the level of support that is offered through elite-level athletics to all pregnant/parenting elite athletes (i.e., both mothers *and* fathers). Remy underscored how, among all elite athletes, those who are parents certainly do not represent the majority: “it’s not like everyone on the start line is a parent. I think ... you’re more likely [the] odd one out being a parent on the start line.” Alexandra expressed this in a similar way when she described her experience at the Olympics as the only member among her country’s athletics team who had children: “I made it work ... but, you know, I was certainly the odd duck in the group.”

The challenges that elite athlete-parents face may hence be easily overlooked, which can leave these athletes feeling unsupported. For instance, Kate disclosed having felt an “identity shift” upon becoming a parent: “I went from being a professional athlete to like, I can’t run at all, to who am I if I’m not running? And that was a really difficult change.” Eric, an expectant father at the time of the interview, alluded to an analogous “fear” of this emotional uncertainty that may come with parenthood:

You might have all the best intentions in the world to come back to sport, but you also might go, you know what, I’m now super focused on my family. And I just wanna do that. So ... there [is] a fear of that.

This feeling was echoed by Cameron when he described his initial experiences of becoming a father amid his athletic career:

One of the biggest things for me to overcome in that first ... year of being a father [was], you know ... most people don’t have ... something that they’ve committed their lives to with the same intent as a professional athlete has to commit their life to ... I was like ... I’m gonna be a dad and a professional athlete ... they’re gonna go hand in hand. But then

as soon as ... [my child] was ... born and ... [it was] like, yeah, this truly is the most important thing. And, really, if I don't run another race in my life, whatever. So, I had to kinda work with my sports psych to kind of re-ignite the importance of running. Because if it was like, well, you know, do you want to retire? No, I don't. ... So, I had to ... be like, okay, this is your career. ... You're now doing it for [child's name] and doing it for my wife instead of just doing it for yourself. And that was the way I needed to look at it.

Kate emphasized her concern for the lack of support in this regard: "I think that that's something that ... we could definitely work on as like a running community to support [athlete-parents] in that phase who are kind of going through that identity shift." Mary also touched on the importance of support when she said, "I don't have to wait [to have a child] until my career is over. I could possibly do this in the middle. If I know I have the right support," and she stressed that having the "right support" should be a reality for all athletes:

And ... like extend that [support] to fathers ... or whoever is staying home ... they should be able to have some sort of paid leave ... I think that's really important to parenthood to have a dad be involved ... but I think the difference is they don't have the physical toll that we went through, so it's different. But even though they're not experiencing that, they can definitely get fatigued ... I could see a [male] runner getting in a cycle of fatigue ... he's still doing kind of all the [parenting] things.

Many of the participants also underscored how female athletes require differing types of support due to challenges that are specifically in relation to pregnancy. For instance, Libby described pregnancy and motherhood as a "huge life adjustment," and Liv shared how,

There were a lot of things that I was naive to, like how hard it is to come back on the woman's body ... the rest and the energy levels is one thing, but just like adapting your

body to training and to nursing and carrying a baby for nine months was the hardest thing. ... You need those first six weeks just to recover and let your body just be like, holy shit, we have a baby.

Similarly, Kate said, “When you have a baby, you are not your same person ... everything changes. And I think that is, you know, something that I underestimated until I went through it.”

These sentiments are important to consider when it comes to supporting an athlete as they return to training and competition after giving birth and, importantly, being cognisant of any pressure that may be put on athletes to pursue this return in a certain amount of time. Hailey stressed, “I definitely felt like I [had] to get back quick, for all the performance and funding reasons. But, it’s unrealistic. ... It’s a high ask to do it within a year. Two years is okay.”

Additionally, Lauren stated,

[E]specially the female [athlete] feels the rush to get back after physically having to take time off. [But] the real timeline, we’re finding out, for your body to be ready to train and race at that [elite] level is longer than what a lot of women are given time for. So [there’s] definitely ... pressure there to ... come back before you’re physically advised to.

The athletes in this study therefore emphasized the significance of the positive shifts that have occurred in the increased acceptance towards pregnant/parenting elite athletes, but they also pushed the need for continued progression in this regard. Perhaps Liv summarized it best when she said that “it’s not okay” that parenthood is “not [fully] accepted yet ... it’s started, but ... we’re not there yet.”

Discussion

The use of feminist poststructuralism and an FPAR approach supported me in examining the perspectives of elite/international and world-class level athletes who are pregnant and/or

parenting. The discourses that I identified in this study further scholarly discussions around the representation of elite athletes within discourses of parenthood and elite athletes. Notably, my results highlight the importance of hybridity as elite athlete-parents, particularly mothers, have challenged the discursive productions of athletes as needing a singular focus in their lives. Moreover, my findings also emphasize the particular lack of fathers' inclusion in discourses pertaining to parenthood and athletics. Therefore, in my discussion below, I expand on the role that these men play in this regard and reflect on the implications of how, when discussing the space that parenthood occupies within athletics, all the fathers in this study defaulted to talking about women and motherhood.

Advancements in the Acceptance of Elite Athlete-Parent Hybridity

The pursuit of a career in elite sport has been portrayed as one that is not conducive to the balancing of multiple major life elements or identities. Spowart (2021) noted the widespread prevalence of the expectation that athletes who are truly “serious” or “committed” are ones who “organize their whole lives around their sport” (p. 194). Given that elite athletes are often discursively positioned according to their athletic endeavours, the sport industry often fails to recognize the multiple identities and responsibilities that athletes hold outside of sport (Tsang, 2000), such as parenthood. This can severely affect elite athlete-parents by subjecting athletes to what Elaina described as an “expected burden” that incorporating parenthood into their lives will undermine their athletic performance.

My results challenge the discursive reinforcement of elite athletes as individuals who thrive with a one-dimensional focus or identity. The athlete-parents in my study stressed that the world of elite athletics has begun to shift to support the idea that parenthood responsibilities and athletic commitments can go hand in hand. These results support Shogan's (1999) argument that

hybrid athletes' rejection of the homogenizing forces of sport discipline can create space for "new ways of understanding and participating in high-performance sport" (p. 88). The participants identified athletes' advocacy towards acknowledging and pursuing the hybridity of being both an elite athlete and a parent as a major element in contributing to disrupting the lack of acceptance that pregnant/parenting athletes have received in the past, and, in turn, have challenged the singular-focus discourse to which elite athletes are subjected (Shogan, 1999).

The Need for Continued Change in the Acceptance of Elite Athlete-Parents

In addition to their emphasis on the positive changes that have occurred within elite athletics around support for athlete-parent hybridity, the participants also expressed the need for continued change. While the calls for improvements in support that were highlighted by the mothers in this study further previous scholarly discussions around motherhood and participation in elite athletics (Darroch et al., 2019; Davenport et al., 2022; Jackson et al., 2022; Massey & Whitehead, 2022; McGannon et al., 2015; Sundgot-Borgen et al., 2019), the inclusion of athlete-fathers' perspectives provides a novel contribution to the literature on athlete-parents.

Interestingly, when discussing parenthood and how it fits into athletics, all the participants – including the fathers – defaulted to primarily talking about female athletes and motherhood. This pattern gave rise to two key subsequent findings: first, parenthood continues to be discursively produced as a responsibility or concern primarily for women; and second, male athletes represent an untapped resource for allyship for female athletes.

When discussing the lack of support that is available to elite athlete-parents, all the participants focused on female athletes' concerns, and they argued that discrepancies in the acceptance of athlete-parents that still exist within elite-level athletics are primarily centred around female athletes, pregnancy, and maternity. These findings further dominant discourses

that portray parenthood as primarily a woman's concern, which are supported by expectations such as that women should sacrifice their own desires (e.g., their elite athletic goals) for the needs of their families (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Darroch & Hillsburg, 2017; McGannon & Schinke, 2013; Miller & Brown, 2005). More specifically, examining these findings through a feminist poststructuralist lens contributes to an understanding of how this is a reflection of the upholding of dominant discourses of gendered parenting roles, including that women are assumed to be the ones who handle childcare responsibilities (Locke & Yarwood, 2016; McGannon et al., 2018) and that men are better suited to paid work, more likely to be involved in sport (de Haan & Knoppers, 2020), and, if they are indeed parents, they are portrayed as part-time and secondary parents compared to women (Stevens, 2015; Sunderland, 2000; Wall & Arnold, 2007).

Furthermore, the results of this study also point to the fact that although the sport industry enables parents to “compete at a high performance level,” this is an opportunity that is “more specifically for men.” This finding sheds light on a lack of gender equity in elite athletics and a failure to recognize that female athletes may require different forms of support than their male counterparts. It is, in other words, “not enough to simply extend the same opportunities to men and women in the name of equality” (Darroch et al., 2019, p. 2155) as doing so is to ignore the dominant masculinity practices that are embedded in sport, which operate to privilege men over women (Hoerber, 2008). That being said, many of the athlete-fathers' distinct focus on female athletes and motherhood throughout the discussions that took part for this study draws attention to the fact that male athletes are untapped resources as allies for female athletes. In line with Lebel et al.'s (2021) emphasis on the importance of having male athletes as advocates for change within women's sports, by recognizing the distinct experiences around pregnancy and

motherhood that women face, the fathers in this study exemplified that they are indeed in a position to amplify and add to the women's voices in challenging the dominant discourses that perpetuate the view that motherhood is reproductively incompatible with elite sport (Cosh & Crabb, 2012; McGannon et al., 2015).

There are a few limitations to this study that must be considered. I must first acknowledge that my own positionality as a woman may have elicited different responses (and thus results) than if it had been a male interviewer who conducted this research. Furthermore, the individuals who participated in this study are elite distance runners from four high-income countries and they all had a partner/spouse. Given this relatively homogeneous representation of athlete-parents, future research should explore the perspectives of athletes who are from groups that experience marginalization (McGannon et al., 2015), including low-income, disabled, single, and/or gender diverse individuals. Such future directions would provide a more diverse and nuanced understanding of the various discourses surrounding acceptance and support of parenthood within elite sport.

Furthermore, in line with my FPAR approach and thus the importance of further action and knowledge mobilization, together with members of the CAB and my research team, we are working to prepare an executive summary of these research findings to be shared among athlete-parent community members and key stakeholders (e.g., athletic governing bodies, corporate sponsors, and policymakers) to highlight the need for further support of pregnant/parenting elite athletes. Further, I have also developed an infographic (see Appendix D), which I plan to disseminate to a diverse audience through social media platforms including Instagram, to illustrate the progression of how pregnancy/motherhood have become increasingly more accepted within elite athletics and important calls to action for continued change in this regard.

Conclusion

Drawing on feminist poststructuralism, the primary purpose of this study was to explore how pregnant/parenting world-class and elite/international-class runners perceive the developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics. My results presented in this chapter indicate that both elite athlete-mothers and fathers alike have perceived advancements in the acceptance of parenthood within elite athletics, which have occurred in large part as a result of several athletes having recently led by example in epitomizing the importance of hybridity as both athletes and parents.

Furthermore, my inclusion of athlete-fathers' perspectives in this research provides a novel contribution to scholarly discussions concerning elite athlete-parents, which have, to date, been primarily focused on the experiences of female athletes as mothers (e.g., Darroch et al., 2016, 2019; Davenport et al., 2022; Massey & Whitehead, 2022; McGannon et al., 2015; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). My analysis enabled me to identify how athlete-fathers can amplify and add to female athletes' voices in challenging the dominant discourses that perpetuate the view that motherhood is reproductively incompatible with elite sport (Cosh & Crabb, 2012; McGannon et al., 2015). Thus, the research that I have presented in this paper can act as a critical starting point for future studies that include a multiplicity of perspectives and voices to explore the various meanings (Hoerber, 2008) that may be ascribed to parenthood in relation to elite-level sport.

My results also indicated that there is a need for continued change and hence further research in terms of the level of acceptance and support for athlete-parents, particularly in elite athletics. For example, future research that looks at elite athlete-parents' insights into how they could be better supported within elite-level competition would be fruitful in contributing to

continued change through widespread policy development to reflect prioritization of parental leave and concrete support for elite/international and world-class athletes.

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Chapter 4: Conclusion

In this conclusion chapter, I first provide a summary of each of the two publishable papers that I have presented in Chapters 2 and 3 of my thesis. Following these summaries, I then bring my findings of these two papers together to describe how, when taken together, my results further scholarly discussions on the experiences of elite and world-class athletes who are pregnant and/or parenting. Specifically, I explore and reflect on key implications of my research with regard to theory, methodology, and policy. Next, I address some of the limitations of my research, followed by my considerations for future avenues of research and knowledge mobilization opportunities, which I believe could both enrich the scholarly understandings in this field and also significantly benefit high-performance athletes who largely depend on leadership, policy, and practice within the sports industry.

Summaries of Publishable Papers

Chapter 2

In my first publishable paper of this thesis, Chapter 2, I used new masculinities theory, community-based participatory research (CBPR), and semi-structured interviews to explore the fatherhood experiences of male elite/international and world-class athletes ($n = 9$ fathers, $n = 1$ expectant father) and the impact of children on their athletic careers. I carried out a critical discourse analysis and found that fatherhood both improves as well as impedes elite athlete-fathers' athletic performance, which contributes to athlete-fathers' varying experiences of a trade-off between athletic performance and fatherhood responsibilities. By exemplifying diverse approaches to this trade-off, the fathers in this study provided insight into their individual as well as collective constructions of new fatherhood within elite athletics. These findings add nuance to a body of literature that, to date, has predominantly ignored male athletes' experiences with regard to parenthood.

Chapter 3

In my second publishable paper of this thesis, Chapter 3, I used feminist poststructuralist theory, feminist participatory action research (FPAR), and semi-structured interviews to explore the perspectives of 21 pregnant and parenting elite/international and world-class athletes ($n = 9$ mothers, $n = 2$ pregnant, $n = 9$ fathers, $n = 1$ expectant father) on the developing degree of acceptance of parenthood in elite athletics. My critical discourse analysis produced two discourses: There have been considerable advancements in the acceptance of elite/international and world-class level pregnant/parenting athletes; and, despite such advancements, there is still ample room for continued progression of the degree to which pregnant/parenting elite athletes are accepted and supported in high-performance athletics. The results from this paper can advance the current need for research to be able to further understand elite athlete-parents' perspectives on the shifts that are currently occurring surrounding parenthood and elite-level athletics.

Research Implications

Taken together, my findings from these two publishable papers provide insight into how parenthood fits – and does not fit – within elite-level athletics as well as how dominant discourses of gendered parenting roles may be reinforced but also challenged in this elite sport context. Specifically, my findings further scholarly understandings concerning discourses related to motherhood, fatherhood, masculinity, parenthood, and elite athletics. Placing the findings from both of my publishable papers in concert with each other enabled me to reflect on both the theoretical and methodological implications of my thesis research, as well as the potential that these results have in informing policy development for pregnant/parenting elite athletes.

Theoretical Implications

My two papers advance understandings on how new masculinities and feminist poststructuralist theories can be used to explore elite athlete-parents' experiences and perspectives on pregnancy/parenthood within elite-level competition. To date, new masculinities theory has been predominantly used by researchers to explore gendered social relationships and hegemonic dominant discourses, especially in relation to men's involvement in caring practices (Lund et al., 2019). While such examinations are pertinent to my employment of this theoretical framework, my thesis research provides a novel approach as I applied new masculinities theory to explore the fatherhood experiences of male elite/international and world-class athletes.

Kaplan et al. (2017) asserted that the employment of a new masculinities lens offers researchers an opportunity to elicit an array of new understandings of masculinity. Indeed, in the context of my research, I would argue that my findings have not only prompted an extended view of masculinity in relation to elite sport and fatherhood but have also deepened the scholarly attention that has been paid towards gender equity in sport. In other words, currently, within most – if not all – of the available literature concerning parenthood in relation to elite sport, there has been no shortage of calls for more explicit focus to be placed on gender specifically. Yet, as depicted by the substantial and continuously growing prevalence of scholarly discussions concerning elite athlete-mothers (e.g., Darroch et al., 2019; Davenport et al., 2022; Massey & Whitehead, 2022; McGannon et al., 2015; Palmer & Leberman, 2009) and the lack thereof concerning fathers (McGannon et al., 2018), such focus on gender in this area of research has been largely geared towards women and maternity only. Notably, to attain equity, this focus must be extended to fathers, too.

My findings, specifically those presented in Chapter 2, illustrated how new masculinities theory can be used to contribute to (re)defining masculinities through men's more frequent

involvement in fatherhood (Scheibling, 2020), including within an elite sport context. Specifically, by constructing themselves as involved fathers, the athlete-fathers in this study contributed to challenging the ever-present traces of hegemonic masculinity in sport (Adams et al., 2010; Stick, 2021). Importantly, however, as a collective, the athlete-fathers in this study also highlighted the value of considering what some scholars have recently referred to as a continuum of fatherhood involvement (Bataille & Hyland, 2022) or a hybrid model that is a combination of both traditional and new father roles (Cannito, 2020).

Magaraggia (2013) noted the importance of “highlighting different experiences of fatherhood” as a way to “legitimise different masculinities” (p. 88) and, in turn, challenge traditional gender norms. As I conducted each of the semi-structured interviews, I took note of the various similarities but also vast differences in how each of the male athletes seemed to describe and portray their approaches to fatherhood. For these fathers, such differences took shape in a myriad of ways. For instance, each of the fathers seemed to adopt different approaches to balancing fatherhood responsibilities with athletic commitments, which, at times, meant that one had to be prioritized (or sacrificed) over the other. For instance, two of the fathers that took part in this study emphasized the importance of prioritizing training, especially in or around an Olympic year, by traveling alone for a training camp within weeks of the birth of their child, while others stressed how becoming a father in many ways marked the onset of having to let go of their “one-hundred-percent ability in the sport.”

Although all the fathers constructed themselves as *involved* fathers, the ways in which each of them expressed different takes on fatherhood demonstrated how each of these participants would likely fall on different points along a continuum of fatherhood involvement (Bataille & Hyland, 2022). These findings thus further contribute to redefining masculinities

by supporting the idea of involved fatherhood as existing along a continuum. Yet, recognizing the differences among male athletes' experiences through fatherhood represents just a fraction of what is necessary for disrupting traditional gender norms around parenthood in relation to elite sport. Indeed, such a pursuit requires not only the recognition of social constructions of masculinity, but also of femininity, as well (Magaraggia, 2013).

My results presented in Chapter 3 contribute to scholarly understandings concerning the use of feminist poststructuralist theory in exploring elite athlete-parents' perspectives on parenthood and elite-level competition. My findings advance scholarly discussions about the importance of recognizing athlete hybridity (Shogan, 1999) and, in turn, challenge discursive reinforcements of elite athletes as having to adopt a more or less one-dimensional identity in accordance with their sport. It is worth noting that this concept of a hybrid athlete is not to be mistaken with McGannon et al.'s (2015) finding of "athlete and mother as superwoman," which they described as a merging of "household/childcare work with body work/exercise to create a 'hybrid' athlete from pregnancy and motherhood" (p. 56). McGannon et al. reported that hybridity in this sense entailed that "success and career were all 'perfectly' attained after having children" (p. 57), which led to the construction of unattainable ideals and thus potential for psychological distress for elite female athletes (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Freeman, 2008).

In the case of my research, many of the participants underscored the positive significance of recognizing athlete hybridity not as an unattainable ideal, but rather as an opportunity to better support elite athletes as they pursue other important endeavours, including parenthood, alongside – and, importantly, not at the expense of – their athletic careers. My use of feminist poststructuralism played an important role in identifying the significance of athlete hybridity by enabling me to pay particular attention to the language that the athlete-parents used throughout

the interviews to detail their perspectives and how such language is positioned in relation to discursive productions of parenthood as well as elite-level sport. Elite athletes who are pregnant/parenting are subject to a two-pronged “all or nothing” mentality wherein one side is driven by societal expectations that are rooted in discourses of parenthood, meanwhile the other side is primarily influenced by the sports industry.

This first form of pressure, which is predominantly brought forth by societal expectations of parenthood, is embedded in discourses of what it means to be a “good mother” or “good father.” The “good mother” discourse is analogous to what Hays (1996) denoted as *intensive mothering* in that good mothers “should invest swaths of time, money, energy, and emotional labor in intensively raising children” (Elliott et al., 2015, p. 352). The good mother has also been described as one who makes sacrifices for her children (Florczak, 2004), which, in this case, could include elite athletic commitments. Moreover, the “good father” discourse reflects the expectations that are often weaved in with those related to the non-traditional “new” or “involved” father, which prescribe men to be nurturing and to care for their children both physically and emotionally (Tichenor et al., 2011; Wall & Arnold, 2007). These expectations are also in line with those of the good mother-athlete as an elite athlete’s pursuit to be a good father can come at the cost of being questioned for their genuine commitment to their athletic career (McGannon et al., 2018). Tied to these pressures of the socially constructed good mother or good father ideals, elite athlete-parents are simultaneously subjected to the problematic discourse that an athlete’s serious commitment to their athletic career must be illustrated by organizing everything around (and possibly sacrificing many things for) their sport (Spowart, 2021).

Through a feminist poststructuralist lens, my findings convey how the athlete-parents in this study used language to ascribe meaning (Weedon, 1988, 1997) to their own perspectives and

interactions within these discursive fields in relation to parenting and elite sport. Specifically, by reinforcing the importance of recognizing athlete-parent hybridity, these findings challenge dominant discourses that produce athletes as singular-identity individuals, while also challenging expectations of sacrifice that are entrenched within discourses surrounding parenthood. The recognition of elite athletes' embracing of athlete-parent hybridity provides a gateway for improved support to athletes who are pregnant/parenting. Additionally, this recognition also opens the door to other opportunities to better support athletes who may occupy a hybrid of identities that extend beyond parenthood (e.g., other care responsibilities or other lines of paid work in which they may be involved outside of sport). Importantly, for athlete support opportunities to actually materialize, a major factor in paving this road from theory to practice lies in the "action" piece of my methodological approach to this research.

Methodological Implications

I employed two methodological approaches: community-based participatory research (CBPR) and feminist participatory action research (FPAR). As FPAR is a branch of CBPR (Wallerstein & Duran, 2017), there are a number of key principles that these two methodologies have in common. Among these shared principles, the element of collaboration is of utmost importance. To this end, having conducted this thesis research with the guidance of an elite athlete-parent community advisory board (CAB), my research carries methodological implications with regard to both CBPR and FPAR approaches by means of this core participatory element. Each member of our athlete CAB was able to share and draw on their own personal experiences of navigating parenthood with a career in elite athletics. Thus, this represents a key novel contribution to advancing the use of CBPR and FPAR methodologies in sport research by bringing the voices of elite athlete-mothers and fathers directly into the research process.

Specifically, my use of CBPR and FPAR also holds potential for eliciting positive change (Israel et al., 1998; Reid & Gillberg, 2014) for elite athletes who are pregnant/parenting, which is notably achieved through action that derives from both of these methodological approaches. Included in their definition of *action* as it pertains to community-based research, Reid et al. (2006) described it as a “multi-faceted and dynamic process” that involves “speaking to validate oneself and one’s experiences in the world” (p. 317). With this definition in mind, the methodological implications of my thesis research go even one step farther: the ways in which I employed CBPR and FPAR not only brought athletes’ voices directly into the research process but, in doing so, it also provided an opportunity for these athletes to use their voices to validate their experiences (Reid et al., 2006) as both athletes and parents. A concrete example of this from my research process includes the development of our interview guide, which was designed entirely based on pressing issues that were identified by our athlete CAB, including a need for further insight into the shifts around parenthood in elite athletics and to explore gender-based inequities related to parenthood and elite athletics.

It is equally as critical to note another significant piece of what it means to take action in CBPR and in FPAR. Reid et al. (2006) described this second half of their definition of action as the “process of doing something, such as taking a deliberate step towards changing one’s circumstances” (p. 317). This was similarly echoed among Israel et al.’s (1998) accounts of the key tenets of community-based research wherein they emphasized the importance of honing in on the dissemination of research findings through the use of language that is understandable and accessible to all partners involved in the research. With this in mind, my findings thus also hold potential implications for action to occur through improvements to policy for pregnant/parenting elite athletes as well as opportunities for knowledge mobilization, both of which I discuss below.

Policy Implications

A major finding that came out of my thesis research was an explicit call for further progression of the degree to which pregnant/parenting elite athletes are accepted and supported in high-performance athletics. One acute gap within this shortage of acceptance is the lack of policy that is enacted by governing bodies and/or corporate sponsors to better support athletes through maternity, paternity, pregnancy, and/or parenthood in general. Alysia Montaña, a trailblazer in speaking out and advocating for the numerous challenges of combining pregnancy with elite running, described the need for enhanced efforts towards policy development in this regard:

We need to really make sure that these are not battles that women or mothers are fighting alone. ... These are best rectified if we can put them in writing – in policy where it's known that, "Hey, we don't have to fight for this. These are our rights." (Rodriguez, 2021, para. 5)

Montaña has certainly not shied away from pushing for this need for improved support for pregnant/parenting athletes through policy and additional resources. In fact, Montaña's co-founded non-profit organization *&Mother* (2021), which is dedicated to supporting professional athletes through motherhood, has been integral in the recent social movement concerning motherhood and elite-level competition.

Montaña and the associated personnel of *&Mother* have publicly shared a number of different resources to help guide corporate sponsors and other key members of the sports industry to adopt best practices for supporting pregnant and parenting elite athletes. Notably, included among these shared resources is a model framework for *Sponsorship Contract Provisions for Pregnancy and Parental Leave*. The development of this framework has

contributed to setting a new gold standard for the language that should be used and implemented into athletes' contracts and is accessible to athletes, agents, brands, sponsors, and the sports industry as a whole. Importantly, this framework is also geared towards all genders and any type of family structure (&Mother, 2021). In addition to this, another major initiative that was brought forth by &Mother in partnership with Allyson Felix as well as Felix's current corporate apparel sponsor (Athleta) was the provision of on-site childcare at the USA Track and Field (USATF) Outdoor Championships in June of 2022. This childcare program, which was made available to athletes, coaches, and staff, was the first ever of its kind (Dutch, 2022).

These elements serve as critical examples of what deliberate action looks like in terms of better supporting elite athletes who are pregnant and/or parenting, and I believe that the research I have conducted through my thesis highlights the importance of such action. Indeed, over the course of my numerous discussions with each of the athlete-parents that I interviewed, many of them raised various concerns around the lack of tangible support in and around elite-level athletics such as access to childcare during training camps or competitions. A recent innovation, on-site childcare that was provided at the USATF Championships, illustrates an influential initiative. Importantly, however, it was carried out and paid for by &Mother (in partnership with Allyson Felix and Athleta) and not the USATF governing body. This serves as a key call to action for corporate sponsors as well as athletic governing bodies to recognize the importance of adopting and executing similar types of supportive practices.

Furthermore, a focus on maternity leave in particular illustrates a fitting example in this regard: while it is more common today for athletes to be able to obtain maternity protections from their sponsors – which highlights the importance of the advancements in the acceptance of pregnant/parenting elite athletes – the participants who took part in my research noted that such

maternity protections are still something for which athletes have to, for the most part, *request*. In other words, while accessibility to maternity support represents a positive shift, it has yet to materialize as standard practice. In addition to this, by including male elite athlete-fathers' voices in my research, my findings also illuminate the potential for the positive change that could stem from taking action towards normalizing support for parental leave for pregnant/parenting elite athletes, as opposed to just maternity leave. Notably, acknowledgement of the significance of athlete-fathers' involvement in childcare can also contribute to alleviating the burden of parenting responsibilities that is often still placed on females and athlete-mothers.

Knowledge Mobilization Opportunities

The implications of my thesis research are not limited to the confines of academia and policy per se. Indeed, in line with the methodological implications of my research, our athlete-parent CAB recommended that we share our findings from this research as well as the larger CBPR project of which my thesis was a part through platforms that are more accessible to athletes, sponsors, agents, policymakers, governing bodies, and sporting organizations as a whole. In April of 2022, I presented my preliminary thesis findings at the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS) conference in Montréal, Québec, which represents an important stride towards knowledge mobilization outside of academic research journals.

Regardless, I intend to take even further steps to be able to reach members of the elite athletics community, as illustrated by the infographic that I developed as a part of my thesis and have included in Appendix D. Importantly, as I have identified in my infographic, my findings from this thesis research highlight that explicit action must be taken to continue to improve the degree to which pregnant/parenting athletes are accepted in elite athletics. There are thus a

number of calls to action that should be acknowledged and shared in ways that are accessible across the elite athletics industry.

The guide to best practices and model framework for sponsorship contract provisions that was developed by &Mother (2021) has set an influential precedent. Given that these resources are primarily geared towards corporate sponsors, there is a need for further education that is extended to sport governing bodies as well as national sport organizations that oversee governing bodies on the implementation of such strategies and enactment of more inclusive policies to better support pregnant/parenting elite athletes. For example, to be able to financially support its elite/international and world-class athletes, Athletics Canada (the national governing body of athletics in Canada) receives funding from Sport Canada, which oversees all programs and policies within the sport system in Canada (Government of Canada, 2022). With this in mind, it is equally as important that representatives from both Athletics Canada as well as Sport Canada be informed of best practices for supporting pregnant/parenting elite athletes.

A key actionable item in this regard includes the infographic that I have designed to illustrate the progression of how pregnancy/motherhood in particular have become increasingly more accepted within elite athletics as well as important calls to action for continued change in this level of acceptance and support. I plan to present the information that I have highlighted in this infographic to Athletics Canada and Sport Canada, in addition to sharing it through Instagram to be able to also reach a more diverse audience. Moreover, there are numerous other knowledge mobilization opportunities that stem from my research findings, many of which I am actively pursuing through collaboration with members of the CAB and the research team. Among these opportunities include co-authoring a magazine article to be published in a popular running magazine (e.g., *Women's Running* or *Runner's World*) and/or through an array of

different outlets including social media, blog posts, other online/print magazines, and podcasts. The overarching goals of these actionable items are multifaceted: to extend knowledge and opportunities to a diverse audience to urge a deeper and more ubiquitous level of understanding concerning how parenthood may impact elite runners; and, importantly, to inform community members and key stakeholders on how to better support elite/international and world-class level athletes throughout pregnancy, parenthood, and elite athletics.

Limitations

My research was limited by two factors: the homogeneity of my participant sample as well as my own positionality. First, all the athletes who took part in this study are from four high-income countries, had a partner/spouse, are abled-bodied, cisgender, straight, and all but one are white. Thus, this homogenous representation of elite/international and world-class level pregnant/parenting athletes lacks diversity on a number of axes. This limitation to my study could have been partly influenced by my use of snowball sampling: this sampling method has been critiqued for instigating a biased sample due to the likelihood of participants helping to recruit other individuals with whom they are socially connected and who thus share similar characteristics or social positions (Etikan et al., 2016).

Second, my positionality as a white, straight, and cisgender woman without children may have had an effect on this research. While we collectively, as a research team, took efforts to mitigate the limitations that this positionality may have had on my research (e.g., working with our athlete CAB throughout the research process), an important detail to note is how this positionality may have affected the interviews. For example, one of the main findings that I presented in Chapter 3 was that all the fathers in this study defaulted to talking about women and motherhood when discussing the space that parenthood occupies within elite athletics. It is

possible that, had it been a male interviewer who conducted the semi-structured interviews, the responses and results of this study may have been slightly different.

Future Directions

While the research that I have conducted for my thesis bears some important contributions to scholarly understandings of the experiences and perspectives of pregnant/parenting elite athletes, my findings attend to a mere fraction of the gap that exists within this area of research. Consequently, there are numerous avenues of research that I recommend be explored to continue to advance the positive shifts that are just beginning to occur with regard to the degree to which parenthood is accepted within elite-level athletics and sport more broadly.

First, future researchers should examine elite/international and world-class level pregnant/parenting athletes' views on and suggestions for concrete solutions to improve the degree to which these athletes are accepted and supported in high-performance athletics. Such an examination could provide a platform for athletes to speak from their own experiences of navigating parenthood amid an elite sport career to then contribute to the development of opportunities and resources similar to those that have been foregrounded and shared by Alysia Montaña and *&Mother*. For example, one topic that came up repeatedly in some of the interviews with the participants in my research was the complicated nature of athletic sponsorship that is embedded within the funding structure that is used in elite running.

Wagner (2018) described sponsorship not as a partnership but rather as a coming together of an athlete and a corporation in the promotion of a joint interest that is based on somewhat opposing objectives. While the corporation benefits from the athlete's social status and reputation, the athlete is left to depend on the corporate sponsor for "financial viability"

(Cornwell, 2014, p. 15). Notably, this can lead to a power imbalance between these two parties (Cornwell, 2014) as many sponsors have the power to terminate or reduce an athlete's contract for nearly any given reason on the basis of an athlete's inability to compete (and hence contribute to corporate branding) – including because of pregnancy and/or parenthood (Darroch et al., 2019; Felix, 2019; Montaña, 2019; Scott et al., 2022). Traces of a similar power dynamic may also be present between an athlete and other key members of the elite athletics industry such as governing bodies or athlete agents. Thus, I believe further investigations into the nature of power within these relationships and how the exercising of such power may be contributing to the lack of support and acceptance that elite athlete-parents continue to experience and perceive is warranted. Future research in this regard could be carried out within a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework given that, according to feminist poststructuralist thought, both language and social relationships of power represent foundational building blocks for the construction of meaning (Crotty, 1998; Weedon, 1988).

Moreover, another important direction to consider for future research would be to look at the pregnancy/parenthood experiences of elite/international and world-class level athletes who are from groups that experience marginalization such as low-income, disabled, single, and/or gender diverse pregnant/parenting individuals. An examination of this nature would offer a more nuanced understanding of discourses surrounding the level of acceptance and support of parenthood within elite sport and would be particularly rich if it was brought to fruition via an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991, 1997). An intersectional framework would allow for all identities (e.g., sex, gender, ability, ethnicity, sexuality, economic status) with which an athlete may identify to be accounted for, which could, in turn, lead to enhanced understanding of the ways in which various forms of inequality or disadvantage may converge (Crenshaw, 2018).

Concluding Thoughts

There is still a great amount of work, research, and knowledge mobilization that has yet to take place to continue to improve the degree to which athletes who are pregnant and/or parenting are accepted and supported within elite athletics. Nevertheless, I hope that the work that I have presented in this thesis serves to plant an important seed of knowledge that will only continue to grow and prosper in years to come. Each of the athletes who took the time to participate in this research helped me understand the importance of providing these individuals with pertinent opportunities and proper platforms for their voices to be heard. They all have a myriad of important things to say, unique experiences to draw from, and innovative ideas to share – and, after having conducted this research, I can assure that each and every single one of these thoughts, views, and perspectives are absolutely worth not only hearing, but also listening to.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Guides

In what country do you currently reside?

- Is this the same country that you represent in international track competition?
- What is your primary racing event?

What is your marital status?

Are you currently a professional full-time or part-time athlete?

Are you currently employed in any capacity outside of athletics?

Participants who are Currently Parenting

How many children do you have?

- How old is/are your child(ren)?

If you go away for a training camp, is it an option for athletes to bring their children with them?

- Would you want to bring your children with you to training camp? Have you done so in the past?

If/when you compete, do you bring your child(ren) with you?

- If not – Are there any scenarios when you would bring your children to competitions?

Do you think that there is a difference in perception if it's a male versus a female athlete bringing their children to competitions?

How does having a child/children affect your day-to-day training?

- Do you bring your child(ren) with you when you are training?
- If not, who is usually the primary caregiver for your child(ren) while you are training?

Do you think there are differences in the ways in which female and male athletes take their children/parenting responsibilities into consideration with their training?

Do you feel that your coach(es) take your children/parenting responsibilities into consideration (e.g., when planning group training times)?

How would you describe the current culture around parenthood in relation to elite-level athletics?

- Have you seen changes in the culture surrounding parenthood in elite athletics?
- If so, what do you think created this shift in culture?
- How would you describe the “ideal” culture in terms of parenting and elite-level competition?

Do you have a support system that helps you balance training/competing with parenting?

- Can you describe your support system (e.g., partner, spouse, extended family member(s), friend(s), etc.)?

Mothers

When did you return to training following the birth of your child(ren)?

- How did you make this decision? (Who/what factors influenced this decision-making process or timeline for your return to training?)
- Did you feel any pressure to return in a certain amount of time? If so, can you describe this pressure?
- If an athlete who is becoming a father took time off training during this transition phase into parenthood, do you think athlete-fathers would feel pressure to return?
 - If yes, would this pressure differ from that of athlete-mothers?

Fathers

Did you take any time off or away from training upon becoming a father?

- If yes, following the birth of your child(ren), did you feel pressure to return to training in certain amount of time? If so, can you describe this pressure?
- Do you think athlete-mothers experience pressure to return to training after giving birth?
 - If yes, do you think this pressure differs from that of athlete-fathers?

Participants who are Currently Pregnant or Expectant Fathers

If you go away for a training camp, is it an option for athletes to bring their children with them?

- In your experience, in the past, have athletes brought their children to your training camps, competitions, and/or to regular training sessions?
 - If yes, how did you feel about that?
- Would you want to bring your child(ren) with you to training camp?

If/when you compete, would you want to bring your child(ren) with you?

Do you think that there is a difference in perception if it's a male versus a female athlete bringing their children to competitions?

Would you want to bring your child(ren) with you to your day-to-day training?

- If not, who would usually be the primary caregiver for your child(ren) while you are training?

Do you think there are differences in the ways in which female and male athletes take their children/parenting responsibilities into consideration with their training?

How would you describe the current culture around parenthood in relation to elite-level athletics?

- Have you seen changes in the culture surrounding parenthood in elite athletics?
- If so, what do you think created this shift in culture?

- How would you describe the “ideal” culture in terms of parenting and elite-level competition?

Do you think athletes who are parents feel pressure to return to training as soon as possible following the birth of their child(ren)?

- How do you think these pressures differ for mother- versus father-athletes?
- Do you anticipate feeling any pressure to return to training in a certain amount of time?

Appendix B

Ethics Approval Certificates

25/10/2021

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number

H-11-20-6298

Titre du projet / Project Title

Water bottles and baby bottles:
Community-based participatory
research to understand the
experiences of parenting track
Olympians and Olympic hopefuls

Type de projet / Project Type

Recherche de professeur /
Professor's research project

Statut du projet / Project Status

Renouvelé / Renewed

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

04/01/2021

Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

31/10/2022

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

**Chercheur /
Researcher**

Affiliation

Role

Audrey GILES

École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics

Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator

Sydney SMITH

École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics

Assistant de recherche / Research Assistant

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

The uOttawa expiry date is set in accordance with the one from the Carleton University REB.

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25/10/2021

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Safaa LAMHOUJEB

Coordonnateur de l'éthique / Ethics Coordinator

Pour/For **Daniel LAGAREC** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences de la santé et sciences / Health Sciences and Sciences Research Ethics Board**

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CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE

The following research has been granted clearance by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board-B (CUREB-B). CUREB-B is constituted and operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2).

Ethics Clearance ID: Project # 114444

Project Team Members: Francine Darroch (Primary Investigator)

Audrey Giles (Co-Investigator (External))

Sydney Smith (Student Researcher)

Candace Roberts (Research Assistant)

Study Title: Water bottles and baby bottles: Community-based participatory research to understand the experiences of parenting track Olympians and Olympic hopefuls

Funding Source: (If applicable):

Awards File No	Title	Status	
112266	Water bottles and baby bottles: A community-based research approach to understand experiences of parenting Olympians and Olympic hopefuls	Active	A. CORIS Awards

Effective: October 16, 2020

Expires: October 31, 2021

This certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Clearance is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to CUREB-B via a Change to Protocol Form. All changes must be cleared prior to the continuance of the research.
3. An Annual Status Report for the renewal or closure of ethics clearance must be submitted and cleared by the renewal date listed above. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the closure of the file. If funding is associated, funds will be frozen.
4. During the course of the study, if you encounter an adverse event, material incidental finding, protocol deviation or other unanticipated problem, you must complete and submit a Report of Adverse Events and Unanticipated Problems Form.
5. It is the responsibility of the student to notify their supervisor of any adverse events, changes to their application, or requests to renew/close the protocol.
6. Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2nd edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

IMPORTANT: Special requirements for COVID-19:

If this study involves in-person research interactions with human participants, whether on- or off-campus, the following rules apply:

1. The study requires prior approval of the relevant Dean's Office. See [Principles and Procedures for On-campus Research at Carleton University](#) and note that this document applies both to on- and off-campus research that involves human participants. Please contact your Dean's Office for information about obtaining this approval.
2. You must submit a copy of that approval to the Office of Research Ethics prior to starting any in-person research activities.
3. If the Dean's approval requires any significant change(s) to any element of the study, you must notify the Office of Research Ethics of such change.

Upon reasonable request, it is the policy of CUREB, for cleared protocols, to release the name of the PI, the title of the project, and the date of clearance and any renewal(s).

Please email the Research Compliance Coordinators at ethics@carleton.ca if you have any questions.

CLEARED BY:

Date: October 16, 2020

Bernadette Campbell, PhD, Chair, CUREB-B

Natasha Artemeva, Co-Chair, PhD, Vice Chair, CUREB-B



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CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE

The Carleton University Research Ethics Board-B (CUREB-B) at Carleton University has renewed ethics clearance for the research project detailed below. CUREB-B is constituted and operates in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2).

Title: Water bottles and baby bottles: Community-based participatory research to understand the experiences of parenting track Olympians and Olympic hopefuls

Protocol #: 114444

Principal Investigator: Francine Darroch

Department and Institution: Faculty of Science\Health Sciences (Department of), Carleton University

Project Team (and Roles): Francine Darroch (Primary Investigator)

Audrey Giles (Co-Investigator (External))

Sydney Smith (Student Researcher)

Candace Roberts (Research Assistant)

Funding Source (If applicable):

Awards File No	Title	Status	
112266	Water bottles and baby bottles: A community-based research approach to understand experiences of parenting Olympians and Olympic hopefuls	Active	A. OVPRI Approval Form

Effective: **October 20, 2021**

Expires: **October 31, 2022.**

Please ensure the study clearance number is prominently placed in all recruitment and consent materials: CUREB-B Clearance # 114444.

Restrictions:

This certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Clearance is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to CUREB-B via a Change to Protocol Form. All changes must be cleared prior to the continuance of the research.
3. An Annual Status Report for the renewal or closure of ethics clearance must be submitted and cleared by the renewal date listed above. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the closure of the file. If funding is associated, funds will be frozen.
4. During the course of the study, if you encounter an adverse event, material incidental finding, protocol deviation or other unanticipated problem, you must complete and submit a Report of Adverse Events and Unanticipated Problems Form.
5. It is the responsibility of the student to notify their supervisor of any adverse events, changes to their application, or requests to renew/close the protocol.
6. Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2nd edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

Special requirements for COVID-19:

If this study involves in-person research interactions with human participants, whether on- or off-campus, the following rules apply:

1. Upon receiving clearance from CUREB, please seek the approval of the relevant Dean for your research. Provide a copy of your CUREB clearance to the Dean for their records. See [Principles and Procedures for On-campus Research at Carleton University](#) and note that this document applies both to on- and off-campus research that involves human participants. Please contact your Dean's Office for more information about obtaining their approval.
2. Provide a copy of the Dean's approval to the Office of Research Ethics prior to starting any in-person research activities.
3. If the Dean's approval requires any significant change(s) to any element of the study, you must notify the Office of Research Ethics of such change(s).

Upon reasonable request, it is the policy of CUREB, for cleared protocols, to release the name of the PI, the title of the project, and the date of clearance and any renewal(s).

Please email the Research Compliance Coordinators at ethics@carleton.ca if you have any questions.

CLEARED BY:

Date: October 20, 2021

Bernadette Campbell, PhD, Chair, CUREB-B

Kathryne Dupre, PhD, Co-Chair, CUREB-B

Appendix C

Oral Consent Script

Hello, my name is Sydney Smith. I am a Master's student in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa working under the supervision of Dr. Francine Darroch and Dr. Audrey Giles. Please note that both of my Master's supervisors will also be actively involved in this study and will thus have access to all of the data. Dr. Darroch is an assistant professor and researcher in the Department of Health Sciences at Carleton University and is the principal investigator for this research. Dr. Giles is a professor and researcher in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa and is the co-PI for this research. I would like to invite you to participate in a study titled *Water bottles and baby bottles: Community-based participatory research to understand the experiences of parenting track Olympians and Olympic hopefuls* as an interview participant. The study is sponsored/funded by a SSHRC Insight Develop Grant.

This meeting will involve an interview that will aim to understand the perspectives and experiences of elite/international [or] world-class runners who are pregnant [and/or] parenting [or] planning to start a family. Participants will be asked to discuss pressing issues that have been identified in the media including the shifting cultures of parenthood in elite athletics. With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded and, once transcribed, the recording will be anonymized and retained for five years, and then destroyed. We estimate that the interview will take about 40-60 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to take part or not to answer any of the questions. If you decide to withdraw after the interview, your responses will be removed if you notify the researcher within 1 month after the interview has been completed.

We do not anticipate any risks from taking part in the interview, nor do we anticipate that you will derive any benefit, though what you share will provide insight to enhancing athlete-parents' experiences. We will treat your personal information as confidential, although absolute privacy cannot be guaranteed. No information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent. However, research records identifying you may be inspected by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board for the purpose of monitoring the research. The results of this study may be published, but the data will be presented so that it will not be possible to identify any participants. All research data will be encrypted and password-protected at Carleton University.

You will be assigned a pseudonym and number code so that your identity will not be directly associated with the data you have provided. All data, including coded information, will be kept in a password-protected and encrypted file on a secure computer. Your data will be stored and protected by Zoom servers outside of Canada but may be disclosed via a court order or data breach. In the case of a data breach, there may be some risk given the nature of some of the questions that you will be asked during the interview. Your de-identified data will be retained for a period of five years and then securely destroyed.

This project was reviewed and cleared by both the University of Ottawa Office of Research Ethics and Integrity (Ethics File Number H-11-20-6298) as well as the Carleton University Research Ethics Board-B (CUREB-B) at Carleton University (Ethics Clearance ID: Project # 114444).

Appendix D

Infographic: Pregnancy, Motherhood, and Elite Athletics Timeline



Pregnancy, Motherhood, and Elite Athletics

Where did it all start and where are we now?



1896

The first Summer Olympic Games

- First international Olympic Games held in modern history
- Only *men* were permitted to compete
- Athletics: 12 men's events

1900

Women compete in the Summer Olympic Games for the first time

- Athlete participation: 22 women, 975 men
- Women were not permitted to compete in athletics
- Athletics: 23 men's events



After the 1928 Games, the **800m** was deemed **"too dangerous"** for women ⚠️



1928

Women's athletics introduced into the Olympic program

- Athletics: 22 men's events, 5 women's events
- Continuous concerns arose around the risks of women's participation (e.g., strenuous physical activity could damage reproductive organs... or cause a woman's uterus to "fall out")

1960**Women's 800m reinstated**

- 32 years later, the women's 800m was added back into the Olympic program
- Athletics: 24 men's events, 10 women's events

**1984****Women's marathon introduced into the Olympic program**

- Athletics: 24 men's events, 17 women's events

**2008****Women's 3,000m steeplechase introduced into the Olympic program**

- Athletics: 24 men's events, 23 women's events

**2014****Montaño races 800m while 8 months pregnant**

- Alysia Montaño ran the 800m at the USA Track & Field Championships while ~ 8 months pregnant

2015

Stellingwerff appeals Athletics Canada's discriminatory policy

- Hilary Stellingwerff contended that AC's policy that equates pregnancy with injury is discriminatory

**2016**

Athletics Canada updates policy

- Following Stellingwerff's appeal, AC replaced the term "injury card" with "health card"
- A health card due to pregnancy can now be used more than once

2018

Ultra and major marathons begin to offer pregnancy deferrals

- The Western States Endurance Run introduced a new policy so runners can defer a qualification for up to 3 years due to pregnancy
- Others have since begun to follow suit (e.g., London Marathon in 2021)

**2019 May**

New York Times articles elicit public outcry

- Alysia Montaño and Allyson Felix spoke out publicly about sponsors' lack of maternity support
- Initiated the #DreamMaternity movement

OLYMPICS

Under fire, Nike expands protections for pregnant athletes

By Adam Kilgore

Nike to change its pregnancy policy in future athlete contracts amid backlash

BY SOPHIE LEWIS
MAY 18, 2019, 12:09 PM / CBS NEWS

Nike further expands protections for pregnant athletes after fierce backlash

By Jordan Valinsky, CNN Business
Updated 11:37 AM EDT, Mon August 19, 2019

2020

&Mother co-founded by Montañó

- A non-profit organization designed to actively support pro female athletes through pregnancy / motherhood
- Allyson Felix also sits on the Board of Directors for &Mother



2019 August

Nike responds to pushback and announces new maternity policy

- In response to NYT op-eds, Nike introduced a new maternity policy for all sponsored athletes to guarantee an athlete's pay for 18 months around pregnancy
- Other athletic apparel companies have since followed suit

OISELLE - a brand that was made **BY** and **FOR** women athletes - is an official founding sponsor of &Mother!

oiselle

2021 February

USA Track & Field introduces maternity grant fund

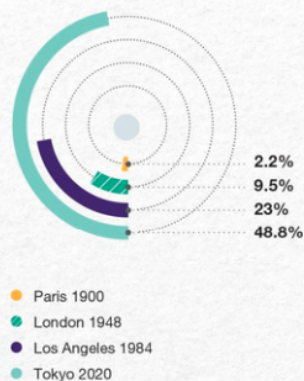
- USATF introduced a new grant to assist elite female runners during pregnancy / postpartum

2021 June

International Olympic Committee responds to backlash from breastfeeding mothers

- After significant pushback from female athletes, the IOC enacted a new policy for breastfeeding athlete-moms: Family members were then permitted to attend the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games amid the COVID-19 pandemic

FEMALE PARTICIPATION AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES



2021 July - August

Summer Olympic Games participation rates almost reach gender parity

- The IOC deemed the Tokyo Olympics the most gender equal Games off all time
- Women comprised a record-breaking 49% of athlete participants

TOKYO 2020



2022 June

&Mother initiates on-site childcare at USATF Championships

- For the first time ever, childcare services were offered on-site at the USATF Championships for athletes, coaches, and staff
- This initiative was led by Allyson Felix and *Athleta* partnered with &Mother

2021 November

&Mother releases framework for sponsors to better support pregnancy and parental leave

- A model framework developed in partnership with *Oiselle*
- Sponsorship Contract Provisions for Pregnancy and Parental Leave
- Best Practices for Supporting and Accommodating Pregnant and Parenting Athletes



2022 October

New York Road Runners and &Mother implement nursing stations

- NYRR partnered with &Mother to provide private nursing tents for New York City Marathon mothers in addition to transporting nursing pumps from the start to finish area for runner-mothers





Calls to Action

- Though we have come a long way, elite female athletes continue to face discriminatory policies and practices
- How can we continue to progress the degree to which female athletes are supported through pregnancy and motherhood?

THE SPRINT (AKA the short answer)



More evidence-based research



Greater education for coaches and sporting organizations



More transparent policies and practices across the sports industry

THE MARATHON (AKA the long answer)

- **Gender equity policy recommendations for athletic governing bodies**
 - Similar to those developed by &Mother, which were primarily geared towards corporate sponsors and contracts
- **Extend gender equity policy work and frameworks beyond just athletic governing bodies**
 - E.g., Athletics Canada receives their funding from Sport Canada; thus, greater education concerning the importance of these policies needs to be extended as widely as possible
- **Athletic governing bodies and elite sport organizations to adopt best practices and improve industry-wide standards to support pregnant/parenting female athletes**
 - E.g., on-site childcare provisions for championships (this initiative seen at the USATF Champs was brought forth by &Mother in partnership with Allyson Felix and Athleta. These undertakings should be carried out by sponsors/major athletic apparel companies, governing bodies, etc.)
- **The call for explicit focus on gender equity means that we must also recognize elite male athletes' and gender-nonconforming individuals' roles in parenting duties**
 - Failing to acknowledge how fathers are involved in parenthood results in an increased burden that falls on women/female athletes
 - We need to normalize that fathers who are elite athletes also participate in caregiving responsibilities - which can, in turn, alleviate the parenting burden that may fall on women
- **Increase athletes' access to key resources**
 - E.g., detailed physical activity guidelines for pregnant/parenting elite athletes, access to proper treatment such as a pelvic floor specialist, etc.

Appendix E

Contributions

This thesis was designed and developed by Sydney Victoria MacNair Smith, including the theorization, analysis, and writing. Dr. Francine Darroch and Dr. Audrey Giles supported all aspects of the development, theorization, and analysis, in addition to playing an integral role in shaping the final product through continuous reviewing, revising, and by providing input into writing. For the research presented in Chapters 2 and 3 (i.e., the two publishable papers that make up this thesis), the five members [anonymized] who were a part of the athlete-parent community advisory board for this community-based research supported the construction of the interview guides, recruitment of participants, as well as data collection and analysis. Both papers will be published with Smith as first author; the first of these two papers (Chapter 2) will have Darroch as second and Giles as third; the second of these two papers (Chapter 3) will have Giles as second and Darroch as third. CAB members will also be included as authors on both of these papers, which will be at the discretion of each individual CAB member and thus dependent on whether they would prefer to remain anonymous.