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Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences

**Return to Elite Sport Post-Pregnancy: The Experience of one Athlete-Mother and
her Support Network**

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to disclose the experience of one woman's return to competition in elite sport following pregnancy. As there seems to be a common belief that it is not possible for a woman to be both a mother and high-level athlete simultaneously, this instrumental case study tells the story of one woman who experienced success in these two roles. Few previous studies have looked at this experience and have done so only through the eyes of the athlete-mothers themselves; this study provides additional perspectives from this woman's husband and her mother, as they are her support network. The three participants shared their stories through telephone interviews. Extracts from the interviews are presented as narrative accounts of the experience from each of the three participants. Four main themes emerged: Dual roles: athlete and mother; Fundamentals for success in managing both roles; Others' expectations and reactions; and Training. The findings provide insight into female athletes' experiences of returning to sport post-pregnancy and add to the growing body of literature of women in sport. This woman's story can serve as a model demonstrating that success in elite sport is attainable while balancing other life roles.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The realm of elite sport is often characterized by a culture of performance which prescribes “single-minded dedication to sport performance to the exclusion of other areas of life and self” (Douglas & Carless, 2009, p. 6). With this perception it is not surprising that we do not consider the roles of ‘elite athlete’ and ‘mother’ as cohesive, and when we hear stories of women who achieve success in elite sport while being mothers, it is regarded as extraordinary. It is certainly true that there are many demands a woman must manage in order to maintain these two roles; however the two are not mutually exclusive (e.g., McGannon, Curtin, Schinke, & Schweinbenz, 2012; Palmer & Leberman, 2009).

Motherhood is one topic of particular salience to female athletes, yet still seems to have been neglected. A woman’s transition upon becoming a mother is recognized as one of the most significant changes in identity for adults (Golden, 2001). One female athlete expressed that the desire to have children is something “as a woman, you yearn for” (Carless & Douglas, 2009, p. 58). However, there is a perceived conflict between the idea of being a mother and an elite athlete simultaneously (Douglas & Carless, 2009). Crosset claimed that “sport culture is intolerant of problems surrounding motherhood” (as cited in Douglas & Carless, 2009, p. 29). As Douglas and Carless (2009) explain, the performance narrative commonly believed to be necessary to fulfill the role of an elite athlete, does not harmonize with the social expectations of motherhood; a good mother is expected to be selfless and to put the needs of her children before her own (Collett, 2005). There is a “negative stigma that is often placed on mothers who spend time away from children due to training and competing” (Appleby & Fisher, 2009, p. 13). A ‘good’, ever-present mother who dedicates her life to her children (Douglas & Michaels, 2004) cannot also

achieve peak performance in sport, as that is said to require abandoning all other endeavours to devote all of oneself to sport training and competition (Ingham, Chase, & Butt, 2002); these are the messages being sent to women regarding the “necessary” behavior in each context. This way of thinking leads female athletes to believe they are forced to choose between these two options, as one former professional golfer said “When I got pregnant, I thought, well, it’s career or babies and I decided to have the baby” (Douglas & Carless, 2009, p. 18).

Despite the presence of this attitude, some elite sporting women have provided examples that challenge these beliefs. Popular media has featured elite female athletes who have returned to their sport after having children and continued to achieve at a high level. In May 2012 RealClearSports, a website from the USA featuring sports news, published a list of the ‘top ten athlete mothers’ (Top ten, 2012). This list highlighted the athletic achievements of ten women who returned to elite competition following childbirth.

Few scholarly works have discussed the psycho-social aspect of female athletes’ return to training and competition following pregnancy. A limited number of studies have focused specifically on elite female athletes who returned to sport after becoming mothers and made an effort to bring these women’s experiences to light (i.e., Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Carver-Dias, 2010; McGannon et al., 2012; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Pedersen, 2001). Other research discussed the topic as it was encountered as a part of other objectives (i.e., Debois, Ledon, Argiolas, & Rosnet, 2012; Douglas & Carless, 2009). Pedersen (2001) advocated for more recognition of the presence of mothers in elite sport. Appleby and Fisher (2009) revealed ways that these women accepted or rejected the social stereotypes of motherhood, as well as how they created a new athletic identity for their continuation in sport. Palmer and Leberman (2009) presented how the athletes’ identities changed with motherhood, factors enabling or preventing their success in both roles, and

strategies they used to manage multiple identities. Carver-Dias (2010) outlined the challenges of continued involvement in sport, as an athlete or a coach, after becoming a mother; she suggested that organizations need to do more to help women manage the dual-roles. McGannon et al. (2012) looked at media representations of one athlete-mother and discussed the cultural narratives involved.

The literature discussed above has begun to provide an outlet for the expression of the stories of elite female athletes who have had children and returned to training and competition in sport. A predominant theme within the experiences of the women whose stories have been told is the importance of having a dependable network of support. As recommended by Palmer and Leberman (2009), gathering perspectives from the individuals in these supporting roles would be a constructive addition to understand the experience more fully. The present study aimed to accomplish this by collecting interviews from one woman who combined elite sport with motherhood as well as the significant others in her life. Considering the information communicated by significant others is valuable in that it may provide further details as well as differing angles of the same story.

As human beings we identify ourselves and understand our lives through stories (McLeod, 2006). We position ourselves within these stories that “are drawn from a shared stock of cultural narratives, which embody moral values and assumptions about what it means to be human within that particular cultural setting” (McLeod, 2006, p. 205). In the sport setting “athletes can have a small pool of narratives to draw on and thus limited access to narratives to frame their experiences” (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, p. 280). Lacking a suitable narrative resource can be problematic, limiting and cause distress (Frank, 1995; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Professionals in the sport and exercise field are urged to discover and share different stories to build on those available in these settings (Sparkes & Smith, 2009a); this “may help expand opportunities for the athlete to

fit their lived experiences into the contours of more satisfactory and appropriate narratives when the dominant narratives in sport do not fit their own experiences” (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, p. 281).

Douglas and Carless (2006) suggested “that it is necessary to explore potential alternatives to the performance narrative in the interests of both performance and well-being” (Douglas & Carless, 2006, p. 16), as “it is the responsibility of researchers to hear, understand, and represent these stories in the scientific literature to provide alternative narrative maps for aspiring female athletes” (Douglas & Carless, 2006, p. 16). Hence, since sport is typically regarded as a male-dominated and male-focused domain where often “the needs and values of women are not understood, appreciated, or even acknowledged” (Douglas & Carless, 2009, p. 29), the need to provide a voice for female athletes and to fill the gap in the literature concerning issues specific to women in sport is apparent. This need was addressed in this study by using a narrative approach to share one woman’s story. It is further pursued here below.

The objectives of this study are several: one objective is to contribute to the developing body of literature that addresses issues specific to women and provides a voice for women within the context of sport. A second is to continue to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the specific experience of female athletes’ return to training and competition following pregnancy. As there seems to be a common belief that it is not possible for a woman to be both a mother and high-level athlete simultaneously, this study tells the story of one woman who experienced success in these two roles. Previous work has looked at this experience only through the eyes of the athlete-mothers themselves or the media; this study provides the additional perspectives of significant others who construct this woman’s support network. A third objective is to demonstrate the relevancy of using a narrative approach to provide an example of a story that follows a course to elite

sport success by alternative means to the 'typical' performance narrative (discussed in detail below), which can act as a model for other female athletes. Through these three objectives the researcher hopes to achieve a fourth, which is to help improve the experiences of women in sport.

Researcher Background

I approached this study as an outsider with an interest in finding out about the experience of elite female athletes who return to training and competition after pregnancy. As an amateur, competitive female athlete myself, but not a mother, I do not draw on personal experience to inform me about this topic. However claiming the identity of female athlete, and having the expectation that I will remain an athlete in years ahead when the possibility exists that I may become a mother, this topic is relevant to my personal life.

Before conducting this research, I believed continuing in elite training and competition post-pregnancy to be an extraordinary feat that was not common in the sporting world. As I explored the topic, I found more and more examples of women who have taken on the roles of both mother and athlete. This is not to say that this is an easy task or that they are the majority; however it seems to contest my (and many others') impressions that motherhood and elite sport participation do not mix.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Narratives in Sport

As introduced above, sport, and especially elite sport, is dominated by a performance narrative that suggests ultimate dedication to performance above all else (Douglas & Carless, 2009; Tinning, 1997). One female professional golfer exemplified the performance-orientation by saying:

I couldn't be successful without it being the most important thing in my life. My golf is more important than anything. ... I think that all of us, it becomes our whole life. Because I don't think that you can possibly be successful without it being the most important thing. (Douglas & Carless, 2006, p. 20)

The statements made by this athlete are a clear demonstration of many women's attitudes in sport regarding the "necessities" to achieving success. She believes that the only way to be successful is to dedicate herself solely to her sport and she applies this to all female professional golfers; this generalization shows how dominant this narrative is in sport culture. Athletes are told, by media, family, friends, and coaches that uncompromising focus is the path they must take. The unproven rule of '10,000 hours of deliberate practice' (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993), which attracted the attention of sport organizations in Western countries, has been discussed extensively as a parameter in the long-term athlete development plans and may have a role in this narrative of uncompromised focus. Popular books (e.g., Gladwell, 2008; Levitin, 2006) have gone to a great extent supporting the idea, that only if one puts in this many hours of practice characterized by a complete focus to the endeavor, it increases his/her chances for success,

with examples and stories from various successful achievements (e.g., music, computers, business, sport, etc.). As Douglas and Carless (2006) rightfully affirm, “Told and retold, these stories [of single-minded devotion to sport] contribute to a cultural script – a dominant narrative – that says success in sport depends on single-minded dedication and focus” (p. 14).

Interviewing seven female professional golfers, Douglas and Carless (2006) found that four of these women told stories that followed the performance script, while three told stories that followed other narrative types. One alternative narrative type identified in two women’s stories was a discovery narrative; this involved “discovering, experiencing, and exploring life in a full and multidimensional sense” (Douglas & Carless, 2006, p. 19) while their self-worth did not depend on performance. Winning was given a much different meaning, being called “not that important” and “not the only thing” (Douglas & Carless, 2006, p. 21). A relational narrative type was encountered in the other golfer’s story; this woman’s gratification was not based within her, but based on pleasing another person (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Her story, where the significance of a relationship far surpassed any personal triumph of winning, suggests that performance success in elite sport is possible under those conditions. The women who followed alternative scripts expressed that others around them were not considerate of this and were concerned only with their results on the golf course: “No-one ever asked how I was, it was all about my golf, ‘how did you score?’, ‘where did you finish?’ No-one ever asked how I was” (Douglas & Carless, 2006, p. 23). Another one shared: “No-one ever asked about my daughter or how I was coping. The media only wanted good news. My problems did not interest them at all” (Douglas & Carless, 2006, p. 21).

Carless and Douglas (2009) concluded that it is necessary to share stories such as these in order to rectify the exclusive dominance of the performance narrative that exists in

sport: “At present, these stories seldom gain affirmation in sport. Instead the teller is more likely to be ridiculed, silenced or ‘encouraged’ to change their story” (Carless & Douglas, 2009, p. 65). Despite the dangers of telling stories that do not fit the prescribed storyline, it is potentially more dangerous positioning one’s life exclusively within the context of the performance narrative. When one’s experiences do not fit the storyline in which one considers herself a part, it is likely that identity will be threatened and psychological trauma will occur (Douglas & Carless, 2009). It is inevitable that at some point an athlete’s experiences will fail to align with the performance narrative, as an everlasting athletic career and perpetual winning is unachievable.

Placing performance success as a part of a multidimensional life can allow for more adaptability and less distress (Carless & Douglas, 2009). Combining motherhood with participation in elite sport can provide this multidimensionality. Carless and Douglas’ (2009) findings from interviews with two professional female golfers exemplify the need to tell the stories of women who choose a path that is not solely based on sport performance. The two participants in this study revealed contrasting experiences related to motherhood and high-level sport; one woman followed the performance script and expressed that having children was “something she has obviously had to sacrifice” (Carless & Douglas, 2009, p. 59) for achieving her goals in sport. In contrast, the other woman experienced that the performance script is not the only way to achieve success in elite sport; she defied the expectations by placing higher importance on having a family than on sport, but nonetheless continued to succeed in elite-level competition (Carless & Douglas, 2009).

Moreover, the athletes themselves are not the only ones who are agonizing over the ‘mainstream’ performance narrative; the world of sports appears to be well programmed and keen on the conception that success in sport comes from single-minded dedication and

focus. In the Douglas and Carless (2006) study, the “participants provided examples of how others (such as coaches, selectors, officials, friends, the sports press, and the media in general) tend to recognise and publicise only one type of story – the performance narrative – which is therefore unchallenged as the way things must be” (p. 25).

Motherhood

“Being perceived as a good mother is a central identity issue for many women” (Collett, 2005, p. 329). The prevailing discourse in our societies (Phoenix & Woollet, 1991) portrays that “motherhood is eternally fulfilling and rewarding, that it is always the best and most important thing you do, that there is only a narrowly prescribed way to do it right, and that if you don’t love each and every second of it there’s something really wrong with you” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 4). Furthermore, a view of motherhood referred to as “new momism” is made to seem ideal and glamorous although in reality it holds expectations that are impossible to meet (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; McGannon, et al., 2012). New momism is described as “the insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 4). This idea of motherhood has pervaded society to such a degree that it is considered “a general cultural stereotype” (Appleby & Fisher, 2009, p. 8).

Motherhood and Sport

The first study to explore the experience of mothers who compete in elite sport included eight Danish elite athlete-mothers who managed these two roles simultaneously and successfully in the 1990s (Pedersen, 2001). In this inquiry, Pedersen (2001) suggested

that we should view 'elite sports mothers' as a social phenomenon rather than an exception to the norm. Given the number of examples we now have in elite sport of athletes who continue their sporting careers following pregnancy, this is an accurate recommendation. At the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, 20 women of the 286 female competitors from the United States of America were mothers (Farber, 2008). These women are not the majority, but they are too frequent to be ignored. Although over a decade has passed since Pedersen's (2001) work was published, there remains a scarcity of knowledge and literature on the topic. Few studies since Pedersen's (2001) have explored the lives of elite athletes who have become mothers and returned to competition.

Palmer and Leberman (2009) set out to understand more about women's experiences of return to competition post-pregnancy in New Zealand from a sport management perspective. They used a symbolic interactionist approach to investigate how motherhood impacted on athletes' identities, how multiple roles and identities were negotiated, and how support systems were utilized to encourage and retain elite athlete-mothers. The women in this study considered sport as fundamental to their sense of self, and this was not displaced by adding the new role of mother; they maintained a strong athletic identity, but incorporated a mothering role.

From a sport psychology perspective, Appleby and Fisher (2009) used a critical feminist perspective to explore the experiences of returning to sport post-pregnancy among elite long-distance runners. They found that the women underwent a transformative process as they negotiated the social expectations of motherhood and their own aspirations, ultimately leading to the negotiation of a new identity which incorporated both sport and motherhood.

Carver-Dias (2010) told the stories of two Canadian women who succeeded in high-level sport post-pregnancy, one as an athlete and one as a coach. She described the

challenges and stressed the need for support and flexibility from sport organizations to enable women to manage both motherhood and the demands of sport.

Debois et al. (2012) studied transitions within the entire career of one elite female fencer; among these transitions was the choice to pause her athletic career in order to have a child. This athlete believed that the time off was positive for her sport career. She reported feeling revitalised, having a better perspective and having more fun upon returning to training and competition following pregnancy. She described some of the organization and support required from others.

Many common themes emerged in these studies of elite athlete-mothers. The importance of various support networks was expressed in all cases (e.g., Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Carver-Dias, 2010; Debois et al., 2012; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). In order to manage being a mother and elite athlete, women relied heavily upon others such as their partners, families, friends and organizations. There was common reference to a change in perspective; after having children, many elite athlete-mothers viewed their training as leisure time which was enjoyable, nourishing and fulfilling (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Debois et al., 2012; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). The athlete-mothers studied viewed the combination of their two roles to be mutually beneficial (e.g. Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Carver-Dias, 2010; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Though these athlete-mothers struggled with feelings of guilt due to time spent focusing on sport rather than their children, these feelings could be overcome with knowledge of the benefits their sport participation provided (e.g., a positive change in perspective, and being a positive role model for their children). Strategies for time management and organization were said to be necessary in order to collaborate their multiple roles. Training was often modified in order to accommodate their child(ren), for example by shortening training or altering their schedule (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Palmer & Leberman, 2009).

The literature presented here provides a foundation to enable understanding and further exploration of the cultural stereotypes that surround motherhood, life as an elite female athlete and the combination of these two roles. Results of the studies presented here are discussed further in relation to the findings from my research below (see ‘Reflecting on the Stories’).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This section outlines the methodological approach I used in designing and carrying out my study. I will provide a brief explanation of the blend of approaches that directed my work, the specific methods used and the rationale for my choices.

The Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research is interpretive; it seeks to understand the world based on subjective meanings that people attach to it, rather than believing there is one objective truth (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative approach can be used to explore an issue and to allow silent voices to be heard (Creswell, 2007), thus I have chosen this approach because it fits the objectives of my study. The method that I have chosen does not follow one approach in ‘pure’ form. “Doing qualitative research is never simply a matter of following a manual; it requires flexibility and ingenuity in adapting methodologies to fit the requirements” (McLeod, 2011, p. 166). In his book, Creswell (2007) presents “the five approaches as ‘pure’ approaches to research design when, in fact, authors may integrate them within a single study” (p. 10). To pursue my objectives here I have blended case study and narrative approaches.

Case study. Case study research can be both quantitative and/or qualitative and can focus on one single case or multiple cases (Yin, 2003); here I focused on a single case using a qualitative approach, thus I will briefly elaborate on case study research from a single-case, qualitative perspective. There are differing opinions on the definition of ‘case study’; however, there is consensus that case study research centers its main focus on a

case that is defined by particular boundaries (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2003; Yin, 2003). Regardless of the approach, it is first necessary to identify the boundaries of the case, concerning details such as context and setting (Creswell, 2007). In defining the term, one perspective is that ‘case study’ describes the object being studied, a corresponding methodology, and furthermore the resulting report of the study (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Other authors suggest that ‘case study’ delineates the object that is being studied rather than a methodology (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2003); this view argues that a wide variety of methods can be chosen to study a case. In this study I adopted a definition that partially agrees with each of the above perspectives; I identifying the object studied and the final product as a case study and I chose to analyze the case using a narrative approach, while also including some features of the case study methodology prescribed by Creswell (2007).

There are various types of qualitative case study; Stake (2003) identifies three types based on the researcher’s intention; he calls them intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. An intrinsic case study focuses on a particular case for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the case itself (Stake, 2003). An instrumental case study also focuses on a particular case, but that case has been chosen with the intention of exploring an issue beyond that single case (Stake, 2003). A collective case study looks at a number of cases with an interest in a concept shared by the cases, in the same manner an instrumental case study looks at a single case (Stake, 2003). Stake (2003) further clarifies that there is some overlap between the first two classifications as a researcher’s interest generally spans across both specific and broad concerns. My work follows the instrumental case study type and further details are provided below.

Narrative. I used this approach since my study is centered on one woman’s experience of returning to sport post-pregnancy and given that “narrative research is best

for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life” (Creswell, 2007, p. 54). With ‘narrative’, the issue of varying opinions and complexity regarding the definition of this term is encountered as it was with ‘case study’. The terms ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ are often used interchangeably, however, this is not unanimously accepted (Reissman, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). Reissman (2008) clarifies that a ‘narrative’ has structure and is arranged in a particular sequence in order to convey meaning to the reader, it is not expressed haphazardly. I have created narratives from the stories told by participants to build the case study in the present research and enable the reader to learn from the stories told.

‘Narrative inquiry’, or ‘narrative research’, is another term that eludes a common definition; Smith and Sparkes (2009b) choose to discuss what narrative research *can* be, rather than providing a strict definition. They explain that “narrative inquiry can be described as committed to interpretivism and is a way of understanding experience” (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b, p. 6), or more briefly, “Narrative research is the interpretation of stories” (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b, p. 10). There are different ways of classifying and conducting analysis concerning narratives. Smith and Sparkes (2009a) differentiate between ‘story analysts’ and ‘storytellers’; the prior apply some form of analysis to the story, while the latter consider the story itself to contain the analysis and communicate the intended message through the story. There is further distinction made based on the type of analysis conducted; the narrative can be analyzed with concern for *what* is said and/or *how* things are said (McLeod, 2011; Polkinghorne, 1995; Reissman, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). In my work I adopted the role of story analyst. I implemented thematic narrative analysis, focusing on the content of the stories told by participants (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a; Reissman, 2008); my analysis is described in detail below (see ‘Analyzing the Information’).

Blending approaches. Following Stake's (2003) view, "by whatever methods, we choose to study the case" (p. 134), I combined strategies from a narrative approach with those proposed as part of the case study procedures prescribed by Creswell (2007, 2009). Creswell (2007, 2009) stipulates that a case study should report a description of the case as well as themes stemming from the case; I achieved this by using the narratives to present the description of the case and followed up with discussion of case-based themes.

My Instrumental Case Study. As Creswell (2007) suggested that "an individual can illuminate a specific issue" (p. 94), the 'case' in my study is of one woman and her experience of returning to training and competition in elite sport following pregnancy. The case studied here is a 'critical incident' and the 'stage' of a woman's life when this event took place, as Patton (2002) agrees these are appropriate to comprise a case. The critical incident at the focus of my study is one woman's return to training and competition in elite sport following pregnancy. The case is bounded in time, beginning from the time when the primary participant had a health issue that affected her potential to have children, to the time of the interview when she was pregnant with her second child. The case is bounded in Western culture and the culture of elite sport.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit the primary participant with the intention of studying an "information-rich case" to "illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 46). More specifically the following criteria were set prior to recruitment for this study: (a) participant must be a current or former competitive¹ athlete who has been pregnant, given birth to a child (or multiple children) and returned to competition in her

sport post-pregnancy, (b) participant must have a minimum of 10 years of experience competing in her sport prior to the pregnancy, and (c) English must be her native language or be at a sufficient level to hold conversation well (listening and understanding as well as articulating her experience) in order to participate in an interview. Requests were made by e-mail for identification of individuals who fit these criteria. E-mails were sent out to contacts in sport known by the supervisor and to one national sport organization. The supervisor's contacts led to a larger network of contacts who identified one athlete-mother and arranged a face-to-face meeting, at which point I invited her to participate in the present inquiry as the primary participant. Two secondary participants were recruited through the primary participant; she was asked to name those people whom she considered her main sources of support in the process of her pregnancy and return to sport post-pregnancy; two members of her support network were identified and invited to participate at this time.

Ethical considerations. The study was reviewed and approved by the researcher's University Ethics Committee. All participants read and signed a consent form (see Appendix A) that outlined what was required of them as well as the ethical issues involved. It was made clear that participation was strictly voluntary and participants were free to withdraw at any time without repercussion. To protect confidentiality participants chose their own pseudonyms, which are the names used here. Participants were given the opportunity to review my work and any sensitive information revealed in interviews was excluded upon request.

Participant Profiles

Victoria competes in athletics at an elite level as her full-time profession. She has many accolades including an Olympic medal, a World Championship medal, a Diamond

League title, and world number one ranking. She has already had one child and successfully returned to elite competition and at the time of the interviews was pregnant with a second with intentions to return again. She has completed her education at an undergraduate degree level. At the time of her first pregnancy she was 29 years old.

Reid is Victoria's husband. At the time of the couple's first pregnancy, he was 28 years of old and studying in a demanding master's degree program. He is a former competitive amateur athlete.

Lucia is Victoria's mother. She is married to Victoria's father and has two children, Victoria and a son. At the time of Victoria's first pregnancy, she was 49 years old and working full-time.

Collecting the Information

Data collection was accomplished through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured mode of interview was chosen as it allowed me the freedom to follow the flow of the interviewees and pursue relevant topics that arose or probe for more detail when necessary. An interview guide was developed based on the research objectives, the existing literature and the interview guides used by Appleby and Fisher (2009), and Palmer and Leberman (2009) in their similar studies. As is widely recommended (e.g. Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003), prior to the interview with Victoria, pilot interviews were conducted with two athlete-mothers. One pilot interview was conducted with an elite athlete-mother by telephone, and the second with a competitive, non-elite athlete-mother by e-mail. The pilot interviews helped to refine the interview guide and provide the researcher with experience in the interview process. The interview guide was revised following the pilot interviews. Changes were made to the initial interview question to encourage more self-regulated, free storytelling from the participant which was then followed up by further

open-ended questions. Additions were made to include emerging themes from the pilot interviews and question structure was altered in some cases to suit the context of Victoria's life (e.g., athletic career, family situation).

Upon transcribing Victoria's first interview, guides for interviewing her spouse and mother were developed, reviewed by two individuals experienced in qualitative methods and women in sport literature, and finally refined. Conducting pilot interviews in this case was not possible due to a lack of an analogous support system to the female athletes who participated in the pilot interviews.

Two interviews were conducted with Victoria, while a single interview was conducted with each of the other two participants. All interviews were conducted within a nine-week time period. The interviews with Victoria's husband and mother were conducted eight weeks after the initial interview with Victoria. Prior to conducting these interviews, transcription of the first interview with Victoria was completed. The follow-up interview with Victoria occurred one week after the interviews with Reid and Lucia. All interviews were audio recorded and I transcribed each one verbatim. The interviews lasted from 18 to 74 minutes and yield 55 single spaced pages of information.

Interviews were conducted by the researcher over telephone and the internet (using computer software, Skype, for voice callingⁱⁱ) because meeting was not feasible due to geographical and time limitations. It is important to determine what method is practical and telephone interviews are the best source of information in the case that direct access to participants is not possible (Creswell, 2007). There are disadvantages to this method; the main one being that nonverbal communication (i.e. facial expression, body language) cannot be seen by the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) confirmed the effectiveness of semi-structured interviews conducted by telephone after a comparison with the face-to-face method and presented many benefits of telephone

interviewing; some of those benefits include: cost-effectiveness, increased comfort for participants when discussing sensitive topics, note-taking without distracting the participant, and avoidance of unfavorable interviewing locations (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Certain features that the researchers believed enhanced their success with telephone interviews are consistent with my study; the participants were recruited face-to-face, as was my primary participant, and the research question did not require immersion into the setting (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004).

My experience with telephone and internet-based interviewing was positive. The only notable difficulties experienced were a brief loss of connection on two occasions, and few brief moments of sound distortion, both assumed to be due to an internet connectivity issue. Given the demands of qualitative interviews, it was important to try to minimize the burden on participants (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004); in my case using telephone interviewing was necessary and participants expressed appreciation that I was able to be flexible using this method rather than a face-to-face meeting.

Analyzing the Information

Analysis began with transcription of the interviews, as it allowed me to become more familiar with the information by listening to the interviews for a second time and typing each one in full. After the transcription process, I read through the transcribed data and generated a new version of each participant's interview in the form of a short narrative. The narratives intended to capture the information shared and stories told by each participant in the interviews as well as the meaning that they communicated as I, the researcher, interpreted. Full transcripts and narratives were sent via e-mail to each participant to review in order to verify completeness and accuracy. At this stage, some minor clarifications were made by Victoria's husband; all other transcriptions and

narratives were confirmed as accurate and no additions were made by participants.

My methods for analyzing the data were established using input from a variety of sources (e.g. Creswell, 2007, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003) and tailored to fit the needs of my study as recommended by Creswell (2007). The framework of the process resembled the general steps of qualitative analysis as outlined by Creswell (2007): preparing and organizing the data, reducing the data into themes by coding and condensing the codes, and representing the data in an appropriate form. The process of my analysis fits well into Creswell's (2007) data analysis spiral and was done as he suggests by "moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach" (p. 150); as this suggests, the stages described below were overlapping and several were often occurring simultaneously.

The first loop of the spiral includes data managing; to organize my data, I printed all of the transcribed information and short stories and compiled a binder with dividers to contain all of the data in one place. I also kept organized folders with electronic copies on my personal computer. The next loop involves reading and memoing; I reviewed the narratives and transcripts from each participant multiple times to become immersed in the stories told by the participants. Although the narratives were intended to capture all of the relevant information from the interviews, I also went back to the original transcripts to ensure I did not miss anything and that I was working from the participants' original statements. I read through all the transcripts at least once prior to making any notes or markings; after this point I began underlining significant statements and making short notes in the margins. At this point I entered the loop of describing, classifying and interpreting; I conducted inductive content analysis (Patton, 2002), or thematic analysis (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a; Reissman, 2008), identifying meaningful statements as I read. I used various methods to conceptualize and understand the data; I made bullet lists and

drew charts of the significant statements and concepts that emerged as I read. I color-coded meaningful statements thematically in the electronic documents. Eventually I was able to categorize the meaningful excerpts of raw data into four broad themes with up to three levels of sub-themes (see Figure 1). This led me to the final loop of representing and visualizing the information to produce the final account; I created an organizational chart to provide a simple graphical representation of the themes and sub-themes (see Figure 1). To elaborate I selected quotes to represent each theme and sub-theme and presented these with a brief reflection for each (see Chapter 4: 'Reflecting on the Stories').

Beyond the thematic analysis described above, I analyzed the stories told by the participants in the interviews and then 'restoried' them in narrative form as a way to facilitate readers' understanding (Creswell, 2007); this involved mostly rewriting in chronological order since "often when individuals tell their stories, they do not present them in chronological sequence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 56). I restructured the multiple stories told by participants into narratives, with particular sequence that intends to convey the meaning to the reader (Reissman, 2008). This process of restorying was done for a second time; the first writing of narratives was done immediately following transcription of the interviews and was my paraphrased interpretation without direct quotations from participants. The second version of the narratives incorporated direct quotations whenever possible, to allow the participants' 'voices' to be heard (see Chapter 4: 'Restorying the Stories'). The writing of narratives and identifying themes both focus on the content of the stories, following the thematic approach to narrative analysis (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a; Reissman, 2008). I chose to share narratives alongside themes from the interviews in order to attend to the smaller units of meaning represented by each theme without sacrificing the meaning conveyed by the story as a whole (McLeod, 2011).

I present the information in chapter four, first in narrative form (predominantly

chronological) followed by a discussion of my interpretation according to emergent themes; I felt this was the most appropriate way to present the information as comprehensively as possible in order to allow the reader to understand the case in whole and with “all its uniqueness” (Patton, 2002, p. 450).

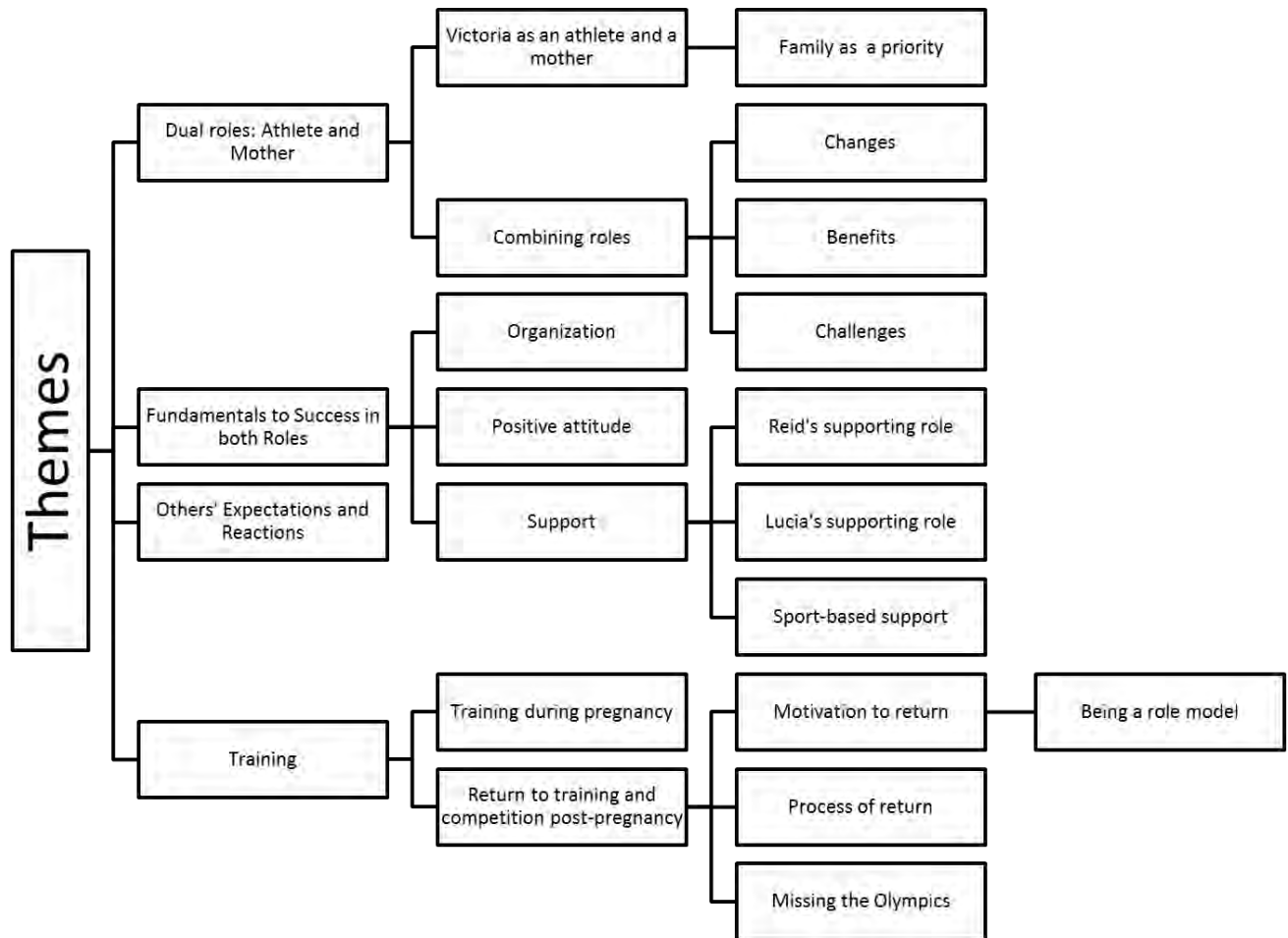


Figure 1. The themes and sub-themes from Victoria’s return to sport following pregnancy.

Trustworthiness

I employed several techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of my work, as described here. The researcher is considered to be an instrument in qualitative work and therefore must be aware of his/her positioning to the inquiry (Creswell, 2007). I made an effort to identify my stance on the research topic and any potential biases that may influence my work (see ‘Researcher Background’ above). Throughout the process of this

work, I engaged in peer debriefing with a fellow master's student with knowledge of qualitative research methods who is impartial to the results of the study. This peer acted as a 'devil's advocate' to ensure I maintained credibility in the study, including methodology, ethics, and interpretations or conclusions from data (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing also provided a good resource for catharsis to manage emotions or confusion that may have clouded my judgment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness in data collection was ensured by on site and terminal member checking. This process involves verifying the accuracy and credibility of the data as well as interpretations and conclusions stemming from the data (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). On site member checking was completed by paraphrasing the participants' words during the interviews and asking them to clarify that I understood them accurately. As mentioned above, participants were asked to review full transcripts of interviews as well as my written narrative in paraphrased form to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information. I also contacted the primary participant on several occasions throughout the process of analysis to clarify specific details of the story.

Conducting interviews with three participants provided an additional source of trustworthiness by triangulation (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002) because the three sources were asked to share their story of the same experience. Each person's account overlaps with the other two, supporting that the information gathered was accurate.

I have made an effort to report the information here as with as much detail as possible, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend, using 'rich, thick description'. This will allow readers to have a deep enough understanding to determine if findings are transferable to other settings (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

CHAPTER 4

Restorying the Stories

In this section I will present the stories told by each participant in narrative form. The narratives presented here are intended to provide a sense of each participant's story through his or her own voice, as direct quotes are used whenever possible. Victoria's story is presented first, as she is the main 'character' of the story and her account is the most comprehensive. Reid and Lucia's stories are presented subsequently, adding multiple perspectives and further details on certain aspects to create a more complete picture.

Victoria's Story

Victoria had just finished a competition where she had one of her best ever performances and almost secured a very big sponsor when she was met with her first health scare that threatened her ability to have children. She was competing abroad and on her way home she "had a twisted ovary and by the time [she] made it to the hospital the ovary was gone". At 25 years of age, she needed surgery which left her with one ovary and the need to take some time off to recover. Although the doctors said that she "should be fine and there should be no complications, that's where the worry started for [Victoria] and [her] husband". She planned to continue competing, but "it was always a big worry". The couple wanted to have at least two kids and they discussed before they got married that they wanted to have children at a young age so they could "enjoy them"; since they had always planned to have kids, Victoria losing one ovary caused some worry about the future of their family and it was "kind of a roller coaster" at times. On one occasion during training, her coach noticed that something was wrong and he asked her if she was worried about having children; she replied "Yes!" and broke down crying.

Following Victoria's surgery, some people expressed thoughts that her competitive career may be over, but she was able to come back in the same year to compete in the world championship. At this point, her athletics career was really picking up and she accumulated a number of significant achievements. Within the next few years she medalled at the Olympic Games, World Championships, won a Diamond League title and was ranked number one in the world in her sport. Victoria's thoughts at that time were that things "just kept getting better and better and it was just amazing... it came to the point where it was like, 'Ok, I've accomplished a lot and I'm really pleased with where I'm at, so it would be nice to see what happens next'".

What happened next started a new chapter in Victoria's life; she was pregnant with her first child. Victoria and her husband, Reid, "were immediately excited when [they] found out [they] were pregnant, because of all the worry and the stress from the past history". Although she was at the peak of her career and performing at a level that put her on course to break records in her sport, she was not concerned when she found out she was pregnant. She and her husband welcomed their "little blessing", a little girl. Victoria never doubted her intention to return to competition following her pregnancy: "Before she even came out I was coming back". She explained that as soon as she found out she was pregnant "it was the plan to come back... that was what we had set up". There were no second thoughts about it; she expressed her feelings at the time were "I'm not ready to hang up my spikes because I feel like I still have more to accomplish".

When she informed her coaches of her pregnancy, their initial reaction was shock. It came at a time when she was performing extremely well and had just accomplished a lot of big things in her sport. They expected her to keep the momentum going and news of pregnancy wasn't on their mind, but "once the news sunk in and [they] gave it a little time to register then they were happy for [Victoria]". They knew what she had been through

with the health scare and that having a family was something that she wanted very much. One of her coaches has been with her since she was a teenager, so he has gone through all of the ups and downs with her.

When making the announcement to her sponsors and sport organization, she was also met with positive responses. The people from her sport organization were very supportive and encouraged her to embrace and enjoy the experience because it is such a great time in a person's life. Victoria was aware that the organization counted on her and the other athletes to perform, so she was very appreciative of this response and surprised at the level of support that they showed. Her sponsors also expressed excitement and encouragement.

When Victoria announced her pregnancy publicly it was coupled with announcing her intention to return to sport, as she said: "I'm pregnant, but I'm coming back". The reactions she received were from "one end to the next end"; there were "people who were extremely excited, to people who responded 'Why are you still doing this? You're a mom. You should retire.'" She explained that people were surprised at the announcement of her pregnancy and some expected she would retire; others didn't automatically expect retirement but asked her if she was coming back. Her response was "I'm still trying to be a good role model. I'm still capable and I have great support, so why not?" She said "When people started hearing it from my point of view they started embracing that" and she felt that she got a lot of love and support back from people, especially mothers or other people who were making their own comeback to sport. People were impressed with her dedication to the sport and thought that because she had already accomplished so much, in a way she had earned the right to retire; they thought she had already reached the top and asked what she still had to pursue. She still had some goals in mind and wanted to have another chance at achieving them. She loved the competition and the feeling of winning: "I'd absolutely

love to go back out there and do what I love doing. It's just something about the competition and going out there and being able to kick some butt every now and then, it's pretty fun".

Victoria said that different people reacted in different ways to the news, but overall she had positive responses and "people were very encouraging".

During pregnancy, Victoria "trained right about until the week before [she] had [her daughter], but took it easy during the first trimester because they said that's what [she] had to do to be safe". Victoria expressed that while it was important for her to continue training throughout pregnancy, it was more important to be smart about it and not take any chances of doing something that may risk the health of the baby: "What if I miscarry? It's not worth that". She maintained her training at a lower level than her typical training regimen and utilized the pool to help with her workouts. Victoria developed gestational diabetes during her pregnancy and although she was not pleased with this it provided one benefit, "I ended up only gaining about 13 pounds because I was on a strict diet, which was great because I was able to bounce back and come back to training".

After giving birth to her daughter, Victoria did not have much time to regain her pre-pregnancy fitness since it was her goal to qualify for the Olympic team that year. The Olympic trials were scheduled just ten months after her daughter was born, so "it did mean crunch time coming into the Olympics". Despite the short timeframe, Victoria always believed that everything would happen as she planned for her return to competition and that she would make the Olympic team: "In my head it was always going to work out. I thought 'This is how it has to be'". Her husband reasoned with her that although they wanted to think positive, it was possible that she may not make the team.

When she returned to training post-pregnancy, Victoria had a great deal of support from significant others; she recalled "Having the support from family, friends, teammates,

coaches – it definitely made a difference”. She admitted that her expectations for childcare did not match the reality; “I was Miss Naïve, thinking the baby was going to sleep and this is going to be fine, but no, she woke up and she always wanted milk in the night”. Victoria managed to maintain her training by utilizing the support of others. “Reid and I decided, because [the baby] was on formula, that one night he would get up with her, and the next night I would get up with her. That worked for a bit, but me still going to practice, it was still really tricky. Then a teammate of mine, her mom would come over and help us out during the day. Typically I’ll be at practice and then I get to see [my daughter] in the mornings and I get to see her in the evenings, just like a typical working person. Reid and I were still going back and forth taking her at night, so that helped out with the training. If I had a hard day then I’d sleep, but if it was an easier day then I’d get up with her. Then my mom stepped in and she actually took a year leave from work, which was a *huge* help. So my mom came over and helped day and night and that allowed me to sleep the full night and not worry about her at all during the day. Mom was my little guardian angel that came to my rescue; otherwise I wasn’t going to be able to train the way I needed to train. You push yourself, with track and field it’s not an event where you can go out and give 80 percent. You have to go out there and run 100 percent every time because that’s what everyone is doing. I definitely wouldn’t have been able to do it if my mom hadn’t taken the time off”. Victoria explained that other people had mixed opinions about her mother, Lucia, taking time off of work in order to help; some people understood Lucia’s choice while others did not feel it was her responsibility. Victoria explained “Once my mom was off, it just was like every single worry was taken off me. She helped out and she absolutely loved it because she never got to experience that with [her own children]. She only got a few months off and then had to go back to work”. Because of her support system she did not feel any conflict between being a mother and an athlete, or have any needs that were

unmet.

Victoria said that her training post-pregnancy was “more or less the same” as pre-pregnancy. The timing of her delivery meant that she “was pretty much starting back at the beginning of the year, just a month behind everybody. I wasn’t able to do completely the same base [workouts] because [the pregnancy] had separated her abdominal cavity. I could stick four fingers in between my abs.... It was harder getting back into it because my stomach was so stretched out. ...I was trying to get the muscle to come back together and got it pretty close. ... Getting ready before nationals it was about a finger and a half separation between my abs. ... For any athlete, especially track and field, the core is your center, your everything, that has to be strong. It was hard getting that back to where I wanted it to be and it wasn’t where I wanted it to be because it wasn’t 100 percent. ...being the athlete, I’m just hard on myself.”

She came back to training with a positive attitude and was ready to attempt anything that was asked of her. She admitted that it was difficult to return to competition post-pregnancy and that she had some training sessions that were incredibly challenging. “Some workouts in the beginning mentally I was ready to go, but physically my body was saying ‘slow down, rewind, and let’s go try this again’”. Some workouts she found herself feeling exhausted and asking why, at which point those around her would remind her that she just returned from having a baby, had taken almost a full year away from regular training and now had a baby to look after at home. Victoria was eager to push herself in training and her coaches “were being the voices saying ‘don’t overdo it’”. Her attitude was “But I can keep going”, “I can do it” and “I feel great” while “everyone kept telling me ‘You just had a baby – slow down’”. While she was regaining her fitness she felt like she was “hovering” close to making the progress she wanted and knew that her “coach had given me harder workouts to get me ready for a later date.” She said “I definitely wanted

to put more in earlier, but I had to listen to my body too. I couldn't overdo it – say I took two steps forward; I'd end up taking four back just because of taking that extra step forward. It was just making sure that I was gaining the steps and being ready for when I needed to be ready for.”

She had many successes upon returning to competition post-pregnancy. In her first competition back, she was able to place on the podium and she “ran the same time as the previous year – so to come back at the same exact time was great. I opened up later in the year and still had the exact same time, so that was really good. ... That [was] definitely a confidence builder and booster.” It was motivating that she could look at the other competitors knowing that she had just had a baby and they hadn't. All signs were positive to making a successful return and reaching her goal of making the Olympic team. “I even won a race leading into nationals... I won a race coming back.”

Going into the Olympic qualifying race, her mentality was: “I'm ready to do this. I've done it hundreds of times before.” However she failed to qualify for the Olympic team because of an unfortunate mishap in the qualifying race, despite the fact that her previous performances had been at a sufficient level. “It was heartbreaking [for me] not making the team.” Reflecting on the race she recalls “My mental state was ‘I'm ready to go. I'm so used to this’ but my body was still playing catch up after pregnancy. ... I guess I wasn't there physically post-pregnancy, but pre-pregnancy that was something I was so used to, so mentally my body was like ‘Let's do this’ If I had raced a week earlier or a week later I don't think there would be any question right now. My coach says he thought it was just the one race. When I went to practice the following week my teammates said ‘You look phenomenal right now.’ ... The week before when I raced I had no issues. The week later when I raced I had no issues, so it was just that point in time and I don't know if you would say that it came down to the training; it was just my body getting adjusted and I just

needed that one race to be not nationals, a different race that didn't have so much pressure on it, but again that's just how our sport is."

Victoria coped well with the result of the Olympic qualifying race. Her attitude was "Okay, this is what it is and that's fine. Other people got to get the experience [of going to the Olympic Games]. I've gone to two before and medalled at one. It would have been an awesome story, is what it really would have been and regardless, I think me reacting the way I did after the race shows my true character and I got a lot of respect from people all around just because of the way I reacted. ...I wasn't going to take it out on the media or take it out on any kids because they're the ones that are looking up to us and that's what I really took from it." "Not making the team didn't upset me. What upset me was the time I missed from [my daughter], but that's nothing I could have figured out along the way because I had all the signs that things were [on track]." She described her conversation with Reid after the race as follows: "I said 'It's not the fact that I didn't make it. I'm fine.' I hadn't cried at that point and then the minute that I said 'It's me being away from [our daughter]. It's [her] that I missed' is what got me all teary-eyed and emotional."

Some of Victoria's negative feelings of not making the Olympic team were caused by time that she missed with her daughter, but they were also offset by the experiences that she had with her daughter later: "I got to see [my daughter] walk and no one can ever take that away from me or you can't take her away from me. She's my little blessing and she's always got surprises." Victoria expressed on many occasions that she always tries to look for the positive side of things. Regardless of not making the Olympic team, she was satisfied with her performance post-pregnancy. She was satisfied not only with her performances but with her ability to prove that she could come back after her pregnancy.

"All in all I was really pleased with how things turned out. Things all didn't turn out the way [I] wanted it to, but that's life. ...I more or less proved that I could come back,

it's just I had one race, one mishap and it is what it is. ... It was really exciting to finish off the year, although I didn't get to the Olympics I still had the fastest times any [woman in my country ran in my event] and I had a baby less than a year before running all that. So [I had] a lot of huge accomplishments.”

Although Victoria and her husband had always wanted two kids, she “was hoping to run a few more years and then have another [child], just have a few years in between.” This plan changed due to another health scare; after having her first child, “working so hard to come back for the Olympics and just missing [qualification]”, her remaining ovary twisted. This time she “had surgery and they were able to save this ovary.” This brought about worry about her ability to have children once again and “kind of jump started the second pregnancy.” Due to the previous loss of one ovary and now a scare of losing the second, Victoria and her husband were forced to make some decisions in their family planning. “I was talking to my doctor and was really searching for answers from friends, family, and coaches; everyone replied ‘We can't tell you what to do. This is a decision you and Reid have to make.’” Due to the risk and the couple's desire for more children, one doctor advised that if he were in their position, he wouldn't wait long before trying for a second child. They decided to try to have a child before the beginning of her competitive sport season. They had planned that if she didn't become pregnant at this time she would compete for the season and they would re-visit the idea of another child later. As it turned out, their efforts were successful and she was pregnant with her second child.

When Victoria announced her second pregnancy, people reacted with even more expectation to hear that she was retiring. She found it funny to hear some people's reactions as they were surprised when she said she plans to return for a second time. She hopes to be able to return as she did the first time, or hopefully even better. She is optimistic and glad that she will have more time to build herself back up since she won't

be rushing to qualify for the Olympics this time around.

When Victoria told her main coach that she was pregnant for the second time, he was happy for her and her husband because he knew it had been hard for them. He told her to enjoy the pregnancy, go home and have fun with her daughter, and said “We’ll come back and we’ll make the game plan after that point.” Another one of her coaches was shocked again with the announcement of her second pregnancy and asked if she was coming back again.

Victoria plans to return for a second time post-pregnancy. She admits that it will be difficult and that there are still some uncertainties with how she will manage the demands of childcare for two, as she doesn’t think that her mother will take another year off from work. She says “I still have the love for [the sport]. I know it’s going to be tricky, but I’m a fighter and I want to be able to come back and to be that person who was able to come back after having two kids. Nobody that I know of has had two [kids] and come back, so I want to be that person.” She believes that her positive attitude will help her through the tough times in trying to come back the second time around. She wants to see what she is capable of and has the desire to break records in her sport. She says that she is not rushing to return as quickly this time around and plans to take more time following the pregnancy to enjoy her children.

Victoria takes pride in being an empowering role model for young girls and women, specifically mothers. She expressed that it is more common for men to start families while continuing competition and many women in sport feel that they should be able to do the same: “The guys can go out and compete and have a family and go back and run again, why can’t we? It’s always harder for the female athlete to have kids. Everyone asks ‘Why didn’t you wait until you’re done?’ People just want you to wait until you’re done and then have kids, but why can’t I have my child and come back and run too?”

Which I proved you can do. Yes, you have to take one year off, but we should be able to do the same thing too. There are a lot of other athletes that are coming up and it would be a cool thing if someone ever said ‘Victoria did it, why can’t I?’” She said that many fellow female athletes tell her how lucky she is to have her child and continue in her sport. She talked about the dissatisfaction that female athletes feel about the difficulty of having a child and making a comeback in sport. She expressed her pride in proving that women can have children and successfully return to sport.

She is also very proud to be a positive role model for younger athletes; when planning to make her return she thought “I’d love to come back and be a great role model for moms and for the younger girls... even for [my daughter] later on; she [will think] ‘Wow, that’s my mom, she always came back.’” Victoria makes efforts to be considerate of young fans and give them positive and inspiring messages. She expressed that part of her desire to come back is to provide this positive example for young girls and mothers. She promotes the idea that “if you set your mind to something, at least if you give it your all, no one can take that away from you, and the outcomes aren’t always going to be the way you want it to be, but life puts hurdles in your way and you just have to go with it and do your best”. She emphasizes that “it’s how you deal with things that basically make your outcomes either come true or not come true and if you stay positive and you stick to your goals and you do the best you can, that’s all you can ask for. ...When an open door closes another one opens. You just have to take it and go with it and really believe even when times get tough.”

When asked about changes in her perspective on sport post-pregnancy, she said “I am definitely even more determined and driven and focused than I was before. Before I’d come home, I’d go to practice, I’d come home and I’d do the same things all over again – go to practice, come home and do the same routine in between. Whereas now I’m going to

practice, I do what I have to go do and when I come home I'm hanging out with [my daughter], I'm being Mommy and I'm enjoying that. I'm not wasting my time in between. I'm more efficient. [Training] is time I'm spending away from my daughter and she's growing and she's changing so much. So much happens the first year. There are so many things going on development wise. I took a picture of her every month just to see the change in her face from the first year. Some of the months you can see a lot more change than others. If you didn't take a picture, if you weren't around to enjoy it then you would have missed it. ...It's just neat, you have somebody who's excited to see you, who looks up to you and I'm able to tell her all these cool stories when she's older. ...When I go out there I'm more serious. I want to go [to practice] and I want to give it everything that I have. When I go to compete I want to go there and I want to give it everything that I have; I'm not leaving anything behind – not that I was leaving anything behind before, but it's because I have [my daughter] there, it's like I have somebody to fight for and somebody who's looking up at me and everything I'm doing. She might not know it now, but later on she will say 'well you did this Mom.'

The biggest sacrifice Victoria has to make in maintaining her roles as both an athlete and mother is the time she has to spend away from her family. In order to compete, she must travel around the world and may be gone for weeks at a time. On some occasions, she was able to bring her daughter with her, along with other people to help with childcare, but other times she travelled alone. She expressed how difficult her first trips away from her daughter were: "It was really hard the first couple times. ...My first time going for a track meet [overseas] I was gone for a couple of weeks. [I was always asking] 'Can you send me pictures? Can you send me a video? We need to Skype!' It was hard being away from [my family] because [my daughter] was growing and changing. Even though it's just a week or two, a week or two is a lot for a baby."

Victoria provided some advice to other female athletes considering having children and returning to competition post-pregnancy. She emphasized “Make sure you have a good support team, because that does make a difference.” She advised that having “a set goal and plan in mind of what you need to accomplish by certain times” as an important factor in making a successful comeback. She said that “Enjoying the baby is first and foremost”. She explained there are so many things to enjoy with a new baby that is growing and developing.

Reid’s Story

The season before Victoria became pregnant “she was on top of the world, but that only lasts so long; there’s an expiration date for that. Should she have achieved everything she could in the track world but not been able to gain a family I think she would have felt like she had lost the overall gain. So [after we found out she was pregnant] it was a lot about balance ... trying [not] to let her position at that point in time overshadow the next, let’s say 50 some odd years of life. ... There are a lot of years that we still have to live after track and trying to keep things in perspective [was important], which is challenging when you’re doing well. ... The easiest option would be to keep the ball rolling instead of changing paths.”

“There was never a doubt in my mind that she would be back [to sport after pregnancy]. I’ve been around a lot of athletes and kind of have a pretty decent sense of the caliber of an athlete that I’m dealing with or I’m speaking with and around and so, I mean, she’s top notch. In my opinion it wasn’t really a matter of ‘Would she be able to make it back?’ It was more, just [a question of] ‘How long is it going to take?’, because she’s extremely, extremely talented and blessed. The X factor is injury along the way, which can unfortunately derail careers that look very promising. ... [With Victoria] I had no second

thoughts about [her ability to return], it was more just timeframe.”

With the timing of the baby and her return to competition “I knew that with the upcoming Olympics and it being an Olympic year that the intensity level towards the middle to end part of the season was going to be raised, and [Victoria’s] training, her setting – everything really needed to be in place for her to even attempt to reach that level just because of the short time frame; not so much because of her ability, because she is very talented, but it was just the condensed amount of time that she was allowed to return after having a child. Pregnancy is quite [a] task to return back to high level athletics in a short period of time. My main concern was trying to keep her healthy [and] trying to have everything in place, so that we were organized and didn’t waste any time or waste a day.”

“I think that the biggest thing in my eyes as the overall theme ... was this idea of incremental, small gains that [Victoria] had to make and those gains had to be realized hopefully in a gradual and accelerating mode, but also with the idea that she can’t get injured. You’re always balancing this fine line about how hard can you push it without breaking down and without taking too many steps back, because inevitably there’s going to be some days or a week, I don’t think it can be a month, but you can probably allow yourself a week to maybe take a step back, but then you have to immediately start [to] gain on the overall fitness level and what not, and strength and speed. I think, that was the main source of pressure, because [Victoria is] extremely talented. ... It’s tough too because you hear people say that they’ve come back from pregnancy and run just as well if not better [than before pregnancy], but there are a lot of confounding variables that you can’t necessarily always quantify or reveal [in] every situation. Every situation is a bit different in terms of the pregnancy, the mother and how the hips change, how the hormone levels have affected them, how their muscle mass has been influenced and also the recovery period... There were just times where I think [Victoria] was very tired and things weren’t

progressing as well and then all of a sudden she'd just have a week or two where she really had a spurt in terms of muscular development, neurological connections reconnecting, going back through some of the habits that she'd had before and working through those, ironing out issues."

"It was such a time crunch...efficiency was kind of the name of the game. If you were potentially wasting time and whatever source of activity that that was then you tried to restructure that just because there were so many objectives to be met and so a lot of things just kind of went by the wayside in terms of 'You know what, this is not really important right now and we just don't have time to kind of deal with it, eventually we'll come back around to it.' We weren't able to speak to friends as much or family as much. Things just had to be a little quicker, a little more precise, but I mean, I think it was okay because we knew that it wasn't a long term situation or pattern; there was kind of the expiration date on that lifestyle and so that always, in my opinion, makes it easier to sprint ahead rather than knowing you're in it for the marathon or long-haul. I guess the biggest thing was more the mental challenge that was probably just as difficult – I won't speak for [Victoria] in terms of what she felt or what not, but I know it certainly had to play a major factor for both of us – there were times for me that you kind of question 'Oh man, is this actually going to work?' and you kind of keep your fingers crossed, say some prayers that if you just keep your head down that things will keep heading in the right direction, which for the most part they did. When you look at it, in all reality, she couldn't really have been much better prepared for that shortened timeframe. She was, by that point in time, in really, really good shape for having come back within eight months or so, because I mean she was starting to run competitively [when the baby was seven and a half months old]. ...[She only had] six [to] six and a half months of training before she really started competing and that's not a lot especially when the workouts in [the beginning] were kind

of like light jogs, so you're more looking at four to five months of heavier training. It's pretty incredible when you look back at it from that perspective. ...It speaks highly of [Victoria]'s determination, dedication and how we were able to haul around her and help her along the way."

People outside of Victoria's main support network had varying reactions to her pregnancy and intention to return to competition. "Fortunately and unfortunately I sometimes don't pay attention to what other people say just because they don't know the full story, they don't understand things and I'm the best person to make the decision because I can see all the information that's really available. I think overall [the] majority of people were supportive [of Victoria's intention to return to sport]. There were some people who were probably questioning whether she would be able to make it back, but some of the people that maybe put forward those opinions didn't necessarily have the deepest athletic background. So, based on kind of your professional experience, your experience with athletes, with track and field, with sports in general, I would value people's opinion differently just based on their amount of knowledge that they had. I think the overriding theme again too was that from what I sensed from people was that if they questioned her ability to come back, they likely weren't very in tune with a depth of athletic knowledge, so I really wouldn't take them seriously because they just weren't a very good source. But if it was somebody else who had been around athletes, had been through some more situations, then I probably would [consider their opinion], but the majority of people who had done that were more along the lines of thinking that it was just a time issue and developing without injury type of issue. So I would say for the most part my thinking was aligned with those who knew quite a bit about track and field and athletics in general, so I didn't really have to face a lot of naysayers, but if I would've I wouldn't give them any time of day just because they weren't really helping me or helping her out in the

preparation, so they didn't deserve – I didn't feel they would deserve my time or mental energy. I had too many things to worry about other than that, but if there was any way to turn that into motivation then I would say 'Ya, okay let's try to use this.' ...I certainly didn't encounter it in person and if I did, and somebody said something I would probably be like 'Oh, are you kidding me?' I would've been like 'What are you talking about?'"

Reid played a major supporting role to Victoria as she was making her return to sport post-pregnancy. "There were a few different levels of my role; initially one was just planning the logistics of: Where are we going to live? Where are you going to train? Where are we going to get food? Who's going to watch [our daughter]? – things of that nature. Even before [Victoria] gave birth it was all about setting the stage [and] after she gave birth then it was more about, 'Okay, I'm busy with my [academic] program, you've got a big year as well. Where can I pick up some of the slack for you, with anticipation that it won't be forever but it'll be for more of a short to medium length, so I just have to try to take over more responsibility earlier on'. I felt like part of my role was trying to manage the overall situation and settings and trying to coordinate with the other aids and tools or helpers who were there as well. ... [I provided] mental support, physical support, in being there, cooking more meals, trying to allow her to get her rest as she needed. During the week we would often rotate night coverage for [our daughter]. Early on in the [first few months], there were times where she was up and wouldn't go to sleep until one in the morning then, all of a sudden, she gets up at three and then you see the clock at four fifteen and then see it at five thirty and then six thirty and you just know that it's going to be rough the next day. The thing is you typically don't just catch up after one day, so that effect lingers until the next weekend, until maybe you can try to get some more rest during the day or a better sleep at night. [At the time] right before Lucia, Victoria's mother, came on board... if there was time where I could get up with [our daughter] and still manage my

day, I would do that. That way Victoria could get the sleep that she needed to recover for the next training session. There were just many different hats to be worn and not enough heads for a while.”

“I think initially everyone has their own idea of how parenthood will be and maybe the particular challenges that one will face, but your perceptions versus the actual reality of it once you have the child home are oftentimes very different and a lot of times we underestimate just how much work is involved with children. Then you have the whole gamut of potential health issues that could influence the amount of time that’s involved as well. Initially I think I personally didn’t realize just how much time and effort and just the amount and the interruption in sleep and [how] that process would throw you off during the day as well and kind of leave your head in a cloud. We managed because the first month was mainly Victoria being home with [our daughter] working on breast feeding, then supplementing as well with formula and allowing her body to recover and tighten up after the pregnancy and then slowly start getting into more pool work, which she had done before, and then jogging and slowly start working up the ladder. I think probably by the time the [start of the baby’s second month] rolled around we realized that likely it’s not going to happen – Victoria’s not going to be able to put in the amount of training that she will need to make it back in time for the Olympics unless we bring in additional help.”

“In [the third month] I believe my folks might have come up for ten days or so and we kind of just had some patch work here and there in regards to having additional helpers, but not one full time helper; that helped and we got through [the first three months]. [Those months] were kind of just like trying to keep your head above water because we didn’t bring Lucia [in yet]; we didn’t really know if we needed Lucia then we were left trying to figure out [if] she could get the time off and then finally it was [decided] – ‘Okay, we definitely need to do this.’ I think we might have had a little bit of help for a

week in [the month before Lucia came in], so the other three weeks, [we] just kind of had to try to make it work. [At that time] my program was starting to really pick up as well, so that added the stress level to me that I started feeling as well and at that point in time we said ‘Okay, we definitely have to use your mother here.’ We had held everything together up to this point in time, but it became too much as [Victoria’s] training picked up in intensity because then she was starting to get more tired as well.”

“There were two training camps, one in [the baby’s third month] and then one in [the fourth month]... so [Victoria and our daughter] were gone for two weeks. [Victoria] had help [at the training camps] when she was there; Lucia went with her [in the third month] for a two-week training camp, so then I was getting my work done. I was working trying to get ahead or catch up with work and then she was [at training camp] for two weeks in [the fourth month], so I was able to get work done; then I just saw the writing on the wall as well, once they were [away at the second training camp] and then I saw my work load steadily increasing, I thought ‘There’s no way that we can do this’. So at that point in time then we made the definite decision to have Lucia take work off, should she be able to get a leave of absence and still return to her previous employer, and once we pretty much got the go ahead, although it wasn’t complete confirmation – there was still some uncertainty that she would be able to go back to her old position – but even at that point we pulled the trigger on it and that’s when having that third person at home really made a difference because Victoria was continuing to go to training camps and travel and her workload was increasing, which then when she comes home at night she’s tired. Combining that with the fact that [the baby] was still getting up two times a night typically a minimum, just for one or even two people to deal with that on a day-in day-out basis [is difficult]. There was no way you could do both that and make a return for the Olympics – it was mutually exclusive, no one could do that.”

“I felt kind of like the whole year was focused on [Victoria]’s preparation and ... I would say the tough part for me was balancing my work, but also like feeling like – I just felt an urge to try to maybe sometimes do more than I was able to handle for [Victoria], to help her out in all those incremental gains. I just remember being extremely tired at times and just kind of really blocking off any accessory forms of entertainment, or types of social activities. It was just like everything got really, really limited, partly because of just the nature of having a child [and] also because [of] this major goal. ... There was added mental strain and stress because I would have been able to approach my program a bit differently... [with] a little more relaxation, so that was probably what some of the more difficulty in terms of me was. Part of it was just the child aspect and not so much [Victoria]’s endeavor, but when you combine both of them, it had some influence on my ability to retain knowledge. ... I always felt like if I wasn’t being productive at school or if I didn’t have something there, at the building, to be doing I should be home. It was just a frantic type of pace for me in terms of trying to keep making sure everything was covered and I think it was more prevalent in [the first three months] because at that point in time I just remember being excessively tired where I couldn’t retain knowledge. My head was in the clouds. Fortunately in my program, it didn’t require probably as much mental power at that point in time, I mean I still had to have bursts, whereas once the [next] semester rolled around...it was much more solid in terms of preparing presentations and being able to sit in front of people and have a knowledge base for you to stand on and had those semesters been flip flopped I would have crashed and burned. I just remember there being times where I just couldn’t focus at all, so I probably should have utilized coffee a little more often than I did except for then I wouldn’t be able to get to sleep at night. ... [Also] when I came home at night too, then I always tried to help in preparing meals as well, so it was challenging; it was very, very challenging.”

“We really couldn’t look any further in advance than the next seven days. It was kind of like ‘Okay... overall what do we have to do within the next seven days? Okay now, let’s get through today.’ The whole timeframe got even narrowed and more of a microscopic focus was on each and every day, because it was very, very challenging, very challenging. It would have been much more ideal to have 18 months to 24 months [for Victoria to prepare for the Olympic trials], but it was our family situation and we did not have an option and so I was of the mindset ‘Well this is – it’s okay, you know, it’s not ideal but okay, so we have to do what we have to do and we can’t make mistakes.’ I guess it would have been a lot easier for us had I been able to like take a year off, like some people are able to take – instead of having the mother take the maternity leave, the father can take a leave of absence from work for a year; that would have been ideal but since I was involved in a program that required a substantial amount of time as well, it just wasn’t in the cards. I think we were always kind of adjusting on the fly. We always kind of had an idea of who can help, when they can help, and then when situations arose, either with [our daughter] being sick or not sleeping well, or lack of food in the house, or something of that nature, or else I have projects that spring up and I need ten days to be able to get some work done, it was well, okay my folks could help, they’re waiting in the wing, in the bullpen should I need to call them up. We had our heavy hitters in place the majority of the time... I think overall it was just more of an organization type of deal, like you just had to really be looking into the future, planning several months out and then refocusing back down to the day-to-day process. [In addition, Victoria] certainly had to take care of her body as well, in terms of nutritional support, making sure she got the right workouts and right strength program to fit her and gain flexibility and strength and speed. There were a lot of things on her plate, in addition to serving the role of a new mother and not being able to completely focus on that, like the majority of mothers are able to. There’s the whole

physical aspect, but there's the mental aspect, [that] many times in sports is equally as important, because if her mind is not with it, is not right, her body's not going to respond. If it is, if she is thinking positively she knows that maybe she's not able to be with [our daughter] as much as she'd like, at least if Grandma, her mother, is that eased some of the potential burden, the mental strain that could have been realized if she'd been completely missing out on everything and if it was a complete stranger capturing or seeing some of those moments, those precious moments during the first year."

"Outside of eliminating any potential drive so that you're just as efficient with all of your time during the day, and having your own chef, aside of some of those more extravagant types of benefits I would say that there wasn't much we could've done additionally. In my opinion the only thing that we potentially could've done more so was maybe have Lucia be there from day one, but that wasn't really in the cards at that point in time. ...Logistically as well... [when the baby was four and a half months old] that's when we really, really could benefit from somebody being with us all the time and up to that point in time we could benefit, but not 100 percent, maybe like 40 percent, 30 percent, so that was why that date was selected as well – most efficient use of a third person and then not being wasteful as well."

"I think there's always going to be a conflict [between the roles of mother and elite athlete] just because you can't be in two places at once. ...It depends on the type of athlete and the amount of travel because that can vary considerably between [sports], from a basketball player, to a track athlete, to a weight lifter or something of that nature. I don't think you can ever really max out the one or the other completely; you can probably get close as long as you structure everything fairly well, but there's another aspect of worrying about whether you might not be able to have kids should you stay in sport too long and you miss the opportunity in terms of fertility. So it's trying to make the most of both of

those roles and both of those opportunities because when you do just focus on one, you maybe achieve at a little higher level but you're not balanced and there's quite a bit of justification for balancing in that regards as well."

"I think one of the more difficult things [for Victoria] was – she's very maternal; she's very loving and really enjoys children – there were times that she was missing out on some of the firsts for [our daughter]. I would say that some of them were difficult things to swallow and the only way you could really soften that blow was by realization that she's doing something big as well and using that for justification. I think that physically it was challenging for her and it was much more challenging than in years past because she had lost a fair amount of ground in terms of muscle performance during the pregnancy and so I know that she had to work much harder than she ever had on the track. ...Otherwise things would have come much easier to her and she would have just been kind of topping off that high level performance rather than having to work through gears one through five. The travel [was also difficult]; she was away a lot more than a non-Olympic year. ...I'd say those are probably the main [challenges, or sacrifices]."

[It was difficult for Victoria] "not being able to connect with [our daughter] because there'd be times where she'd be gone for a couple weeks at a time... [and we would be] seeing [our daughter] connect more with Grandma because she was there a lot. It's neat because she's connecting with her grandmother too, but at the same time, in the back of your mind as well ideally you'd want to see her closest to her mother. So for me at some points in times that was kind of a tough pill to swallow, but in justification it was that if there was anyone else that should gain or be able to fill that spot you would want it to be the grandmother."

One benefit that emerged from this experience was finding out "how far you can push your body on lack of sleep and rest and what not. It gives you a better perspective of

some difficult endeavors that people dive into and accept. ... I think it testifies to just how incredible the human body is and how far you can really push it. There certainly are limits that we anticipate that you have and I think she is testimony to breaking some of those barriers, some of those perceived barriers or limits, and that in itself is kind of like the human experiment of 'How far can you jump?', 'How fast can you run?', that type of deal, but then, adding in this aspect of 'Oh you just had a child, your body just has been slowly changing for nine months and then now within the next nine months you've got to chisel it back into this athletic machine' and that whole process because the body is a slowly adapting vehicle and she had the gas pedal put down so I mean that was [an] unexpected kind of occurrence and benefit and experience all at the same time."

"I would say it's given her a bit of a different perspective to [sport] as well; when she goes to the track now she kind of puts on her hard hat, you know, more of a worker's mentality, like 'Okay, I'm here to get this work done in a reasonable amount of time. The amount of work that I intend to get done isn't going to change... but maybe the efficiency of that has to be increased.' Maybe [she's] a little more serious in that regards, more focused. I would say overall she can pretty much be right there where she was before; it's just that she has a few more hats to hold. So I think that's different too for different females as well because some benefit from the time away from the sport to maybe let a potential injury heal... things like that. That's why some females will say they come back stronger, [but] for [Victoria] that didn't really apply. She's always been very healthy and tried to minimize injury and be careful about that in terms of taking recovery time if needed. But on the other side of the coin though is [that] a mental break from the travels will help because it can become kind of taxing after doing that for five or six years of extensive travel, because it's not really glamorous – it's more just hotels, airports, tracks, you know – so a break from that monotony can be good, I think, mentally and then when

you go back you have a little more desire. It could certainly fall that way, maybe not for everyone but it's a very real possibility. ...I would say [Victoria is] pretty much able to give every bit of focus and energy and efforts to track, it's just structured a bit differently."

Victoria's involvement in elite sport "might influence the diet [and] the amount of exercise the child gets. I think overall there's a lot of benefit for a child from having, an athletic mother or father and we'll kind of restrict this just to the mother discussion. Especially because the mother is typically the primary caregiver, and is likely a little more close to the child than the father is, even though maybe they're around them a similar portion of the time. I think there is a large benefit to that, to [our daughter] from [Victoria], not just in diet or in exercise, but kind of ingraining habits in her from an early age and I'm a strong believer of that, like some of those initial things that you do in the first five to seven to eight years of life really can carry through into early adulthood. ... I think just in terms of activity, like getting up, moving, exercising, running, playing, and being an advocate of those ideals and also discipline as well; they do carry over and I think they have a much larger influence from that early development than maybe most people perceive."

"It always brings two people closer when they're locked arm in arm and going into a metaphorical battle of some sort, so it certainly has brought [Victoria] and I closer because we were both so tied closely into the situation and both really, really wanted her to be successful. I think we both saw each other at certain points in time sacrifice for the other one and you build a certain high level of trust and understanding that [we were trying to pick] up the slack for the other person or trying to aid in the process that they are going through at that time."

Although it was hard for her, "the time away that [Victoria] had from [our daughter] kind of sweetened the amount of time that they were together. I think she didn't

take for granted that she had a child. Putting that perspective on it made her enjoy family even more so; I mean, [Victoria]'s a very, very loving individual though, so, it'd be tough to be even more loving, but I would say in some regards that happened. I think as well we kind of realized that, [Victoria] and I need each other and at this point in time we need [our daughter] as well to feel whole and when we're pulled away from each other for various reasons, professional obligations typically at this point in time, you realize that that family aspect and core to you really is center of your existence and it would be tough to continue to thrive and exist without those other pieces of you along. I think it really gives you an appreciation for family. It's kind of like the adage, people say 'I hope you have enough rain in your life to enjoy the sun' ... there's different ways to phrase it, but enough of the alternative to make you realize how blessed you are to have that other thing in your life."

Lucia's Story

Lucia was an important source of support for Victoria in making her return to sport after pregnancy. "I took over taking care of [Victoria's daughter] so she could train and be able to compete at that level. If I wasn't there to help her, it would have been very difficult for her to get back. ... [While] she was out training, I just took control of taking care of the baby through the day [and] during the night, so she could just focus on trying to get back. ... I knew that she was capable of coming back. I know how determined she is and I know what a good athlete she is and I knew that she could do it, but if she didn't get the right help then it would have been difficult. So I had to give her that opportunity to try again."

"The benefit [that] I got was just being able to see [my granddaughter] grow for that one year. [I got] the experience [of] all the little things she was doing, stuff that I missed with Victoria, because now they get a year off, when the kids are pregnant they get a year off of work. In my day we didn't [get much time off], in six weeks you were back to

work, so what I missed out with Victoria I gained with [my granddaughter]. ... I wouldn't really say [that] I made any sacrifices. I wasn't at home, I just had to be at [Victoria's] place looking after [the baby], and that was really the [only] sacrifice I made. ... Actually I wouldn't say any part of it was difficult [for me]. It was all easy really. ... It was great having the time off of work and being able to spend time with [my granddaughter], watch her grow up and do little things. So it was all a pleasure."

Lucia wasn't surprised at all that Victoria intended to return to track post-pregnancy, "I know [track is] in her blood. It's something she loves doing." "I don't think anybody had any doubts. They know her; they know what she loves doing and they just know [that] after the baby she's going back – that's no ifs, no doubts. They know that's what she's going to do."

"I think that [returning to sport] was just all her decision, what she wanted to do. ... Track is something that she loves doing and she would do it 24/7 if you give her a chance. ... She always had intentions of going back, so I don't think it was anything that she had any doubts that she wasn't going back. She knew after the baby, she was going back... no ifs, no doubts, [her attitude was] 'I'm going back.' So, for me, whatever her decision was, I'm there. Her trying to come back, that was all her decision. She knew that's what she wanted to do so she was determined to do that and we just supported her."

"When [Victoria] asked me [if I would take time off in order to help with the baby] obviously I had to go to my workplace and find out if they would give me the time off. It took a few months of just asking and asking before they said 'Okay' that they would give me the time off and that was great that they did. Some companies probably wouldn't have, so that was the difficult part." Lucia wasn't aware of anyone expressing a negative opinion about her choice to take time off work to help Victoria. She said "everybody in my household was willing to help 24/7 and I don't know whoever it was that was negative – I

don't know anybody that was."

For Victoria "the running part is always easy; she loves doing that.... [Victoria] knew she loves being an athlete. ... [The] difficult part was being away from the baby; that was the difficult part. When she was away we tried to Skype a lot, so she could see what [the baby] was doing and stuff like that. I think that was the most difficult part for her, was just being away from home, [and] especially being a new mom. She knew that she was missing out a lot."

"I'm not sure [what sacrifices Victoria had to make]. ... The only one that I know for sure [was the time she had to spend away from her daughter]. I think that [being away from the baby] was one of the big ones and I think it was the most difficult one. ... She would have loved to have [her daughter] a little bit more with her, but that wasn't possible. I think that would have made it a little easier."

Lucia didn't see any changes in Victoria as an athlete once she became a mother, "because when she's competing, she's competing; she's very focused on what she's doing. So, when she's home she's a mom." Lucia feels that she does a good job of playing both roles. "I didn't really see any [conflicts between her roles as an athlete and as a mother]; she was at track and when she came home she was a mother. She didn't complain, that's for sure."

Being a mother "just made her want to go out there and prove that you can have a baby and you can still compete. She was determined, that was one of the things that she was determined to prove, that she can still do that. There are a lot of [female] athletes out there; [she wanted to show] women they can have their babies and they can still compete. ... I think she was determined to prove that one. ... I mean, it's a lot easier for a guy, they're not having the kids."

"I was just so happy and thrilled to be there and nervous at the same time watching

her compete. I know how difficult it was for her just being away from [her daughter], so that was a little hard to watch, knowing that she's away and seeing her on Skype and knowing she wants to hold her and kiss her and stuff like that. ... She's a great mom and she wants everything for [her daughter]. She knows that nothing in life is easy, so she tries to teach her all the right things and all the wrong things. She's trying to instill a little bit of athlete world into her I guess."

"I was glad to be there; I knew that she trusted me. ...If I wasn't there it probably wouldn't have been that easy for her; she would have been maybe [sic] worried about certain things. Just knowing that I was there, I think it gave her peace of mind. So I was glad for that one; it gave her the opportunity so she can focus."

Reflecting on the Stories

In this section I will present the themes identified from the entirety of the information collected. Themes will be presented using representative quotations from the participants' stories and discussed in relation to previous research that was introduced in my literature review section.

Four themes were identified – Dual roles: athlete and mother; Fundamentals to success in both roles; Other's expectations and reactions; and Training – with up to three levels of sub-themes within each broader theme. Figure 1 (p. 23) provides a visual representation of the themes and sub-themes.

Dual Roles: Athlete and Mother

Victoria as an athlete and a mother. It is evident that Victoria identifies with being an athlete and that her athletic involvement plays a major role in her life. The way her mother describes it, "Track is something that she loves doing and she would do it 24/7

if you give her a chance. ... It's in her blood. ... She loves being an athlete." Becoming a mother added another role that now contributes to Victoria's identity; she refers to "being Mommy" and considers 'mothers' a group within which she identifies herself when she says, "That's a huge one for the moms out there ... 'We can do this.'" Reid describes her as "very maternal". As with Victoria, other women with the experience of return to competition post-pregnancy expressed strong athletic identities that were maintained but adapted when they acquired the new identity of being mothers (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Victoria, along with all of the women in the Palmer and Leberman (2009) study said they had always expected to have children. Appleby and Fisher (2009) found that their participants' identities shifted upon becoming mothers; sport became less of an exclusive focus and they developed a more multidimensional identity.

Family as a priority. It is clear that Victoria considered having a family to be a priority in her life, as she said, "Family stays, track will be done one day" and Reid explained "Should she have achieved everything she could in the track world but not been able to gain a family I think she would have felt like she had lost the overall gain." Female athletes often plan to have children at a time that causes the least disruption to their sport competition; one woman said "We planned her. She had to be before the Games." (Palmer & Leberman, 2009, p. 245). For Victoria this was not the case; at the time of her first pregnancy, she and Reid simply welcomed their daughter when she arrived, "When we found out we were pregnant we were immediately excited because of all the worry and the stress leading from the past history." Her intentions for the timing of the second pregnancy also did not follow her original plan, "I was hoping to run a few more years and then have another [child] ... but I felt like we had to really make a decision. ... [That] kind of jump started the second pregnancy."

Combining roles. Victoria describes the day-to-day situation of combining roles

as, “Typically I’ll be at practice and then I get to see [my daughter] in the mornings and I get to see her in the evenings, just like a typical working person.” Lucia puts it simply, “She was at track and when she came home she was a mother.” Victoria and Lucia’s descriptions reflect a strategy of compartmentalizing each role in isolation, as some women in Palmer and Leberman’s (2009) study did.

Reid articulates his overall perspective of the combination of athlete and mother roles, “I think there’s always going to be a conflict just because you can’t be in two places at once. ... I don’t think you can ever really max out the one or the other completely; you can probably get close as long as you structure everything fairly well, but there’s another aspect of worrying about whether you might not be able to have kids should you stay in sport too long and you miss the opportunity in terms of fertility as well. So it’s trying to make the most of both of those roles and both of those opportunities because when you do just focus on one you maybe achieve at a little higher level, but you’re not balanced and there’s quite a bit of justification for balancing.” The stories told by Victoria, Lucia and Reid all provide evidence that support this idea that conflicts exist, but are manageable and that balance is important and possible with these two roles.

Changes. Victoria expressed how becoming a mother impacted her as an athlete, “I’d say I’m definitely even more determined and driven and focused than I was before. ... I’m more efficient ... this is time I’m spending away from my daughter. ... When I go out there I guess I’m more serious. ... When I go to compete I want to go there, I want to give it everything I have ... because I have [my daughter] there, so it’s like I have somebody to fight for.” Reid also saw changes in the athlete side of Victoria, “I would say it’s given her a bit of a different perspective to it as well. ... When she goes to the track now she kind of puts on her hard hat, you know, more of a worker’s mentality. ... Maybe [she’s] a little more serious in that regards, more focused.”

Other women corroborated a change in perspective upon returning to sport post-pregnancy (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Debois et al., 2012; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Overall these women felt that motherhood had a positive effect on their role as an athlete. Victoria's idea of increased efficiency during training was shared, as another woman similarly stated, "You've got to train harder because every moment is a wasted moment I could be spending with my child" (Palmer & Leberman, 2009, p. 246). For some athletes, training became more enjoyable after pregnancy (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Debois et al., 2012; Palmer & Leberman, 2009); as one runner called it "an expression of joy in her life" (Appleby & Fisher, 2009, p. 10). The change in perspective in some cases was a decrease in pressure associated with competition or becoming less self-critical in sport (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Debois et al., 2012). In other cases women had the opposite experience, feeling that "it certainly places a lot of pressure on you so you feel you need to succeed" (Palmer & Leberman, 2009, p. 246).

Benefits. Victoria expressed that continuing to compete in sport after having her daughter allowed her "to have both of best worlds." Disappointments on the track were countered by the joys of motherhood, "Definitely it was heartbreaking not making the [Olympic] team, but at the same time I got to see [my daughter] walk and no one can ever take that away from me or you can't take her away from me. She's my little blessing and she's always got surprises." Another woman seeking Olympic selection after pregnancy also felt a countering effect of having her child; she said, "I hadn't put off my other dream and so I felt like I was very relaxed going into it" (Appleby & Fisher, 2009, p. 11). This woman compared her situation to a fellow athlete who had delayed having a child until after the Olympics, expressing pity that "there was so much on the line for her to make that team 'cause she put off having her baby" (Appleby & Fisher, 2009, p. 11).

Reid saw that "the time away that Victoria had from [our daughter] kind of

sweetened the amount of time that they were together.” Other athlete-mothers had similar experiences, as they were concerned with “quality, rather than quantity of time spent in both spheres” (Palmer & Leberman, 2009, p. 247); as discussed above, they also altered training to reflect this.

Victoria’s sport demands allowed Lucia to benefit from spending extensive time with her granddaughter; as she expressed “being able to spend time with [the baby], watch her grow up ... it was all a pleasure”. Reid shared, “It’s neat because she’s connecting with her grandmother too. ... If there was anyone else that should kind of gain or be able to fill that spot you would want it to be the grandmother.” The same situation was true for one participant in Palmer and Leberman’s (2009) study; her time away allowed for the grandchild-grandmother bond to be formed.

There were benefits to Reid and Victoria’s relationship, “It always kind of brings two people closer when they’re kind of locked arm in arm and going into a metaphorical battle of some sort, so it certainly has brought Victoria and I closer. ... We kind of realized that Victoria and I need each other and at this point in time we need [our daughter] as well to feel whole and when we’re pulled away from each other for various reasons, professional obligations typically at this point in time, you realize that that family aspect and core to you really is center of your existence and it would be tough to continue to thrive and exist without those other pieces of you along. So I think like it really gives you an appreciation for family.”

Some aspects of motherhood that could be considered challenges were actually reversed and deemed benefits, as one woman said “Don’t underestimate someone that’s had a baby. It’s emotionally draining, it’s physically draining, it hurts and you feel all these things that you’ve never ever felt before in your whole life. I think that gives you the edge” (Palmer & Leberman, 2009, p. 246).

Challenges. The most significant challenge that Victoria faced was the time she had to spend away from her child to fulfill the demands of her sport; all three participants emphasized this as a sacrifice that Victoria had to make. She explained, “My time away – it was really hard the first couple times. ... [Being able to] send videos and pictures back and forth ... if I didn’t have that I don’t even know what I would have done.” Her husband agreed, “There were times that [Victoria] was missing out on some of the firsts for [our daughter]. ... Some of them were difficult things to swallow and the only way you could really soften that blow was by [the] realization that she’s doing something big as well and using that for justification.” For Victoria the disappointment of lost time with her child was more significant than lost achievement in sport, “Not making the [Olympic] team didn’t upset me. ... What upset me was the time that I missed from [my daughter].” It was common among athlete-mothers to talk about missing out on opportunities to spend time with family and missing out their children’s milestones (Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Sending videos back and forth during long travels for training or competition was also referred to by another mother as a strategy to manage her time away from her family (Debois et al., 2012).

The physical process of returning to world-class performance posed another challenge for Victoria, “Honestly, it was really hard. Some of the workouts I had were very challenging and it was very difficult. ... I just kept telling myself ‘I’m doing this for me. I’m doing it for [my daughter]. I’m doing it for my family. I’m doing it for everybody.’”

Parenting proved to be challenging for Reid and Victoria, “Perceptions versus the actual reality of it once you have the child home are oftentimes very different and a lot of times we underestimate just how much work is involved with children.” The process of breastfeeding was “hard and frustrating” for Victoria at some points “because I wasn’t able

to produce any more milk. So then we went to the formula ... all that part was hard transitioning.”

Fundamentals to Success in Managing Both Roles

Themes in this section that emerged from Victoria’s story are very similar to those of ‘managing time and space’, ‘personal support networks’ and ‘extent of organizational support’ found by Palmer and Leberman (2009). The women in their study used “words like ‘compromise’, ‘juggle’, ‘balance’ ‘sacrifice’ and ‘being organized’” to describe their ways of negotiating multiple roles (Palmer & Leberman, 2009, p. 247).

Organization. Reid explained that organization was fundamental to allow them to fulfill all of the targeted objectives, “It was such a time crunch that ... efficiency was kind of the name of the game. ... Things just had to be a little quicker, a little more precise. ... We really couldn’t look any further in advance than the next seven days.” The mind-set was ““Overall what do we have to do within the next seven days? Okay now, let’s get through today.’ So the whole timeframe got even narrowed and more of a microscopic focus was on each and every day.” The woman interviewed by Debois and colleagues (2012) also talked about the organization for childcare that had to be arranged between couples and how her sport demands complicated these arrangements.

Positive attitude. Victoria frequently expressed her positive outlook on life, “If you stay positive and you stick to your goals and you do the best you can that’s all you can ask for. ... You just have to take it and go with it and just really believe even when times get tough. ... [I] just always try to find the positive in things and go at it that way.” It is likely that this attitude helped Victoria manage the demands of her dual roles as she did not dwell on the challenges but continued to move towards her goals.

Support. Reid expressed the necessity of support in Victoria’s situation, “There

was no way you could do both [take care of the baby's needs] and make a return for the Olympics. It was mutually exclusive. No one could do that." Reid expressed how he and Victoria saw that trying to manage taking care of the baby alone "become too much as her training picked up in intensity because then she was starting to get more tired. ... We kind of realized that ... likely it's not going to happen, she's not going to be able to put in the amount of training that she will need to make it back in time for the Olympics unless we bring in additional help." Victoria recognized, "Having the support from family, friends, teammates, and my coaches, it definitely made a difference."

Palmer and Leberman (2009) indicated that support was "integral to participants' continued involvement in elite sport" (p. 247). The women depended on their support networks, partners, family, friends, and peers, to enable them to successfully maintain roles as athletes and ensure their children were cared for; these people provided support in various forms, from hands-on help to emotional encouragement. The women credited their personal support networks as facilitating their continued involvement in sport by reducing or eliminating obstacles (Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Like Victoria, the women were very grateful for the support of their partners and family members.

Reid's supporting role. Reid explained, "There were a few different levels of my role." Some of those included "planning the logistics", "setting the stage", "[taking] over more responsibility earlier on", "trying to manage the overall situation and settings and trying to coordinate [things]", "mental support", "physical support", "being there", "cooking more meals", and "rotating shifts at night".

Reid faced many challenges in his role as a part of Victoria's support network. "I just felt an urge to try to maybe sometimes do more than I was able to handle. ... I just remember being excessively tired. ... My head was in the clouds." He recalled having to "block off kind of any accessory forms of entertainment, or types of social activities. It

was, it just like everything got really, really limited partly because of just the nature of having a child also because it was just there's this major goal. ... When you combine both of them, it had some influence on my ability to retain knowledge. ... I always felt if I wasn't being productive at school or if I didn't have something there at the building to be doing, I should be home."

Lucia's supporting role. Victoria expressed the vital role that Lucia played, "My mom actually kind of stepped in and she actually took a year leave from work which was a *huge* help. ... [She] helped day and night ... and that allowed me to sleep the full night and not worry about her at all during the day. ... [I] definitely wouldn't be able to do it if my mom hadn't taken the time off."

Lucia's role was all-encompassing as far as caring for the baby, "I took over taking care of [the baby] ... through the day [and] during the night, so [Victoria] can just focus on trying to get back". Lucia was motivated to help because she knew the importance of support in Victoria's comeback on the track, "I knew that she was capable of coming back. ... I knew that she can do it, but if she didn't get the right help then it would have been difficult. So I had to give her that opportunity to try again." Lucia's experience as a supporter was very positive and free of challenges, "I wouldn't say any part of it was difficult. It was all easy really. ... It was all a pleasure."

Sport-based support. Overall Victoria received a positive response to her pregnancy from her sport community. "The initial [reaction from my coaches] was shock ... but then once the news sunk in and we gave it a little time to register then they were happy because, especially [my main coach] knew everything I went through. When I told my coach about my second pregnancy, he said] 'I'm happy for you because I know this has been a hard thing for you guys' and he's like 'Just enjoy this pregnancy. Go home have fun with [your daughter] and we'll come back and we'll make the game plan after

that point.”

Victoria received positive support from her sport organization, saying the response they gave “was amazing ... and then when I told [my sponsors] they were still supportive also.” Many women in Palmer and Leberman’s (2009) study encountered a lack of support from their sport organizations; this was a source of frustration and anger as the women felt abandoned upon becoming pregnant. Those who were supported by sport coaches, clubs or organizations found it very helpful in their ability to manage multiple roles (Palmer & Leberman, 2009).

Others’ Expectations and Reactions

People’s expectations and reactions to Victoria’s pregnancy varied, as she said, from “one end to the next end”. Although the “majority of people were supportive” (Reid), some reacted with different expectations, such as “Aren’t you going to retire?”, “Are you sure you want to come back?”, “[Are] you sure you’re able to do it and come back?”, “Why are you still doing this? You’re a mom. You should retire” or “Why didn’t you wait until you’re done?” Other women received similar responses; people believed that pregnancy indicated that their sport careers were over (Palmer & Leberman, 2009). In some cases this was a disappointment to the women, while in others they used people’s doubts to fuel their motivation to return to sport (Palmer & Leberman, 2009).

Both Lucia and Victoria expressed that “It’s always harder for the female athlete to have kids ... [and] people think the guys can go out and compete and have a family and then go back” (Victoria). Victoria asks “Why can’t I have my child and come back and still run too? ... We [women] should be able to do the same thing too.”

Other studies discussed how the social expectation that women should act according to an ‘ethic of care’ for others (Palmer & Leberman, 2009) or ‘the good mother identity’ (Appleby & Fisher, 2009) impacted their feelings when resuming sport. A

prevailing theme in their interviews was that the women felt guilty for pursuing their sport goals, as one woman shared her thoughts, “‘I’m a mother now. I’ve got to give up everything.’ Don’t you when you’re a mother? Or you’re supposed to, so some people say” (Palmer & Leberman, 2009, p. 247). Another woman voiced her internal conflict of “‘Is what I’m doing too selfish?’” (Appleby & Fisher, 2009, p. 9).

Victoria’s concern for being a ‘good mother’ did not manifest in the same way as the women in both above-mentioned inquiries; she expressed considerably less feelings of guilt because of her decision to continue her athletic career. She did face others’ social expectations that suggested her sport participation was in conflict with her role as a mother. In response to this she said: “‘I have great support, so why not?’” With this statement she acknowledges her responsibility for ensuring her daughters’ needs were met, but affirms that her support system could fill that role. She hinted at some feelings of guilt due to missing some of her daughters’ “‘firsts”, but those feelings were alleviated by the trust she felt in her support system. Victoria didn’t make any direct references to ‘feeling guilty’ or ‘selfish’ as did many athlete-mothers in other studies (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Palmer & Leberman, 2009).

Training

Training during pregnancy. Victoria described some of the considerations that she and her coaches had to take into account to balance continued training throughout pregnancy while maintaining her baby’s safety. “[When I found out I was pregnant] my coaches instantly backed down on the workouts. ...I trained right about until the week before I had [my daughter]. [I] took it easy the first trimester because they said that’s what I had to do to be safe, and then once I got back into it I was doing jogs, I just couldn’t full out sprint, I mean I could but they wouldn’t allow me to, so it was just being smart about certain things. ... For me it was the worry about ‘Oh, what if I lose her? What if I

miscarry?' It's not worth that."

Return to training and competition post-pregnancy. When Victoria returned to training post-pregnancy, Reid thought, "The biggest thing in my eyes ... was this kind of idea of incremental, small gains that she had to make... but also with the idea that she can't get injured, so you're always balancing this fine line about how hard can you push it without breaking down and without taking too many steps back. ... That was the main source of pressure ... it was no doubt that she had the ability, it was more just about the timeframe."

Victoria was satisfied with her performance after pregnancy. "I even ... won a race coming back. ... I didn't get to the Olympics, but I still had the fastest times any girl [from my country] ran ... [I had] a lot of huge accomplishments. ... I more or less proved that I could come back."

Motivation to return. Victoria was determined to make a comeback on the track, "I'm not ready to hang up my spikes because I feel like I still have more to accomplish. ... I'd absolutely love to go back out there and do what I love doing. ... The competition and going out there and being able to kick some butt every now and then, it's pretty fun."

Various motives to return are present in the interviews that have been done with mothers who continued in sport; love or enjoyment of sport was a common factor for many women, while some wanted another chance at achieving high performance or participating in the Olympics (Debois et al., 2012; Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). One woman said "I felt that I had not finished with fencing ... I still wanted to learn and try new things. I decided to start fencing again and continue until the next Olympics [with the intention of competing]" (Debois et al., 2012, p. 665).

Victoria maintains her intention to return after her second child is born, "I still have the love for it. I know it's going to be tricky, but I'm the kind of person, I'm a fighter and I

want to be able to come back and be like I'm that person who was able to come back after having two kids." As Palmer and Leberman (2009) found, "a strong passion for sport appeared to be the driving force for continuing involvement in sport after becoming mothers" (p. 245).

Being a role model. One aspect of Victoria's motivation was "trying to be a good role model." It was evident that she was passionate about setting a positive example for others, particularly mothers, young female athletes and her own daughter. "I'd love to come back [again] and be a great role model for moms [and] for the younger girls. ... I want to try to be that good role model for the kids that are coming up." She wanted to empower other mothers with the idea "We can do this."

Palmer and Leberman (2009) discussed athlete-mothers as positive role models for various groups including other women, their own children, sport organizations, and society at large. Victoria derived a great deal of motivation to return to sport from the idea of being a role model and while the other women recognized this role, it does not appear to have been central to their desire to return to sport; instead it became more significant after commencing their return. Being a positive role model was a factor in helping women cope with feelings of guilt and in strengthening their athletic pursuits as it reinforced that sport participation "can have a positive impact on motherhood and family" (Appleby & Fisher, 2009, p. 13).

Process of return. A major factor in the case of Victoria's return to training was the timeframe; it was "crunch time coming into the Olympics." She discussed the process, "It's just getting back into shape after having her. ... I definitely wanted to put more in earlier but I had to listen to my body too. ... It was just making sure that I was gaining the steps and being ready for when I needed to be ready for." As mentioned above, the physical workouts were "very challenging" and Victoria was "feeling so drained." A major

obstacle was that the baby “had separated my abdominal cavity”, but Victoria did not find the mental or emotional aspect of her return to sport challenging. She had positive results on the track in early stages, “My first meet I ran [when I came] back was the same time I ran the previous year, like the same exact time. ... That definitely is a confidence builder and booster.”

The process of return differed among women interviewed in other studies; some women began training immediately following pregnancy, as Victoria did, but others took more time off, had multiple children during the break, and returned later (Debois et al., 2012; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Differing from Victoria’s strong belief in her ability to return, other women disclosed uncertainty about belief in their ability, and in some cases desire, to come back to elite sport (Palmer & Leberman, 2009).

Missing the Olympics. The main focus of Victoria’s return to competition post-pregnancy was to make the Olympic team and she didn’t doubt her ability to reach that goal, “in my head it was always going to work out.” After the race, Victoria was left dealing with it being “heartbreaking not making the [Olympic] team”, and without any concrete reason why. She explained how her performances before and after the Olympic qualification showed that she had successfully regained her high-level performance after pregnancy. “The week before when I raced I had no issues, the week later when I raced, I had no issues. ... I just needed that one race to be ... a different race that didn’t have so much pressure on it.” Although she made the statement “My body was still playing catch up after pregnancy”, her other performances demonstrated that she was ready and she also suggested “it was just the one race” and that it was a “mishap.”

CHAPTER 5

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative research, specifically case study research, generally emphasizes the cultural setting in which the participant is located (Creswell, 2009). In order to uphold participants' anonymity, specific details are not discussed, including those relevant to the cultural setting; the participants' nationalities are not revealed, nor are the years in which the events occurred. The setting of the case is instead directed to the location of the participant in elite sport culture. The primary participant's precise sport discipline is not revealed, but her participation in the sport of athletics provides sufficient information to place the athlete within her sport culture. The omission of nationality and detailed background of the participants may limit the reader's understanding of specific cultural factors that may play a role in the story as well as making determination of transferability difficult.

The limited number of participants and focus on only one woman's return to sport post-pregnancy can be seen as a limitation. Limiting the number of participants was necessary in order to achieve sufficient depth of information within the time available to complete the project. I believe sufficient information was obtained, but more time would have allowed for greater depth or the inclusion of more participants (i.e. members of Victoria's support network and/or other athlete-mothers and their supporters).

The range of perspectives in my study is both a strength and a limitation. Including accounts from the support network is a novel addition to the literature; however only the principal members of Victoria's support network were interviewed due to time and accessibility issues. Victoria identified her main coach as an additional member of the support team, but indicated that he would not be available for interview because of his

coaching responsibilities. She indicated that her father played a role in her support system, but his involvement was peripheral in comparison to those interviewed. These additional members could have provided a broader range of perspectives, as Creswell (2007) suggests is favourable.

Implications and Future Directions

Due to the importance of a dependable support network in making the comeback to sport following pregnancy, coaches, sport psychologists and others working in supporting roles with female athletes can benefit from knowing what challenges may be faced and developing strategies to aid in this process.

There are many avenues to be explored concerning female athletes and motherhood. Multiple authors have suggested looking into more diverse populations of athlete-mothers, (e.g., women of different race, ethnicity, marital status, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status) while taking into account culture and sub-culture (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; McGannon et al., 2012; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Appleby and Fisher (2009) suggest exploring elite and non-elite athlete-mothers in various sports. It is important to recognize that continuation of sport involvement is only one possible outcome for female athletes who become mothers. As was suggested in Palmer and Leberman's (2009) study, future research should investigate the experiences of those female athletes who did not continue their sport career following pregnancy.

Concluding Reflections

The primary purpose of this research was to tell the story of Victoria's experience in order to fulfill a number of objectives; by telling her story Victoria's 'voice' is added to the existing literature, providing one more piece to the collection of material regarding

women in sport. Hearing her story, complete with accounts from her primary sources of support, extends our understanding of a female athlete's experience of returning to sport following pregnancy. Victoria's story demonstrates that continued success in elite sport is possible without neglecting other aspects of life, such as motherhood, and can act as an 'alternative narrative map' for female athletes (Douglas & Carless, 2006).

Throughout this work, I have emphasized the importance of providing alternatives to the dominant performance narrative in sport culture; for this, Victoria's story can stand alone as an illustration, but I will also contribute my interpretation and connection to existing literature. The information collected suggests that Victoria did not divert completely from the performance narrative, rather she combined it with aspects from multiple narratives to create a new one that fit her multidimensional life; as Frank (1995) suggests, the story an individual tells never truly mirrors a single narrative, but people feel "a need for a voice they can recognize as their own" (p. 7). In Victoria's story, there is evidence of all three, performance, discovery, and relational narratives described by Douglas and Carless (2006). Before proceeding, I would like to note that the discussion of these three narrative types (performance, discovery, and relational) is not to suggest that they are the only ones that may exist in sport; other types of narratives exist and new ones can and should be created (Frank, 1995).

Through Victoria's story, it is evident that she does value winning, results and achievements, as she often talked about her places and medals and enjoying the feeling of "being able to kick some butt" in her sport. Although her well-being, identity, and self-worth may be bolstered by performance achievements, she also draws from other sources to maintain these aspects of herself so these elements are not entirely dependent on performance success. After a 'failure' in performance terms, when Victoria missed Olympic qualification, she did not experience 'narrative wreckage' as would be the case if

she relied solely on a performance script to frame her experiences (Carless & Douglas, 2009). Instead she framed her experience from a relational perspective, focusing on being a positive role model for young fans. The relational narrative which highlights 'care' and 'connectedness' (Douglas & Carless, 2006) has a significant role in her life. She puts great value in being a role model for others (i.e. her daughter, young athletes and fans, mothers, and female athletes) and expresses her sport motivation in relational terms, "I'm doing it for everybody". Victoria's multi-layered approach to life demonstrates a discovery narrative; as she explores and experiences new aspects of life, such as motherhood.

Victoria's story exemplifies the ability to change the script from which we draw our life stories when the need arises. Her experience with health issues changed her way of thinking; in Frank's (1995) words, she experienced a "loss of the 'destination and map' that had previously guided" (p. 1) her life. Until that time Victoria's story was more closely aligned with the performance narrative, but after the second health scare she made a choice of family over sport performance. While changing which principles guided her life as the need developed, Victoria did not discard other narratives, but maintained a multidimensional storyline throughout the transitions with different storylines taking precedence at different times.

Victoria's story of successfully incorporating motherhood together with an elite sports career is a valuable addition to the few studies that have explored this topic. Although there are now a number of women who have combined these roles, there is still a cultural perception that the two are incompatible; this challenge was voiced by one woman, "It's not like I was physiologically incapable of doing it but it was a cultural landmine to negotiate" (Appleby & Fisher, 2009, p. 10).

Though the findings here cannot be generalized to apply to all cases of return to sport following pregnancy, nor is that the goal, we can learn from the stories that are

available. Victoria's story combined with others discussed in the literature in the section above ('Reflecting on the Stories') provide insight into this experience for women in sport (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Debois et al., 2012; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). These stories suggest that the roles of mother and athlete are not only possible, but can be mutually beneficial in several ways (as described above). The combination of these two roles requires some navigation of various challenges, but none that are not manageable, and the necessity of a strong support network is a key element in that navigation.

As one of Victoria's goals in her return to sport was to act as a positive role model, I hope that telling her story can act as a positive example for aspiring female athletes. Based on anecdotal evidence, the number of women who maintain their sport involvement following pregnancy seem to be increasing. It is my hope that circulating success stories can shift the cultural perception to accepting and supporting mothers in sport.

CHAPTER 6

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

1. Title of the study

Female Athletes' Return to Competitive Sport following Pregnancy

2. Aim of the Study

To explore, understand and voice the experiences of female athletes returning to training and competition following pregnancy.

3. Description of research activities

As a participant you are asked to partake in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. These interviews will be conducted in person or over the phone if meeting is not feasible. You are kindly asked to be available to be contacted for further information or clarification when necessary. The duration of and number of interviews is uncertain as they will continue until sufficient information has been obtained. You will be asked to read the transcript of your interview in order to verify the completeness and accuracy of the information you shared. You will also be asked to read and verify the researcher's written narrative containing interpretation of your story.

4. Risks/ discomfort involved

There are no risks involved in this study. If at any point you feel uncomfortable sharing personal information please let me know and I will withdraw the question.

5. Expected impact

As mentioned in the purpose, this study seeks to explore, understand and voice the experiences of female athletes returning to competition following pregnancy. By sharing these stories the researcher hopes to increase the understanding of issues specific to women in sport.

6. Dissemination of results

Results from the study will be presented in the form of a written report. As a participant you may choose to share your identity or remain anonymous. If you wish to remain anonymous you are asked to choose a pseudonym that will be used throughout the interview process and in the final report. In this case details that could make you identifiable will not be made public. If you wish to remain anonymous please choose your pseudonym here:

7. Further Information

Do not hesitate to ask questions regarding the aim of this study or the implementation of study design. If you have any doubts or questions, do ask for clarifications.

8. Freedom of consent

You are a volunteer participant. You are free to withdraw your consent now or later.

Participant's declaration

I read this form and I understand the procedures involved. I agree to participate in this study.

Date: ___ / ___ / ___

Participant Name

Researcher Name

Signature

Signature

Appendix B

Interview Guide – Victoria (Initial interview)

I would like to learn about your experience as an athlete becoming pregnant and returning to competition following the birth of your child/children.

I would like to know about your life before you became pregnant, during the pregnancy, and after the delivery.

Could you please tell me your story with as much detail as possible?

Tell me about the decisions that you had to make throughout this experience and what was involved.

At what point did you decide to have a child? What was involved in this decision?

At what point did you decide to return to competition? What was involved in this decision?

What other decisions did you have to make? What was easy or difficult about your decisions?

What expectations did you have? Were they fulfilled?

What obstacles did you face? How did you manage these?

What thoughts and feelings did you have throughout this experience?

Tell me about yourself as an athlete before you became pregnant.

Tell me about the transition in your athletic career from pre- to post-pregnancy.

What was your training schedule like at each point in time?

What aspects of your career changed and how did they change?

What new considerations did you have to account for with the pregnancy?

What expectations did you have? Were they fulfilled?

What obstacles did you face? How did you manage these?

What thoughts and feelings did you have throughout this experience?

Do you feel that you had to make any sacrifices? What were they? How did you manage these?

What benefits did you receive? How were these helpful?

What needs did/do you have? Were/are they being met?

What support is needed from external sources (i.e., people, organizations, etc.)?

Tell me about being an athlete and a mother.

What does it mean to you?

Are there any conflicts between these two roles? If yes, what are they? How do you manage these?

Are there similarities between your roles as a mother and an athlete?

Tell me about any influence that you felt, or feel, from external sources (whether positive, negative or neutral).

What advice would you offer other female athletes considering having children and returning to competition?

Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your experience?

Appendix C

Interview Guide – Victoria (Follow up interview)

I would like to ask you some more questions specifically about your return to training and competition after your first pregnancy. I have some questions about specific topics and I may press on certain issues that came up during our first interview in order to get a deeper understanding of your experience. If there is any question that makes you uncomfortable or you do not want to answer that is perfectly fine, just let me know and I will withdraw the question.

You emphasized the importance of your support system as you were making your return to sport. In the first interview you mentioned that you were naïve at first about taking care of your daughter, that early on you and your husband took turns looking after her in the night and had help from your teammate's mother during the day, and at some point your mother decided to take a year off of work to help both day and night.

Could you tell me more about what was involved in setting up the support system that you needed at this time?

How did it develop and change as you were figuring out what worked?

You talked about bringing your daughter and your mother along for one training camp and you husband's parents for another. Can you tell me more about managing these types of situations?

Were there any other situations that you didn't anticipate?

How did you manage these?

Are there any other details that you feel are important about the support that you had?

In the first interview you told me that because of the great support that you had, things were pretty good and you didn't have any trouble meeting your needs and the baby's needs. You also said that it was really difficult making the comeback; could you tell me more about what made it challenging?

You mentioned that some people expected you to retire when they heard that you were pregnant. Can you tell me more about the reactions that you got from others when you announced your pregnancy?

What reactions surprised you? Annoyed you?

What reactions did you receive from your coaches?

What reactions did you receive from the sport organization?

When you announced your intention to return to sport, how did these people react?

I recently saw a video of you in an interview shortly after you had your daughter where you mentioned another woman in your sport achieving her personal best after having her baby. How did knowing this contribute to your confidence and motivation to return?

I know this is a tough topic, but I'd like to talk about when you missed making the Olympic team. Can you tell me more about this experience?

In our first interview you mentioned that your mental state was ready to go but

your “body was still playing catch up after pregnancy”. Can you tell me more about this?

In our first interview you said that the biggest sacrifice that you had to make was leaving your daughter at home when you had to travel for your sport. Can you tell me more about that experience as a new mom having to be away from your baby so that you could continue in your sport?

Is there anything else that you feel is an important part of your story that you haven't had a chance to tell me?

Appendix D

Interview Guide – Significant others

I would like to gather as much detail as possible about the experience of Victoria's pregnancy and return to training and competition in her sport. I would like to ask you some questions about your experience as well as your perspective of Victoria's experience. If at any time there is a question that makes you uncomfortable or you do not want to answer that is perfectly fine, just let me know and I will withdraw the question.

Supporter's experience

What was your involvement in Victoria's pregnancy and return to competition?

What kind of support did you provide?

What sacrifices did you have to make?

What benefits did you receive from this experience?

Can you tell me about parts of this experience that were easy and parts that were difficult for you?

Did you contribute to Victoria's decision to return to competition? How?

Were there any other important decisions that you contributed to?

What were your expectations for Victoria when she returned to training and competition after pregnancy?

How would you describe the feelings of the general culture towards the idea of Victoria, an elite athlete, having a child and returning to competition?

Supporter's perspective of athlete's experience

Now I would like to ask you some questions about Victoria's experience from your perspective.

Can you tell me about sacrifices that Victoria had to make in order to be a mother and an athlete?

Can you tell me about benefits that Victoria received by being a mother and an athlete?

Can you tell me about parts of this experience that were easy or difficult for Victoria?

Do you feel that Victoria had any needs that were not being met? If yes, what were they, how could they have been met, and by who?

Tell me about Victoria being an athlete and a mother.

What do you think has changed in her role as an athlete now that she has become a mother?

Responsibilities? Perspective? Importance of sport? Training?

What advice would you give to another female athlete who is considering having a child and returning to her sport?

Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about this experience?

ⁱ The participant's required level of competition was not concretely defined prior to recruitment as availability and accessibility of participants needed to be taken into account. The researcher aimed to recruit an athlete with experience at the highest level of competition possible which signified a considerable level of demands.

ⁱⁱ Despite the video capabilities of the software, the interviews conducted using Skype were with audio only in order to uphold best possible sound quality.