

FLOURISH IN SPORT:  
EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TRACK AND FIELD OLYMPIC MEDALISTS

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Doctorate of Philosophy

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School,  
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FLOURISH IN SPORT:

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TRACK AND FIELD OLYMPIC MEDALISTS

Presented by Robert Glenn Low

A candidate for the degree of

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And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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There are many people who deserve an acknowledgment for their guidance, support, contributions, encouragement, and assistance throughout this journey.

Chronological order is where I will begin to tell this story and express my gratitude.

Working for an Alaska fishing lodge as a Boat Captain, I met many people on my deep sea fishing excursions. I never quite realized that one meeting would influence my life in the dramatic way that it has. I met Dr. Rick McGuire. Over a five-day period catching 225-pound halibut and 25-pound salmon surrounded by brown bears, killer whales and humpback whales I was introduced to the field of sport psychology. With his background in coaching track and field, sport psychology and his ability to tell stories, Dr. McGuire fielded my question like an all-star shortstop. The week ended with an invitation to study with him in graduate school in 2005. In 2011, I contacted Dr. McGuire and began my doctoral journey.

I would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Rick McGuire for mentoring me throughout my journey here at the University of Missouri. Also providing me with sound knowledge and unforgettable field experience in sport psychology. I will value the relationship for years to come.

I attended Brigham Young University as a member of the Men's Track and Field team. In between my sophomore and junior season, I realized that there was something more that I needed to do in order to achieve my goals. I was already doing everything I could physically, but I had always had recognized that there was something that the great athletes did mentally that separated them from the others.

These realizations lead me on a journey to the Head Women's Tennis Coach at BYU. Dr. Craig Manning, a graduate of Dr. Kieth Henschen's Sport Psychology program at the University of Utah. Dr. Manning began to teach me how to apply the mental skills that enhance performance to my sport. I experienced immediate results that carried me into a professional career and caused me to fall in love with Sport Psychology.

I appreciate Dr. Craig Manning, guiding me through the world of sport psychology as he taught me the mental skills that allowed me to achieve more than I could have imagined as a pole vaulter, as well as his continued mentorship throughout my graduate career in sport psychology.

When I arrived on campus, the first class I took was Motivation from Dr. David Bergin. I learned quickly that we attended the same high school in a small town in Utah. In his class the world of motivation theory came to life for me as we discussed why people do what they do. I am grateful for Dr. Bergin for the guidance and continued mentorship during my time at the University of Missouri.

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## **ABSTRACT**

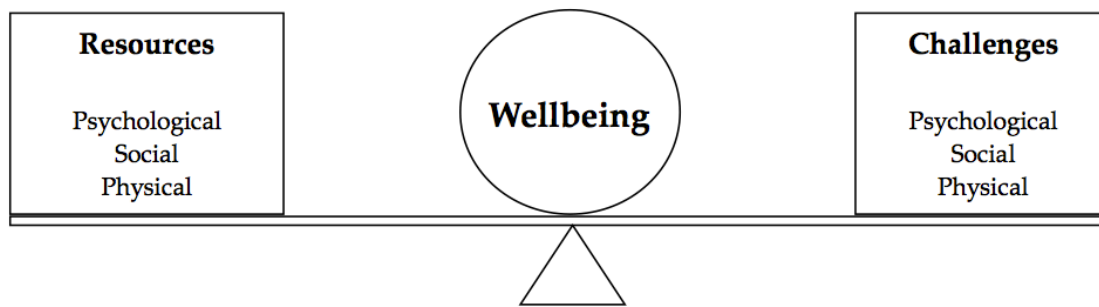
The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study explored emergent evidence that was consistent with Seligman's (2011) theory of well-being, also known as the PERMA Model. A qualitative research design utilizing multiple case study methods was used for this study. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews guided by an open-ended question: What were your experiences at the Olympic games? The data analysis utilized adapted content analysis strategies. The participants included four Olympic track and field, medal-winning athletes who competed in the 2012 London Olympic Games. Six themes emerged as evidence of well-being that were present in the described experiences of the Olympic games. Five themes emerged consistent with Seligman's PERMA model and one additional theme emerged. The themes included Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Achievement and Motivation. This study reported evidence of well-being that emerged from the lived experience of these Olympic athletes.

## CHAPTER 1 - OVERVIEW

Imagine yourself running full speed down a runway, carrying a sixteen foot pole soon to be planted into the ground, launching yourself nearly twenty feet into the air, clearing a bar resting eighteen feet up, then falling softly to the safety of the mat below. Follow that imagery up with standing on a podium, with the crowd cheering, as an official hangs a medal around your neck at one of the biggest championship events of your life. I was a competitive pole-vaulter, and this was one of my greatest experiences: jumping a lifetime best mark of eighteen feet in the pole vault and winning a medal at the biggest championship meet of my life.

It is reflecting about this experience and my athletic career as a whole that has brought about the purposes and problems explored in this manuscript. When I was competing at my very best, it seemed like everything in my life was in balance. I strategically use the word balance because when considering the definition of well-being, balance, equilibrium or homeostasis is at the forefront.

For the purpose of this manuscript, I will use the well-being definition provided by Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, (2012). The definition of well-being is the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced (Figure 1) (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012).



**Figure 1. Visual Representation of Balanced Well-Being (Dodge, et, al., 2012)**

I was experiencing balance in my well-being when I was competing at my best. It is important here to understand what in my experience was in balance. Well-being is undeniably a complex construct. Many researchers have spent a tremendous amount of energy and effort trying to identify all the intricacies of well-being (Seligman, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Kahneman, Diener, & Shwarz, 2003; Sheldon, & Lyubomirsky, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, & Jackson, 2000; Dodge, et. al., 2012). Seligman (2011) presents a model that is a simple description of the experience of well-being. This model suggests that well-being is the experience of five elements: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement (PERMA, Seligman, 2011). Seligman (2011) suggests that as people experience these elements they flourish. Flourishing, experienced with the PERMA elements, provides for a balanced well-being as defined by Dodge et. al. (2012).

When I was competing at my best, I was experiencing balance in my well-being. I was experiencing positive emotions that include joy, happiness, satisfaction, and excitement. These positive emotions were brought about by my experience in

track and field. I was achieving things that I envisioned only in my dreams. I was reaching lifetime best mark in the weight room; I was jumping new heights on the track. I won two conference championships and was ranked in the top five in the country. I won an All-American award. Achieving in these areas contributed to my experience of achievement and positive emotions, which enhanced my well-being.

I was experiencing positive emotions through the interactions with the people I cared about the most. A new coach was hired and I quickly developed a positive relationship with him. This coach cared about me as a person. We developed a friendship that extending beyond track and field. During this time I met my wife, and I experienced what it feels like to love someone and be loved by someone.

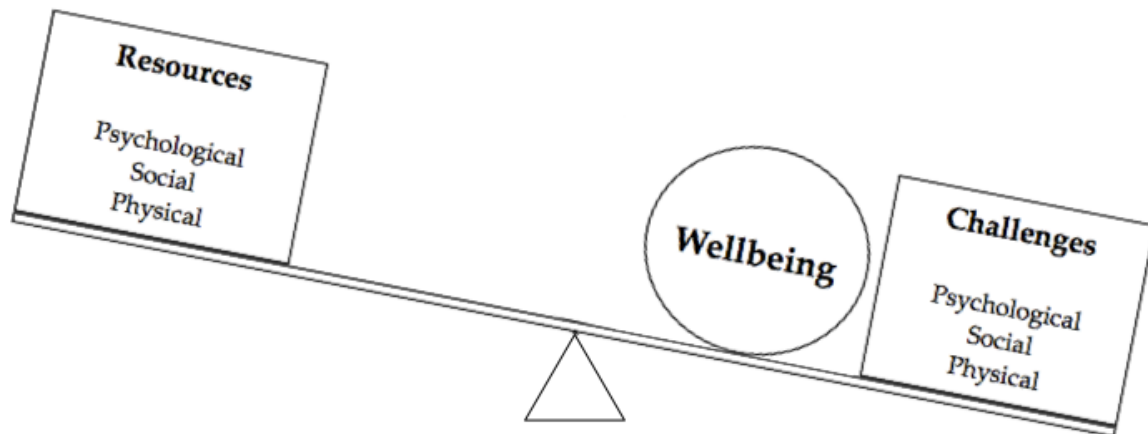
My engagement was very concentrated in track and field. Track and field was my life, I was excited about training and competing, and I relished the challenge of getting better and striving to attain new heights. Every aspect of pole vaulting was fun to me. Having fun is a critical element of Csikszentmihalyi and Jackson's (2000) description of the flow experience, which is evidence of the engagement element of flourishing. Finally, I had reached a performance level that allowed me to contribute to the team points at the NCAA championships. I was also elected team captain. I felt like I had a purpose on the team; I was contributing to a greater team cause with my ability.

I began volunteering as a coach at the local high school. I was able to help younger athletes learn the skills that I had learned to help them achieve their dreams. Everything I was doing as a father, husband, athlete, teammate, friend, and

role model gave me perspective and brought meaning into my life. I felt like I was contributing to something larger than myself.

When I was competing at my best, I had balance in my life. I had a reserve of resources from my experiencing these PERMA elements that balanced the challenges I was facing at the time. One of those challenges was to perform well in training and competition.

In contrast to this dream-like life of balance and flourishing, there was a time that was very much the opposite. Upon reflecting about a time just two years earlier, when I was not competing my best, I can see that my well-being was out of balance (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Visual Definition of Unbalanced Well-Being (Dodge et, al., 2012)**

Many of the previously mentioned PERMA elements were not part of my well-being. I experienced frustration, anger and depression more than any positive emotion. I experienced these emotions because of challenges in my life. Coping with the split of my parents due to incarceration of one caused me distress, along with



the financial burdens that came with supporting myself while attending college. Academic challenges arose due to being a first time college student and balancing, sport, work, school and social domains all at once. Experiencing negative emotions made it difficult to engage in my sport. Another challenge that contributed to my inability to engage in my sport was the presence of a verbally abusive coach. Due to the lack of engagement, I was not achieving according to my own standards. These stresses and distractions were making it challenging to achieve. As such it was difficult for me to find my place on the team, which caused me to question my participation in sport in the first place. Questioning my participating in track and field made it challenging for me to find purpose or meaning for participating. During this part of my life, I was not experiencing many of the elements of PERMA and my life was out of balance.

My personal narrative illustrates the balance definition (Dodge, et. al., 2012) of well-being and Seligman's (2011) description of well-being, the PERMA model. The importance of my experience is three fold. First, to introduce the definition and description of well-being, which I will further describe in chapter two. Second, to show the intersection of well-being and performance in the sport experience. Finally, to give context to how athletes may describe their experience of well-being in their respective sport domains.

When I compared these two personal experiences, I began to wonder what it was about my positive, balanced experience that allowed me to perform well. I also contrasted what about my negative, imbalanced experience was inhibiting my ability to perform well. I wondered if my experience was unique or if other athletes

were experiencing similar scenarios. How was their experience of well-being influencing their ability to perform well if at all? Furthermore, what does this experience of well-being look like in their lives? Does it look like mine or is it completely different? Finally, what does this experience of well-being look like in the lives of our Olympic medal-winning athletes?

The reason I chose to study Olympic medal-winning athletes is because they succeeded on the biggest stage during what is arguably the most difficult stage for performance. Every Olympic quadrennial begins with more than 10,000 track and field athletes dreaming to win a medal at the Olympic games. In 2012 about 1,100 athletes qualified for the Olympic trials in track and field. Of those athletes 132 made the Olympic team and only 21 athletes won a medal at the games. On that day, something worked for these 21 athletes.

These astonishing performances by medal winning athletes have garnered tremendous interest in the field sport psychology. Coaches, athletes, sport administrators, and sport psychology researchers are very interested in what these athletes do prior to the games that allow them to perform in such a way to achieve winning a medal. The potential knowledge gained is valuable; coaches and athletes spend a significant amount of time modeling what former great athletes do.

Similar to how my experience influenced how my questions developed, other researchers, as described below, have asked questions about what athletes do beyond the physical to be successful. What are these athletes thinking and experiencing during, before and after competition that allow them to perform to the best of their ability at that moment? These questions have uncovered cognitive

strategies that help athletes control their thoughts and manage their stresses to perform well.

### **Cognitive Strategies of Elite Athletes**

When we begin to think about athletic excellence, the performances of Olympic greats come to mind. We reflect on athletes like Michael Phelps, Usain Bolt, and Lindsey Vonn, and their unbelievable performances overcoming the challenges of the most unique competitive environment, the Olympic games. Sport psychology researchers have garnered an intense interest as a result of these tremendous accomplishments. Sport psychology researchers have been successful in identifying the cognitive strategies that contribute to the success of Olympic athletes. Identifying these cognitive strategies is where most of the research in sport psychology has been developed.

In a study done by Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon and Templin (2000), several cognitive strategies that help athletes control their thoughts and manage the stresses of performance were identified: mental imagery, visualization, confidence, patience, and perseverance. Further research has identified more cognitive strategies and personal attributes that enable athletes to handle the distractions and stresses of performance. These include: positive mental health, coping with adversity, peaking under pressure, goal setting, mental preparation, freedom from worry, confidence, achievement motivation, focus, imagery, commitment to the pursuit of excellence, competition simulation, distraction control, competition plans, concentration, self talk, automaticity, activation, and relaxation strategies (Gould, Weiss, & Weinberg, 1981; Smith, Schutz, Smoll, & Ptacek, 1995; Gould, Guinan,

Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001; Krane & Williams, 2006; Gould, Dieffenbach & Moffett, 2002; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004).

These findings give us great insight into the strategies that elite athletes use to handle distractions, stresses and pressure in many sport domains. This research does not tell us much about the whole athlete. Furthermore, this research does not tell us much about the well-being of an athlete. There is need for further research on the topic of athletic well-being. Specifically, if lack of well-being is the source of these distractions, stresses and pressure that athlete's experience, it would be useful to study aspects of well-being.

Even though much research has been done on the strategies that influence great athletes and performance, there is still more research to be done, specifically as it pertains to life satisfaction and well-being (Gould, Dieffenbach & Moffett, 2002;). Research regarding the well-being and life satisfaction of an athlete has gained growing interest (Lundqvist, 2011). The research on well-being in the general psychology field is pretty extensive on this topic. Psychological well-being and subjective well-being have been studied (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, Singer, Love, 2004; Diener, 2000; Coakley, 2007; Gould & Carson, 2008; Tracey & Elcombe, 2004; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006; Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005; Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & Sheldon, 2004). However, well-being research is still fairly new in the sport domain. A few research studies have looked at specific elements of well-being like emotions, achievement and relationships (McCarthy, 2011; Jackson, 2000; Hanin, 2007; McCarthy & Jones 2007; Rienboth & Duda, 2006; Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern, & Seligman, 2011). But very little

research has been done on the construct of well-being as a whole. Little research has attempted to explore well-being in the lived experience of Olympic medal winning athletes. Finally no attempt has been made to see if that evidence is consistent with Seligman's (2011) well-being theory or PERMA Model (Lundqvist, 2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences at the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study will explore what of the emergent evidence is consistent with Seligman's (2011) theory of well-being, also known as the PERMA Model. The reason that this question is important is because the difference between winning and losing at this level is largely dependent on the mental component of sport. Those that win have a highly developed ability to control, manage and eliminate distractions or interference (Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon & Templin 2000; Gould, et. al., 1981; Smith, et. al., 1995; Gould, et. al., 1999; Greenleaf, et. al., 2001; Krane & Williams, 2006; Gould, et. al., 2002; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004; Shadle, 2013; Ivey, 2013). This is critical because athletes who experience less interference perform better.

Interference can enter our minds from anywhere. Interference can be the experience of negative emotions, or a conflict with a coach or spouse, or not accomplishing a particular goal. Interference affects performance, and the source of that interference can come from the imbalance of an athlete's well-being. This imbalance can be described in the experience of the PERMA elements that influence

well-being. Before we can make causal claims about well-being and performance, we need to know what that subjective experience of well-being looks like from the voice of our elite athletes. It is also critical for us contextualize that lived experience of athletic well-being within a larger theoretical framework (Lundqvist, 2011).

This study will focus on exploring the athlete's experiences of the Olympic games, before, and during the games to see if evidence of well-being was present prior to winning the medal. If successful Olympic athletes report that well-being was present, it may be valuable for future coaches and athletes to attempt to replicate that well-being.

The main research questions under investigation in this study were the following:

1. What evidence of well-being emerges in the lived experience of the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field medal winning athletes?
2. What, from the emergent evidence is, and is not, consistent with Seligman's Well-being theory or PERMA model?

## **CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences at the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study will explore what of the emergent evidence is consistent with Seligman's (2011) theory of well-being, also known as the PERMA Model. For this purpose a review of the literature will be addressed.

This review of the literature will first introduce a brief history of the origins of well-being including definitions of the hedonic and eudaimonic philosophies. Furthermore, a description of the transition of the hedonic philosophy into subjective well-being and the transition of the eudaimonic philosophy into psychological well-being will be outlined. Next, the merging of these two dichotomous perspectives will be addressed. This will include the emergence of well-being theory. With the emergence of well-being theory, three theoretical models of well being will be discussed. These include: the multiple discrepancy theory, the mental health continuum, and the broaden and build theory.

Well-being is inconsistently defined in sport psychology literature, and this review will highlight the importance for adopting a uniform definition and model of well-being containing both subjective and objective perspectives to advance progress in the field. This study posits the use of Seligman's (2011) PERMA model as that uniform model. Next the PERMA model will be addressed, more specifically the elements of Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and

Achievement. Finally, a review of the well-being literature in the domain of sport will be reviewed to further compel the need for this study.

### **Well-being, Hedonic & Eudaimonic View**

Well-being research is especially prominent in the current field of psychology. Much attention has been given to the study and promotion of positive affect, wellness and well-being in the last century (Ryan & Deci, 2001). These topics have garnered interest from many dating back to fourth century B.C. It was during these times that two distinct philosophies emerged that provide the foundation to what we now understand as well-being. These two competing perspectives were centered on the idea of what constitutes “the good life” (Ryan & Deci, 2001). These two philosophic perspectives were the hedonic view and the eudaimonic view.

Aristippus, a Greek philosopher, posited this hedonic philosophy. The hedonic view is defined, as the main goal in life is to experience happiness, maximum amounts of pleasure, and to satisfy human appetite and self-interest. Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, posited that hedonic pleasure was vulgar and enslaved us to our own desires and appetites. Furthermore, he contended an opposing philosophy, the eudaimonic view. The eudaimonic view is defined, as the proposition that true happiness is found in the expression of virtue in doing what is worth doing.

These philosophies have evolved in the last century. The hedonic view has evolved into Subjective Well-Being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Subjective well-being includes three elements: life satisfaction, the presence of positive mood, and the absence of negative mood, together comprising happiness (Diener, 2000; Lundqvist,



2011). Kahneman, Diener and Schwarz (2003) further define this subjective well-being as the study of what makes experiences and life pleasant and unpleasant.

The eudaimonic view has evolved into Psychological Well-Being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Psychological well-being has a multidimensional approach, which includes six elements: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Lundqvist, 2011; Cox, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

During the last century much of the attention to the promotion of well-being has been overshadowed by psychology's attention to the amelioration of psychopathologies. Since 2000, a shift has occurred. The emergence of positive psychology garnered the attention of researchers to focus their efforts on the promotion of growth, well-being and wellness (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is the study of positive emotions, positive character, and positive institutions (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). The field focuses on improving happiness and well-being through the discovery and building of strengths as opposed to solely fixing weaknesses and treating mental disorders (Seligman et al., 2005). This resurgence of research attention on well-being has been successful in identifying well-being and interventions to improve well-being in a variety of domains. These domains include, education (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009), work (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2003), personal (Sheldon, & Lyubomirsky, 2004; Seligman, et. al., 2005), and sport (Reinboth & Duda, 2006). This success has led researchers to attempt to create uniformity by providing singular definitions and theoretical models that explain well-being.

## Well-Being Theory

Instead of contending over which perspective is the most accurate description of well-being, researchers have begun to merge the two dichotomous perspectives of psychological and subjective well-being suggesting that both contribute to overall well-being (Seligman, 2011). Despite the increased awareness, researchers have remained inconsistent in attempts to create a uniform model of well-being. This section will describe three theoretical models of well-being before suggesting the PERMA model as a useful theoretical model. These include: multiple discrepancy theory, the mental health continuum, and the broaden and build theory

Multiple discrepancy theory (Michalos, 1985) is based on the prior determined standard of expectation. The standards include our perception of other people, past conditions, ideal level of satisfaction, and needs or goals. This theory posits that a person will make comparisons to these standards with their predetermined level of expectation. A discrepancy due to an upward comparison (my expectation of the restaurant was better than the actual restaurant) results in decreased satisfaction whereas a downward comparison (my expectation of the restaurant was worse than the actual restaurant) will result in an increase in satisfaction (Michalos, 1985). This model was an early simple explanation of the experience of well-being.

Keyes (2002) conducted a study (N = 3,032) measuring mental health symptoms among adults and found that people fell within a continuum of mental health. Another well-being model is the mental health continuum (Keyes, 2002). This theory suggests that the experience of well-being operates on a continuum

from languishing to flourishing. Participants who were flourishing reported high levels of the experience of positive emotions, social well-being, and psychological well-being. Languishing was the experience of absence of mental health, positive emotions, social well-being, and psychological well-being (Keyes, 2002).

Fredrickson (2004) posits the broaden and build theory of positive emotions. This theory includes both subjective and psychological well-being components. The experience of positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment and love are the foundation of this theoretical framework. Fredrickson (2004) proposes that these emotions broaden the momentary thought-action repertoire. The emotion of joy causes the urge to play. Interest promotes the desire to explore. Contentment sparks the urge to savor and integrate. Love promotes the urge to experience these other emotions within the safety of loving, caring relationships. This theory encapsulates positive emotions, meaning, and the need for positive relatedness (Fredrickson, 2004).

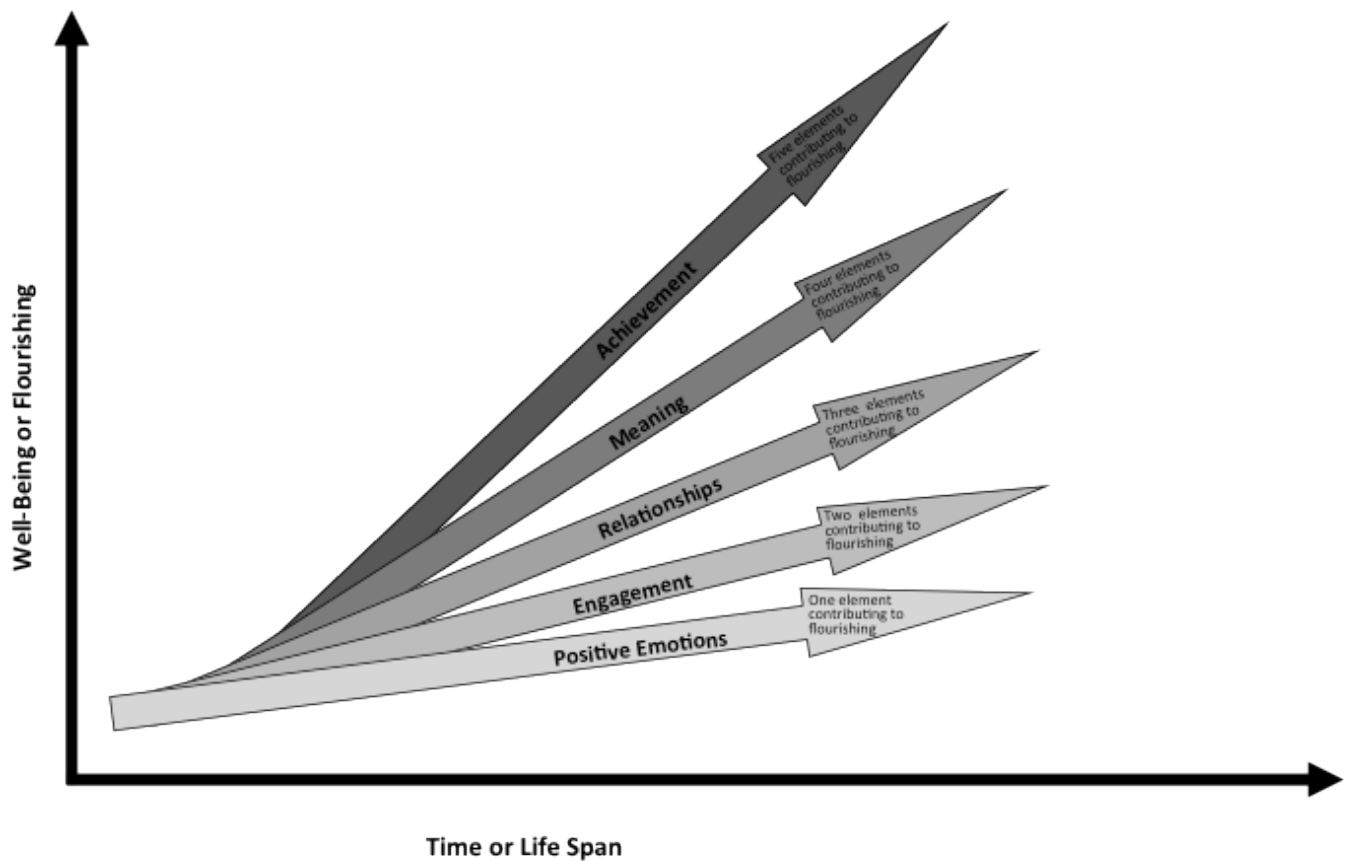
Researchers have made great strides in attempting to unify the psychological and subjective well-being views to create a uniform theory of well-being; but there are still disparities among these theoretical models. I contend that the PERMA model is the most complete model that effectively unites the two dichotomous perspectives; thus this study will use the PERMA model as the guiding theoretical framework (Seligman, 2011).

### **PERMA/Flourishing**

Seligman (2011) presents a theoretical framework, which encompasses both subjective well-being and psychological well-being. In his book *Flourish: A new*

*understanding of happiness and well-being*, Seligman (2011) outlines Well-Being Theory. According to Seligman (2011), flourishing is a construct comprised of five elements. He suggests that each of these five elements must meet three critical properties in order to be included as an element in the construct of flourishing. These properties include: (1) it must contribute to flourishing, (2) many people pursue it for its own sake, not merely to get any of the other elements, (3) it is defined and measured independently of the other elements (Seligman, 2011).

The five elements that contribute to flourishing include: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationship, meaning, and achievement (Seligman, 2011). These elements comprise the acronym PERMA. If an individual experiences positive emotions, those emotions contribute to increase flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Furthermore, when an individual experiences more than one of the elements together, flourishing is amplified when compared to an individual's experience of just one element (Seligman, 2011). Seligman (2011) suggests that an individual does not have to experience all five elements to experience flourishing. Seligman (2011) also posits that it is simply the pursuit of one of these elements that contributes to flourishing, but the more elements an individual pursues and experiences the greater that individual's flourishing will be (Figure3) (Seligman, 2011).



**Figure 3. Compounding Effects of the Elements of Flourishing**

### **Positive Emotion**

Positive emotions include: joy, happiness, satisfaction, excitement (Seligman, 2011; Jackson, 2000), peace, gratitude, hope, or love (Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008). There are many working definitions of emotion within positive psychology (Diener, Eunkook, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), most commonly emotions are “conceptualized as multicomponent response tendencies that unfold over relatively short time spans” (Fredrickson, 2004). Emotions emerge as a result of one’s appraisal of the personal

meaning of an antecedent event, in which the appraisal can be either conscious or unconscious (Fredrickson, 2004).

Empirical evidence supports the notion that the experience of positive emotions enhances well-being (Seligman, 2011; Fredrickson, 2004; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; Seligman, et. al., 2005; Cohn & Fredrickson, 2010; Sheldon, & Lyubomirsky, 2004; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Furthermore, the experience of positive emotions has been found to broaden the scope of attention, improve one's ability to make intuitive judgments, increase brain and immune function, foster resiliency, and increase longevity (Fredrickson, & Branigan, 2005; Bolte, Goschkey, & Kuhl, 2003; Davidson, Kabat-Zinn, Schumacher, Rosenkranz, & Muller, 2003; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003, Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001)

## **Engagement**

Engagement refers to a psychological state in which individuals report being absorbed by and focused on what they are doing (Forgeard, et.al., 2011). At its high end, engagement has been referred to as flow (Csikszentmihalyi, & Jackson, 2000), or the overall feeling referred to as being in the zone. According to Csikszentmihalyi & Jackson (2000), high levels of engagement are characterized by the following characteristics: the individual has clear goals and is intrinsically interested in the task at hand; the task presents challenges that meet the skill level of the individual; the task provides direct and immediate feedback to the individual; the individual retains a sense of personal control over the activity; and action and awareness

become merged, such that the individual becomes completely immersed in what he or she is doing (Forgeard, et.al., 2011).

Hodge and colleagues (2009) present a working definition of engagement. Engagement is defined as a persistent, positive, cognitive-affective experience that is characterized by confidence, dedication, enthusiasm, and vigor. Furthermore, confidence is “a belief in one’s ability to attain a high level performance and achieve one’s goals”, while dedication represents “a desire to invest effort and time towards achieving goals one views as important”. Vigor is defined as “ a sense of physical and mental liveliness”, and feelings of excitement and high levels of enjoyment characterize enthusiasm (Hodge, et. al., 2009).

Engagement has been found to be intrinsically rewarding (Hodge, et. al., 2009). Furthermore, evidence supports engagement as a factor that enhances well-being by promoting curiosity, learning and creativity (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009; Seligman, 2011).

## **Relationships**

The belief that one is cared for, loved, esteemed and valued as well as loving, caring and valuing others, has been recognized as one of the most (if not the most) influential determinants of well-being for people of all ages and cultures (Reis & Gable, 2003; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Deci and Ryan (2008) identify this concept of relationships, as one of the essential psychological needs that every person is motivated to seek. Deci and Ryan (2008) call this term relatedness or belonging.

Positive relationships that consist of love, care, trust and respect contribute to enhanced well-being (Reinboth & Duda, 2006; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). One of

the single most robust findings in a large meta analysis on well-being was that happy people have better social relationships (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener 2005). This same meta analysis also showed that community involvement, friendships, social support and intimate relationships all contribute to enhanced well-being (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener 2005).

### **Meaning**

Meaning creates a sense of purpose and significance in life for the individual and is central to optimal human functioning (Seligman, 2011). Meaning has been defined several different ways, for the purpose of this study we will use the definition provided by Seligman (2011). Seligman (2011) defines meaning as a feeling of belonging and serving something larger than the self or contributing to the greater good. Life satisfaction was associated with individuals who described their life as one that has lasting meaning, serves a higher purpose, benefits others people, and makes the world a better place (Peterson et al., 2005). Meaning is now viewed as an essential contributor to overall flourishing that is separate from, but positively correlated with, other facets of flourishing (Seligman, 2011; Hicks & King, 2007; Lyubomirsky, et.al., 2004).

### **Achievement This section is really weak. What do you really want to say, aside from citing people?**

There is a large body of research on this element of PERMA. Achievement Theories are theories of motivation that explains why people do what they do (Cox, 2012; Gallucci, 2008). A large portion of a person's life is devoted to the element of



achievement (Gallucci, 2008). People may not realize that they are achieving, they may simply be going through life thinking that these achievements are part of life.

Achievement is defined as a sense of accomplishment, mastery, or success at any level (Ericsson, 2002). Achievement can be defined in terms of reaching a desired state and progress toward pre-stated goals (Forgeard, et.al., 2011). Ericsson (2002) identifies that this achievement element can be met by deliberate practice to achieve mastery. Deci and Ryan's (2008) Self Determination Theory supports this mastery notion; more specifically the psychological need of competence.

Competence is simply the need to feel skilled at a particular task.

Gallucci (2008) suggests that people feel positive emotions when they achieve. Achieving also contributes to a person network of supportive relationships. Achievement is connected to a person's sense of identity. Finally when people become absorbed in their life's pursuits, they may experience the joyous flow state (Gallucci, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi & Jackson, 2000; Seligman, 2011). Empirical evidence supports the link between achievement and enhanced well-being and life satisfaction (Smith, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2007; Gallucci, 2008; Seligman, 2011).

### **Summary of PERMA**

To summarize, well-being is comprised of an individual's subjective experience of positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and achievement. The PERMA model consists of elements from both the psychological well-being perspective and the subjective well-being perspective. This study will use the PERMA model as the theoretical model to aid in building consistency among

sport related well-being research with regards to well-being theoretical constructs and well-being definitions (Lundqvist, 2011).

### **Well-being in sport**

Research on the topic of well-being in sport is focused largely on individual components of well-being rather than well-being as a whole. As stated previously no research has been conducted using a theoretical model of well-being with each component of well-being represented. This section will outline the sport psychology research conducted on the elements of well-being in the competitive context. This section will also include sport psychology research where well-being emerged but was not the main focus of the research study.

Vernacchia et al (2000) conducted a qualitative study with fifteen Olympic track and field athletes. This study consisted of nine males and six females who participated in one or more of the Olympic games between 1984-1996. The intent of this study was to identify the cognitive strategies evident in these Olympic athletes. Even though it was not reported specifically in the findings evidence of well-being did emerge. The athletes reported the importance of the role that the emotion joy played in their development. Seven of the athletes recognized the paramount importance that role of the coach played, citing positive relationship characteristics such as trust, belief and care. The findings reported the these athletes described setting goals and achieving those goals, this finding would be consistent with the element of achievement within the construct of well-being (Vernacchia, et. al., 2000).

In another qualitative Olympic study conducted by Greenleaf et al, (2001) components of well-being were described in the findings. This study consisted of fifteen athletes, eight athletes who participated in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and seven who participated in the 1998 Nagano Olympics. The researchers found that social support was a positive influencing factor that athletes acknowledged when they performed well. The researchers also found that those athletes who did not perform well acknowledged that negative social support factors were present. Social support was defined as coach support; familial support and feeling cared for. These findings are consistent with the element of positive relationships within the well-being construct. The athletes cited positive relationship characteristics such as care, trust, and close friendship in the findings. Under the attitudes towards the Olympic games theme, the athletes reported an intense focus. "I have a job to do," or "I am focused on having fun" is consistent with the engagement element of well-being (Greenleaf, et. al., 2001).

Mallet and Hanrahan (2004) conducted a qualitative study that consisted of ten elite athletes. In this study "elite" was defined as someone who had competed in an Olympic or world championship between the years of 1995 and 2000. Five male athletes and five females athletes who competed for the Australian national team participated. The study intended to measure the motivational processes within three social-cognitive theories of motivation. These theories include self-determination theory, achievement goal theory, and the hierarchical model of motivation. The findings associated with achievement goal theory and competence within self-determination theory are consistent with the element of achievement in

the well-being construct. These athletes reported achieving both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and goals. Six of the athletes also cited the importance of a positive relationship with the coach (Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004).

Considering the specific well-being element of positive relationships in sport psychology research, most research is done with regards to the coach-athlete relationship. Jowett and Cockerill (2003) conducted a qualitative study with twelve Olympic medal-winning athletes from an array of countries. This study included three females and nine males who participated in 30 to 40 minute interviews directed at coach-athlete relationship. The findings revealed that the interpersonal relationship between coach and athlete is an important factor that contributes to the athlete's development. The stereotypical perception that the athletic relationship formed between coaches and their athletes at the elite level is impersonal, authoritarian, and dependent upon competition success was not supported. More specifically, the findings revealed that the relationship was underlined by mutual respect, trust, care, concern, support, open communication, shared knowledge and understanding, as well as clear, corresponding roles and tasks (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). The evidence that a positive relationship between the coach and the athlete contributes to well-being is supported (Reinboth & Duda, 2006; Greenleaf, et. al., 2001; Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, & Carbonneau, 2011; Poczwadowski, Barrot, & Henschen, 2002)

The research on the specific element of positive emotions in sport is limited. Most of the sport psychology emotion research has been done on negative emotions—such as anxiety, stress, and anger—rather than on positive emotions

such as enjoyment, satisfaction, and happiness (McCarthy, 2011; Jackson, 2000). McCarthy and Jones (2007) found sport enjoyment to be a key factor in sport motivation and commitment. The link between the experience positive emotions during competition and performance was made in a study conducted with sixty-nine softball players. Following a national competition, these softball players were asked to complete the Sport Emotion Questionnaire. These athletes also retrospectively reported the perceptions of how emotions influenced their attention, concentration, and sport performance. The findings revealed that excitement and happiness were more closely linked with concentration than negative emotions such anxiety, dejection and anger. The positive emotions were also perceived as more likely to increased focus and automatic physical movements, which are beneficial for performance (Vast, Young & Thomas, 2010). Csikszentmihalyi and Jackson (1999) posited that athletes who reported enjoyment during an activity were more likely to achieve “flow” states. Flow is a form of the engagement element with in the well-being construct.

The research on the element of meaning is limited. Meaning in an athlete’s life can come from experiencing positive emotions (Hicks & King, 2007; Seligman 2011), performing acts of kindness (Seligman, et. al., 2005; Lyubomirsky, et.al., 2004), by glorifying one’s deity through maximizing one’s abilities (Raikes, 2011; Steger, & Frazier, 2005; Balague, 1999; Shadle, 2013) and through belongingness by being part of a team (Rienboth & Duda, 2006; Ivey, 2013).

As previously presented, the research on well-being in competitive environments has steadily increased. Lundqvist (2011) contends that this interest

in well-being has likely been stimulated by the view that a high level of psychological functioning, adaptive short-term responses of emotions and long-term affects among athletes are crucial to perform optimally. Moreover, well-being likely helps athletes deal with the diverse challenges they face during their sporting career (Lundqvist, 2011). With respect to this growing interest, the athletic well-being research is still limited. Furthermore, no research effort has been made to contextualize athletic well-being within a larger theoretical framework (Lundqvist, 2011).

### **Summary of Literature**

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of the Olympic games as described by Olympic, track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study will explore what of the emergent evidence is consistent with Seligman's (2011) theory of well-being, also known as the PERMA Model. For the purpose of this study a review of the literature on the topic of well-being was presented. Furthermore a description of the transition of Hedonic philosophy into Subjective Well-Being was outlined. The transition of Eudaimonic Philosophy into Psychological Well-Being was outlined. The merging of these two dichotomous perspectives was addressed. Well-being theory with three theoretical models of well being were discussed. These included: the multiple discrepancy theory, the mental health continuum, and the broaden and build theory.

The PERMA model was discussed as the theoretical model that best combines both the elements of Subjective Well-being and Psychological Well-Being, suggesting that both constructs contribute to overall well-being collectively not

separately (Seligman, 2011). The elements of the PERMA model were outlined and described. The five elements that contribute to flourishing include: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationship, meaning, and achievement (Seligman, 2011). Positive emotions are the experience of the emotions: joy, happiness, satisfaction, excitement (Seligman, 2011; Jackson, 2000), peace, gratitude, hope, or love (Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008). Engagement refers to a psychological state in which individuals report being absorbed by and focused on what they are doing (Forgeard, et.al., 2011; Seligman, 2011). Relationships are the belief that one is cared for, loved, esteemed and valued as well as loving, caring and valuing others (Reis & Gable, 2003; Seligman, 2011). Seligman (2011) defines meaning as a feeling of belonging and serving something larger than the self or contributing to the greater good. Finally, achievement is defined as a sense of accomplishment, mastery, or success at a high level (Ericsson, 2002; Seligman, 2011).

Research on the topic of well-being in sport was addressed. A review of current Olympic research that report findings consistent with the elements of well-being. Research addressing specific elements of well-being with athletic populations were also included in this literature review.

## CHAPTER 3 - METHOD

The participants in this study included members of the USA Track and Field team who won medals at the 2012 Olympic games. This study will focus on exploring the athlete's experiences of the Olympic games, before, and during the games, to see if the evidences of well-being were present prior to winning the medal. The potential knowledge gained is valuable; as stated previously, coaches and athletes spend a significant amount of time imitating what former great athletes do. If well-being is present and emerges from the lived experiences of these Olympic medal winning athletes, it may be valuable for future coaches and athletes to understand those elements of well-being.

This study will explore athlete's reports for evidence that is consistent or inconsistent with Seligman's (2011) theory of well-being, also known as the PERMA Model. I will discuss the research questions, methodological approach, and procedures including participants, interviewer, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

This study will address the following research questions: (1) What evidence of well-being emerges in the lived experience of the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field medal winning athletes? (2) What, from the emergent evidence is, and is not, consistent with Seligman's Well-being theory or PERMA model?



## **Design**

A qualitative research design was used for this study. “Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2012). When conducting qualitative research, the researcher must identify his or her epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods (Crotty, 1998).

The nature of this study was investigative. As previously stated, this study explored the Olympic lived experience of medal winning, track and field athletes. The present study operates from a constructivist epistemology, suggesting that truth or meaning is constructed through the interaction between a person and his or her social environment (Crotty, 1998). That is, the research sought evidence of how individual athletes construct meaning from their experiences of the Olympic games.

The data collected in this study were phenomenological in nature. Phenomenology falls under the larger theoretical perspective of Interpretivism (Crotty, 1998). In the data collection process the athletes’ described their lived experiences of the Olympic games. The researcher recognizes that the individual realities of these athletes are constructed through their lived experiences and interactions with others.

A phenomenological methodology was used for this study. In phenomenology, the researcher transcends or suspends personal past knowledge and experience to explore the lived experience of the participants (Anderson &

Spencer, 2002). Phenomenology is an attempt to approach a lived experience with a sense of newness and to elicit rich and descriptive data (Anderson & Spencer, 2002).

This study utilized case study methods (Crotty, 1998). These methods are adapted from Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon and Templin (2000), and Mallet and Hanrahan, (2004). These case study methods include semi-structured interviews, verbatim transcriptions, content analysis, and cross case analysis (Scanlan, Ravizza & Stein, 1989; Vernacchia, et, al., 2000; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004). These methods will be further described below in the procedures, data collection, and data analysis section of this chapter.

## **Procedures**

This study was part of a larger study being conducted by a research team at the University of Missouri in collaboration with the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and USA Track and Field (USATF). Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained to perform human subjects research with participants from a pool of the 21 Olympic Track and Field medal winners. The criterion for selection to the broader study was any athlete who won a medal at the 2012 London Olympic games. The 21 medal-winning athletes were then divided up into the three groups according to event similarity. For example, the running event athletes were combined into one sample, the field event athletes were combined into the second sample, and the combined event athletes were combined into the final sample. This also allowed for more in-depth research with smaller sample sizes. The study reported in this document focused on the field event athletes.

Eight field event athletes were identified and invited to participate in this study. An IRB-approved email invitation was initially sent to each participant to begin the recruitment process. Multiple attempts were made to contact each participant; six participants agreed to participate, but only four participants followed through to completion. As such, this study consisted of four Olympic field event medal-winning athletes. Further contact through email and phone were used to arrange convenient times for the interviews. Informed consent was given and signed consent forms were received prior to the interviews being conducted.

Each interview was done via skype due to proximity challenges of the researcher and athletes. Each interview ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded. A semi structured interview schedule was used to help guide the interview, to create a comfortable, and conversation-like environment. This allowed for an environment where the athletes could share rich and descriptive lived experiences of the Olympic games. The questions were designed with an inductive frame to allow the athletes to share their experiences. The large open-ended question that drove the interview was “What were your experiences at the Olympic games?” Adapted from Mallet and Hanrahan, (2004) the interview schedule that guided the interview is included below (Table 1).

**Table 1. Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

---

1. What were your experiences at the Olympic games?
2. What was it like to win a medal at the Olympic games?
3. Tell me about the Olympic village?
4. Tell me about the Olympic team training camp?
5. Tell me about your competition during the Olympic games?
6. Were there any defining moments?

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7. Tell me about your preparations for the Olympic games?
  8. What would you say contributed the most to your success?
  9. What will you remember most about the Olympic games?
  10. Can you describe the award's ceremony?
  11. Can you describe the emotions that you had throughout the Olympics?
  12. Can you describe your support system? Coach, Trainers, Family, Friends?
  13. Tell me about your relationship with your coach?
  14. Describe your performance compared to other performances?
  15. Were there any challenges you had to overcome?
  16. Were there any critical moments?
  17. What did being at the games mean for you?
  18. What did winning a medal mean to you?
  19. Describe what this achievement was like for you?
  20. Did winning a medal change you?
- 

## **Participants**

Only medal winning athletes were considered for participation in this study. As previously stated, 21 athletes were divided into three groups according to event similarity. This study is focused on the field event sample. The field event sample consisted of eight eligible athletes. Over a period of 14 months of contacting and interviewing these participants, two never responded, thus electing not to participate in the study. Furthermore, two participants agreed to participate but due to challenges in scheduling both opted to not participate after several months of contacting and scheduling. The four Olympic medal winning track and field athletes who participated included two males and two females. To help protect anonymity, no further demographic information will be described.

## **Interviewer/Researcher**

I am a sport psychology doctoral student in my final year of the Ph.D. program at the University of Missouri. I have been trained in qualitative research

methods through completing two graduate level qualitative inquiry and research design courses, reading several qualitative research methods books, reading many articles, conducting and audio taping pilot interviews, and receiving feedback and instruction from professors and committee members who are experienced in qualitative research design. I was a former NCAA All-American and competed at the Olympic level in track and field. I have also coached athletes who participate in track and field and have competed at this same level. My experience can inform and strengthen the data collection and analysis process because I can speak and interpret the language of track and field.

### **Data Collection/Analysis**

The data were collected using semi-structured interviews guided by a large open-ended question: What were your experiences at the Olympic games? The interview was intended to avoid leading the participants to talk about well-being. This intent was to allow evidence of well-being to emerge organically from the descriptions of the Olympic games.

As previously stated, the data analysis was conducted using adapted strategies from Vernacchia, et. al., (2000), and Mallet and Hanrahan, (2004). These case study methods include semi-structured interviews, verbatim transcriptions, content analysis, (Scanlan, et, al., 1989; Vernacchia, et, al., 2000; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004) and cross case analysis (Yin, 2009). Research assistants who were not part of the interview process transcribed each interview verbatim. The researcher then reviewed the transcriptions with the audio recording to ensure that the track and field jargon and language was transcribed accurately. Using content analysis

(Scanlan, et, al., 1989; Vernacchia, et, al., 2000; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004) strategies each transcript was read several times to get a thorough understanding of the interview. Meaningful phrases or statements were extracted from the transcriptions. These phrases are called meaning units. A meaning unit is a phrase or statement that the participants use to illustrate a point (Crotty, 1998). The meaning units were analyzed for a code that represented the meaningful phrase. These codes were then grouped together into themes. An example of this process is below:

1. Raw Data Quote: "That made me pretty happy."
2. Meaning Unit: Participant experienced happiness.
3. Code: Happiness.
4. Theme: Positive Emotions.

The data analysis was focused on evidence of well-being rather than the entire Olympic experience. A deductive approach was utilized in the data analysis. This approach is utilized by qualitative researchers attempting to find support and lack of support for a specific theoretical framework (Hyde, 2000; Yin, 2009). While deductive analysis is not the most common practice in qualitative research, it is a recognized and useful approach (Hyde, 2000).

Addressing the second research question, what, from the emergent evidence, is and is not, consistent with Seligman's Well-being theory or PERMA model. The themes that emerged from the content analysis were compared with the five themes or elements of the PERMA model. Similar themes were then categorized into the themes represented by the PERMA model. These themes are Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement (Seligman, 2011). A six

theme was created to allow for confounds or themes that were not consistent with the PERMA model that emerged from the described lived experiences. The sixth theme that emerged was labeled Motivation. There was evidence of well-being that emerged that could be represented in multiple themes. Codes that represented multiple themes were categorized as such in each respective theme. An example of this process is below:

1. Raw Data Quote: “The love I felt from my family helped a lot.”
2. Meaning Unit: Participant experienced love from family.
3. Code: Love.
4. Theme: Positive Emotions and Positive Relationships.

The primary researcher conducted initial data analysis. A peer debriefing team was organized to provide external checks to the research process. This team consisted of one doctoral committee member, and two doctoral students with knowledge about the topic being studied and had experience with graduate level research methods courses. Each received a final copy of the meaning units, codes and themes, with these themes imbedded into the theoretical framework of PERMA. The peer debriefing team analyzed the data to ensure accuracy of the interpretations. If there was a disagreement about a meaning unit, code or theme the peer debriefing team reviewed and discussed the data until consensus was reached concerning an appropriate interpretation.

During the peer debriefing process consensus was reached on all codes, themes. There were two disagreements that emerged in this data analysis process. The first disagreement was in regards to the sixth theme, Motivation, actually being consistent with the Engagement element of the PERMA model. The peer debriefing

reviewed and discussed the disagreement and consensus was reached that Motivation should stand as an independent theme.

The second disagreement was in regards to the data that emerged in the theme of positive emotions. The codes were consistent with Positive Emotions; but some of the described Positive Emotions were experienced after the participants won the Olympic medal. The peer debriefing team reviewed the data and consensus was reached. It was determined that the data was valuable but should not be included in the findings of the Positive Emotions theme due to the focus of this study on the experiences that lead up to winning the medal. The Positive Emotions that emerged as a result of winning the medal will be addressed in the discussion section.

The data were inductively collected allowing for each athlete to describe his or her experience of the Olympic games. The data were deductively analyzed into larger themes that were consistent with Seligman's PERMA model. An additional theme also emerged. These adapted strategies are consistent with qualitative research design (Hyde, 2000; Yin, 2009; Scanlan, et, al., 1989; Vernacchia, et, al., 2000; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004).

## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings as best described by the researcher and the participants. Qualitative researchers use strategies to establish trustworthiness. Next I will discuss supported trustworthiness strategies (Creswell, 2012).



Clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study is important so that the reader understands the researcher's position and any biases that influence the inquiry. As the researcher, I have given a personal narrative of my experience as an elite athlete and how the operational model of PERMA fit the descriptions of my experience. This was to help inform the reader of the problem and purpose of this study, and to force me to consider how my experience might influence the data collection and analysis process. Qualitative research can bring a rich understanding to the world of psychology. My experience is what led to the puzzlement or curiosity inquired about in this research study. As a qualitative researcher it is imperative that I bracket out my experiences that might influence the data collection and analysis process. I have an understanding of how my personal experience relates to the PERMA model. I attempt to make sincere efforts to bracket my experiences that might shape the data collection and analysis process (Ahern, 1999), while considering the impossibility (Schutz, 1994) of being completely objective.

Member checks (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2012), considered a technique for establishing credibility, were conducted to ensure the credibility of the data. Each of the participants received a copy of their transcript with questions, comments and clarifications from the researcher to verify the accuracy of their experience. One participant responded with one correction. The other three participants each responded confirming that their respective transcript was accurate. All of this was conducted through e-mail.

As stated previously, a peer debriefing team was organized. The team was used to resolve researcher bias and confirm the accuracy of the data analysis. This strategy is often used to strengthen the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2012).

## CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS

The analysis started with the components of the PERMA model as the themes. A sixth theme also emerged and was labeled motivation. The themes are reported as positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and achievement, motivation. Within each theme meaningful phrases and statements are used to show evidence of the experience of well-being. Each athlete's experience of the theme will be reported as independent cases within each theme. A summary of each theme will be provided after each participant's experience with the theme. A cross-case analysis, as recommended by Yin (2009), of each participant's reported themes will be described after each theme is introduced.

The tape-recorded interviews produced 53 pages of transcriptions. 306 meaning units were identified and condensed into 52 codes followed by the categorization into the six themes. A frequency table (see Table 2) was included to show the distribution of the number of raw data meaning units across themes for each athlete.

**Table 2. Frequency Report of Raw Data Codes**

	Positive Emotions	Engagement	Positive Relationships	Meaning	Achievement	Motivation
Jane	9	20	24	6	14	9
Beth	6	13	17	5	13	4

Walter	9	25	19	7	21	7
Ron	7	32	10	6	17	6

An illustration of the data analysis process including examples of raw data codes, meaning units and themes is provided in Table 3.

**Table 3. PERMA Inductive Analysis Results**

Meaning Unit	Code	Theme
"So much joy" "I was really happy and excited" "I had an optimistic happy mindset" "I did something spectacular" "It was awesome"	Joy, Happiness, Love, Satisfaction, Excitement, Awe, Gratitude, Hope, and Optimism	Positive Emotions
"I got in that zone" "I needed a queen sized bed" "My main focus was just to be me" "Got to keep my head on straight" "Focus on Olympic games stuff"	Confidence, Dedication, Enthusiasm, Vigor, Focus, Awareness, Preparation, Flow, Concentration, Decision Making, Attention to Detail, and Fun	Engagement
"We have a father daughter relationship" "Coach is like an older brother" "The love and energy I got from my family" "100% support from everyone" "I am a family person" "There is trust on both sides"	Love, Value, Esteem, Care, Trust, Honesty, Quality Communication, Respect and Support	Positive Relationships
"Winning a medal meant the world to me" "I got to hear the national anthem" "I have never worked as hard as I did for that medal" "Being part of history" "Being able to stand on the podium meant a lot"	Being part of team USA, Contributing to something bigger than the self, Part of History, Leaving a Legacy, Trust in God, and Satisfaction from Achievement	Meaning
"Overcame an obstacle of making the team" "I was top 3 in the world" "Chess match of getting better" "I had a little injury " "Earned a scholarship" "I set big goals and met them" "I jumped my seasons best" "I won before"	Making the Team, Winning, World Rankings, Mastering Skills, Overcoming Injuries, Achieving Lifetime and Season best marks, College Scholarships, and Achieving preset Goals	Achievement

“We were really really really hungry” “I am naturally a competitive person” “I was a force to be reckoned with” “I can do anything”	Motivation, Resiliency, Persistence, Competitive, Goals, Determination	Motivation

## **POSITIVE EMOTIONS**

There was evidence of positive emotions in the lived experience of all participants. Collectively these athletes experienced joy, happiness, love, satisfaction, excitement, awe, gratitude, hope, and empathy. The experience of negative emotions also emerged in the participant’s reported lived experiences. Specifically, the negative emotions described included anxiousness, and brief disappointment. Below I will outline each athlete’s experience of positive emotions with quotes and phrases that meaningfully represent these emotions, followed by a data analysis of the described experiences as it related to the primary research questions in this study.

The athletes reported extensively about the emotions that they experienced on the medal stand after they won a medal. It was intended in the interview process to have the participants talk about this experience because it set the tone for them to talk about their Olympic experience generally. Due to the nature of this study, being a performance study focused on the experiences prior to winning a medal, the positive emotions that were experienced as a result of winning the Olympic medal were not reported here. There is value in the emergence of these positive emotions,

but that value will be addressed in the discussion section as it relates to future research.

### **Jane's Lived Experience of Positive Emotions**

Jane reported that performing well at the Olympic trials and making the team elicited positive emotions such as joy and excitement, followed by relief. These emotions were a result of overcoming the obstacle of making in onto the Olympic team, which some American athletes believe is a tougher challenge than actually winning an Olympic medal.

Hope and optimism emerged as positive emotions in preparation for the games. Jane reported, "I made the team, I am here, my goal was done, I was optimistic about winning, I hope I'm going to win, but what ever happens, happens, I am just having a good time here." Jane reported that this experience of hope and optimism replaced the feelings of anxiousness and nervousness that she experienced in the trials. Jane added that this distinction in emotion between the two competitions, made a huge difference allowing her to relax and just perform.

Jane described that she felt very loved and supported by her community, church, friends and family. This caused her to reciprocate that support by wanting make everyone proud. Jane described that the most significant sources of this type of love and support came from two people, her fiancée, who is now her husband and her long time coach of ten years.

Jane reported that experiencing London created emotions of awe, wonder, and amazement. Exploring London allowed her to stay calm and not worry about all

the pressures of the Olympic games. Jane also expressed that “being comfortable, calm and relaxed allows me to perform better.”

Evidence of positive emotions emerged from the descriptions of the Olympic games. The positive emotions that she described were excitement, happiness, joy, hope, optimism, love, awe, wonder, amazement, being comfortable, and calm. The described emotions are consistent with the element of positive emotions in Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model (Table 4).

### **Beth’s Lived Experience of Positive Emotions**

Satisfaction was also evident in Beth’s experience. She describes having a very disappointing previous Olympic games, and how that motivated her to put in extra work and dedication to have a successful Olympics in 2012.

That was something that I worked hard for over the past four years after a disappointing 2008 Olympic game. I placed fifth and I felt like I let a lot of people down. I got caught up in all the hype and that distracted me from jumping far in 2008 and I did not get caught up in all the hype in 2012. I focused on having fun and it was satisfying because it showed how hard I have worked for something, and I’ve never work as hard as I did for that medal.

Beth described being distracted by the hype in 2008; as such she felt anxious and worried about her performance, which lead to a disappointment. This motivated her to work hard, which contributed to the feeling of satisfaction for all her accomplishments leading up to the Olympic games. Beth reported an emphasis on experiencing fun during the Olympic games; Fun is most closely associated with the

positive emotion of sport enjoyment. Beth reported having fun as a distinction between a disappointing 2008 and a successful 2012.

Beth reported that she is a family person and that spending time with her family prior to leaving for the games helped her to relax. She added that the love and support she felt from those around her was a contributing factor to her success the day of the final competition.

Evidence of happiness, excitement, hope, optimism and anticipation emerge from the description of her experience being around her teammates at the games. Beth reported that watching her fellow teammates do well and celebrating those successes with them caused her to be happy, hopeful, excited and optimistic about her performance.

Evidence of positive emotions emerged from Beth's described experience. These include joy, satisfaction, relief, love and being calm. The described emotions are consistent with the element of positive emotions in Seligman's (2011) PERMA model (Table 4).

### **Walter's Lived Experience of Positive Emotions**

Walter described his experiences with a sense of awe, wonder, and amazement, identifying "wow" moments. Walter said, "One of the most memorable moments was the opening ceremonies because there was so much energy in that stadium during the opening ceremonies and I was like wow!"

Below Walter describes two sources where evidence of positive emotions emerged. The sources include his team and his family.



To sit side-by-side with people from these countries so I think that was interesting, it was just fun to be around a whole bunch of different other athletes. Being with the USA team. We had a lot of team spirit in the Olympic village we all stuck together we were always together. You know trying to just get a clear mind and just have fun. So to get away from all that we all felt it would be cool to hang out and have fun. As well as I think just the love and energy that I got from my family were things that help me. These things contributed to help me stay comfortable.

Being part of team USA and the love and energy he received from his family contributed to his experience of positive emotions. Walter reported that experiencing the love and energy from his family contributed to his success at the Olympic games. He added that the love and support lead to actions from his family that allowed Walter to be comfortable and relaxed at the games. Walter described the experience of fun, which elicits the positive emotion of enjoyment.

Walter had a unique experience at the Olympic games. Walter won two medals. As such the experience of winning the first medal can be included in the experience of leading up to winning the second medal. One interesting finding that emerged from Walter's description of the experience of winning two medals was that winning the first medal contributed to being more relaxed for the second competition.

In describing his preparations for the games Walter reported that he had a happy optimistic mindset, saying, "I had an optimistic mindset, you have to have optimistic happy mindset towards things because the way that you feel is often

times the way it is going to turn out.” He reported this with the comment that if you have a negative, worried, anxious mindset you will not be successful. The reported happy optimistic mindset is of the experience of happiness, hope, and optimism.

Walter experienced joy, happiness, satisfaction, gratitude, love hope, optimism and being comfortable. The described emotions are consistent with the element of positive emotions in Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model (Table 4).

### **Ron’s Lived Experience of Positive Emotions**

In response to the experience of positive emotions after an achievement Ron reported, “I guess in some way I’m a bit robotic in terms of, I get really, really, really excited, happy, but then I come down, then I start focusing on the next quest of competing again.” Ron described experiencing joy and satisfaction throughout the year as he celebrated filling his mantle with trophies and medals. Ron added that when that year is over, he clears the mantle and starts the process of collecting medals and trophies over.

Ron reported feeling loved and supported from two sources, his family and coach. Ron reported his wife, mother and other family members coming to the games to support him. As Ron described the relationship with his coach, he reported the importance of knowing that the coach cares and has your best interest at heart. This reciprocation of love contributed to Ron’s experience of positive emotions.

From Ron’s descriptions of the Olympic games, evidence of positive emotions such as joy, excitement, happiness, satisfaction, and love emerged. The described

emotions are consistent with the element of positive emotions in Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model (Table 4).

**Table 4. Evidence of Positive Emotions**

Jane	I made the team, I am here, my goal was done, I was optimistic about winning, I hope I’m going to win, but what ever happens, happens, I am just having a good time here.
Beth	My thing is I am a family person. I got the opportunity to be around my family before I left. I got the local support from my hometown... feeling that love and support was definitely a BIG key to me being successful that day
Walter	I had an optimistic mindset, you have to have optimistic happy mindset towards things because the way that you feel is often times the way it is going to turn out.”
Ron	I guess in some way I’m a bit robotic in terms of, I get really, really, really excited, happy, but then I come down, then I start focusing on the next quest of competing again.

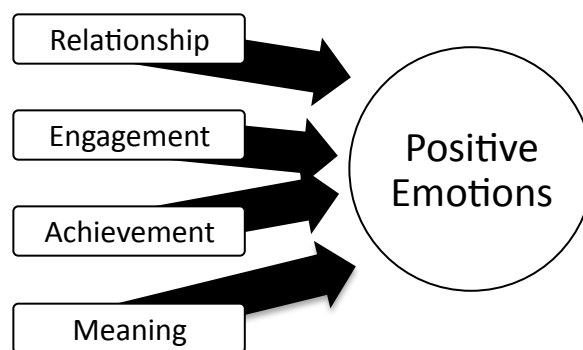
**Summary of Positive Emotions**

The evidence of positive emotions that emerged in the reports of each participant are consistent with Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model. The positive emotions reported were joy, happiness, love, satisfaction, excitement, awe, gratitude, hope, and optimism. The reported positive emotions are consistent with what other emotion researchers suggest (Seligman, 2011; McCarthy, 2011; Jackson, 2000; Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Although the experience of positive emotions became evident in the athlete’s descriptions of the Olympic games, evidence of negative emotions were reported as well. These evidences were reported with little frequency and were followed by descriptions of positive emotions. The negative emotions that were described were

disappointment and anxiousness. The experience of positive emotions does not mean that there was an absence of negative emotions. Positive emotions need to be present to contribute to flourishing.

Similarities emerged from the experience of positive emotions. The similarities were in the source of the positive emotions. The sources that the athlete's reported came from other elements of the PERMA model. These other elements were Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement (Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Sources of Positive Emotions**

The athletes described experiencing positive emotions from their relationships. The source of the relationships that elicited the emotions came from their coach, spouse, family members, friends, teammates and community members. The athletes described experiencing positive emotions from their engagement with the sport. These emotions were a result of being focused on their sport. The strongest evidence of the emotions as a result of focus emerged from the descriptions of fun; sport enjoyment is the experienced emotion associated with fun.

Another source of these positive emotions emerged from the achievements that the athletes were accomplishing. These athletes were achieving long before the winning of the Olympic medal. Mastering skills, improving season and lifetime best marks, making Olympic and world championship teams and winning competitions elicited positive emotions. Meaning also emerged as a source of positive emotions. Contributing to the larger team USA objectives of winning medals created feelings of satisfaction. The satisfaction and feeling of accomplishment derived from the meaningful achievements created positive emotions.

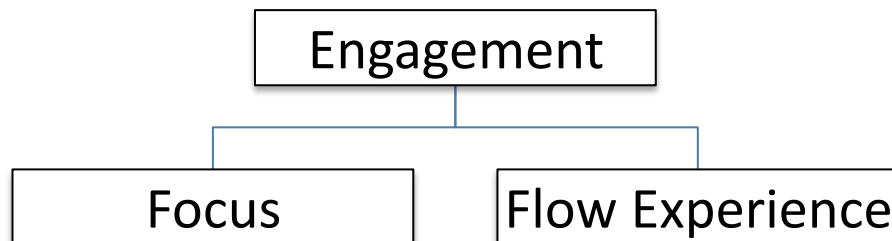
Reflecting on the research questions, this study explored the lived experiences of the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study explored what of the emergent evidence is consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA Model. Evidence of well-being emerged. The reported findings are consistent with Seligman's positive emotion element. There was no reported evidence that confounded the element of positive emotions.

## **ENGAGEMENT**

The working definition of athlete engagement presented by Hodge and colleagues (2009) is a "persistent, positive, cognitive-affective experience in sport that is characterized by confidence, dedication, enthusiasm, and vigor." Engagement refers to a psychological state in which individuals report being absorbed by and focused on what they are doing (Forgeard, et.al., 2011). At its high end, engagement has been referred to as flow (Csikszentmihalyi, & Jackson, 2000), or the overall feeling referred to as being in the zone.

One main category emerged during the data analysis process. This category was focus (Figure 5). Focus refers to the athlete being completely absorbed in their sport. Confidence, enthusiasm and vigor were present in the reported experiences and categorized within focus. An ancillary category that emerged within this theme was the descriptions of characteristics of flow (Figure 5). Without measuring the full extent of all the characteristics that define a flow experience these findings can't for certain claim that the athlete experience a complete flow experience. With that the athletes described some of these characteristics. Three of the four participants reported being in the zone or experiencing characteristics of flow.

Below I will outline each athlete's experience of engagement with quotes and phrases that meaningfully represent engagement. I will then provide data analysis of the described experiences as it related to the research questions inquired about.



**Figure 5. Categories of Engagement**

### **Jane's Lived Experience of Engagement**

When asked to describe her experience of the Olympic village, Jane used the word "distracting." Jane described several aspects of the Olympic village that contributed to the distractions. Among these distractions were the number of

people from different places, and the successes and failures of other athletes. Jane also described a commitment to remaining focused on her and what she needed to accomplish her goals.

The Olympic Village is distracting. You get so many people around each other, especially when you're not until later on in the Olympic games. So say someone's competed the first two days of the opening days of the meet you know, and they're done with their event. So say they did well, those people want to celebrate and have a good time. And you still have to rein that in and focus because you want to be happy for them and celebrate with them and you have to think, I still have a competition to think about and focus on. I can't worry about them and be happy for them right now because I have a goal and I need to stay focused and I need to look over this direction so I can go to training, go do things I need to do. So that is actually quite a big distraction. And, and then you have other people who don't do well and they come and you can see that they're kind of moping around and they, they're trying to be cheery and say, hey, good luck and then you kind of feel like, well what if that happens to me? So those things are very distracting and you have to look inward and think to yourself, ok, they're situation is not going to affect mine whatsoever.

Jane was able to remain focused in an environment that she felt was very distracting. This ability to focus is evidence of being engaged in her sport.

Jane described having to pay attention to detail during the games, especially how her body felt. "My coach asks me, how do you feel today and I say, oh, you know, I feel really good and then we decide from there what we're going to do." Jane

also describes the process if she does not feel great. “If he asks me, how you’re feeling today and I say, my knee is hurting a little bit, we curtail the practices because you can’t really have a productive practice, training session if you’re not 100%.”

In moments when Jane began to feel nervous or overwhelmed she was able to draw on her positive self-talk and build her confidence prior to the Olympic competition, “I was feeling a little nervous and I thought to myself, just let it go, if you make it, you make it, if you don’t, you don’t, forget about being nervous, I am going to do it.” Jane also relied on her preparation to build her confidence, “I feel pretty good today, I don’t feel bad, I had done all the rehab, I had iced back up, massaged and all that stuff, I feel great, so let’s go out there and jump.” This experience is evidence that Jane was aware and focused on the details of how her body felt and the preparations she made.

When asked to talk about the competition Jane described characteristics of flow on one of her jumps.

I think on my second jump I really do believe I had that moment where everything was perfect. Actually, everything was perfect. I remember my coach always yells to me, “dig, dig” which means to really get a nice push out of the back so I can really get some speed going and maintain that speed until I get to the board, and I remember I had done a couple run-throughs and I had jumped once, it was a decent jump, nothing spectacular, and I remember thinking, “this one’s going to be my jump.” I got on the runway, closed my eyes, and said, “ok I’m going to do this.” I remember pushing out of the back, and I remember just



running, and I remember just feeling everything was perfect, like the jump that you always hoped for was coming, I could feel it. And I remember thinking, “we’re going to go for it.” And I remember thinking, as soon as I hit the ground, I was like, I just won, I won, I know I did, there’s no way I didn’t win, and I turned around, and I looked at the guy and he’s holding up a red flag, and I remember thinking to myself, “No! No!” But I had lost myself in the moment of getting on the runway knowing I was going to make that one the one, that was going to be it, and as soon as I hit the runway and started running, it was perfect, I lost myself. And I had a hard time achieving that flow again because I was so flustered about being there and scratching the jump. But I was pretty darn close on my other jumps, which were good too. So definitely on my second jump, yeah, I had it.

Jane reported characteristics of flow during her competition, being absorbed in the moment, focused on tasks, and a sense of losing herself.

Evidence of engagement emerged in the form of focus. Jane also reported experiencing flow characteristics during the final competition. The reported findings of engagement are consistent with Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model (Table 5).

**Table 5. Jane's Evidence of Engagement**

	Focus	Flow Experience
Jane	To me the Olympics was, you know I had worked so hard for it, it was almost an expectation. I knew that I was there for a reason and it	I really do believe I had that moment where I, everything was perfect...I remember thinking, this one’s gonna be my jump. I got on the runway, closed my eyes, and said, ok I’m gonna do this. I

	<p>wasn't to play around and hope for the best...it was to win a gold medal and had I not been so focused on winning a gold medal, maybe I wouldn't have even gotten a bronze.</p>	<p>remember pushing out of the back, and I remember just running, and I remember just feeling everything was perfect, like the jump that you always hope for... And I was like, we're gonna go for it. And I remember thinking, as soon as I hit the ground, I was like, I just won, I won, and it was perfect, I lost myself in the moment.</p>
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### **Beth's Lived Experience of Engagement**

Evidence of being engaged in the sport experience emerged from Beth's descriptions of the Olympic games. This attention to detail shows that Beth was absorbed in her sport. When asked about her preparations for the games Beth described her focus plan.

My main focus was just to go out there and be me. That was just what me and my coach came up with. Just go out there and be me, if I go out there and be myself then there was nothing that could stop me from getting on the medal stand. I just had to put in my head, that if I continued to do everything that I had been doing that led me up to making the team, then there should be no problems. So I just focused on being myself.

Beth's knew that she did not have to go out and do anything special or different than what she had been doing all year. Understanding and recognizing that she could continue to do those same things that she had been doing demonstrates being absorbed and engaged in her sport.

Beth also described some challenges that she had to be aware of and overcome. The first distraction included the differences in the surface of the track at the training site and the competition site.

Usually I am where the track is the same as the track we are competing on and this time it wasn't that way. So that made it kind of difficult. For me, I just didn't worry about it. At the end of the day you still got to do what you do. It was a challenge because your runway approaches on that track, to the track at the stadium are completely different so you might have to move back, move forward something so it was a challenge that way.

Beth reported being engaged by being aware of the differences in the surface of both the training track and competition track.

The second distraction that Beth described was the challenge of not buying into the "hype" that the media put on her to win. In 2008 Beth did not perform up to her expectations. The media had projected Beth to place third in 2008. Beth described the media as being "distracting" especially when she "bought into all the hype in 2008." Beth was aware of this type of distraction and approached 2012 with a different mindset.

This time I didn't worry about the hype, about me being projected to win. This time I just went in with a clear mind and just focused on mainly on winning but focused on also having fun and that time I had fun, I wasn't engaged into the hype that time, I just went out there and did what I was supposed to do.

Beth reported that the media hype was distracting. Preparing for the 2012 Olympic games she created a plan to how she was going to manage the distractions associated with the media hype. The planning and awareness to recognize those distractions is evidence of being engaged.

Beth also implemented a cognitive strategy that is common in the sport psychology field. This strategy was developed by Dr. David Cook and is called SFT which represents See it, Feel it, Trust it.

I was in Istanbul at the world indoor championships, and my coach email me about SFT. He said he read it in a book and that it comes from golf, he reads a lot of books. He emailed me and was telling me about it. So I started doing it, it helped me visualize on the runway what I need to do. The see it part is me seeing the runway, and me visualizing what needed to happen, “feel it” is just having the trust, feeling it in my body, and the trust part was me, coming off the board, and trusting my knee drive in order to help me go further out. But since indoor, leading up to the games is when we started the SFT. That was our motto for the year and it paid off.

Implementing SFT was evidence of being absorbed and engaged in the sport. Beth demonstrated being highly engaged in her sport by spending time analyzing video and math. Analyzing math, video as well as using SFT is evidence of determination to improve, which is consistent with the element of engagement.

From Beth’s experience, evidence of characteristics that contribute to the flow experience emerged while she was competing. Beth reported having fun, there was a challenge and skills balance and she was absorbed in the moment.

For me I like to get the crowd involved. I started that clap and that helps me a lot to get the nerves going away and gets me hyped up to jump far. So when I get the crowd, I tend to go with the rhythm of the clap and it just gets me hyped up and ready to jump far, I told myself, SFT, see it, feel it, trust it, after that I just ran

down and popped a big one and that held. When I jumped it I knew it was a big jump. I didn't know how far it was going to be. But I knew that it was a 7 meter mark. At that time I knew that in order for me to get on the podium I had to jump 7 meters. So when I tend to do big jumps I think, at that time too the crowd just erupts and that is when you also know you've got a big jump and it is so fun and it gets you excited, gets you knowing that you just pulled out something pretty big and when I jumped I know I looked back at it and saw that's 7 meters so I knew that there was no reason for me not to be on the medal stand I just didn't know it was going to be the winning jump.

Evidence of engagement emerged in the form of focus. Beth also reported experiencing flow characteristics during competition. The reported findings of engagement are consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model (Table 6).

**Table 6. Beth's Evidence of Engagement**

	Focus	Flow Experience
Beth	My main focus was just to go out there and be me. That was just what me and my coach came up with. Just go out there and be me...if I go out there and be myself then there was nothing that could stop me from getting on the medal stand. I just had to put in my head, that if I continued to do everything that I had been doing that led me up to making the team, then there should be no problems. So I just focused on being myself... I just went in with a clear mind and just focused on mainly on winning but focused on also having fun and that time I had FUN.	For me I like to get the crowd involved. I started that clap and that helps me a lot to get the nerves going away and get me hyped up to jump far. So when I get the crowd, I tend to go with the rhythm of the clap and it just gets me hyped up and ready to jump far...I told myself...SFT, see it, feel it, trust it...after that I just ran down and popped a big one and that held... When I jumped it I knew it was a big jump.

## **Walter's Lived Experience of Engagement**

The element of engagement emerged from the descriptions of Walter's experience. Walter's experience can be summed up in with the word "awareness." Walter stated, "just being aware helps." This awareness helped Walter remain focused, and overcome the distractions associated with the Olympic games.

When asked to describe some of the distractions he had to overcome during the games he reported, girls, managing family, trying to relax, avoiding thinking about the competition, and not becoming a spectator of the Olympics. Walter reported having to remind himself "you are here for the Olympics and you're here to do something." These reminders helped him remain focused. When referring to the girls and his family Walter reported.

I just knew what was right for me and what was wrong for me to be doing in order for me to get on the medal stand. I knew that you know if a girl was like to come to my room and say let's hang out, I would say maybe this isn't the best time to do that so I'm just going to go to my brothers house or even with family even with like my parents would be like hey let's go to dinner let's go out or do you want to meet this family member, or your aunt and uncle and stuff. And I'm like, you know what, we can do that afterwards. Right now I don't think that would be conducive to what I'm trying to do on the track.

Walter described having to manage distracting situations and did so by remaining focused. Walter was strategic in how he used his surroundings to manage these distractions and stay focused. He went to his family if he needed to relax and get away from the Olympic village and he would go to the Olympic village if he needed

to get away from his family. When describing not becoming a spectator of the Olympics Walter reported, "I just had to kind of keep my head on straight and not get sucked into a lot of stuff that was going on, I would just watch in the room because I had to relax and keep my legs." Walter described how the team would relax and avoid thinking about the competitions,

We would sit on the porch and you know really just trying to get away from the stressful feeling of competition. Just trying to get a clear mind and just have fun because you know if you just sitting in the room thinking about competing, that is when it is stressful and draining so to get away from all that we all felt it would be cool to hang out and have fun.

Walter described managing his stress by relaxing with his teammates trying to clear their minds. Walter was aware and strategic about how he remained focused through out the games.

Walter reported that the experience of previous World Championships helped prepare him for distractions at the Olympic games. Walter described, "It was nothing new to me and I knew that there was going to be distractions, I was prepared for that, there was distractions at world championships, so I just had to keep focused."

Characteristics consistent with the experience of flow emerged from Walter's descriptions of the Olympic games. When asked to describe the experience of the Olympic competition, Walter described being highly absorbed in the moment.

I feel like my prelim and my final were like night and day. In the finals I felt like it was me and the runway and nobody was around I didn't even look in the

stands, after I completed a jump then it was just me and coach I didn't see no one else I just saw my coach and we would go over things and it was back to me on the runway just me right there. In the final I was able to get in that zone and so I definitely feel like it contributed to the way I jumped because in the prelims I jumped terrible and I almost didn't make it to the final. So definitely being in that zone and just not worried about anybody else but myself helped a lot. I got out there and I wasn't worried about anyone I didn't see anything but my goal of winning that was all that was on my mind and I was going to do whatever it takes to get there. I jumped three centimeters short of my lifetime best.

Walter described evidence of a flow like experience. Walter referred to the experience as being in the zone.

Evidence of engagement emerged in the form of focus. Walter also reported experiencing flow characteristics during competition. The reported findings of engagement are consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model (Table 7).

**Table 7. Walter's Evidence of Engagement**

	Focus	Flow Experience
Walter	I feel like you can have fun but you still have to remember that you are here for the Olympics that you're here to do something instead of just have all this fun and forget about what we're here for... I just had to kind of keep my head on straight and not really get sucked into a lot of stuff that was going on...	In the final I was able to get in that zone and so I definitely feel like it contributed to the way I jumped... I got out there...I wasn't worried about anyone I didn't see anything but my goal of winning... I jumped three centimeters short of my lifetime best.



## **Ron's Lived Experience of Engagement**

Evidence of being engaged in the sport experience emerged from Ron's descriptions of the Olympic games. Ron's engagement was evident in the attention to detail that he used during experience. This attention to detail was learned over the course of a 17-year career and three different Olympic games.

Ron reported specific details on how far he would need to throw in certain competitions to put him in the best possible situation to win. When asked to describe the Olympic trials Ron reported, "I knew I needed to throw 20 meters to make it into the final and then 21 meters to make it onto the team and there were really only three other guys that could do that." Ron added, "it started to rain during the trials, so I knew that would take some guys out, and it reduced how far I needed to throw probably to about 19 meters." During the competition Ron threw 19 meters on his first throw, then followed it up with a 21 meter throw on his second throw. Ron described "I knew I was in after the first throw, but I wanted to see what I could do in the rain, and I knew I was in pretty good shape when I threw over 21 meters, I led all qualifiers with that." Ron made the Olympic team by throwing over 22 meters in the final to win.

Ron continued to show evidence of this attention to detail when describing the Olympic games competition.

I don't really worry about the qualifying rounds because I am very consistent and because I have not missed a final since 1999, I felt pretty good about getting into the final. My first throw in the final was around 21 meters and I knew I was

in a good spot after that, and I just tried to build on that. I ended up throwing just over 21 meters, which was good enough to get on the podium.

Ron was aware of what marks he needed to through in order to make it to the final. Ron knew what he was capable of and knew what marks were consistent with what he needed to do in order to advance and eventually win a medal. This awareness, preparation and confidence in his ability are evidence of being engaged.

Ron added that the competition at the Olympic games was not a traditional competition. The final was full of competition distractions that the athletes did not have control over. Ron described, "because the Olympics were on NBC they were stopping competition all of the time for TV and the starts and finishes of other events." Ron added, "a round should take about 15 minutes and because of the TV stuff it would take 30 minutes, it was hard to stay up for that length of time." These distractions made it difficult for Ron to experience flow characteristics. Ron explained, "It was tough to get into my normal flow, so I just tried to do the best I could and kind of grind it out."

Ron described that one of things he learned from his previous two Olympic experiences was how to appropriately manage his family and friends. In Ron's first Olympic games, Ron reported spending too much time with family and this distracted him from his Olympic objectives. In his second Olympic games Ron's wife was housed in a hotel that was far away and difficult to get to. Ron reported, "Getting on a bus, and taking a taxi, was very time consuming and took away from what I consider my mental focus on a competition." The arrangements during the third Olympic games were much easier to manage. Ron's wife and family were

staying in a close hotel. The hotel was near a mall and within walking distance from the Olympic Village. Ron reported a mutual understanding of his purpose at the games with his family, "I told my wife this during the Olympic games, I need to focus on Olympic games stuff, and to distract me from doing my Olympic games stuff is taking away from performance and that really helped." This is evidence of Ron being focused and engaged in during the Olympic experience.

Ron reported being highly engaged when asked to describe what contributed to his success.

My insistence on having a queen size bed in my room, this is kind of funny because the normal beds were twin sized at best. So, if I'm laying on it, my elbows weren't even resting on the bed, they hung off the side. So, when I got there I told the people, listen, I need a queen size bed. I don't care how you get it in there, but I need a queen size bed. These beds are too small and I think being able to go there and have a good night's rest, really helped. I was able to find an extra fan. Because, the only team that had air conditioning in their housing was the British team. So, having one extra fan was huge. Also not having to walk very far to the dining hall was huge. Like, we were right across the way to the dining hall. So, that was awesome! So, all these little things kind of contributed to me being at my best as I could possibly be for the Games.

Ron described that the attention to these "little things" are what he learned from his experience on two previous Olympic teams. Ron explained, "my first one I did not know what to expect in Greece. Beijing, I got a little sick from the food, but you know, London, I had done it a couple of times, I knew what to expect."

Evidence of engagement emerged in the form of focus. Ron did not report experiencing flow characteristics during competition. The reported findings of engagement are consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model (Table 8).

**Table 8. Ron's Evidence of Engagement**

	Focus	Flow Experience
Ron	I told my wife this during the Olympic games, I need to focus on Olympic games stuff, and to distract me from doing my Olympic games stuff is taking away from performance and that really helped.	Did not report.

**Summary of Engagement**

Evidence of engagement emerged from the lived experiences of the Olympic games. Within engagement one category emerged from the descriptions. As previously reported this category was focus. The evidences that emerged show that these athletes were aware of potential distractions and recognized those distractions when they emerged and chose to focus on the relevant information. This created a pattern of refocusing through out the course of the games. The evidence of focus that emerged does not mean that these athletes were impervious to distractions.

Evidence of focus emerged from the descriptions of distractions that the athletes experienced. These distractions are interference that can inhibit performance. For these athletes, succumbing to distractions resulted in a loss of focus. The athletes reported being aware of many of the distractions before hand.

The athletes learned about these types of distractions from teammates, friends, coaches, previous athletes who competed in the games, or personal experiences from previous Olympic games. Each athlete reported attending to specific details in the preparation and decision-making processes to avoid being negatively affected by these distractions. The athletes reported being absorbed by and focused on what they were doing at the Olympic games (Forgeard, et.al., 2011).

Also, evidence of flow characteristics emerged from Jane, Beth and Walter's descriptions of the Olympic games. Evidence of flow characteristics did not emerge from Ron's descriptions of the games. Engagement at its high end is the experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, & Jackson, 2000). Flow is defined by nine characteristics that cause a person to be completely immersed in what they are doing in the moment (Csikszentmihalyi, & Jackson, 2000). Three of the four athletes reported evidences of a flow experience. When asked to describe the competition at the Olympic games, flow like characteristics emerged. Again, without fully exploring all the characteristics of the flow experience, it is difficult to say that they experienced flow completely. However, the descriptions of being in the zone or experiencing flow like characteristics are evidences of engagement.

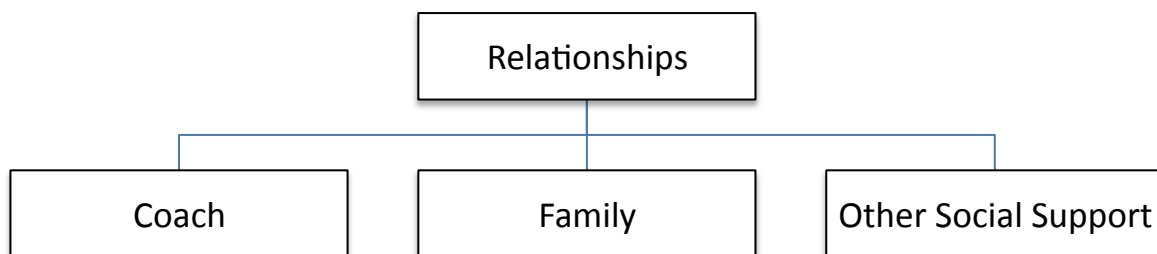
Reflecting on the research questions, this study explored the lived experiences of the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study explored what of the emergent evidence is consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA Model. Evidence of well-being emerged. The reported findings are consistent with Seligman's engagement element. It could be suggested that the experience of these

distractions confounds the experience of the engagement element of PERMA; with that, the athletes described a persistent pattern of refocusing their attention to the tasks at hand, which I contend is evidence of engagement.

## **RELATIOINSHIPS**

According to Reis and Gable (2003), the relationships element has been recognized as one of the most influential determinants of well-being for people of all ages and cultures. As previously stated the relationships element is the belief that one is cared for, loved, esteemed and valued as well as loving, caring and valuing others. Self-Determination Theory supports this reciprocal experience of positive relationships (Deci, & Ryan, 2008). The findings in this section support what previous researchers have found (Greenleaf, et. al., 2001; Shadle, 2013; Rienboth & Duda, 2006; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

There was evidence of positive relationships in the lived experience of these athletes. The sources of these positive relationships can be categorized into three areas. The athletes reported positive relationships with their coach, their family, and support from other external sources (Figure 6). These other external sources included community support back home, and social support from teammates and friends. Below I will outline each athlete's experience of relationships with quotes and phrases that meaningfully represent these relationships. I will then provide data analysis of the described experiences as it is related to the research questions posed in this study.



**Figure 6. Sources of Positive Relationships**

### **Jane's Lived Experience of Relationships**

Jane experienced having positive relationships within each of the three categories. Jane reported that the most influential factor in her success was having the support from her coach, family, community and others.

In all honesty I think it was just my, the support I had from everyone else. I went into the Olympics Games with my whole city, Fort Collins, behind me, my family, everyone in 100% support of me and that really made a huge difference because I felt like I didn't have to do it just for myself. I wanted to do it for everyone else, to make everyone else proud as well and not just for me. It wasn't just a goal of my own. And that was probably the biggest factor, was just having the support. I mean, my family was there, my mom and dad, my brother were there, my fiancé, my coach, his wife, my whole support system, my very close-knit support system was there for me, my church, my community in general, they just really stepped up and helped me get to where I was. I think that was the biggest one. Jane reported that having the support of those around her was on of the most significant factors in her success. The specific factors that would define "there" for

someone were outlined in the report of Jane's Olympic experience. Those individuals who were a part of Jane's family were present on site showing support for Jane. As for community members the proximity of the support was not discussed, therefore it is presumed that support was given or shown from her hometown of Fort Collins.

Jane reported that when distractions entered into her mind, about the possibility of not performing well, she would rely on the support of those that were close to her.

Track and field is more of a mental battle than it is physical and sometimes you get to a point where you feel like, I'm here but can I stay here. Can I continue to be where I am? And I feel like had I not had them, and there were some moments, especially at the trials, where I felt like, I'm not going to make it, there's no way, I should just give up right now, there's no way I'm going to do this. And you have those moments of discouragement and you feel like, what if I don't make it, and when you don't have other people to help you through those moments... and to tell you that you're going to be fine, you're just panicking, relax, you know, calm down, I believe in you, all those encouraging words you can fall apart and so I think that's exactly what I would have done had I not had the support of all the people that were around me.

For Jane, recalling words of encouragement from her support system was seen as an effective means for both limiting the frequency in which she experienced negative thoughts, and preventing negative thoughts from having a detrimental



influence of her performance. This is also evidence that she valued the supportive, caring relationship of those in her social circle.

The second category of positive relationships that emerged was the category of family relationships. During the Olympic games athletes were presented with a variety of challenges and distractions. Jane described that her fiancé played a critical role in helping her handle those distractions. One of those challenges for athletes who are married is that the athletes stay in the Olympic village and the spouses stay offsite. Below, Jane describes how her fiancé helped her remain composed, calm, focused and confident in preparing for the Olympic games.

There was quite a bit of distractions. I know particularly a few athletes who didn't do well and were roommates of mine and I was like, oh now, what, what if that happens to me and, of course, the first thing I do is call my fiancé and am like, what if I, if I don't jump well and he's like, you're fine, don't worry about them, just do what you need to do, focus, you are in the best shape you've ever been in your life and that's where, you know, family, encouragement comes in and people who support you come in.

As Jane describes, her fiancé was most helpful in directing her attention towards only things that were directly under her control such as her preparation. The evidence of trust, confidence and love between Jane and her fiancé supports the notion that a positive relationship was present.

The third category that emerged under the theme of positive relationships was the relationship with the coach. Jane described having a close relationship with

her coach, and how her coach knew what type of athlete she was and the specific details of how to coach her effectively.

We're really good friends, we joke around and laugh at each other. He knows that I'm not the type of person that, and when I'm in competition I don't need this focused type of attitude. I need to be relaxed and playful and hang out. He kind of grounds me so that I'm able to not think so much and not persevere on all the little, small details that I need to do in order to jump far. He's really good at reading me and I'm really good at reading him. And we just work really well together.

Jane's confidence in her coach's ability to draw out her best performances characterized this positive relationship.

From Jane's description of the experience of the Olympic games, evidence of positive relationships emerged. Jane experienced being cared for, loved, esteemed and valued as well as loving, caring and valuing those in her support system. The findings are consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model (Table 9).

**Table 9. Jane's Evidence of Positive Relationships**

	Coach	Family	Other
Jane	We're really good friends...I mean... we joke around and laugh at each other... He, keeps me grounded so that I'm able to... not persevere on all the little, small details... he's really	My family was there, my mom and dad, my brother were there, my fiancé... my very close-knit support system was there for me.	The support I had from... Fort Collins... my church, my community in general, they just really stepped up and helped me get to where I was... because I felt like I

	good at reading me and I'm really good at reading him... we just work really well together.		didn't have to do it just for myself.
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### **Beth's Lived Experience of Relationships**

Beth experienced positive relationships within each of the three categories. The first category was her experience with her coach. When asked to describe her relationship with her coach, Beth reported the most influential factor was having a "special bond with her coach," like a loving "father daughter relationship." Beth stated that trust, communication and that special bond contributed to their success at the Olympic games.

Me and my college coach have like a father-daughter type of relationship, and I trust in anything that he tells me to do that I am doing wrong in order for me to be successful and he trusts me to give him the feedback in order for him to help me. So we had that bond, we had that connection leading up to the Olympics. You got to have trust in your coach. Because he is the one that is getting you to where you need to be and I trust 100% on him. And communication was never a problem, we always talked, and if there were problems, we would go sit down and figure it out. Having that father daughter relationship helped a lot. After I won, I couldn't reach him to grab him to hold and cry on his shoulder, but after that I just thanked him so much for, that we had that kind of a bond that can help an athlete to be successful. Some athletes don't have that kind of a bond with their coach and I feel like if you want to be super successful, you got to have that type of bond with your coach, you've got to have that type of understanding

between each other, if things go wrong you can talk about it, if things are going good you can laugh and cry about it.

As Beth described, she believed having a “special bond” with her coach was essential for her success at the Olympic games. Beth compared her relationship with her coach to a traditional father-daughter type relationship to illustrate the reciprocation of love, care, value, trust, and communication when describing her relationship with her coach.

Beth also attributed part of her success to the relationship and support she received from her family. Beth stated that the time she spent with her family just prior to 2012 was a differentiating factor between her lack of success in 2008 and her success in 2012.

My thing is, I am a family person. I got the opportunity to be around my family before I left. I got the opportunity to go home right before I left for the Olympics so I think that mentally prepared me for what I knew I had to go out there and do at the Olympics from what I did in 2008. So I would say being around family and friends was definitely a big key to me being successful that day.

Beth values her family and reported that spending time at home before going to the Olympic games contributed to her success.

When she was home visiting her family just prior to the games, she also received support from her community stating, “I got the local support from my hometown and we just made this big thing about me going to the Olympics.” Within this third category of relationships Beth also attributed being around her teammates, friends and other people to her ability to stay calm while she was in the

Olympic Village and away from her immediate family. Beth said, “Being around my teammates and other people to keep me calm was a good thing for me.”

Beth described her experience of the Olympic games. From that experience evidence of positive relationships emerged. Beth experienced being cared for, loved, esteemed and valued as well as loving, caring and valuing those in her support system. These findings are consistent with Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model (Table 10).

**Table 10. Beth's Evidence of Positive Relationships**

	Coach	Family	Other
Beth	Me and my college coach have like a father-daughter type relationship... I trust in anything that he tells me to do...he trusts me to give him the feedback in order for him to help me...So we had that bond...we had that connection leading up to the Olympics... if you want to be super successful, you gotta have that type of bond with your coach.	I am a family person...I got the opportunity to be around my family before I left... being around family and friends was definitely a big key to me being successful that day.	I got the local support from my hometown... we...made this big thing...about me going to the Olympics and...I think that helped mentally prepare me for what I knew I had to...do at the Olympics

## **Walter's Lived Experience of Relationships**

Walter reported experiencing positive relationships in each of the three categories. Walter described a strong familial type bond with his coach. When asked to describe the coach athlete relationship Walter reported, "Coach is like an older brother to me." Walter described being able to "hang out, joke around and play videos games" together. Their relationship began when the coach recruited Walter to compete in college, "Coach came to my house three times, and I ended up going there solely because of him, it was the best fit for me." When asked to describe what makes their relationship work, Walter reported having a close relationship.

I think we both developed a sense of being really comfortable around each other. We are a lot alike. We were able to grow really close. He knows me on and off the track and he understands what it takes for me to be who I am physically and mentally. He knows that if I am a little frustrated he knows how to handle that or if I'm a little too excited he knows how to handle that. There was a time when I was training with another coach and I was able to see the difference of how it was without him and I think that made me even more grateful of the relationship that we had as a coach and an athlete. I would listen and believe and do everything he said because I trust him as a coach. I think he is the best coach, but even if he wasn't I would still compete really good just because I was comfortable with everything that he was doing and that we were doing together because I wouldn't have no uncertainties and I would be comfortable with what I was doing.

Walter described being comfortable around his coach, this type of relationship contributed to well-being. Walter even explained that he really began to appreciate his coach when he was away training with a different coach. This helped him realize how much he valued the relationship with his current coach.

Walter described being more grateful for this relationship after he experienced training with a new coach. Within this element of relationships Walter added that his family relationships contributed to his success.

Some things that I feel like contributed to what I did was my family being there. I have a lot of family that's from London my brother lived one train stop down from the village. Coach rented out a house, so I would just go and stay at the house and my aunt and my mom and everyone was cooking for us. I think just the love and energy that I got from my family were things that contributed to help me stay comfortable.

The relationship with his family contributed to the positive emotions Walter experienced. The family being in London and having a house helped Walter be strategic about managing distractions. Being in an environment with team USA was evidence of this element of relationships during his experience at the Olympic games, "Being with the USA team. We had a lot of team spirit in the Olympic village we all stuck together and I think it was just all of us being friends."

Evidence of positive relationships emerged from Walter's descriptions of the Olympic games. Walter experienced positive relationships through a brotherly relationship with his coach. The family contributed to a comfortable environment through the love and energy they gave. The team environment emerged as a source

of positive relationships for Walter due to the friendships. These findings are consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model (Table 11).

**Table 11. Walter's Evidence of Positive Relationships**

Sources	Coach	Family	Other
Walter	Coach is like an older brother to me...we will have days where we will be joking around even when I was in college...I would just hang out with Coach...not talking about track just...playing video games... I just feel like we were able to grow really close...He knows me off the track he knows me on the track and he understands what it takes for me to be who I am physically and mentally.	I feel like one thing that contributed to what I did was my family being there I have a lot of family that's from London my brother lived one train stop down from the village... I think just the love and energy that I got from my family were things that help me things that contributed to help me stay comfortable.	Being with the USA team...we had a lot of team spirit in the Olympic village we all stuck together we were always together...I think it was just all of us being friends.

**Ron's Lived Experience of Relationships**

When asked to describe the coach athlete relationship, Ron reported that having a good relationship with the coach is key for success. Ron reported that when you are with the same coach for 17 years there will be ups and downs but that their relationship is really good. Early in the relationship it was very professional; coach would instruct and Ron would listen. Later in Ron's career the coach-athlete



relationship transformed into more of a friendship dynamic, “We are really good friends and we hang out off the track too.” The characteristics of trust and honesty emerged at the heart of the coach athlete relationship between Ron and his coach.

I think there’s a trust on both sides. I trust that coach has my best interest at heart and, I think coach knows that I have his best interest at heart. I need somebody that’s going to be 100% honest, and coach is really good at that. Your friends sometimes sugar coat things too much, if you are doing bad they will tell you, you’re doing great! Blah, blah, blah. But we communicate really well and that’s huge. He will tell me here is what you need to do and he gives me his opinion and he will take my opinions as well. I think communication has got to be both ways, and I think he’s a big part of why I’ve been able to stay very high in the sport for a very long time.

Trust, honesty and quality communication emerged from the lived experience of the coach-athlete relationship.

Further evidence of positive relationships emerged when Ron described his family being at the games, “Having my wife and family there was great. They have given me so much love and support.” Ron added, “But you got to be able to manage it. I told my wife this during the Olympic games, I need to focus on Olympic games stuff, and to distract me is taking away from performance. And that really helped.”

Evidence of the experience of positive relationships emerged from the descriptions of the Olympic games. Ron reported a friend like relationship with his coach. Ron then described his loving and supportive family. Ron did not report any

other sources of positive relationships. These findings are consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model (Table 11).

**Table 12. Ron's Evidence of Positive Relationships**

Sources	Coach	Family	Other
Ron	I think there's a trust on both sides. I trust that Don has my best interest at heart and, I think Don knows that I have his best interest at heart.	Having my wife and family there was great. They have given me so much love and support. But you got to be able to manage it. I told my wife this during the Olympic Games, I need to focus on Olympic Games stuff, and to distract me from doing my Olympic Games stuff is taking away from performance. And- and that really helped.	Did not report.

**Summary of Positive Relationships**

Athletes form relationships in their sport settings with teammates, coaches, and family. Some relationships are negative while others are more positive in nature. The well-being research suggests that positive relationships enhance flourishing (Reis & Gable, 2003; Greenleaf, et. al., 2001; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Seligman, 2011). Previous Olympic research has found that those athletes who did not perform well acknowledged that negative social support factors were present

(Greenleaf, et. al., 2001). That same Olympic research found that athletes who performed well reported positive social support factors contributed to successful performance (Greenleaf, et. al., 2001).

In the present study each of the athletes described their relationships within their Olympic experience. From those descriptions positive relationships emerged. There was no evidence of negative relationships reported in this study. This does not suggest that no evidence of negative relationships existed in the athletes lived experience; the athletes did not report any evidence that would confound the experience of positive relationships. The reciprocation of love, esteem, value and care are the indicators of positive relationships within this PERMA construct. The coach, family and other social support emerged as the sources of these positive relationships where those indicators emerged.

The coach was the first source that emerged as a category for positive relationships. Each of the athletes reported having a positive relationship with the coach. The characteristics that emerged in these positive relationships were love, value, esteem, respect, care, trust, honesty, support, and quality communication. Walter and Beth reported a relationship with their coach analogous to a traditional family relationship. Having a father-daughter relationship or a brotherly relationship was reported. Jane and Ron reported being good friends with their coach. From the descriptions of the coach-athlete relationship there was evidence of the reciprocation of love, care, value and esteem.

Family relationships were reported as the second source of positive relationships. Each of the athletes reported that family support was something that

contributed to their individual success at the Olympic games. Ron and Jane attributed some of their success to having supportive, loving spouses. Beth and Walter reported the support of their family as contributing factors to their success.

The third source of positive relationships emerged as other social support. As each of the athletes described their experience of the Olympic games this source emerged. Beth and Jane reported having the support of their community as part of the relationships component. Walter reported support from his teammates as contributing factors. Ron did not report any other social support.

Reflecting on the research questions, this study explored the lived experiences of the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study explored what of the emergent evidence is consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA Model. Evidence of well-being emerged. The reported findings are consistent with Seligman's positive relationships element. No evidence of negative relationships was reported in this study.

## **MEANING**

The definition used in this study is the feeling of belonging and serving something larger than the self or contributing to the greater good (Seligman, 2011). Evidence of meaning emerged from the athlete's descriptions of the Olympic games. Meaning is a subjective concept with many definitions, and evidence of meaning can be illustrated in an array of different ways. This element of PERMA had the least amount of emergent evidence.

This study focused on the evidence that emerged before and during the Olympic games. With respect to the focus of this study being a performance study, the evidence that emerged as a result of winning the Olympic medal was not included in the findings. These findings are valuable and therefore will be addressed in the discussion section.

Below I will address the limited evidence of meaning that emerged with quotes and phrases that meaningfully represent the meaning component. Then I will provide data analysis of the described experiences as it is related to the research questions inquired about.

### **Evidence of Meaning for All of the Athletes**

Jane derived meaning from her accomplishments. These accomplishments are described in the achievement findings section. Each accomplishment was meaningful because it represented all the hard work and effort that was put into achieving. Jane described that being part of team USA was meaningful as she was able to represent and contribute to larger team USA objectives. Jane also described a “falling in and out of love” relationship with track and field because it was such a large part of her life for so many years. Jane added, “track and field means a lot, it has been my whole life for so long that I have fallen in and out of love with it.”

Beth also derived meaning from her previous achievements up to the point of winning the medal at the Olympic games. Beth reported that the positive emotions that are experienced as a result of a meaningful achievement motivated her to want to achieve those emotions again. Being part of team USA elicited meaning. Beth described how they all contributed to the team by, “cheering on my teammates, it

was good to see them do well and then we go out there and try to perform and do our best, and come home with a lot of medals for team USA.” Beth feels “grateful” and “blessed” for her talents, and continues to put her “trust in god.” Her faith in god brings her a sense of meaning because she feels as though she glorifies god through the use of her talents. The experience of positive emotions like gratitude for being blessed was another source of meaning for Beth.

Walter derived meaning from being a role model for his supporters. The role that Walter modeled was one of overcoming challenges and accomplishing what you put your mind to. Walter described it as,

I feel like I have a lot of supporters, like younger male high school track athletes and I think that just shows the people that watch me that anything you put your sights on and your goals you can accomplish that no matter what the odds are. I think I was able to just show that I could come back from having an injury and still compete at a high-level and just to show that I was dominant.

Being a role model is evidence of contributing to something larger than the self.

Walter modeled overcoming adversity to accomplish what you set your sights on.

Ron experienced meaning as a member of team USA. “I have just been blessed to represent my country three times,” Ron reported. Ron also described how meaningful it is to build on his legacy. Ron reported that his legacy began when he won the world championships in 2006. Before Ron won in 2006 he was struggling to find his place among his competitors. He felt like he was a good athlete but not good enough to win major competitions. “After I won in 2006 I felt like I had

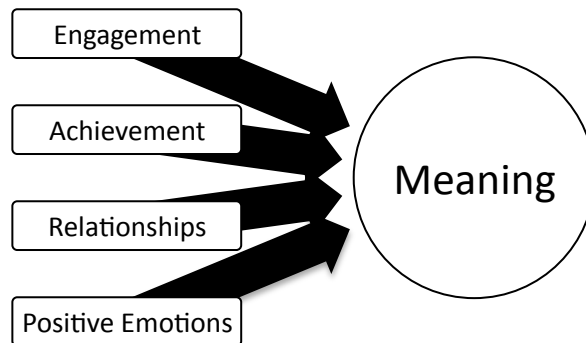
arrived, it meant everything and after that I had to consistently prove it to myself,” Ron reported (Table 13).

**Table 13. Evidence of Meaning**

Jane	Track and field means a lot, it has been my whole life for so long that I have fallen in and out of love with it
Beth	Cheering on my teammates, it was good to see them do well and then we go out there and try to perform and do our best, and come home with a lot of medals for team USA
Walter	I feel like I have a lot of supporters, like younger male high school track athletes and I think that just shows the people that watch me that anything you put your sights on and your goals you can accomplish that no matter what the odds are. I think I was able to just show that I could come back from having an injury and still compete at a high-level and just to show that I was dominant.
Ron	I have just been blessed to represent my country three times.

**Summary of Meaning**

Meaning is an essential contributor to overall flourishing (Seligman, 2011; Hicks & King, 2007; Lyubomirsky, et.al., 2004). Meaning emerged from the athlete’s descriptions of the Olympic games, including in the context of the experience of the other components of PERMA, which included positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships and achievement (Figure 7).



**Figure 7. Sources of Meaning**

Meaning also emerged from other sources. All four of the athletes reported that being part of team USA was meaningful (Rienboth & Duda, 2006) Contributing to the team, winning medals for USA and representing their country on a world stage emerged as meaningful. Meaning emerged from Jane’s description of the link between track and field and her identity (Balague, 1999). Meaning can be derived from Beth’s reference to her deity (Raikes, 2011; Steger, & Frazier, 2005; Balague, 1999). Walter found meaning as a role model for younger athletes. Ron described that leaving a legacy in the sport was meaningful to him.

Reflecting on the research questions, this study explored the lived experiences of the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study explored what of the emergent evidence is consistent with Seligman’s (2011) PERMA Model. Evidence of well-being emerged. The reported findings are consistent with Seligman’s meaning element.



## **ACHIEVEMENT**

Achievement is the final component of flourishing within the PERMA model. Achievement may be the most recognizable component of flourishing due to the measurability of achieving. Achievements usually have a tangible end point, for instance winning the game or a medal. Although winning is part of achieving it is not the only defining trait of this component of flourishing. Achievement is defined as a sense of accomplishment, mastery, or success at a high level (Ericsson, 2002). At the individual sport level, achievement can be defined in terms of reaching a desired state and progress toward pre-stated goals (Forgeard, et.al., 2011).

Evidence of achievement emerged from the athlete's described lived experiences of the Olympic games. Winning a medal in the 2012 Olympic games is a major achievement. Winning a medal was a criterion to be eligible to participate in the study; due to the focus of this study being on performance prior to winning the medal, winning the medal was not included in these findings. The individual accounts of their achievements will be outlined in chronological order to illustrate that this component of flourishing was present prior to the Olympic games. Below I will outline each athlete's experience of achievement with quotes and phrases that meaningfully represent achievement. Then I will provide data analysis of the described experiences as it is related to the research questions inquired about.

### **Jane's Lived Experience of Achievement**

Jane experienced many achievements that culminated in the one achievement that most Olympic athletes aspire to. That achievement is winning a

medal at the Olympic games. These findings show that Jane was experiencing this element of flourishing before she won the Olympic medal.

Jane reported that earning a college scholarship to run track was a defining achievement that was part of her Olympic path. Jane wanted to be a college basketball player, however track and field presented larger scholarship opportunities. Jane described several achievements during her college experience that were meaningful to her. Jane made a Junior World championship team after her freshman year in college. The following year Jane began to improve, mastering her skills, “it was the first time I had run under 12 seconds in the 100 meter dash and the first time I jumped beyond 21 feet.” Jane was achieving in the form of mastery and improvement.

Jane qualified for the Olympic trials in 2008 but did not perform well due to “a long college season” and “being burned out that year.” The following year, Jane described taking up a new event in track and field, the 100 hurdles. “I fell in love with track all over again, it was so much fun again, I was not perfect at it, I had to start working on stuff and get better.” In 2011, the year leading up to the Olympic Jane had a realization that changed her outlook on wanting to win an Olympic medal.

I thought I was serious before, but I took a 180, I was sitting in the car with my fiancé and realized, there is no reason that these other girls should be beating me. I can make an Olympic team and I can win a medal. I changed everything, I began to eat better, I was a bit heavier at the time so I changed the way I looked,

and I changed my whole attitude. I decided right then and there that I could win USA's.

Jane added that she “went to USA indoors and won!” Jane experienced little achievements such as losing weight, getting in her best shape and winning the USA championship leading into the Olympic games. In the months leading up to her Olympic moment Jane achieved the qualifying standard to get into the Olympic trials. Jane also performed well during the Olympic trials and achieved a spot on the USA team. Jane described making the team with a sense of relief, “there was a huge obstacle of actually getting to the Olympics, that obstacle was making the team, for me that was probably the hardest part. Once I had made the team, I made it there, so my goal was done.”

Evidence of achievement emerged from the descriptions of Jane's Olympic experience. These achievement findings are consistent with achievement research. These achievements are consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model.

### **Beth's Lived Experience of Achievement**

Beth had some pivotal achievements prior to the 2008 Olympic games. She won the NCAA outdoor championships, the Olympic trials, and had the leading mark going into the final at the Olympic games before she “gave into the hype” of being a favorite and falling short of her goal in 2008.

Beth “set big goals” for herself over the next few years. She began mastering the skill of “driving the knee” at take off to help her jump further. She analyzed “math and video” to help her master those skills of jumping far. Beth described putting in a lot of hard work to reach her goal. She won the Indoor World

championship in 2012, setting an American record jumping a life time best of 23 feet 2 inches, making her the favorite for the gold medal going into the Olympic games.

From the descriptions of Beth's experience the element of achievement emerged. The evidence that emerged was consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model.

### **Walter's Lived Experience of Achievement**

Walter's track and field accomplishments began in high school when he won the state title his freshman year. Walter earned a scholarship to run track in college. He finally accepted the scholarship when he realized he had a brighter future in track than he did playing football. Walter won the NCAA championship during his freshman year of college and that changed his outlook on the sport. Walter reported,

My whole outlook on track and field changed because until that point I didn't know where I could go with track I just knew I was going to be able to go to college for free but at that point I realized I could make a career out of this or be one of the best ever.

Walter earned a college scholarship and his outlook on what track and field could do for him changed when he won his first major championship. After winning the NCAA championship, Walter "started to work even harder" to master his skills.

In 2011 Walter made the world championship team. The following season Walter won the indoor world championships, making him the favorite going into the 2012 Olympic games. Walter reported, "Winning indoor worlds gave me a lot of

confidence going into the Olympic games.” Walter jumped a season best at the Olympic trials and achieved one of his goals by earning a spot on the Olympic team.

Walter was able experience characteristics of flow during the Olympic games. Walter described, “in the final I was able to get in that zone and so I definitely feel like it contributed to the way I jumped.” This form of achievement is evidence of mastering the skills that lead to experiencing the characteristics of flow.

Walter described achieving through the mastering of skills. Walter also described achieving through the form of winning. These findings are consistent with Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model.

### **Ron’s Lived Experience of Achievement**

Ron’s experience of achievement in track and field has been over the course of 17 years. Ron reported, “I have achieved all of my career goals, if I had to retire tomorrow, that’s fine, I’ll just go onto the next thing.” Ron reported having a successful college career despite many people thinking he would not. Ron achieved five all American awards while competing in college. While in college, Ron had improved his skill to allow him to throw his first 20-meter mark.

In 2002 Ron became a professional athlete. In 2004 Ron eclipsed the 21-meter mark. Ron reached his first top three world ranking in 2005 and has been ranked there ever since. Ron reported, “I knew I was good, I have been ranked top three in the world from 2005 on, but I just needed to establish myself.” Ron added, “After I won in 2006 I felt like I had arrived, it meant everything.” Ron won the world championships in 2006. He followed that up with another world

championship win in 2007 and said, “that puts a lot of pressure on you for 2008, which will be the Olympic year. And that result was a bit disappointing.”

Achievement emerged from Ron’s experience in the form of mastery. Ron reported being proud of achieving a high level of consistency in the sport. Ron achieved this high level of consistency by studying the event.

I can’t jump as high, I can’t sprint as fast, but in that ring, what kind of gives me my edge is I can move that ball faster than those guys. The chess match of figuring out just enough of the speed and getting just enough height to make the ball go somewhere. That’s really been my motivation and I’ve always wanted to be consistent.

Achieving consistency was reported as a motivating influence for Ron. This is evidence of the achievement.

Ron starts out every season with a clean slate. Each time he wins a medal, trophy or has major accomplishment he will place that achievement on his mantle. Through out the year as he fills up his mantle, he celebrates. At the end of each year he clears off his mantle and stores it away. “This helps me continue to stay motivated and competitive, I just focus on one year at a time,” Ron described.

These achievements are evidence of flourishing. Walter described achieving through the mastering of skills. Walter also described achieving through the form of winning. These findings are consistent with Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model (Table 14).

**Table 14. Evidence of Achievement**

Jane	I thought I was serious before, but I took a 180...I decided right
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	then and there that I could win USA's.
Beth	I set big goals and I give everything I have to try to accomplish those goals.
Walter	Winning indoor worlds gave me a lot of confidence going into the Olympic games.
Reese	I have achieved all of my career goals, if I had to retire tomorrow, that's fine, I'll just go onto the next thing."

### **Summary of Achievement**

Achieving is linked to enhancing flourishing and life satisfaction (Smith, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2007; Gallucci, 2008; Seligman, 2011). Evidence of achieving emerged from the lived experiences reported by the participant's. The most prominent evidence of achieving was the reporting of winning medals, and championships. Each athlete reported winning many competitions and medal prior to their experience at the Olympic games. Another form of achieving that emerged from the descriptions was making the Olympic team. Each of the athletes also reported achieving personal records as contributing forms of achievements. The athletes reported mastering skills as another form of achievement. Jane and Walter reported earning college scholarships as prominent achievements. Ron reported making history with his consistency as a major achievement.

The athletes reported that these achievements created positive emotions that motivated them to engage and continue achieving. This finding is consistent with what goal achievement research suggests (Gallucci, 2008; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004). These achievements also contributed to the component of meaning for the athletes. Each achievement meaningfully represented hard work and effort put

toward a goal. These achievements also strengthened the network of positive relationships as the achievement was celebrated with others.

Reflecting on the research questions, this study explored the lived experiences of the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study explored what of the emergent evidence is consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA Model. Evidence of well-being emerged. The reported findings are consistent with Seligman's achievement element.

## **MOTIVATION**

The sixth theme that emerged from the participant's reported experience of the Olympic games is motivation, which is not in the PERMA model. Motivation emerged from inductive analysis of the data. The participants described being highly motivated to accomplish their goals. Evidence of motivation to pursue the elements of PERMA also emerged.

### **Evidence of Motivation for All the Athletes**

Jane reported evidence of motivation. When asked to talk about her motivation she described, determination, hard work and a commitment to perform her best.

Just being there was motivation enough, I made it here so let's take advantage and do something with myself. I went in knowing I was going to win a gold medal and ended up with a bronze. I was so determined to beat everyone and to



do my best and to show everyone that I am a force to be reckoned with that I had to just give it my all. I had worked so hard for it; it was almost an expectation. I knew that I was there for a reason and it wasn't to play around and hope for the best, it was to win a gold medal and, you know, had I not been so focused on winning a gold medal, maybe I wouldn't have even gotten a bronze.

Jane described being highly motivated to beat others and perform her best.

Beth also shared experiences that can be categorized under the motivation theme. She reported being motivated, determined and always striving to be the best. Beth described that this motivation contributed to her success.

I can do anything that I want to do. I always set big goals for myself, and try to reach them by, doing anything I can to as far as in practice, on and off the track. I am trying to be as successful as I can. That definitely has helped me out. I have not given up on anything that I said I was going to do.

Beth described that nothing was going to stop her from striving to be the best she can be. The previous description is evidence of motivation. Beth was not only motivated to win a medal, but highly motivated to prove to herself that she can do anything as well as just being as successful as possible.

Walter experienced being highly motivated. Walter describes that motivation using the word "hungry." "We're really really, really hungry and I think that's what it comes down to. If you have a goal and you know that's what you want to accomplish you shouldn't let anything in between you and that goal." Walter also described having the mindset of a winner. Walter said, "I had the mindset that I'm

going to be a winner and that never changed, I had ups and downs through out the season, but my mindset never changed, I knew that nothing was going to stop me.“

Motivation emerged from Ron’s descriptions of the Olympic games. Ron described himself as “naturally a very competitive person.” Ron recognized that he possessed some athletic talent, but not as much talent as some of his taller, stronger, faster competitors. Ron used an analogy, comparing the game of Chess to the challenge of maximizing his performance. Ron said, “I can move that ball faster than those guys, the chess match of figuring out just enough of the speed and getting just enough height to make the ball go somewhere. That’s really been my motivation.”

When asked what all his achievements represent, another form of motivation emerged from Ron’s response.

I think it represents that you can’t underestimate a person that doesn’t look the part, in a way. When I first got into throwing, everyone said that there’s no way you’ll be able to throw a 16-pound ball and be competitive. And then, I became a five-time All American. It’s like oh maybe there’s a chance! And then you’ll never, throw 70 feet. Even one of my training partners, said you’ll never throw 70 feet, when I first started throwing with him. And now he’s like, wow I was really wrong about that! It just shows that you can’t see the heart of the person and sometimes people are just determined.

People expressing their disbelief in his ability to be able to do something motivated Ron. Ron also reported being proud of his consistency.

I value being consistent, I pride myself on my consistency, I have the most 21 meters throws in history, I would like to be able to throw a world record, but I don't think physically I have that ability, not enough horse power, I guess I am like Lou Gehrig, I just like consistently getting those hits.

Ron shared his awareness of his strengths and weakness with a comparison to hall of fame baseball player Lou Gehrig.

Ron added, "That's definitely the motivation, pretty much the only reason I'm really competing still." Ron reports being highly motivated and engaged in sport to continue being consistent.

### **Summary of Motivation**

Each athlete reported high levels of motivation. The athletes reported being motivated intrinsically as well as extrinsically. These motivating factors included, striving to be the best they can be, winning medals and championships, proving others wrong, leaving a legacy, and beating the competition. The athletes also reported that the experience of other components of PERMA contributed to increased motivation. Experiencing positive emotions as a result of achieving a medal created the desire for continued athletic achievement.

Reflecting on the research questions, this study explored the lived experiences of the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study explored what of the emergent evidence is consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA Model. The evidence that emerged in the form of motivation is not an element consistent with

the PERMA model. The evidence that emerged supported the need for a sixth theme (Table 15).

**Table 15 - Evidence of Motivation**

	Motivation
Jane	I was so determined to beat everyone and to do my best and to show everyone that I am a force to be reckoned with that I had to just give it my all... I like to steal other people's fame, so to speak... So when you hear someone running the 100m, everyone cheering for them, I pretend they're cheering for me...it kind of gets you amped, a little bit hyped and you're kinda ready to go.
Beth	I can do anything that I want to do. I always set big goals for myself, and try to reach them by, doing anything I can to as far as in practice, on and off the track, I am trying to be as successful as I can. That definitely has helped me out...I have not given up on anything that I said I was going to do.
Walter	We just like to have fun but at the same time we're really really really really hungry and I think that's what it comes down to... I had the mindset that I'm going to be a winner and that never changed...I had ups and downs through out the season and I went through little injuries...but my mindset never changed and I had that glow inside me that I knew that nothing was going to stop me.
Ron	I guess I'm naturally a very competitive person, and what I've noticed is this event is not easy. There are a lot of people in front of you that are a little bit more talented, I am not as strong, talented as these other guys, I can't jump as high, I can't sprint as fast, but in that ring, what kind of gives me my edge is I can move that ball faster than those guys. The chess match of figuring out just enough of the speed and getting just enough height to make the ball go somewhere. That's really been my motivation.

## **CROSS CASE ANALYSIS**

The cross case analysis will include a comparison of each athletes full experience of the PERMA elements. Similarities among the reported experiences emerged; each section describing the PERMA elements addressed these similarities above. The cross case analysis will focus on the distinctions.

Intuitively there were many similarities reported in the experience of positive emotions between each athlete. One notable distinction was that Beth reported experiencing anxiety during the final competition. This was a result of jumping the leading mark early in the competition. The anxiety was a result of worrying that another competitor would jump further and take the gold medal from her. The other three participants did not report the experience of anxiety, likely due to the focus remaining on striving to achieve the gold medal.

There were many similarities between athletes and the experience of engagement. A notable distinction is that engagement was the most frequently reported element of flourishing for the males in this study. Engagement was not the most reported element for the females in the study. Another distinction in the element of engagement was that Ron reported not experiencing flow characteristics during the Olympic games due to the distractions of media. Ron reported having to do the best he could to remain focused and perform his best given the situation, but noted that he had experienced flow characteristics in other major championship events. Ron reported the most specific engagement-related details that contributed to his success at the games. This attention to detail played a role in his decision-making processes that he reported contributed to his success. This could be due to his vast Olympic experience being his third Olympic games.

The females in the study reported evidence of positive relationships more frequently compared to the other elements of PERMA. When asked about the coach athlete relationship all the athletes reported having only had one coach with the exception of Walter who reported a short experience with another coach. That

short experience with another coach strengthened his appreciation for his current coach. Each of the athletes reported that being with the same coach for a long period of time contributed to a strong relationship.

Meaning was the least reported element of flourishing among all the athletes. This may be due to the subjective nature of the component and the difficulty of measuring meaning without being direct in the interview process. Each of the athletes reported similarities in meaning when they reported being part of team USA and the satisfaction of achieving something that they have been striving for. The other sources of meaning were different. Ron reported his legacy as meaningful. Walter reported meaning in being a role model to younger athletes. Beth reported meaning in her trust in God. Jane reported a meaningful love-hate relationship with track and field as part of her identity. This is likely due to the uniqueness of each individual and what they deem as meaningful.

Achievement was similar across each case. One notable distinction was Ron's report of having completed all his career goals, and would be satisfied if he retired today, yet he was still pursuing and striving to achieve more. The other three athletes all reported wanting to achieve more.

There were many similarities in the cases when considering motivation. One interesting distinction was that Ron and Beth reported that experiencing the positive emotions of winning a medal or a championship as a major factor of motivation. An interesting distinction that emerged considering motivation; Jane was the only athlete that reported times in her life where she was not motivated to participate in track and field. All the athletes reported striving to win medals and

awards, which is evidence that would be consistent with extrinsic motivation and supported by Self Determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Beth and Ron reported striving to be the best they can be, which is evidence consistent with intrinsic motivation supported by Self Determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study explored what of the emergent evidence was consistent with Seligman's (2011) theory of well-being, also known as the PERMA Model. Evidence of each element of PERMA emerged and descriptions were provided in the findings chapters. A brief summary of the findings for positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement were reported.

The positive emotions reported were joy, happiness, love, satisfaction, excitement, awe, gratitude, hope, and empathy. The athletes experienced positive emotions as a result of experiencing other elements of PERMA. For example, positive relationships with their coach, family, teammates, and community members produced positive emotions for each athlete. The athletes reported engaging in their sport produced opportunities to experience fun and created positive emotions. Meaning also emerged as a source of positive emotions. Contributing to the larger team USA objectives of winning medals created feelings of satisfaction. The satisfaction and feeling of accomplishment derived from the meaningful achievements emerged as another source of positive emotions. Evidence of positive emotions emerged from each athlete's experience of the Olympic games.

Evidence of engagement emerged from the athlete's experience of the Olympic games. Focus emerged as the main category of engagement. Focus refers to the athletes being completely absorbed in their sport as opposed to being distracted by the spectacle of the Olympic games. Ron and Beth both described being distracted by the spectacle or hype of the games in previous Olympic games, three of the four athletes reported evidences of experience flow characteristics. When asked to describe the competition at the Olympic games, flow like characteristics emerged. This component was the most reported component for the males in this study.

Evidence of positive relationships emerged from the reported Olympic experience of these athletes. The sources of these positive relationships were categorized into three areas. The reported sources were the coach, their family, and social support from teammates and friends and community back home. The characteristics that emerged in these positive relationships were love, value, esteem, respect, care, trust, honesty, support, and quality communication. Each of the athletes reported that these positive relationships contributed to their success in the Olympic games. This component was the most reported component for the females in this study.

Evidence of meaning emerged from the reported Olympic experience of these athletes. Similar to positive emotions, the sources of meaning emerged from the other elements of PERMA. The two main sources of meaning emerged from the descriptions of being part of team USA and the satisfaction gained from



achievement. Meaning was the least reported element of PERMA that emerged from the athlete's experience of the Olympic games.

Evidence of achieving emerged from the lived experiences reported by the athlete's. The most prominent evidence of achieving was the reporting of winning medals, and championships. Other forms of achieving emerged, making Olympic teams, lifetime best performances, scholarships, and mastering skills. The athletes reported that these achievements created positive emotions that motivated them to engage and continue achieving.

Each of the participants reported being highly motivated. These motivating factors included, striving to be the best they can be, winning medals and championships, proving others wrong, leaving a legacy, and beating the competition. Intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation emerged from the described experiences.

Each athlete reported evidence of all five elements of PERMA. The experience of these PERMA elements contributed to each athlete's level of flourishing. The athletes reported descriptions provide context and illustration to the larger theoretical PERMA model.

## CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences at the Olympic games as described by Olympic track and field, medal winning, athletes for evidence of well-being. Furthermore, this study explored what of the emergent evidence was consistent with Seligman's (2011) theory of well-being, also known as the PERMA Model. A secondary purpose of this study was to answer the call to action suggested by Lundqvist (2011). That call to action was to broaden the research on well-being within the sport/athletic domain. Lundqvist (2011) suggested that future qualitative research be conducted to contextualize athletic well-being within a larger theoretical framework. The evidence of well-being that emerged adds to the understanding of well-being within the PERMA theoretical framework.

This study is part of a larger study being conducted by a research team at the University of Missouri in collaboration with the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and USA Track and Field (USATF). This study focused specifically on eight field event athletes. These athletes were invited to participate in this study, six originally accepted and four followed through to completion.

The design of the study was qualitative. The methodology was phenomenological in nature, exploring the lived experience of the Olympic games (Crotty, 1998; Anderson & Spencer, 2002). Case study methods were used in the data collection and analysis process. The data were collected inductively allowing

the participants to describe their experience of the Olympic games (Scanlan, Ravizza & Stein, 1989; Vernacchia, et. al., 2000; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004). The data were deductively analyzed to explore what evidence was consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model (Vernacchia, et. al., 2000; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004; Hyde, 2000; Yin, 2009).

Participants described their lived experience of the Olympic games. From the experiences, evidence of well-being emerged. Each participant reported evidence consistent with each element of PERMA. Evidence of a sixth theme emerged; this theme was labeled motivation.

Evidence of positive emotions emerged. The reported characteristics that emerged were joy, happiness, love, satisfaction, excitement, awe, gratitude, hope, and empathy. These reported positive emotions are consistent with previous positive emotion research (Vernacchia, et. al., 2000; Greenleaf, et. al., 2001; Gould, et. al., 2002; Mallett & Hanrahan, 2004; Vast, et. al., 2010). The participants reported that experiencing these positive emotions contributed to their success; this is harmonious with Vast's et. al., (2010) research suggesting that positive emotions enhance focus and concentration.

Evidence of engagement emerged. The participants reported being absorbed by and focused on what they are doing (Forgeard, et.al., 2011). The participants reported evidence of being focused. At its high end, engagement has been referred to as flow (Csikszentmihalyi, & Jackson, 2000), or the overall feeling referred to as being in the zone. Three of the four participants reported a flow like characteristics. This element of PERMA was the most reported element for the males in this study.

An interesting distinction from the males and the engagement element was that the females reported evidence of the element of positive relationships the most. Evidence of positive relationships emerged from the Olympic experience of the participants. The participants reported characteristics of love, value, esteem, respect, care, trust, honesty, support, and quality communication as evidence of positive relationships. Each of the participants reported that having a positive relationship with their coach and families contributed to their success at the Olympic games. This finding is consistent with previous Olympic research suggesting social support as a positive influencing factor on performance (Greenleaf, et. al., 2001). This evidence is consistent with well-being research that suggests that a positive coach athlete relationship that exhibits love, care, value, trust and respect enhance flourishing (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Rienboth & Duda, 2006).

The element of meaning emerged from the lived experiences of the participants. Meaning was the least reported element that emerged. This is likely due to the subjective nature of the element. I would also contend that it is difficult to uncover this element without asking direct questions related to meaning in the interviews. The participants reported evidence of meaning in the experience of other PERMA elements. This was particularly evident from the positive emotion of satisfaction that was derived from meaningful achievements. Other sources of meaning that emerged were, being part of team USA, contributing to team USA objectives, contributing to history, and leaving a legacy. The evidence of meaning that emerged was consistent with previous meaning research (Seligman, et. al.,

2005; Lyubomirsky, et.al., 2004; Raikes, 2011; Steger, & Frazier, 2005; Balague, 1999; Rienboth & Duda, 2006).

Evidence of achieving emerged from the lived experiences reported by the participant's. The most prominent evidence of achieving was the reporting of winning medals, and championships. Other forms of achieving emerged, making Olympic teams, lifetime best performances, scholarships, and mastering skills. The athletes reported that these achievements created positive emotions that motivated them to engage and continue achieving. These findings are consistent with other achievement research (Smith, et. al., 2007; Forgeard, et.al., 2011; Ericsson, 2002; Gallucci, 2008; Seligman, 2011).

Each of the participants reported being highly motivated. These motivating factors included, striving to be the best they can be, winning medals and championships, proving others wrong, leaving a legacy, and beating the competition. Intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation consistent with Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self Determination theory emerged from the described experiences.

## **Implications**

The findings in this study are specific to these participants. These findings are not to be generalized to larger populations. This study was to explore the lived experience of these four Olympic medal winning track and field athletes. Even though these experiences were similar in many ways, there were also differences. Different experiences and evidence may emerge from research with other Olympic athletes.

Two notable ancillary findings emerged specific to this sample. The first suggests that experiencing well-being is a motivational influence to pursue enhanced well-being. The second will discuss the reporting of a perceived causal relationship between flourishing and enhanced performance.

The first ancillary finding, which in the case of these four athletes suggests that flourishing contributed to the pursuit of athletic achievement. As the athletes experience the elements of PERMA they were motivated by the opportunity to experience those elements again, through their athletic achievement. Specifically, Beth and Ron both reported that the experience of positive emotions and achievement motivated them to pursue the elements again. This finding emerged as the athletes described their experience winning previous world championships.

The second finding is related to the report of well-being elements contributing to enhanced performance. This study was not intended to explore a causal relationship between flourishing and enhanced performance. This study does not claim that there is a causal relationship. In light of this claim, the athletes did report that experiencing elements of well-being was perceived to contribute to their success. Walter, Beth and Jane all reported that the love, energy and support that they experienced from their positive relationships were key factors in their success on that day. Ron and Beth reported that experiencing engagement in the form of attending to specific details contributed to their success. All four of the participants reported the closeness of the coach athlete relationship as an influencing factor on their success at the Olympic games. Walter reported that experience positive emotions contributed to his success. The reported attributions

of experiencing well-being elements enhances performance is consistent with what previous researchers have suggested (Gould, et. al., 1981; Smith, et. al., 1995; Gould, et. al., 1999; Greenleaf, et. al., 2001; Krane & Williams, 2006; Gould, et. al., 2002; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004; Vernacchia, et. al., 2000).

It is important to understand what the experience of well-being looks like in the sport context. The definition of well-being is the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced (Dodge, et. al., 2012). An athlete may experience an imbalance in their well-being. That imbalance then becomes a form of interference for the athletes. It is accepted in the field of sport psychology that interference decreases performance (Vernacchia, et. al., 2000; Gould, et. al., 1981; Smith, et. al., 1995; Gould, et. al., 1999; Greenleaf, et. al., 2001; Krane & Williams, 2006; Gould, et. al., 2002; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004). Winning at the highest level can be by the smallest of margins. A slight interference can be a negatively influencing factor. Those that win have a highly developed ability to control, manage and eliminate distractions or interference (Vernacchia, et. al., 2000; Gould, et. al., 1981; Smith, et. al., 1995; Gould, et. al., 1999; Greenleaf, et. al., 2001; Krane & Williams, 2006; Gould, et. al., 2002; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004). The sources of interference can become evident from anywhere. An unbalanced well-being can be a source of interference. Experiencing the opposite of the PERMA elements can be a form of interference. For example, experiencing negative emotions, negative relationships, lethargy, no meaning, and not achieving would suggest an unbalanced well-being and could be a form of interference.

Reflecting on my own personal narrative as described in the introduction of this manuscript, I can relate to what these athletes are describing as perceived performance enhancing experiences. The relationship with my second coach was critical to my success, having a positive relationship freed my mind to be able to focus on my tasks related to competing. This is in contrast to my mind being clouded with negative, distracting thoughts that were created as result of a poor relationship with my first coach that took my mind away from the relevant tasks that contribute to successful performance. It is likely that these athletes are attributing a perceived causal relationship because the positive experiences of high well-being removed potential sources for distractions. The Olympic games requires the highest level of performance to succeed. Any distraction can be the differentiating factor between succeeding and not succeeding. It is possible that those distractions can emerge from the experience of negative well-being. Therefore, it is of value to discuss the reporting of a perceived causal relationship by the athletes. The reported evidence could suggest the need for future research related to the causal relationship between well-being and performance.

These findings provide increased opportunities to evaluate the impact of well-being on competitive settings. These findings can give insight and direction to inform future studies that evaluate causal relationships between enhanced well-being and performance. These findings provide increased possibilities to adapt available global well-being measures to a sport context. These findings can also aid in the selection and development of interventions used to promote well-being in a sport context. Finally this study aids in building consistency among sport related



well-being research with regards to well-being theoretical constructs (Seligman, 2011) and well-being definitions (Dodge, et. al., 2012).

These findings can provide education and teachings about well-being that could be used to inform future athletes and coaches in their preparations for the Olympic games. Many aspiring athletes try to model what former elite athletes have done. If these athletes are viewed as models by other coaches and aspiring Olympic athletes, this study provides new and potentially compelling information about the models than was previously identified. Furthermore, the “Olympics” and all that it encompasses, the Olympic villages, the competitive venues and facilities, the opening and closing ceremonies, the media exposure, and all of the festivities leading to and throughout the actual Olympic competition can be tremendously distracting. Therefore, the evidence of focus that emerged within the engagement element of PERMA, speaks to the importance for future athletes to learn and utilize specific focus skills to maintain a strong concentration on their competitive challenges throughout the games. These implications could help to educate and inform coaches, future athletes, and the governing officials at the USOC and USATF on how to prepare for the Olympic games factoring in the well-being of the athletes.

### **Limitations**

Researching Olympic athletes naturally presents some limitations. Studying the highly successful is a common practice in sport psychology research, but results may not generalize to less elite or less successful athletes. These athletes are truly a unique sample that is valuable to the field of sport psychology. In addition, studying

this unique cohort of people presents sample size limitations. In this study, we interviewed four athletes, which is a relatively small number.

These high level athletes are challenging to gain access to due to own time constraints that are associated with training hours, travel to competitions, sponsorship obligations, and maintaining personal time. Gaining access to this group was a fortunate opportunity. It was also a limitation due to the limited time given for the interviews. Each interview was between 45 and 90 minutes in length. The allotted time may not be enough to uncover the full scope of the experience of well-being.

The interview structure may have been a limitation as well. It was intended to avoid leading the athletes to describe well-being directly. This was a strength to the study as it allowed evidence of well-being to emerge naturally, but richer, more in depth descriptions of well-being may have emerged if the research questions were structured directly to address specific components of well-being.

These elite athletes are often interviewed and are coached on how to respond to questions asked by the media. It was the hope of the researcher that prescribed answers would not emerge due to the anonymity of the identity and conversational type style of the interview. However, it is possible that the athletes tended to respond to questions using well-practiced responses rather than heart-felt utterances.

The component of meaning is the most subjective component of well-being. It is believed that quality evidence of meaning emerged from the experience; although a higher quality of meaning could have emerged with more direct

questioning of elements meaning during the interview process. For example, some of the athletes have children, it is possible that the athletes could provide truly rich descriptive data if the interviewer investigated these other meaningful experiences in life.

### **Directions for Future Research**

To advance future research on the topic well-being in the sport context, the following recommendations are suggests:

- Replicate the current study with larger sample size.
- Replicate the study sampling Olympic athletes who did not medal
- Include Olympic athletes from other sports, including team sports.
- Extend the sample to Paralympic athletes.
- Replicate the study with non-U.S. Olympic athletes.
- Use mixed methods and other qualitative methodologies.
- Explore the causal relationship between well-being and performance.
- Add empirically validated global well-being measures.
- Conduct experimental designs by introducing interventions to enhance well-being.

Future research should aim to replicate this study with larger samples sizes to establish consistency in the emergence of similarities and differences.

Researchers should include Olympic athletes that did not win medals, and compare the medal-winning athletes with the non medal-winning athletes. These comparisons could elicit some of the negative factors that may have influenced athletic performance. Researchers should broaden the sample to extend to other Olympic sports including team sports.

From a methodological standpoint, future research should consider different methodologies to uncover well-being in sport. Adapting the interview protocol and exploring the experience of well-being from a purely phenomenological standpoint

might uncover deeper insights and richer data concerning the experience of well-being. Conducting an ethnographic inquiry could bring added insight, due to the complete emersion into the life of the coaches and athletes by living the experience in their environment. This also could add a longitudinal component to the research topic of well-being.

The addition of quantitative methodologies would add value to the research. Using empirically validated global measures to assess well-being quantitatively is a recommendation for future research. The statistics with the added richness of descriptive interview data could allow researchers to explore well-being in greater depth.

Researchers should consider conducting experimental research designs to examine causal influences on well-being. Implementing an intervention prior to or during the Olympic games may contribute to enhanced flourishing.

Sport psychology researchers have been making strides to advancing research on the topic of well-being in sport. As with other fields or issues, more research on the topic of an individual's experience of well being and its relationship to successful sport performance is needed to help broaden the scope of understanding and knowledge.



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## **APPENDIX**

It is valuable to help provide context to the entire Olympic experience to include the evidence of well-being that emerged as a result of winning the medal. The evidence that emerged as a result of winning sparked the motivation within each athlete to being the pursuit of achieving again. The evidence that emerged completes the cycle of achievement. Below I will include the descriptions of each participant's experience of each post winning the medal.

### **Positive Emotions Post Medal**

#### **Jane**

When asked to describe her emotions about winning the bronze medal Jane described mixed emotions. Jane's initial response was one of "excitement" followed immediately by disappointment. Jane was excited because she slightly "edged out another athlete" to win the bronze medal. She was disappointed because she did not reach her "goal of winning the gold medal." Jane's perspective quickly changed, overcoming her initial feelings of disappointment, and experiencing happiness and gratitude after reflecting on the experience of a fellow USA team member who did not reach the medal stand and should have. Jane describes that change in perspective as,

I watched a fellow jumper, who had been dominating all year, go down, after she knocked the bar down. I watched her crumble to the mat and cry. I could see

the pain on her face and I could see that it just killed her. That is when my perspective changed, and I thought, how many people come here and actually medal? Only three people per event, I mean I did something spectacular and I am happy and appreciate that.

### **Beth**

Beth's most memorable moment of the Olympic games was standing on the podium receiving her gold medal. She experienced a flood of emotions that brought her to tears, "I was even crying, all that kind of stuff after I won." She summed up these experiences of emotions with one-word "Joy." Beth said, "There was a lot of joy, it is very hard to describe, but it is a feeling that I want again."

### **Walter**

Walter also described experiencing happiness, and satisfaction when he was achieving. He also described these moments with a sense of surprise using the word "Wow!" after achieving what no American had achieved since 1906, saying, "When I heard that I was like Wow! That is a pretty big accomplishment." After winning his first medal Walter describes the experience as, "I experienced being very happy, I think I felt better about winning the first medal. After I won that I was like, you know what this is? I did this and I am happy with that."

Other positive emotions that Walter described in his experience were gratitude for achieving and sympathy for other teammates.

I experienced being sympathetic to some of my teammates...that had high expectations and didn't achieve their goals that they wanted to like. John is one



of my really good friends, and I had knocked him out of the finals to make it to the finals and he didn't make it to the final and I did and I went on to get the bronze medal and I was thankful for that but he was really hurt from that not hurt from me knocking him out but him not making it to the finals because he had had a really good season so you know I kind of had to be there for him as a friend.

Sympathy for a teammate emerged when that teammate did not perform up to expectation, along with feeling thankful for having won a bronze medal.

## **Ron**

Ron described the experience of positive emotions as a surreal experience. Within this surreal experience Ron initially described a feeling of disappointment followed by the positive emotions of excitement and happiness.

When I first got the Bronze medal I was very disappointed. Uh, you know, it's just kind of the American way, like going in with the mentality that I'm going to win. I felt like I had the ability to win. And that entire year the only things I lost were the World Indoor Championship and the Olympic games. I won every single competition I entered for that year, so mentally I'm going to win this! This should be no problem. I've beaten everyone all the time. So, to go in there and get Bronze, that's not really the color I was going for, but then after hugging everybody and then walking out there to get the Olympic Bronze medal, that was surreal, I was very excited and very happy, it was awesome!

After walking out to the medal stand Ron realized the significance of his accomplishment and reported the experience of positive emotions.

## Meaning Post Medal

### Jane

Evidence of meaning emerged in Jane's experience of the Olympic games. When asked to describe her experience of winning a medal, Jane reported that it was meaningful to be on the podium and to hear the national anthem. Jane won the bronze medal, and one of her teammates won the gold medal. "Winning a medal was especially nice for me because my teammate won the gold medal so I got to hear my national anthem on the podium." This is meaningful because Jane felt like she was contributing to something larger by representing team USA. Jane was a part of team USA, and contributed to that team by winning a medal. Standing on the podium and hearing the national anthem represented that contribution and thus contributed to the meaning element of PERMA.

When asked to describe what winning a medal meant, Jane described the satisfaction of all the effort and work that went into this achievement.

Winning a medal meant that all the hard work that I'd ever done, all the pain that I went through, all the sacrifices that I made wasn't for nothing. That it paid off, that everything that I was doing was worth it. That was kind of that moment when I was like, this is what I've been wanting, and needing, and desiring forever and I finally achieved it. I have a medal. I have something to say, look what I did. Look at all the hard work that I went through, that it wasn't for nothing.

Jane derived meaning through her sense of accomplishment. The effort and hard work that she went through emerged as meaningful to her.

Jane also described a “falling in and out of love” relationship with track and field because it was such a large part of her life for so many years. Jane added, “track and field means a lot, it has been my whole life for so long that I have fallen in and out of love with it.”

Jane reported evidence of the element of meaning in her lived experience. These evidences are consistent with Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model.

### **Beth**

When asked about what winning a medal meant to her, Beth described it saying, “It meant the world to me because it was just a defining moment for me showing how much I’ve worked hard for something, I’ve never worked as hard as I did for that medal.” Beth added, “It means that I can do anything that I want to do. I worked so hard for that medal. And for me to finally get it, it just shows how dedicated I was and how blessed I am.” Beth derived meaning from that satisfaction of the achievement and what the achievement represents. The achievement represents all the hard work, effort and dedication.

Beth’s experience of meaning emerged in the experience of the other PERMA elements. Beth is a “family person” and found meaning in her positive relationships with others. Beth described meaning in her achievements. The described experiences of meaning are evidences of flourishing and are consistent with Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model.

## **Walter**

Walter described contributing to Olympic track and field history as a meaningful accomplishment. Walter won two medals in two different jumping events at the Olympic games. That accomplishment has not been achieved for an American in over a century. Walter reported, "I didn't even know it at the time but that another American hasn't done this since 1906 for America. So when I heard that I was like wow that's a pretty big accomplishment."

Meaning emerged from Walter's lived experiences of the other elements of PERMA. Walter reported being part of team USA as contributing to something larger than himself. Walter reported having his family there was meaningful. Meaning emerged from the accomplishments that Walter achieved. The described experiences of meaning are evidences of flourishing. These findings are consistent with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model.

## **Ron**

While describing his experience on the medal stand Ron reported, "To be able to stand on the podium, and to get the medal, and see the U.S. Flag raised right next to all the other countries that got medals meant a lot, it was awesome!" Ron derived meaning from being able to represent team USA. Ron also derived meaning from being able to contribute to the goal winning a medal for team USA.

When asked what did winning an Olympic medal mean Ron described, "it just shows that someone that's under 6 foot tall can not only be very competitive in this event, but can thrive and do great things." Ron added that if he retired today he would feel very satisfied with all that he had accomplished. Ron said, "I have

achieved all of my career goals, being so close to winning an Olympic Gold medal kind of motivates me to want to stick around until 2016. But now I am mostly trying to build on being consistent.” Ron also reported that he wanted to add to his streak of most competitions with throws further than 21 meters.

Meaning emerged in the form of contributing to team USA. Ron also found meaning in the accomplishments that he has achieved. Meaning also emerged in the form of being proud of leaving behind a legacy. Evidence of meaning emerged from Ron’s descriptions of the Olympic games. The described experiences of meaning are evidences of flourishing. These findings are consistent with Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model.

## **Achievement Post Medal**

### **Jane**

“Winning a medal I think was especially nice for me” is how Jane described the experience of achieving a previously set goal. Jane stated, “I had a goal in mind, which was to make the team and win a gold medal.” There were many goals and achievements that Jane met along her journey to the Olympic bronze medal.

### **Beth**

When asked to describe the most memorable part of the Olympic games Beth said, “finally getting that opportunity to get on the medal stand at the Olympic games was the most memorable part of the Olympics for me personally.” This was the culminating experience of a long awaited four years after a “disappointment in

2008.” To most placing fifth at the 2008 Olympic games would not seem like a disappointment. However, to Beth it was unexpected.

After she won the gold medal at the 2012 Olympic games she summed up the previous 4 years with this statement, “It meant the world to me because it was just a defining moment for me showing how much I’ve worked hard for something, I’ve never worked as hard as I did for that medal.”

### **Walter**

When asked to describe the most memorable part of the Olympic games Walter said, “Winning a medal, winning my first medal in an event that I wasn’t supposed to medal, that was awesome.” Walter added,

I think it felt better winning the bronze medal than it did the silver medal because I wasn't expected to win the bronze and that competition was just so close and what made it better was that the conditions were not good for the event and I just still had to overcome that and everyone didn't overcome that and there were guys that had jumped better than me in the season that didn't overcome those conditions and I did and so that was really cool and after I won that I was like, you know what this is? I did this and I'm happy with it.

Evidence of achievement emerged in the form of winning and overcoming the challenge of bad conditions from Walter’s experience at the games.

Walter followed up winning a bronze medal with winning a silver medal. Walter also became the first American to achieve winning two medals in these two events in over a century. When asked where this ranks among his top achievements Walter reported, “I think that was the top one. I didn't even know it at the time but

that another American hasn't done this since 1906 for America. So when I heard that I was like wow that's a pretty big accomplishment."

"I won two medals, I was top three in the world so I can't complain about that," Walter reported when describing how he felt about the achievements.

## **Ron**

Ron won an Olympic bronze medal. The initial response to winning a bronze medal was disappointment, because bronze was not the medal Ron had been focused on. Ron wanted to win the gold medal. After the competition and walking out to the medal stand the disappointment was replaced with excitement, happiness, and satisfaction. Ron described the moment as "surreal and awesome." Ron reported that the achievement mixed with the positive emotions "kind of motivates you to try and stick around and try to do it again."

## **Recruitment E-mail**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to you as a former track and field athlete and co-primary investigator for this 2012 Olympic study. As a 2012 Olympic medal winner I want to invite you and your coach to join us in a very exciting research project, intended to highlight important and impacting understandings from the experiences of you and your fellow Track and Field Olympic medal winners, that will serve to guide American coaches and athletes in the future in their efforts to attain success!

USA Track and Field, in collaboration with the research team of Dr. Rick McGuire and Bobby Low are looking for participants for their research study. You are receiving this invitation because you are a 2012 Olympic medal winner in the London games.

This study is exclusively for USA Track and Field Olympic Medal Winners and their Coach. For each of you, your process of preparation and performance delivery is unique. We are interested in determining what were the key factors, beyond talent and physical/technical training that impacts your achieving success.

As an Olympic medal winner, you are the role models for our young junior athletes in their dreaming, and striving and preparing for their chance to stand where you have stood! We are specifically and intentionally trying to help that modeling effect to have its greatest impact!

This research is being done with the intention to learn from you and your



coach, to develop better understandings. Ultimately, the long-term objective is to create appropriate educational materials to assist coaches and sport leaders in their efforts to teach, coach, develop and support future young athletes in their training and preparations in their pursuit of performance excellence.

Your actual participation in the study will be a short interview either in person or via Skype according to convenience. The interviews will be semi-structured 30-45 min interviews allowing you and your coaches to just share your lived experience at the games. After the initial interview, there is the possibility of 1-2 short follow up interviews as indicated as our analysis of the data unfolds just to clarify and check for the correct information. We expect to have all of the interviews completed at the latest by December 1, 2014.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please contact the following:

- Bobby Low: rglt2d@mail.missouri.edu Phone # 801.362.4791

Attached to this email is the informed consent document, which further explains the study. Thank you all for helping us out with this! Looking forward to hearing your personal story in your Olympic Journey!

Sincerely,

Bobby Low, Dr. Rick McGuire and USA Track & Field.

## **Consent Form**

### **CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

**INVESTIGATOR'S NAME: Richard McGuire & Robert Low**

**PROJECT # 1205374**

**STUDY TITLE: Exploring the Psycho-Emotional Factors Influencing Performance and Achievement in 2012 USA Track and Field Olympic Medal Winners**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

**This consent may contain words that you may not understand. Please ask the investigator or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.**

This is a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to participate. As a study participant you have the right to know about the procedures that will be used in this research study so that you can make the decision whether or not to participate. The information presented here is simply an effort to make you better informed so that you may give or withhold your consent to participate in this research study.

Please take your time to make your decision and discuss it with your family and friends.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you were a Coach of or a Medal Winner in the Sport of Track and Field in the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

This study is being sponsored by the USA Track and Field Sports Sciences and Coaches Education Committees, along with the University of Missouri's Institute for Positive Coaching.

In order to participate in this study, it will be necessary to give your written consent.

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#### **WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

Many athletes dreamed and prepared to make the Olympic Team and to win an Olympic Medal. Only a very few succeeded in standing on the Olympic Games Medal Awards Podium. For these athletes, their process of preparation and performance delivery worked. We are interested in determining what were the key factors, beyond talent and physical/technical training, that impacted their achieving success and winning

their medal(s) at the Olympic Games.

We are seeking to understand the influence and impact of specific deliberate practice, preparations, focus, sense of self, core values and beliefs, motivation, commitment, and sense of autonomy on their Olympic medal winning performance.

This research is being done with the intention to learn from these athletes, to develop better understandings, and ultimately to create appropriate educational materials to assist coaches and sport leaders in their efforts to teach, coach, develop and support future young athletes in their training and preparations in their pursuit performance excellence, and culminating in winning even more Olympic Medals.

### **HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?**

Specifically, 24 people will be invited to take part in this study. These are the 24 members of the 2012 United States Olympic Track and Field Team who won 25 individual medals in London.

### **WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?**

Each of the 24 medal winners and their coach from Track and Field will be invited to participate in this research project. Those who choose to participate will be scheduled for one on one interviews that will last 30 -45 minutes at their convenience. Interviews may be conducted via Skype as well. The environment for these interviews will take place in a quiet, comfortable and safe setting of their choice.

Interviews will be semi-structured, utilizing open-ended qualitative questions.

Interviews will last approximate 30-45 minutes, and will be audio recorded for accuracy. Additional interview sessions will be conducted as indicated.

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### **HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?**

Your actual participation in the study will be limited to the 30-45 minute initial interview, with the possibility of 1-2 short follow up interviews as indicated as our analysis of the data unfolds. We expect to have all of the interviews completed by December 1, 2014.

**You can stop participating at any time.**

### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?**

We anticipate minimal, if any, risks or discomforts for the participants. We are asking the participants to share their preparations and perspectives regarding their experiences leading to and competing in the 2012 Olympic Games. By their very nature,

these experiences with the Olympic Games preparation and competition were very intense, with extreme personal identification and investment. The information shared in the interviews will certainly be personal and potentially sensitive. Thus, there could be potential emotional risks in discussing their challenges and obstacles. But, these risks should be minimal. The interviewer will be a fellow athlete, with whom they are very comfortable. And, most of the participants are experienced in answering these types of questions in public or semi-public settings.

If at any time you are uncomfortable with a question, you are perfectly free to not answer it, or even withdraw from the interview and study.

We anticipate that the participants will enjoy recounting and sharing their Olympic experiences, culminating in winning their Olympic Medal.

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### **ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?**

If you agree to take part in this study, there may or may not be direct benefits to you. You may expect to benefit from taking part in this research to the extent that you are contributing to the education and preparation of coaches and athletes in the future. We hope and intend that the information learned from this study will benefit our finest junior athletes and their coaches in their quest for future Olympic Medal celebrations. You, the 2012 Olympic Medal Winners are exactly the role models of success for future athletes to follow.

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### **WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE THERE?**

The options essentially are to either choose to participate, or to choose not to participate.

### **WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?**

All data and digitally recorded materials will be held confidential by the research team. It will be stored in locked files in locked offices.

Beyond that, this study has a rather unique feature to it regarding confidentiality.

We acknowledge that, having won their Olympic Medals in London in 2012, all of the participants in the study are highly prominent and recognizable individuals. To suggest that these participants' identities would be held confidential would not be realistic.

In fact, and in truth, these participants are potentially ideal role models for young athletes who are dreaming and working to become the Olympic stars of the future. The

intention of this study is to uncover and to refine important understandings from the experiences of these participating Olympic Medal Winners, and to facilitate the impact and influence of their role model for others.

To this end, each participant will have final approval of any aspect of their interviews that they wish to be included in the data that will be retained and analyzed, and to any identifiable information that could be shared in any research report or ensuing educational materials or publications.

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### **WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?**

**Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study.** If you decide to participate, you can change your mind and drop out of the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty to you the participant.

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### **WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?**

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) at (573) 882-9585.

You may ask more questions about the study at any time. For questions about the study o contact Dr. Rick McGuire at 573-882-0727 (o) or 573-268-4263 (c) or Bobby Low at 802-362-4791.

A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

### **WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?**

You may get further information regarding the study from the Principle Investigator, Dr. Rick McGuire at [McGuireR@missouri.edu](mailto:McGuireR@missouri.edu) or from Bobby Low at [rglt2d@mail.missouri.edu](mailto:rglt2d@mail.missouri.edu).

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### **SIGNATURE**

I confirm that the purpose of the research, the study procedures, the possible risks and discomforts as well as potential benefits that I may experience have been explained to me. Alternatives to my participation in the study also have been discussed. I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below indicates my willingness to participate in this study.

Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNATURE OF STUDY REPRESENTATIVE**

I have explained the purpose of the research, the study procedures, identifying those that are investigational, the possible risks and discomforts as well as potential benefits and have answered questions regarding the study to the best of my ability.

Study Representative \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## VITA

Robert Low graduated from Brigham Young University with a Bachelors degree in Psychology. While attending BYU Robert competed on the Men's nationally renowned track and field team. Specifically, Robert participated in the Pole Vault. Robert was a two time Mountain West Conference Champion. Robert was a four-time NCAA national finalist, including a third place finish in 2009 and earned the All American Award. Robert finished his collegiate career as the third best pole vaulter in BYU history. Robert went on to compete professionally for two year, becoming a top 10 ranked USA athlete and a Top 50 ranked World athlete.

Robert graduated with a master's degree in sport and performance psychology from the University of the Rockies. During that time Robert worked as a sport psychology mental strength coach under the direction of Dr. Craig Manning. Robert consulted for Red Bull High Performance, the US ski teams and BYU athletics along with other private organizations.

Robert earned an Education Specialist Degree in Counseling Psychology from the University of Missouri in route to completing a Doctorate of Philosophy in Sport and Performance Psychology under the direction of Dr. Rick McGuire. While attending the University of Missouri, Robert worked as a Graduate Assistant Mental Strength Coach for the Sport Psychology program in the athletic department. Primary responsibilities included teaching mental skills to the Men's Basketball, Baseball and Softball teams. Robert was also on a committee that organized, planned and implemented the social responsibility program for the male student athletes. This program was called Men 4 Men.