

University of Alberta

Narratives By Elite Runners:
Descriptions of their Bodily Experiences During Pregnancy

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how two elite female marathon runners used narrative to describe their lived bodily experiences during pregnancy. Information for the analysis of this phenomenon was derived from two elite runners' personal narratives obtained from their internet dairies (blogs). This study employed phenomenology as a form of inquiry and used a *paradigmatic analysis of narratives* (Polkinghorne, 1995) to capture the essence of the runners' experiences with pregnancy. This study found that the elite runners wrote about their pregnancies as something both public and medical. They wrote about their unborn children as distinct entities and continued to write about their elite running bodies, despite pregnancy. This study concluded that the runners had identity struggles as they shifted from being elite runners to mothers, all while attempting to balance the social expectations of sport and motherhood.

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I admit, I was confronted by the fact that I would not have a round bump during my race because for some reason, that did not seem very marathon-like. I guess, I was afraid I'd be judged for being pregnant. Besides, you don't see many pregnant runners run marathons and I wasn't sure what other people thought about that. While toeing the line I was grateful I looked like everyone. It made the fact that I was pregnant easier to handle.

(Shutello, 2010, February 1)

As the acceptability and opportunity for women to participate in elite sporting competitions increases, it is inevitable that pregnancy may occur, affecting both their training and competition. Elite female runners may experience a pivotal moment in their athletic careers when they are faced with this reality.

Pregnancy. What does this word evoke in the mind of an elite runner? The runner may recall hearing tales of an amazing nine months, only for reality to replace those tales with morning sickness, declining fitness, and wobbly legs, all while attempting to *just-keep-running*. As women naturally do, they share stories. Some of these stories may be tales of sickness; others are accounts of women who run marathons while four months pregnant, and yet, do not look pregnant at all. These personal stories, as a form of narrative, may be a good resource to learn more about the athletes' experiences with their bodies during pregnancy.

There are several real-life examples of elite female runners who have chosen to compete while pregnant and many more recreational athletes who have continued to train well into their pregnancy. The first known physical ability to race during pregnancy occurred in the post-war 1948 London Olympics, when - unknown to herself and the world - Francina Blankers-Koen won gold medals in the 100m, 200m, 80m hurdles and 4 x 100m relay while she was pregnant. During the games she was three months pregnant with her third child and may have “conceived the concept” of a sporting mother (Turnbull, 2007).

Joan Benoit-Samuels won the gold medal in the marathon at the 1984 Olympics and in 1987 she ran the Boston Marathon while she was three months pregnant with her first child (Williams & O’Neil, 2007). As Lorraine Moller explains in her autobiography, *On the Wings of Mercury* (2007), she ran her fourth Olympic marathon at the age of 41 years and soon after discovered that she had run the race while pregnant. Unfortunately she miscarried and subsequently retired from running, later to give birth to a healthy daughter. The latest story of elite runners training through pregnancy involves Paula Radcliffe and Kara Goucher. Upon awareness of each other's exact same due date, the world class marathon runners trained together throughout part of their pregnancies (Shea, 2010). Both women gave birth to healthy babies in September 2010.

Most recent scholarly literature on the body and pregnancy attempts to determine appropriate levels of physical activity during pregnancy. The bulk of these studies focus on running as a form of physical activity and typically use

recreational athletes as their informants; unfortunately, the findings from these investigations may not generalize to well-trained elite runners. Guidelines published in pregnancy and exercise resources are typically based on information that has been extrapolated from studies on non-athletes and recreational athletes; findings from these studies are often generalized for all women. There is still minimal research specifically on elite athletes and pregnancy. This may, in part, be due to the difficulty of mass studies on elite athletes who are pregnant and subjected to intense training, exposing both practical and ethical complications for research. Lack of research minimizes the value of physical activity guidelines that do not consider individual differences with pregnancy and athletic backgrounds.

There is much research dedicated to the general scientific and biological phenomena of pregnancy, yet research is very sporadic towards the investigation of the social processes that mold the perceptions of the mother-to-be. There are few studies of female's perceptions of their changing bodies during pregnancy, and even less that highlight the perceptions of elite athletes' experiences. A significant gap in the literature on elite female athletes is created from the absence of studies on pregnant elite female athletes' perceptions of their bodies. This represents a significant concern because elite runners - who once may have exercised maximal control over their bodies' physical appearance and capabilities - are faced with the natural physical process of pregnancy which, unlike their training, is outside of their conscious control. Furthermore, pregnancy ultimately decreases their athletic physicality for the duration of the pregnancy and, perhaps, even thereafter. There

are few studies highlighting the complexities that affect a woman's perceptions of her pregnant body. Particularly sporadic is research that considers women's own voices, descriptions or narratives as a compelling medium for analysis.

The purpose of this thesis is derived from the question: how do elite female runners perceive their bodies during pregnancy? I was interested in investigating how the pregnant body is described in the narratives of elite female runners who have experienced pregnancy. By determining how elite runners write about their bodies' during pregnancy, one can better understand the impact of individual experiences with pregnancy that mold their perceptions.

As a previous competitive sub-elite runner myself, but not yet a mother, I used my knowledge of running and perceptions of elitism and pregnancy in my role as an investigator when categorizing the descriptions elite runners may have of their bodies during pregnancy. More specifically, I investigated written accounts by two elite female marathon runners - Paula Radcliffe and Kara Goucher - who both have relatively recent experiences with pregnancy. I analyzed the blogs (online diaries) written by each athlete using a paradigmatic analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995) in order to locate and highlight the descriptions these athletes have of their bodies during pregnancy. Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine how two elite female marathon runners used narrative to describe their lived bodily experiences during pregnancy.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The Dominant Medical Perspective

Before I could begin to explore the limited research of elite runners' perceptions of their bodies during pregnancy, it was helpful to highlight the research on pregnancy and physical activity in the medical field. Until as recent as the 1980's, women experiencing pregnancy were advised by doctors to avoid physical activity because the pregnant body was deemed something fragile (Mittelmark & Gardin, 1991). This earlier approach has changed since many physically active women wish to continue light training during pregnancy, while others - like competitive elite runners - may desire to continue performing hard exercise. This has prompted an increase in medical research focused on the potential effects of exercise during pregnancy (Blackburn & Calloway, 1983; Clapp & Dickstein, 1984; Dale, Mullinax & Bryan, 1982).

Decrying that exercise has negative effects during pregnancy, studies now suggest that physical activity during pregnancy benefits both the mother and child-to-be. Specifically, physical activity of moderate intensity is safe during uncomplicated pregnancies (Sternfeld, Quesenberry, Eskenazi & Newman, 1995; Webb, Wolfe & McGrath, 1994).

In an earlier study, Clapp and Dickstein (1984) analyzed the interaction of maternal endurance exercise prior to and during pregnancy. They found that women who continued endurance exercise during pregnancy - at or near pre-conception levels - gained less weight, delivered earlier, and had lighter weight

newborns. Sternfeld et al. (1995) found that aerobic exercise (pre-conceptually or in any trimester) at a level great enough to produce or maintain a physiological training effect, does not adversely affect mean birthweight. In this study, gestational age, maternal weight gain, and other pregnancy outcomes were also uninfluenced by the degree of exercise.

Further support comes from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG; 1994, 2002) who recommend that pregnant women may continue to exercise in the absence of both obstetric and medical complications. The ACOG (2002) recommended that pregnant women should engage in 30 minutes or more of moderate exercise on several - if not all - days of the week. They purported that participation in a wide range of activities appears to be safe but that sports with high physical contact or a risk of falling should be avoided. The ACOG (1994) recommended that pregnant women should not exceed a heart rate of 150 beats/minute because of the potential dangers of fetal malformation, intrauterine growth retardation and fetal distress. In spite of this ACOG recommendation, there are few studies that have measured fetal and maternal outcomes of athletes who are physically conditioned before conception and who continue to train during their pregnancy (Hale & Milne, 1996).

Research more specific to running was performed by Davies, Bailey, Budgett, Sanderson, and Griffin (1999) who investigated the impact of endurance training during a twin pregnancy in a marathon runner. The study followed a 33-year-old marathon (42.2 km) runner with a personal best time of 2 hours 36 minutes. The

physiological data analyzed during her pregnancy suggested that an endurance athlete can continue to train intensely during a twin pregnancy without adverse outcomes on both maternal and fetal health. The results also suggest that highly physically active women can continue exercising during pregnancy to both maintain their pre-pregnancy physical fitness and prevent unnecessary weight gain. More vigorous physical activity, during uncomplicated pregnancies, by women who are pre-conception athletically well trained, has also been shown to have no adverse effects on the course of pregnancy, labor or on the fetus (Kardel & Kase, 1998; Penttinen & Erkkola, 1997).

However, Treuth, Butte, and Puyau (2005) noted that maximal exercise testing in pregnant women may not be safe since it requires an increased heart rate to very high levels. This seems to be an appropriate explanation for the lack of medical and physiological studies on elite athletes who continue intense training during pregnancy. Despite the safety concerns, a couple of studies have measured changes in maximal oxygen consumption (VO₂ Max) during pregnancy (Heenan, Wolfe, & Davies, 2001; South-Paul, Rajagopal, & Tenholder, 1988). By studying maximal exercise testing in late gestation, Heenen et al. (2001) found that carbohydrate utilization during pregnancy may be blunted at high levels of exercise, thus not supplying both the mother and the fetus with sufficient energy during periods of intense exercise.

Another medical concern regards whether it is safe for a new mother to exercise soon after childbirth. This question is important to elite athletes who plan

to continue competing after pregnancy and was addressed in a study (Potteiger, Welch, & Byrne, 1993) of an elite runner training for the 1992 United States Olympic Marathon Trials. The study and the runner's training commenced immediately postpartum and data collection of her physiology continued for 16 weeks. The study found that no physical or medical complications were observed during her training. The runner's VO₂ Max improved during intense endurance training that did not compromise her health. The researchers stated that this evidence indicated that a well-conditioned athlete may participate in rigorous physical activity soon after childbirth. The researchers also made it clear, that this study was only on one elite runner and that the outcomes of this study may not apply to other postpartum athletes. Treuth et al., (2005) looked specifically at pregnancy-related changes in physical activity, fitness and strength in non-athletes. They found that relative to prepregnancy levels of physical activity, fitness and strength declined in early postpartum but improved again by 27 weeks after the delivery.

Western culture is increasingly dependent on expert knowledges and this is especially the case with our relationship with, and trust in, medical practices. When assuming a positive perspective, it is important to note that medical and scientific research has played a positive role in producing knowledges about the body's capacity. Specifically, medical knowledge has helped to dismiss the past common knowledges surrounding the pregnant body as something fragile and incapable of physical activity. With this new knowledge established and, for the most part,

society's further acceptance of women's physical activity, knowledge from other methods of inquiry could benefit the understanding of pregnancy experiences. The emphasis on pregnancy research through medical eyes has overshadowed our need for understanding pregnancy from other perspectives, such as how women experience their bodies in everyday life. The magnitude of medical knowledge of pregnancies is what justifies the need for research on women's own perceptions of their pregnant bodies. From reviewing the pregnancy research dominated by a medical viewpoint, I am confident in the justification for pregnancy research from a socio-cultural perspective.

Cultural Shifts in Female Body Image

Blaikie et al. (2004) suggested that the human body consists of more than just simply biological processes; it is influenced by social and cultural currents that mold and shape it to reflect the current socio-cultural times. Despite the stated medical findings about physical activity during pregnancy, participating in physical activities, such as running, may not be widely executed for the purpose of maintaining the maximal biological and medical health of the unborn child.

As the introductory quote about the marathon runner exemplifies, females of today's society have a heightened awareness and concern for their body image (Selby, Weinstein, & Bird, 1990). Body image is defined as the internal representation of one's own outer appearance (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Shontz (1969) stated that the image one has is a composite

of “perceptions, attitudes and feelings” of their body as “it exists in space” (as cited in Strang & Sullivan, 1985, p. 332). A more current definition of body image is by Cash (2004) who defined it as “the multifaceted psychological experience of embodiment, especially but not exclusively one’s physical appearance” (p. 1). He elaborated that body image encompasses how one thinks about oneself and one’s body-related feelings and beliefs. Being aware that one’s own body is incessantly on display, Bartky (1988) suggested that women are conscious of the fact that they are primarily identified as only their bodies; meaning women see their own bodies as others see them.

Even though feminists have worked against “the history of exclusions, erasures, and other absences of female identity” (Balsam, 2003, p. 1153), the modern, still paternalistic, society continues to shackle the female body with expectations of the ideal physical form. Despite being controlled by social expectations, the ideal body image is fluid; it changes with the current times. The change in the popular bodily aesthetics of Western women is correlated with the rise in the popularity of exercise. In Western cultures during the 1950’s, women who once displayed “curvaceousness embodiment”, had the robust, curvy, ideal body image (Lloyd, 1996, p. 80). Fitness and athletics were not a priority at this time.

The 1960’s is recorded as having minimal participation in exercise when considering the whole of Western society. It was the 1970’s that was characterized as booming the cultural fitness trend because of the public concern for the

increased risk of heart disease. It was a collective health consciousness that initiated jogging in particular. Subsequently, jogging - originally a cardiovascular activity - shaped a lean and sometimes emaciated physique (Egger, Champion & Hurst, 1988) and was soon recognized as having an aesthetic benefit.

Then came the “tyranny of slenderness” (Chernin, 1981), responsible for “culturally induced body insecurity” (Orbach, 1993, p. 23). The slender ideal female body was unattainable by most, and yet, this body image was culturally desired. By the 1980’s, aerobics was a normalized activity, in the gym or at home, as women tried to match Jane Fonda’s hard, yet slim physique. Women of Western society were using exercise to contain their bodies (Lloyd, 1996) in a culturally prescribed package. The 1990’s were similar, as Lloyd (1996) wrote:

At present, the epitome of the feminine body is slim and supple with sculpted (but not built) musculature. It is, above all, a slender body. The prevalence of this message that slim is “good” while fat is “bad” is incontestable”. (p. 80)

Participating in exercise and physical activity was, and still is, women’s way of grasping control over the shape of their bodies (Willis, 1990). It is a method to ensure their body image matches that of the cultural ideal body. As pregnancy shifts the female body away from this slender ideal, perceptions of the body during pregnancy need to be considered.

Perceptions of the Body During Pregnancy

In 19th-century America, speaking about pregnancy was considered forbidden, even between a mother and her daughters (Gardner, 1994). Prior to the 1950's, pregnant women, if referred to at all, were considered “ ‘with child’... or ‘had a bun in the oven’ ” (Davis-Floyd, 1986, p. 46). Women were expected to remain out of public, often secluded to their homes, but Davis-Floyd (1986) argued that this is no longer the case. He explained that we presently “see pregnant women everywhere, from the nightclub to the formal dinner, and it is only a few old die-hards who mutter under their breath about unseemly display” (p. 47). Longhurst (2000) suggested:

Pregnant women appear to ‘have arrived’ and are free at last from social constraints which formally tied them to domesticity and to the private realms. It seems as though it is now possible to be pregnant and fashionable; pregnant and sexy; pregnant and a corporate manager; pregnant and sporty. (p. 458)

However, Longhurst (2000) went on to explain that despite this liberation, “regulatory practices that shape pregnant bodies have not disappeared” (p. 458). Pregnant women are still bound by social expectations for them to monitor their body changes during pregnancy.

A number of scholars (e.g. Corea, 1985; Davis-Floyd, 1992; Longhurst 2000; Oakley, 1979; Rich, 1976; Rothman, 1988; 1989) have discussed the heightened pressure for mothers-to-be to closely monitor their weight gain during pregnancy -

by submitting to a regulated diet and fitness regime - for social aesthetic reasons. Clarke, Skouteris, Wertheim, Paxton and Milgrom (2009) found that pregnant women reported “having a generally positive attitude towards their pregnant body” but also noted “specific undesirable bodily changes such as fluid retention, larger breasts, leaking breasts, alterations to nipple colour, dry facial skin, varicose veins, skin rashes, acne, or loss of muscle tone” (p. 334). The bodily changes that take place during pregnancy may place a woman’s body further away from the cultural ideal of the female body (Strang & Sullivan, 1985). Greer (1984) suggested that pregnant women feel unattractive because others can see that their rounded pregnant bodies do not resemble the socially desired slim appearance. This is supported by Bailey (1999) who, through an array of interviews with pregnant women about their pregnant bodily experiences, found that “they described their bodies as being ‘invaded’, both by these other people and the fetus inside them” (p. 340). What she means by “these other people” is the existence of an external cultural gaze. Due to this cultural gaze, in which people feel like they are constantly on public display, much of modern society has come to view the body as a project in which its image is worked upon as part of an individual’s self-identity (Shilling, 1993). Investing in the body’s image, gives people a way to express themselves and have control over something. If people feel that they are unable to exercise control within an increasingly complex society, they are at least able to have some form of influence over their own body (Shilling, 2003).

In a study focusing on the effect celebrity pregnancies have on the general public, Nash (2006) suggested that in our modern culture, a pregnant woman is considered successful if she manages to gain only a minimal amount of weight, all the while exercising during her pregnancy, eating healthy food and then losing the excess weight immediately after birth. The notion that pregnant women are not traditionally defined by their physical attractiveness or fitness, is a testament to the contemporary pressure for them to look after their bodies, lose the baby weight immediately after birth (Earle, 2003) and regain the culturally ideal female form that is so blatantly displayed to the public.

Obviously, women participate in physical activity not simply for health reasons alone, but also to normalize their appearance to be most consistent with the current signifiers of emphasized femininity (Markula, 1995). Pregnant women and new mothers are not immune to this and they often participate in physical activity, for more than just embracing health practices, in order to maximize child and maternal health (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004). The motivation to maintain a desirable body shows that, even during pregnancy, ideologies of the female body are not immune to social expectations. As feminist theorists point out, women are becoming increasingly uncomfortable in their bodies and feel as though their physical frames are problems to be rigorously managed, rather than as forms to contently live with (Blaikie et al, 2004).

It is clear, the female body is currently expected to be thin and aesthetically pleasing; however, society is not forgiving during times of pregnancy - both during

and after. The pregnant body is only socially accepted for a limited time, and the mother is expected to reclaim her pre-pregnant body almost immediately after childbirth.

With nine months of pregnancy and declining fitness, even after delivery a woman's body may still appear to be pregnant (Becker, 1980). This realization may be an extremely dissatisfying experience for the mother (Leifer, 1977). The large, rapid and uncontrollable increase in body shape and size that occurs during pregnancy is unlike any other time in a woman's life. Despite the fact that some women may be pregnant, society views the obvious anatomical changes to their bodies - other than the *baby bump* - to be associated with the reductions of physical and global self-esteem (Poudevigne & Connor, 2006). In the aforementioned study of pregnant women's bodily experiences during pregnancy, Bailey (1999) reports that one of her informants tried to conceal the pregnancy at work, when it first started to show, "in order to maintain her 'professional image' " (p. 342). Older studies on non-athlete participants, found that women's dissatisfaction with their bodies increased throughout pregnancy and this dissatisfaction peaked after the child was born (Leifer, 1977; Moore, 1978). Strang and Sullivan (1985), comparing body image attitudes during pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, and the postpartum period, found that their informants were generally more positive about their pre-pregnant bodies than their postpartum body image. They also found that their participants felt more positive about their postpartum body image than their pregnancy body image. The possible dissatisfaction with one's body during and after pregnancy is

one of the factors that make body perception during pregnancy a critical concern to explore.

Women, in general, are concerned about the appearance of their body and have a heightened concern for whether pregnancy will have a long lasting and permanent impact on their body shape and weight (Gunderson & Abrams, 2000). However, it has been well-illustrated through numerous studies completed in the 1980's that the majority of exercising and non-exercising women quickly decrease their physical activity during pregnancy (Blackburn & Calloway, 1983; Dale, Mullinax, & Bryan, 1982; Erkkola, 1982), thus increasing the risk of losing their figures. South-Paul, Rajagopal and Tenholder's (1992) study of exercise responses prior to pregnancy and in the postpartum state, found that women did not regain their pre-pregnancy aerobic capacity by four-to-eight weeks postpartum. This finding does not support the cultural ideal of 'getting your body back' immediately after childbirth. By realizing that a woman may be driven by socially desirable aesthetics over health and resist the natural decline of physical activity during pregnancy, research from a socio-cultural perspective may help to fill the gap in the literature created by the predominant medical perspective.

Earlier research found that women who are positive about their body appearance before pregnancy, are more likely to be positive about their body image during and after pregnancy (Harris, 1979; McConnell & Daston, 1961). These earlier findings may encourage more current research on this issue and ideally stimulate the creation of new ideologies and social programs that assist the

development of a women's positive body image both before, during, and after pregnancy.

I am curious at to how women describe their bodies during pregnancy. This is especially interesting because any decline in their physical activity is contradictory to society's expectations for them to maintain a pleasing body shape. In attempting to conform to societal expectations, being physically active during pregnancy is more and more becoming accepted and normalized; however being too physically active also challenges society's level of acceptance. As observed through this literature review, society has boundaries for its acceptance of female athleticism - suggesting that there is a very fine line between society's comfort level with physically active pregnant women. This led me to to wonder how extremely active women, such as elite runners, may describe experiences with their pregnant bodies. Before I could investigate elite female runners' experiences with their pregnant bodies, I first needed to understand them as exclusively elite female runners.

The Elite Female Running Body

I now focus my discussion on elite runners' bodies with out any reference to being pregnant. My justification for exploring this area of research is, simply, that before an elite female runner has experienced a pregnant body, she has experienced the body of an elite runner. In order to better understand an elite runner's experiences with pregnancy, I needed to first understand her elite body. Runners are interesting participants to consider when interested in the body and lived

experience because their bodies are central to their athletic careers. Their bodies are their careers.

To date, much of the sporting research on the body has been influenced by scientific and medical quests for knowledge. Every fiber of an athletic body relevant to sporting practices has been measured, quantified, and classified with the intent of performance-enhancement. By trying to make sense of this vast array of knowledge, a central metaphor has been developed and perpetually used to refer to the athletic body: *Body as a machine*. Seymour (1998) wrote:

The perspectives of the body as machine, exemplified in medicine (Lupton, 1994, p. 59) reaches its zenith in sport science. The raw material of the athletes' bodies becomes *the athletes'* machines, as specific parts of the machine are isolated and transformed into effective components of competitive performance through the application of scientific knowledge (Shilling, 1993, p. 37). (p. 6)

Athletes, coaches and fans often refer to the sporting body as a *machine* as a way of understanding its functionality and outcome. In this context, sporting bodies may be referred to as *well-oiled, tuned, spring-loaded, fueled, exploding with energy, running on low, having a body of steel, having wheels*, etc. Metaphors are a matter of thought, rather than just a part of language. This means, with the use of such metaphors, athletes may come to perceive their bodies as universally mechanistic rather than receptors of individual lived experience. This assertion is

supported by Sage (1990) who suggested that when the body is regarded as a machine, there is a lack of recognition for how scientific manipulations interfere with the personal and social development of an athlete.

For many elite running fans or general onlookers, the runner is her body; a model of modern feminine beauty and the normalized ideal of a slim, yet muscular physique. Runners' bodies are lean and muscular, often lacking breasts and buttocks, and potentially resembling that of an adolescent male. When discussing the body of the female participant in sport, it is important to consider that this social construction of the athlete's body as something feminine is actually quite convoluted for two main reasons. First, what present Western society expects women to look like - thin - is actually taking away from traditional ideologies of looking feminine - curvy (Markula, 1995). Secondly, women are expected to focus on their bodily appearance; however, the dominant expectations are limited to the maintenance of their soft aesthetics and inferior physical strength (Markula, 1995). Female athletes often battle with the development of the hard muscles that are required for competing well in their sport because they are simultaneously aware of society's expectations of them to conform to the ideal lean body (Mosewich, Vangool, Kowalski & McHugh, 2009). In studying track and field athletes, Mosewich et al. (2009) found that their "environment provides various opportunities for physique-related comparisons; and that those social comparisons have the potential to be distressing to the athletes" (p. 112). As soon as women focus on the development of hard muscles and physical endurance, their actions,

and consequently their bodies, are considered masculine. Female athletes may be easily confused by these contradictions because, as pointed out by Bolin (1992), sporting lifestyles, such as long-distance running, create a blurred distinction in the contours of male and female body shapes. Yet Markula (1995) wrote, “The very parts of our bodies that identify us as females: the rounded bellies, the larger hips, the thighs, the softer underarms...are also the ones we hate the most and fight the hardest to diminish” (p. 435). It appears as though society expects women to shed their bodies of a feminine physique but not become masculine.

An elite female runner’s physical characteristics are a contradiction to a patriarchal society’s expectations of the female image. The interplay between expectations of femininity and athleticism may confuse a woman’s sense of self in relation to how she melds with society. Yes, female athleticism is becoming more common, thus socially accepted, yet still only to a certain degree. Muscles are becoming more of a cultural icon and working-out is glamorized and sexualized (Bordo, 2003); however, most people still attempt to maintain layers of differences between the socially constructed characteristics of men and women. These differences are usually the visual aesthetic characteristics that traditionally suggest either femininity or masculinity. The type of female body required for competitive running - lean and muscular - blends the female body with masculine features and this challenges the gender ideologies of the general public.

In today’s Western societies, the body has a certain malleability to it. People have come to accept that their appearance, size, shape and bodily contents, are

potentially open to revisions. People have the free will to build and mould their bodies to be consistent with whatever blueprint they have designed for themselves (Shilling, 2003). This opportunistic social construction has created a misconception of the free will and the power one has over him/herself to claim his/her identity - as if it is something to be sought after. This misconception allows for an elite athlete's body shape and physical capabilities to be obtained and placed at the forefront of their perceptions of their selves.

Since elite female runners have developed their identity around their bodies' physical performance while being in the spotlight, their attempts to adhere to cultural expectations of what it means to be athletic may be scrutinized more intensely than would be the average citizen. In the true nature of competitive sport, a runner's abilities are more important than her body's appearance; however, there is an ideological misconception that bodily appearance is directly correlated with physical capability or that the body must look good to perform well. In such a landscape, at the expense of working against layers of common ideologies of what it means to be feminine, female runners strive for a specific body that is conducive to successfully performing their sporting activity, all the while aware of what it means to be feminine. With this, female runners - just like many other athletes and much of modern society - have come to view the body as a project with an intense focus on physical looks and abilities.

Through physical training, elite athletes need to have a substantial amount of control over their bodies' growth and development - especially when preparing for

major competitions. Elite athletes have been identified as a group of people who may feel required to conform to an ideal body shape conducive to their sport. They typically have a heightened concern for excessive body weight, primarily because it detracts from their athletic performance (Hale & Milne, 1996). Hulley and Hill (2001) found that elite British runners with an eating disorder were found to be significantly less satisfied with their physical appearance. These researchers also concluded that the demands for leanness in elite endurance running - rather than exercise intensity - appears to be the main risk for the cause of a eating disorder. Byrne and McLean (2002) specifically studied elite athletes and the effects of the pressures to be thin. They found that elite females, more than males, participating in sports that emphasized lean bodies (endurance running, ballet and gymnastics), have a higher tendency toward eating practices that minimize their body weight and shape than do other athletes and non-athletes. Similarly, Sundgot-Borgen and Torstveit (2004) determined that “The prevalence of eating disorders is higher in athletes than non-athletes, higher in females athletes than males athletes, and more common among those competing in leanness dependent sports” (p. 25).

Studying elite runners' perceptions of their body is especially interesting for contemporary sport research because of the emphasis on thinness and strength for women in competitive marathon running. As noted in this discussion, females - and especially female runners - treat their bodies as a conscious project, purposely sculpting, tweaking, and innovating it towards an aesthetic and physical potential. These modifications are socially constructed as a necessary action because the

body is a form of physical resistance (Shilling, 1993) with physical limitations.

This knowledge of their bodies, as something to be self-manipulated for success at elite running, challenges the runner to consciously improve their body shape and abilities - closing the gap of their own limitations - in order to meet their sporting goals.

Phenomenology of Sport

It is germane to note that reference to both the pregnant body and the athletic body as medical/scientific phenomena are becoming normalized. Knowledge generated by Western medical/scientific traditions, disseminated throughout the majority of society, greatly differs from the portrayal of the body through more descriptive illustrations of lived experience. Studying the body in an objective manner - measured and assessed, poked and prodded - does not engage the body as something lived and experienced (Rintala, 1991). The field of medicine does not take into account the importance of the ontology and epistemology of the body - both what are our experiences and how we know our experiences with our bodies. The influence of medical and scientific views, and their stark descriptions of the body, has leaked into sport domains. In referring to these domains, Sparkes (1999) wrote, that the body “has often been dealt with in a fragmented and mechanistic manner, as something to be dissected, manipulated, treated, measured, or performance-enhanced” (p. 17). This thesis presents situations where persons are both pregnant - thus, highly influenced by medical practices - and athletic - highly

influenced by scientific sporting practices. Yet, pregnancy and athleticism can be explained both scientifically and as idiosyncratic bodily experiences. Scientific research on pregnancy and athleticism is in abundance, thus there is need for an emphasis on understanding the pregnant-athletic body that illuminates unique lived experiences. This thesis takes the position that the body is not an object or an instrument to be used, measured and objectified, but instead considers the body as “the subject of perception...we know the world through the body, just as that body produces the world for us” (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007, p. 117).

Phenomenology is a strategy of inquiry that studies human experience from this first-person point of view. It has been innovated as a form of study with the intent of understanding human experience and meaning (Hein & Austin, 2001). By using a phenomenological perspective as a form of inquiry, this thesis will add to the critique of society’s dominant way of thinking of the body - and its processes - as merely a biological and medical phenomenon. Phenomenology is an appropriate strategy for understanding more contemporary manners in which pregnant runners may experience and describe their bodies. Athletes have a cognitive understanding of how to perform their sporting practices, however their understanding is “also corporal, developed by the body’s immersion in habitual training practices” (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007, p. 117). By understanding that the body is corporeal - a physical entity - phenomenology is used as more than just a theory. It is a way of understanding an individual’s unique perspectives of lived experiences; it is a way of making sense of life. Sparkes and Smith (2002) recognized:

There are moves to take seriously the phenomenological body, with a view to understanding the multiple and diverse ways in which people experience their bodies and how these experiences interact to shape identities and selves over time in specific contexts. (p. 261)

The use of phenomenology encourages a strategy of inquiry that highlights individuals' experiences and incorporates participants own identities into the understanding of what their experiences mean. Phenomenology focuses not only on the the nature of consciousness, but specifically on achieving knowledge of the nature of consciousness, which are central ontological and epistemological concerns. In relating this to the topic of this discussion, it means studying the unique descriptions pregnant athletes provide of their bodies. As a researcher, I also needed to be aware of the culture that produced the capacity for, and knowledge of, those perceptions. Nash (2006) noted, pregnancy is a culturally relevant experience, in part because pregnant women - athletes or not - are "outside the boundaries of normalized appearance" (p. 44). Since, pregnancy is idiosyncratic and culturally relevant, this suggests that when understanding the essence of the lived experiences one has with their pregnant body, one needs to consider how those experiences have been influenced by one's culture.

The strength in phenomenology is that it provides the opportunity to illuminate one's lived experience. Sparkes (1997, 1998) claimed that learning how to tell stories about one's body helps to develop an order to unique bodily experiences and

to make sense of the happenings in life. Making sense of lived bodily experiences is at the heart of phenomenology and, as such, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) suggested, “Some of the most useful intellectual resources for developing a phenomenology of sport... [are] different kinds of textual forms” (p. 116). This suggests, written narratives are rich resources for understanding phenomenological bodily experiences. I have used this opportunity to analyze how elite runners wrote about their pregnant bodily experiences as a reflection of their interpretations of their own lived experience.

Narrative in Sport

There is growing interest in the use of narrative inquiry among qualitative sport researchers. Polkinghorne (1995) explains that within qualitative research literature, the term *narrative* is used with an array of meanings. In facets of qualitative research and everyday meaning, *narrative* can be used to refer to any form of text. Stories are a fitting linguistic form when understanding how people express lived experiences (Polkinghorne, 1995) because narrative studies are influenced by phenomenology’s salient emphasis on understanding ones lived experience and perceptions of experience (Patton, 2002). Following Polkinghorne, my thesis used the term *narrative* in a specific context, as reference to text in the form of a story. In this thesis, the stories of interest are presented in an autobiographical nature.

The personal narrative process is an activity enabling elite athletes to construct their own stories about their lives. Writing personal narratives provides an opportunity to release both true and/or moulded representations to the public. Traditional forms of investigation, such as interviews, unnaturally flush out information, whereas personal narrative reveals information the writer intends to reveal. Using personal narratives in research means an informant is not pushed into a particular topic of discussion the way he/she could be guided in an interview. In telling stories through their own personal narratives, the runners may reveal or conceal themselves; they have the liberty to present themselves in the way they choose. Women often write about personal events in a similar fashion to that of writing in a diary, so there is the possibility for these narratives to provide deep rich personal information (Patton, 2002). Personal narratives highlight the essence of what the athlete wants to convey, influencing the reader's awareness of the athlete's social reality. The reader thus gains a more accurate perception of the athletic experience and has the opportunity to both be open to the writer's opinions and aware of the biases that may affect the narrative (Denison & Markula, 2005).

Personal narratives may be regarded as rich descriptions of experience and analyzed as extensions of human experience revealing larger social meanings (Patton, 2002). The acceptance of personal narratives within sport has provided athletes, coaches, fans, and sports administrators with the power to write valuable descriptions of their experiences that researchers can then use as a source of first-hand information.

I was interested in how elite female runners wrote about their experiences with their pregnant bodies. I was not just interested in how they felt about their bodies, but specifically how they wrote about their bodies - how they described their bodily experiences in a public environment. In locating runners' public descriptions of their bodies, I chose to develop an understanding of new forms of narrative stories that are presented on the world wide web; specifically looking at pregnant elite runners' 'online diaries' - also known as blogs.

Online Personal Narratives - Blogs

During rapid technological change, it is imperative to keep authentic sporting stories alive through narrative forms while simultaneously adjusting to the new mediums through which they are presented. Within an online dynamic matrix of information are new forms of rhetoric or narratives - personal 'diaries' called *blogs*. A blog (blend of *web* and *log*) is a type of website typically perpetuated by an individual with entries of commentary or news of a particular subject; others function more as personal online diaries or autobiographies. Each entry is a personal story, intended for an online audience. Polkinghorne (1995) described *a story* as narratives of life events, such as autobiographies and reports of remembered episodes, and this is often the main purpose of a blog. Studying blogs as a form of narrative is supported by Patton (2002) who proclaimed "rhetoric of all kinds can be fodder for narrative analysis" (p. 115) and Polkinghorne (1995) who

explained that narrative is “any text that consists of complete sentences linked into a coherent and integrated statement” (p. 6).

At present, there is very little research on the growing phenomenon of blogs. There is debate about how and why blogging is different from other forms of narrative, such as personal diaries (Herring, Scheidt, Wright & Bonus 2005). Blogs may be similar to diaries or autobiographies in that they warrant narrative analysis, yet there are unique differences from traditional personal narratives because blogs are for an audience, publicly displayed and judged.

One of the few studies on blogging content was performed by Sanderson (2008) who explored the self-presentation strategies of the Boston Red Sox pitcher, Curt Schilling, through his blog titled *38pitches.com*. In part, Sanderson’s findings suggested that blogs and other online information and communication technologies are useful tools for professional athletes, as they employ accurate personal information that counters negative media framings of their personalities. The article argues “Blogs are valuable self-presentation mechanisms that enable professional athletes and celebrities to have greater control over their representations to the public” (p. 913). Professional athletes may find it beneficial to blog because they have the opportunity to write on their own behalf without necessarily being restricted by an editor. Athletes who blog have the opportunity to avoid traditional media structures and are free to submit or hold back any personal information they choose - a primary and untainted resource. Blogs offer athletes the ability to become directly involved in both releasing and presenting personal information.

Sanderson also argues that blogs allow athletes to “position themselves in a manner that contradicts negative framing by mass media organizations” (p. 913). In this case, mainstream media, such as newspapers, magazines, online news sources and television, become less involved in filtering through and selecting which information is presented to the public. Blogs also may provide elite athletes with the opportunity to prudently present their desired image to the public and have greater control over self-image strategies (Caplan, 2005).

While I was conscious of its prevalence, the current study avoided analyzing information about the elite runners’ pregnancies that had been siphoned through the filters of mainstream media. Written mainstream media resources are often only sprinkled with direct quotes by professional athletes that have been carefully selected by the article’s author. These articles are not often rich with an accurate perspective of the athletes’ perceptions since they are written through the eyes of a third-party. When mainstream media sources compile news, they usually present the information in the form of a story; this format is called framing (Kuypers & Cooper, 2005). Framing is, in part, considered strategically highlighting specific aspects of a story to elevate a particular definition, interpretation, evaluation, or recommendation (Entman, 1993). What is happening in the news can be framed - and thus understood - in different ways, as mainstream media sources often follow defined perspectives that gear the viewers’ interpretation towards desired perspectives (Kuypers & Cooper, 2005). Furthermore, mainstream media often use the method of framing to enhance the perceived importance of specific news stories

in order to reinforce the ideological systems that the media source supports (Carruthers, 2000). Additionally, mainstream media shapes interpretations of events. In circumstances where framing compromises a person's image, an individual may use a method, such as blogging, to challenge the media's interpretation. In Sanderson's (2008) article about the blogging activity of baseball player Curt Schilling, he noted that Schilling blogs critically about journalists and mainstream media. He suggested that blogging allows Schilling to provide his thoughts and beliefs in an authentic format, choosing how what he offers to the public is preserved.

With the use of blogs, professional athletes can communicate directly to the public and counter the potential inaccurate or negative portrayals made by the media. By using a blog, the writers themselves decide what to say to the public about their pregnant bodies. Blogs are, thus, a rich primary resource that may provide sports scholars with a wealth of interesting personal information about the elite athletes who write them.

When interested in the written experiences of pregnant athletes, another very valid medium for analysis are autobiographies. There are several elite runners who have written about their experiences with pregnancy in their autobiographies (Mollar, 2007; O'Sullivan & Humphries, 2008). Similar to that of a blog, one is able to gain an understanding of the runners' experiences by using autobiographies as a resource because they are written by the runners and are not a product of mainstream media articles.

Autobiographies reveal cultural patterns through the lens of the individuals' experiences, encompassing the richness and diversity of their cultures. Women often write autobiographies more like diaries, so there is a real truth value to their writings (Patton, 2002). There is reason to suggest that blogs have similarities to share with autobiographies, but in a more current environment; both blogs and autobiographies are primary resources of information. For this thesis, I decided not to analyze autobiographies, in part because they require recollection of the past. In contrast, blogs are more often written immediately about recent events or perceptions of something in current life. Also, autobiographies are often edited by a second party or written, in part, by a more experienced author. This means that some critical events described in autobiographies could be either eliminated or emphasized by the secondary author, which would not be authentic to the athlete. Producing a blog is also much more practical for a current professional athlete because no funding, publishers, or editors are needed. One of the most appealing aspects for an athlete to write a blog, instead of an autobiography, may be that the athlete does not need to devote a massive amount of time to the blog when compared to that of writing an entire memoir of her life. In time there may be a greater availability of relevant blogs by elite runners, as opposed to autobiographies, that contain information about their pregnancy experiences.

Currently, there are no studies on elite pregnant runners and their experiences expressed through narratives, especially in the new format of online blogging.

Looking at runners through a more current medium may help reveal prevailing cultural and social patterns through the lens of their individual experiences.

A limitation of analyzing blogs is that a significant amount of time is needed to research through-out the blogosphere. Researchers of the blog phenomenon may spend countless tedious hours surfing through numerous sites, posts and comments, all in hopes of finding a post germane to the subject matter of their research (Keen, 2007). As of June, 2011, Blogpulse.com suggested that they have identified 163,880,956 blogs. Despite Blogpulse's extensive encyclopedia of blogs, there is not one central search engine locating all blogs existing in cyber space and there is not one complete mainframe that houses and organizes all blogs. There are attempts at this though and in time socio-cultural scholars interested in the internet's social reality may be assisted by websites such as 'Blogpulse.com', 'Technorati.com', 'Bloglines.com' and 'Blogscope'.net.

It is too early in the existence of the blogging phenomenon to fully analyze its impact. At this point, understanding the act of blogging would benefit from rich sociological analysis and description of the phenomenon so that a foundation is laid for theoretical discussion. A blog is a good example of the construction of cultural digitization being produced more quickly than scholars have the ability to track and analyze it; thus, I took the opportunity to understand blogs and focus on blogs as a form of narrative within sport.

Summary of Literature

This study aimed to use blogs as a type of narrative and a source of rich information of lived experience. By using phenomenology as a strategy of inquiry, my main purpose was to specifically illuminate the descriptions elite runners have of their bodily experiences during pregnancy. As pregnancy does not conform to the athletic ideal, I believe researching the pregnant body will make an important contribution to debates about what it means to be a female athlete.

Pressure to lose pregnancy weight immediately after birth, may inspire some elite runners to proactively return to an ideal body shape by controlling their weight-gain and fitness during pregnancy. This may occur if elite runners wish to continue their competitive careers after the birth of their child. Society may place an expectation on the female runner to return to her athletic body-type after pregnancy; if she does not do so, she may receive the stigma of failing to battle the potential post-pregnancy bulge.

Runners have a substantial amount of control over their bodies' endurance and muscular development, whereas mothers-to-be have limited control over their bodies' course of change during the pregnancy. Elite female runners are often fixated with controlling their body shape and physical ability; however, there are occasions, such as pregnancy, where runners may feel uncomfortable in their bodies, thus leading them to confront it as if it were an external object (Blaikie et al., 2004). The perceptions pregnant runners have of their bodies and the

experience of bodily changes during pregnancy may further distort their battle between society's expectations of the ideal female body and their athletic identity.

Presented here, was a question, and a concern about females, who are both athletic runners and pregnant, and how they describe their changing body, as it shifts away from athletic to pregnant. The purpose of this study, to determine how two elite runners describe their bodily experiences during pregnancy, may allow, a better understanding of the impact of individual experiences on body perceptions.

Chapter Three: Methods

The focal point of methodology in narrative studies is interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Ways in which to interpret stories and the texts within them are central to narrative analysis (Patton, 2002). It is most salient to know the intentions of the author's communications (Palmer, 1969). When analyzing narratives, the researcher's goal is to illuminate the voice of the writer in a particular time, place or setting (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Working in tandem with these narratives, through a phenomenological lens, I provided a description of pregnant runners' stories and experiences based upon their stated perspectives and feelings regarding their own bodies. The runners' self identities, cultures and communities are telescoped by the runners through the process of telling their stories.

Ethical Considerations

This master's thesis did not receive an ethical review from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board. This study analyzed blogs, internet sources of information that are open to all members of the public, similar to other forms of mass media resources. Authors of blogs typically understand that their stories are open to all who have access to the internet. Also, it must be noted that this study specifically analyzes written content only and does not make claims about the women themselves. I am focusing on the story, not the person. When determining whether this study needed ethical supervision, I contacted Dr. Kelvin Jones, the

Chair of the Research Ethics Board. In an email responding to my question of whether or not to present my research to the Research Ethics Board, he wrote:

I would consider a blog the same as I would a newspaper, with some qualifiers later. Since the source of the data is not private, i.e. it originates from a publicly available source, then you do NOT need ethics approval.

This is also the case for magazine or other published articles.

However, you as a researcher can not interact with the individuals writing the blog. Many blogs allow for comments. These are often responded to by the author of the blog (this is also an issue for letters to the editor in newspapers). The ethical issue is that if you intervene by commenting on the blog then you would need to contact the author and make them aware that you are doing research. (K. Jones, personal communication, December 1, 2010)

Following this advice, I, as the researcher, analyzed the blogs written by both Radcliffe and Goucher, without having any contact with these authors and refrained from personally commenting on their blogs.

Locating Narratives: Internet as a Relevant Resource

In locating elite runners' stories of their pregnant bodies, this study focused on a new form of media that is used to transmit elite sporting experiences to the public. The world's most current medium for media and literature are world wide

web communications. A major challenge for sociological scholars is keeping up with the evolution of online trends and activity. Internet time (Wellman & Haythornthwait, 2002) runs faster than the ability of scholars to produce the research about the internet. The study of sociology may gain more understanding of the internet phenomenon by becoming more technology savvy and matching their research with the speed at which new internet trends are produced (Lash, 2002). There has been exponential developments in internet culture, presenting the opportunity for sociologists to lead academia in vast accumulations of knowledge. Online activity and related technologies have very quickly become part of the framework of people's everyday realities. Web activity is now routine in contemporary day-to-day life, especially for the younger generation (Lenhardt & Madden, 2005). These activities evolve so fluently that sociological scholars are in danger of missing the information as it disappears from cyberspace, seen all too often with the dreaded notification: 'this page is no longer available'.

Online activities are shifting towards the proclamation of personal information through social network sites like *Facebook*, *Myspace* and personal online diaries - blogs. This is creating a phenomenon in which one's personal information becomes available to any person who has access to the internet. It is a shift in the values of privacy and generates important questions, not only about people's dynamic values but also the surveillance of personal information. It is suggested that this activity is perpetuated by the notion that the public is claiming the internet for themselves and taking control of its content (Keen, 2007). This is encouraging a new form of

cultural collaboration. Anyone with access to the internet has the tools to express their thoughts and comment on other people's online contributions, creating a participatory and open online culture. Internet users are involved in online activity as both producers and consumers of public perpetuated information. In his book *The Cult of the Amateur*, Keen (2007) expresses his concern for the volumes of unprofessionally generated information, suggesting that it closes the gap between trained experts and uninformed amateurs. The online environment is a culture where amateurism is celebrated and Keen suggested that anyone with the internet and an opinion can publish a blog. He further questions the reliability of online information and concludes that if online information is unconstrained by professional standards it could manipulate public opinion.

However, online information could also be studied in a positive light. The activity of writing a blog - in many cases acting as a public diary - is generating a new wealth of personal information that in the past would have been traditionally concealed. There is the potential for rich personal descriptions of the writers' lived experiences - and this is valuable information to sociocultural scholars. The evolution of the internet activities, such as blogging, has produced online content that is an interesting medium to explore from a sociocultural viewpoint.

Locating Blogs

Before I could conceive my study and determine the method of analyzing elite runners' blogs as a form of narrative, I needed to confirm that there was, in fact, an

elite runner who wrote a blog during her pregnancy. My procedure for locating blogs commenced with searching the internet for blogs of elite runners who had experienced pregnancy during their competitive careers. My preliminary search consisted of foraging through blogging mainframes such as ‘Blogpulse.com’, ‘Technorati.com’, and ‘Blogsphere’.net for blogs that contained the words “*pregnant-elite-runner*”. None of these blogging warehouses generated results of actual elite runners who had experienced pregnancy and blogged about it. My next attempt at locating an elite female runner’s blog was by typing the words ‘*pregnant-elite-runner-blog*’ into Google.com. By perusing through the first 20 websites that this search generated, my hunt for blogs snowballed through webpages and I became aware of only two elite runners who had blogs and used them to write about their pregnancies: Paula Radcliffe and Kara Goucher. There is the possibility that other blogs exist that may be relevant to this topic, however, as mentioned previously, researchers may better spend their time qualitatively analyzing a particular blog or two, rather than quantitatively locating every relevant blog - out of over 160,000,000 of them. With two relevant blogs identified, my next step was to print-out both athletes’ blogs into a paper format. This is a crucial step because of the uncontrollable possibility that the blogs’ webpages may state “this page is no longer available”, indicating the blogs had been removed from the internet.

The particular blog posts used in this analysis, had been written by the runners from the time they announced their pregnancies on their blogs to the last blog post

before they gave birth. I did not consider blogs written after the birth of their children because the experience of giving birth - and becoming a mother - may have interrupted my analysis of descriptions of their pregnancies. I refrained from analyzing blogs posted before the announcement of their pregnancy because these narratives would not have contained references to their experiences with their pregnant bodies.

Analysis of Narratives

After locating the two blogs, I searched for a form of analysis which would assist me with the purpose of my research: determining how elite marathon runners use narrative to describe their bodily experiences during pregnancy. By keeping in mind that blogs are a new form of personal narrative, similar to that of a diary, I needed to establish a method of narrative analysis that was sensitive to the nature of autobiographical texts or stories.

There are many forms of narrative analysis available for the study of specific kinds of narrative (see Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Reissman, 1993); however, the form of analysis that applied to my specific research question is termed *paradigmatic analysis of narratives* (Polkinghorne, 1995). Sparkes (1999) explained the method well when he stated “This process is very much like content analysis whereby the researcher seeks central themes, typologies or instances of paradigmatic categories within the narratives told by one person or by a number of people about a similar issue” (p. 21). Paradigmatic analysis of narratives is a good

tool within phenomenological studies, such as this one, because the study of personal narratives can help us understand human existence (Polkinghorne, 1983) through written accounts of human experience. Paradigmatic analysis of narratives works well within a phenomenological form of inquiry because when studying human experience, phenomenology acts to break down the experience into structures with the intent of further describing these structures (Hein & Austin, 2001). Similarly, Polkinghorne (1995) explained that the basic concept of a paradigmatic method of analysis is “classifying a particular instance as belonging to a concept or category. The concept is defined by a set of common attributes that is shared by its members” (p. 9) - in this case, members being the various blog posts. I sought to locate similar themes within each athletes’ personal blog entries. The strength in paradigmatic methods is that it can bring “order to experience by seeing individual things as belonging to categories” (p. 10). Specifically, the paradigmatic analysis of narratives attempts to determine common themes among stories - stories, in this study, were blogs written in the form of personal narratives by the runners.

A similar method of analysis was used by Young and White (1995) when developing an understanding of female elite athletes’ experiences with injuries. Sparkes (1999) further supported the use of paradigmatic analysis of narrative when he stated that:

Paradigmatic analysis can make an important contribution to our understanding of the subjective meaning associated with bodies in different contexts by

highlighting the common themes that emerge in the stories told and the manner in which they relate to wider social issues. (p. 21)

Since this study looked at multiple blog posts over a period of time, the paradigmatic analysis of narratives was applicable because it requires data collected from several stories - blogs - from which these common themes can be drawn. As the researcher, I analyzed the different blogs to discover the common themes that appeared across all relevant entries, in which “concepts are inductively derived from the data” (p. 13). This inductive form of analysis is an approach whereby the researcher innovates the concepts derived from the data, rather than implementing theoretically derived concepts that have already been developed through other research. Using an inductive method to develop common themes was crucial for this study because presently there are no other studies that have developed themes from the narratives of elite runners’ experiences with pregnancy. The approach was to locate these concepts by physically highlighting the various descriptions, actions and understandings that appear in the blogs (Denzin, 1989). I performed the analysis of narratives by fragmenting the blogs, sentence-by-sentence. The analysis then consisted of grouping together and separating direct quotes by the athletes that pertained to the identified themes. Each sentence had the potential to create a new theme or to be grouped with other sentences that had a similar theme. Only sentences that pertained to the topic of pregnancy were grouped and analyzed during the analysis. There was also the potential for one

sentence to contain a number of themes, thus sentences had the potential to belong to more than one category. Due to this possibility, I then looked for key descriptive words and the frequency of emerging key terms of how the elite runners described experiences with their pregnant bodies.

In the analysis of these quotes, I tried to preserve the authenticity of the runners' descriptions and only sought to piece together and clarify what the runners were intending to say. The deeper meaning and social origin of the words they chose to use was outside the boundaries of the present study but will be considered for future research. My study brings awareness to the ways in which the elite runners' used narratives to describe their pregnant bodies and let the descriptive words and contexts stand alone in their representations.

Method of Comparison - Verification of Themes

Since I looked at several blog entries from two separate athletes, I adapted the method of paradigmatic analysis of narratives to then adopt a form of comparison between the two athletes' blogs. I implemented a form of constant comparative analysis derived from Glaser and Strauss (1967) whereby, when I located a theme in one of the athlete's blogs, I then searched for a similar theme in the other athlete's blog. This method was used by Allen-Collinson & Hockey (2001) in a study comparing both of their personal journals, written during running related injuries. This additional analysis is consistent with paradigmatic analysis of narratives because paradigmatic analysis is not only used to uncover or depict

common themes within the narratives, but also to determine relationships between the categories (Polkinghorne, 1995). This study sought to go one step further by determining relationships - or lack there of - not only between the common themes, but also between the two athletes' narratives. Further mirroring Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2001), I determined similarities and differences between the two athletes' blogs by looking for the accurate composition of each theme, as well as its individual boundaries and mutual connections to other themes already generated.

Qualitative Research and Subjectivity

As a researcher, I was mindful of the distinction between the experiences the runners lived and the experiences they wrote about and I avoided "the illusion of causality" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 6). I was cognizant that no single story - in this case, blog entry - defined the runners' complete description of their body during pregnancy; rather each narrative only provided a part of their individual collage (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Eichelberger (1989) noted that if various researchers with different backgrounds, use of methods, and purposes were to study the same narrative, they would have different reactions to the story, emphasize certain aspects of the details and, overall, develop varying scenarios. Therefore it is important to identify the researcher, as well as the researched (Patton, 2002). In this case, when I employed my method of analysis, I was a research instrument. Qualitative research has a subjective component to it, taking into consideration that the information gathered

from the study is interpreted by the researcher. Being a graduate student in physical education, a previous sub-elite runner, coach and, importantly, a female, all provide meaningful experiences that gave me both interest and insight into my thesis topic, and thus, created the lens through which I interpreted the athletes' narratives. Being a knowledgeable outsider to the world of elitism gave me a good vantage point from which to understand the runners' experiences. I also used my experience of being female, though not yet a mother, to help me better understand a woman's description of her pregnant body.

Selection Criteria

Focusing on Elite Athletes

It is evident through my literature review that pregnancy studies tend to focus on non-athletes and recreational athletes. Most studies on athletes are directed towards obtaining more medical and scientific knowledges. These reasons are enough to warrant adding to the limited research on elite athletes and their bodily experiences during pregnancy with a phenomenological form of inquiry. To martial action towards future research on elite athletes and pregnancy - and justify the proposed study's focus - I argue that elite runners are interesting participants because their bodies are central to their careers and lives. Elite runners place much emphasis on their bodies' shape and performance, whereas recreational or non-athletes may not focus much on the experiences of their bodies. Running is a lean body sport and runners need to focus on their bodies' weight, physical appearance

and physical performance to be successful at the sport of running. With this emphasis, elite runners may have more experience in describing their bodies - such as in situations with their coaches, physiotherapists, fans, etc. than individuals whose body's physicality is not their primary concern. This suggests that elite athletes may be rich resources to investigate when interested in body descriptions.

Elite Athletes' Blogs

I looked at blogs written by two different elite marathon runners. The runners of interest are Paula Radcliffe and Kara Goucher. Both runners have current blogs and blog entries written during their experience with pregnancy.

Other than the fact that I was unable to locate more than two elite runners' blogs, looking into the narrations of only two athletes is positive for a very specific reason. As shown through the copious medical research in my literature review, the medical researchers seem to generalize their findings across women. They seem to regard pregnant physically active women as a homogenous group. However, every woman's body will react differently to physical activity and pregnancy (Clapp, Rokey, Treadway, Carpenter, Artal, & Warrens, 1992), thus producing very subjective personal descriptions. I am interested in these subjective personal descriptions and getting at the heart of each of the runner's individual lived experiences.

I only analyzed blog entries that were posted from the time the runners announced their pregnancy to the public on their blogs, until the last entry they

posted before they gave birth. I limited my analysis to the period of their pregnancies to avoid the different descriptions they might have before pregnancy and any changed perceptions they might have during early motherhood. A change in identity after one's first child is born was reflected in a study by Bailey (1999) in which one of her participants described the shift to motherhood as "deepened" in that she is now "more aware" of herself (p. 346). Thus, the runners' experiences with the birth of their children could have yielded very different recollections of their pregnant bodies. I was specifically interested in the descriptions during pregnancy and not formally comparing pre-pregnancy or post-pregnancy descriptions of their bodies to perceptions during pregnancy. In an article comparing body image attitudes before, during and after pregnancy, Strang and Sullivan (1985) focused on highlighting the *changes* in women's perceptions of their bodies during these periods. I am not interested in the changes in women's descriptions of their bodies, I am interested in looking only at descriptions during the pregnancy period. Gaining an understanding of this period may buttress further research on how the bodily descriptions change.

Elite Runners' Profiles

I now introduce the two elite runners whose descriptions of their bodily experiences during pregnancy I have analyzed: Paula Radcliffe and Kara Goucher. Both athletes are elite marathon runners who have recently experienced training throughout pregnancy. It is important to my study to introduce personal facts

about both athletes' running careers because they should be recognized as two unique blog writers with potentially very different descriptions of the same phenomenon.

Looking exclusively at these two athletes may produce interesting findings because they actually have similarities in their running careers and life choices. Both athletes have had similar careers in that they started their professional running in track distances such as 3,000m and 5,000m and, through the years, have changed their competitive focus to longer distances such as 10,000m and, finally, the marathon. The two runners both have Olympic experience, however Radcliffe's is much more distinguished with four Olympic appearances compared to Goucher's single appearance. Radcliffe competed in track distances at her first two Olympics (1996 & 2000) and in the marathon for the final two appearances. Goucher competed in her first Olympics (2008) in track distances and plans to race in the marathon at the 2012 Olympics. Both athletes have been unable to medal in their Olympic experiences, however they do have medals from World Championships. Radcliffe and Goucher both delivered their first child during their professional running careers. Radcliffe has a second child now, however I will avoid considering her blog entries during her second pregnancy because she is a seasoned mother experiencing the phenomenon for a second time and this could affect her descriptions. Radcliffe was born in 1973 and Goucher in 1978. Radcliffe had her first child at the age of 34 years and Goucher had hers at the age of 32 years.

Elite Runner: Paula Radcliffe

Paula Radcliffe is a British marathon runner born in 1973. Her running career made a significant start in 1992 at the age of 18 years, when she won the Junior World Cross Country Championships. At this point, she was just entering the international cross-country and track running circle as a young contender. She started her 1994 season with a foot injury and later discovered her injury was misdiagnosed even though it had forced her to miss the entire season. At one point during this injury, Radcliffe considered quitting her running career, however she recovered and continued her career, competing in the 5,000m at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. Two years later she set the fastest debut time over 10,000m (30:48.58) and, in the same year, she won the European Cross Country title as her first senior international title.

In 2000 Radcliffe competed in her second Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia at the 10,000m and was still unable to medal. Afterwards, she committed to making her marathon debut in 2002, 10 years after her international running career took flight. She started the year with her first senior division world title victory at the World Cross Country Championships and later competed in the Flora London Marathon. Her time (2:18:56) was a women's-only world best, a European record, and the fastest ever debut for the marathon at a 26-miles distance. Afterwards, her running career was delayed due to injuries, but her determination shone through and she headed to Athens for the 2004 Olympics. Unfortunately, with just 6 km to go, she was running on empty and pulled out of the race. Radcliffe admitted that

these Olympics were the worst times of her career, but three months later she redeemed herself by winning the New York City Marathon. In 2005 she won the marathon at the World Championships (Radcliffe, 2005).

Radcliffe took a break from racing during the 2006 season, initially due to injury and then later announced she was pregnant with her first child. She gave birth to a baby girl, Isla, in January of 2007. She then delayed racing during the 2007 season due to a stress fracture in her lower back that arose during her pregnancy (Powell, 2007). She returned to marathon racing in late 2007 and regained her title as the New York City Marathon Champion (Ridley, 2007). Despite enduring stress fractures to her femur, in 2008 Radcliffe went on to compete in the Beijing Olympics in the marathon for her fourth consecutive Olympics. She had regained enough fitness to contend in the race, however due to the recent stress fractures, she was forced to stop and stretch, resulting in a 23rd place finish (Knight, 2008). Again, later that year, she went on to win the New York City Marathon for a third time (Longman, 2008). In early 2010 she announced she was pregnant with her second child and in September she birthed her son, Raphael.

Elite Runner: Kara Goucher

Kara Goucher was born in Queens, New York in 1978 (Longman, 2008). She emerged onto the competitive scene as a runner for the University of Colorado in 2000. While at university she became the National College Athletics Association (NCAA) Outdoor Champion in both 3,000m and 5,000m, the NCAA Cross

Country Champion, and also a 5,000m Olympic Trials Finalist. After college, Goucher fought through running related injuries for several years until she was running strong again in 2006.

She had an amazing running season in 2006, finishing 2nd in the 5,000m at the USA Track and Field (USATF) Outdoor Championships and she set personal best times in the 1,500m, 5,000m, and 10,000m races. Goucher later ran 8:41.42 over 3,000m and this accomplishment - as well as her best 10,000m time - established her as the second fastest American woman of all-time. In 2007, she won the Great North Run in the United Kingdom - a half marathon event - in 1:06:57 and it was the fastest woman's time of the year for that distance. This half-marathon was Goucher's first international race at a distance over 10,000m. That same year she earned a bronze medal at the World Championships in the 10,000m. Goucher went on to race the USATF Championships and Olympic Trials in 2008 at the 5,000m and 10,000m and qualified for both distances. She went on to compete at her first Olympics in Beijing 2008 where she placed 10th in the 10,000m and 9th in the 5,000m races.

Goucher increased her training distances and made her marathon debut in 2008. At the New York City Marathon she placed third place with a time of 2:25:53. In 2009, she placed third in the Boston Marathon and tenth in the marathon at the World Championships. In 2010, Goucher announced she was pregnant with her first child (Shea, 2010) and gave birth later that September. She

took the rest of the 2010 season off from competitive racing and will attempt to qualify for the 2012 Olympic Games in the marathon (Shea, 2010).

Summary of Proposed Research

The perceptions pregnant runners may have of their bodies and the experience of bodily changes during pregnancy, may further distort women's battles between their athletic identity and cultural expectations of the ideal female body. The present study mined information from the ever growing world wide web and advocates that the internet is a vital source of culturally relevant information. Blogs specifically, as a form of narrative, are potentially a rich resource of written accounts of lived experience. I focused on the blogs by elite runners who have experienced pregnancy, identifying the blogs of Paula Radcliffe and Kara Goucher as methods for unique descriptions of their pregnancies. Using phenomenology as a form of inquiry, my main purpose was to specifically illuminate the descriptions these elite runners have of their lived experiences with their pregnant bodies. Using a paradigmatic analysis of narratives, I broke down the blogs into specific themes that further described their pregnant experiences. As pregnancy does not conform to the traditional athletic ideal, I believe researching the pregnant body will make an important contribution to debates about what it means to be a female athlete.

Chapter Four: Results & Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine how two elite female runners used narrative to describe their lived bodily experiences during pregnancy. Using the paradigmatic analysis of narrative, and phenomenology as a form of inquiry to analyze the blogs, I focused on four inductively derived categories pertaining to how both elite runners - Paula Radcliffe and Kara Goucher - described their pregnant bodies. The four categories are: (a) the pregnant body as something public, (b) the unborn child and the pregnant body as something medical, (c) the pregnant body as something separate from the unborn child, and (d) the pregnant body as still an elite runner - despite pregnancy. This results section is structured to identify the similarities and differences of both runners' blogs by organizing the results and discussion under the four inductively derived categories. Discussion of the findings follows each of the four main results categories under separate subtitles, rather than the traditional method of being integrated into the findings. My rationale for organizing my results and discussion this way is that the several findings within each category are symbiotic, they work together to build the resulting knowledges that I discuss. The results and discussion of this qualitative analysis provide insight into how the elite runners wrote about their bodily experiences with pregnancy.

The Public Pregnant Body

Both Radcliffe and Goucher made the decision to make their pregnancies public by writing about their experiences on their blogs. In the first place, their narratives suggest there was a need for the elite runners to inform, justify and update the public about their pregnancies. Secondly, the elite runners appeared comfortable with describing and showing their pregnant bodies to the public. Finally, the women wrote about the value of sharing stories and advice with other women about their experiences with pregnancy.

An Inclination to Inform the Public

A commonality in the use of blogs, for both Radcliffe and Goucher, was to inform, justify and update news of their pregnancies to the public. The news was then available, but not limited, to any reader with access to the internet. In the following quotes from the runners' blogs, it appears that both athletes made it a point to release information about their pregnancies to the public. Radcliffe exemplified this when she blogged:

By now maybe some of you have already heard but I have some very good news to announce. Gary and I are very pleased and excited to announce that we are expecting our first child at the beginning of January. (July 12, 2006)

Radcliffe made it clear to her online audience that announcing her pregnancy on her blog was not breaking news; as she states, some of her readers may have

already heard. Despite this, she still wrote a formal announcement to the readers of her blog.

Goucher also made her pregnancy public on her blog by writing the following statement “I was already more than 19 weeks pregnant when I made the news of my happy condition public in a Mother’s Day New York Times article” (May 18, 2010). Goucher informed her online audience that the news of her pregnancy had already been made public, and yet she still took the initiative to insure that the readers of her blog were also informed. These blog entries, from both Radcliffe and Goucher, suggest that the runners were making several attempts to insure that knowledge of their pregnancies was widely distributed to their public audience.

Directly after informing blog readers of her pregnancy, Radcliffe began to justify the reason for, and timing of, her pregnancy. She wrote:

With my foot injury this year it was only reinforced to me that I am a long way from wanting to retire competitively but at the same time feel ready to start a family so we had to fit it in somewhere along the line! (July 12, 2006)

The placement of Radcliffe’s statement, directly after she announced her pregnancy, seemed to justify the reason for her pregnancy; she had to “fit it in somewhere”. Her narrative suggests that she wanted to experience pregnancy at a time that would not interrupt her running career.

Goucher also seemed to immediately employ justifications to the public through her blog. However, rather than justifying her pregnancy, she apologized for not informing them of her pregnancy at an earlier date. She blogged:

So it was hard for me to hold back the news of my pregnancy from you, and I just want to say that it was not because I didn't respect your interest in me.

Quite the opposite; I couldn't wait to tell you, and I'm so glad it's out there now. I promise many timely future updates on my path into motherhood!

(May 18, 2010)

Her statement appears to indicate that she wrote about her pregnant body as rightfully public news and was clearly apologetic that she did not inform the public of her physical condition at an earlier date. Goucher also used her blog to remind her audience that she was very clear about her intentions to become pregnant. This is evident through her following quote:

Considering that I was very outspoken about my desire to get pregnant, many in the American running community probably wondered why I held back so long. Let me tell you. I certainly did not plan to wait so long. (May 18, 2010)

Goucher wrote of being eager to inform her audience of her pregnancy news. It appears that she was inclined to tell others - the public - about her desire to, and success at, becoming pregnant.

Not only did both Radcliffe and Goucher inform and justify their pregnancies to the public through their personal blogs, they also publicly updated the status of their pregnancies. Radcliffe wrote “I have been really lucky so far through the pregnancy in that I haven't had morning sickness and have generally felt good and enjoyed my pregnancy” (November 13, 2006).

Goucher kept her audience informed of her body's progress by writing “the screening did not confirm the baby was fine” (May 18, 2010); “even my sleep is being affected” (August 11, 2010) and “the baby will come any day now. At last check I was 3 cm dilated and the fetus was fully dropped” (September 22, 2010). Goucher was very open about updating the public of her experiences with pregnancy, even providing facts as personal as her dilation measurement.

By simply announcing their pregnancies on their blogs, Radcliffe and Goucher have shown that they wrote about their experiences with pregnancy as something open to the public. Justifying their decisions to get pregnant, the timing of their pregnancies and updating their audiences, suggests that both runners appeared to be comfortable writing about their bodies in a public domain.

Comfortable with the Pregnant Body in Public

Both Radcliffe and Goucher appeared to be comfortable with writing about experiences with their pregnant bodies. They also appeared to be comfortable with writing about their pregnant bodies when located in a public environment.

Photographs of the runners' pregnant bodies in mainstream media resources are not the focus of this thesis, however it is interesting to note that Radcliffe seemed comfortable enough writing about her pregnant body to also inform the public of her body on visual display. She wrote "I've had a busy birthday so far as I've also had a photoshoot on my pregnancy for Vogue US to do" (December 17, 2006). Her quote gives the impression of ensuring her public audience would be aware of her photographs.

Goucher wrote about being pregnant in public when she described a trip she took to New York City to watch a running race. She blogged:

I'm still riding the high of the trip I made last weekend...It was one of the most satisfying trips I've taken in a while, despite the fact that I was unable to compete against the deep field of elite women assembled for the race, because I'm pregnant, or even jog the race with Paula Radcliffe as originally planned...
(June 17, 2010)

Goucher wrote positively about being in the public race environment with her pregnant body, even when the general demographic of those participating in the race were physically able to run competitively. Her pregnant body was not consistent with the bodies of the women toeing the line, who at previous races, she would have competed against. This blog post appears to suggest Goucher's comfort with writing about displaying her pregnancy publicly in a competitive milieu.

Stories and Advice from Other Women

Both Radcliffe and Goucher wrote about their experiences with sharing and receiving stories and advice with other women. Radcliffe wrote “It has also been really nice to hear from so many people who are going through, or have gone through, pregnancy and compare notes, feelings, anxieties with you all – so thank-you to all of you” (November 13, 2006). Radcliffe’s quote was very positive about her experiences of sharing stories with others. She also showed her gratitude for advice obtained from an infamous elite runner when she stated “Joan Benoit Samuelson amongst others and I got to chat with her and get her advice on pregnancy etc. too, which was great.” Radcliffe’s positive narrative suggests that she liked comparing her experiences with pregnancy to others’ experiences and receiving their advice.

Goucher recognized others’ influential personal experiences when she wrote “My own doctor was running again five days after she gave birth, but I’m planning to write off the whole month of October as a wash” (September 22, 2010). Writing about her doctor’s experiences exemplifies that sharing stories with other women appears to be valuable to Goucher. She even compared her postpartum potential training regime to the story she received from “Paula Radcliffe (who) was training again five weeks after she gave birth” (September 22, 2010).

Through their blogs, both Radcliffe and Goucher emphasized that they had spoken to, and obtained advice from, other women who had experienced pregnancy and athleticism. They both also wrote about other elite runners’ experiences with

pregnancy. Encompassing these findings suggest that open communication with others about their pregnancies was something important to them.

Discussion of the Public Pregnant Body

The blog posts suggest that Radcliffe and Goucher appeared to have an inclination to inform the public of their pregnancies. The narratives also imply the runners were comfortable writing about their pregnant bodies being in public. These findings indicate that both Radcliffe and Goucher have written about their pregnant bodies as something open to the public.

Sharing Pregnancy

Radcliffe and Goucher shared the lived experiences of their pregnancies with the public by writing on their blogs. Traditionally, society has viewed pregnant women as taking up excessive space (Berlant, 1994). Due to this, research has generalized that pregnant women have felt uncomfortable with their bodies while in public spaces because of their rapidly changing bodies and the public gaze upon them (Bailey, 1999). Longhurst (2000) suggested that people “expect pregnant women to act in a manner that is demure and modest when occupying public space” (p. 455). The onset of pregnancy in elite sport is considered more problematic than celebratory (Nash, 2010). However, as shown through Radcliffe and Goucher’s blogs and their decisions to share their pregnancies with the public,

conceptions of athletic pregnancies and women's uncomfortable feelings with their pregnant bodies may be shifting.

Increasingly there are readily available images and stories of pregnant women in the media. Simultaneously, the interpretation of the pregnant body is evolving as pregnant women are becoming more accepted in both the workforce (Daniels, 1980) and in performing physical activities (Bordo, 1993). Now, many pregnant women are starting to feel comfortable being in public (Longhurst, 2000). Shown through this investigation, using phenomenology as a tool for inquiry revealed that these elite women appeared comfortable writing publicly about their lived experiences with pregnancy. Butler contends that "Language sustains the body... [it is] interpellated within the terms of language" (p. 5). By writing about pregnant bodily experiences, the public's acceptability of what are deemed appropriate behaviors from pregnant women are broadening (Nash, 2006) because it is "within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible" (Butler, 1997, p. 5).

Many scholars of the social aspect of pregnancy (Berlant, 1994; Cunningham, 2002; Longhurst, 2001; Stabile, 1994; Tyler, 2001) have asserted that Demi Moore's 1991 *Vanity Fair* cover - unveiling her naked pregnant body - was the turning point for pregnant bodies to cease being deemed inappropriate for the public eye. Being a member of the culture subsequent to Moore's pregnant photograph, Radcliffe seemed comfortable enough writing about her pregnant body to give awareness of her own pregnancy photographs to her public audience. When

Goucher attended a race as a spectator during her pregnancy, her body was “outside the boundaries of normalized appearance” (Nash, 2006, p. 44), however, this did not stop her from showing her body in a public and highly athletic environment. As the perceptions of the pregnant body are drastically shifting from being something concealed to something public, both Radcliffe and Goucher’s narratives demonstrated an acceptance of the current perceptions of the pregnant body as something public.

Proving Suitability for Motherhood

By writing on their blogs, the two runners did not just provide black and white facts about their pregnancies to the public; they provided the public with stories that updated and justified their lived experiences to the public. Every action - or in this case, word written - invited the audience of these blogs to make personal and cultural assumptions about the runners’ suitability for future motherhood (Nash, 2006). Informing the public seemed to be important to the athletes, as if they were being socially responsible in doing so. By writing about their pregnancies to the public, it may be the case that the runners were attempting to prove to the public that they would be suitable mothers.

Western society has a preconceived notion that by becoming pregnant a woman instantly becomes a mother and, thus, is already a mother in advance of the child’s birth (Bordo, 1993). This suggests that society expects a pregnant woman to behave and prioritize like a mother. During Radcliffe and Goucher’s pregnancies, both

women made the decision to both continue running and to write about it. Hard physical training towards a sport is not a traditionally accepted behavior for a mother and, thus, both athletes were performing outside of society's expectations for suitable motherhood. However, by writing about their pregnancies, it appears the runners were assuring the public that they were also focused on their unborn children.

Pregnant women who participate in physical activity or who wear tight and revealing clothing are not culturally considered "mothers". Instead, these women are representing their own definition of what it means to be a pregnant woman (Betterton, 2006). Nash (2006) elaborated on this finding when she explained, they are "rewriting...traditionally defined social meanings by defying pregnancy norms" (p. 33). By writing about their running during pregnancy, it appears that Radcliffe and Goucher challenged social norms, redefining the behaviour of mothers, while reaffirming to society that their actions were not without attention to their future children.

Both Radcliffe and Goucher wrote about their experiences of sharing stories with other women who had experienced running throughout pregnancy. The elite runners specifically referred to their communication with other elite runners. Radcliffe and Goucher may have written about the other runners' experiences to justify and affirm that they were not acting alone in their decisions to run while pregnant.

Working Against Social Expectations of Motherhood

Past social conceptions surrounding motherhood have viewed women as reproductive machines (Oakley, 1979b). The predominant view in present society still remains that it is a woman's responsibility to become a mother. Whether or not a woman becomes a mother, she is still defined in comparison to this expectation (Letherby, 1994).

It seems as though attempting to assure the public of their mothering capabilities were contradicted by Radcliffe and Goucher's athletic actions during pregnancy that worked against the social expectations of motherhood. The runners wrote about maintaining their elite athleticism and they divulged part of their training plans to assure their readers of their return to elite running. This may have been risky for the runners because, as Longhurst (2000) suggested, "When pregnant women break the unwritten rules of what it means to be seemingly, motherly and sensible... they are often assumed to be unworthy mothers and possibly even antagonistic towards their fetus" (p. 468).

Even though running while pregnant is becoming more socially acceptable, there is no research to suggest that society, as a whole, is accepting of high levels of athleticism during pregnancy. However, there is evidence to suggest that some elite athletes' training regimes during pregnancy have been celebrated (Gullan, 2007).

The Medicalization of Pregnancy

The written content in the blog entries surrounding the pregnancies of both Radcliffe and Goucher was predominantly medical. The runners described their unborn children and their own bodies in manners which appeared influenced by Western medical practices and terminology. Furthermore, Goucher wrote significantly about the expertise of medical professionals.

The Medicalized Unborn Child

The very first thing Radcliffe wrote after she announced her pregnancy was medical verification that her unborn child was healthy. She wrote “We had the first trimester scan last week and it was amazing to see the baby moving around and kicking its legs” (July 12, 2006). Writing about the results of the first trimester scan, suggests it was important to Radcliffe to assure her audience of a healthy unborn child.

Goucher had similar, but very detailed, medically stimulated descriptions to inform the public of the health of her unborn child. She wrote:

The problem was that the screening did not confirm the baby was fine. Instead, my doctor’s measurements revealed that the baby had a 1 in 32 chance of having a chromosomal abnormality. The normal risk for first-time mothers my age is more like 1 in 1,000. One in 32 is pretty good odds in many situations, but not this one. Adam and I were badly shaken by the result. We decided to wait on announcing my pregnancy until an amniocentesis at 15 weeks showed

that the baby was normal. But when the time came, the doctor, who is a very cautious person (which I appreciate!), decided it was too risky to perform the procedure and postponed it a week. The next week she postponed it again. At last the procedure was done at 18 weeks. Two days later my genetic counselor called to inform me the baby was developing normally. I surprised myself and her by feeling and showing little emotion on the phone. I was still cold when I passed the good word to Adam. (May 18, 2010)

The fact that Goucher described her self as “still cold” when she informed her husband of a normal developing unborn child, boldly highlights the influence of stark medical processes that dominated what should have been a moment of relief and rejoicing. Seemingly influenced by medical terminology, Goucher described her pregnancy, and her unborn child, as a “problem” and an “abnormality” confirmed by “doctor’s measurements”. She explained that there is a “normal risk” for her unborn child, which indicated that the doctor’s quantifiable observations of her unborn child had been compared to a normal statistical range (and as an elite marathon runner, how could she be compared to “normal” at all?). The timing of her decision to announce her pregnancy was determined by a medical procedure - the amniocentesis. The amniocentesis is the medical procedure that Goucher defined as “too risky” for the unborn child and yet appeared to write casually about it as a normalized procedure used in present medical practices during pregnancy.

Even by the end of her pregnancy, in later blog posts, Goucher still wrote with medical findings to support the current events of her unborn child's progress. She blogged "My doctor says the baby will come any day now. At last check I was 3 cm dilated and the fetus was fully dropped" (September 22, 2010). In this statement, she referred to the unborn child as a "fetus", likely regurgitating the doctor's terminology. Also, Goucher supplied minimal descriptions of how she felt about her unborn child within, and seemed to mostly use what doctors typically measure, calculate and medically describe.

The Medicalized Pregnant Body

As identified through the review of literature, the field of medicine has influenced ideologies of the pregnant body. The present study identified that both Radcliffe and Goucher's narratives appeared influenced by medical traditions through the ways in which they wrote about their unborn children. By writing about their unborn children in a medical context, the runners were also writing about the process of pregnancy as something highly medicalized. What is interesting to find however, is that Radcliffe's blog entries did not include many significant medical descriptors of her own body.

Radcliffe did provide some written descriptions of the pregnant body in a medical context, however for the most part, they were very indirectly related to medical descriptions. Radcliffe wrote about "being lucky so far through the pregnancy in that [she has not] had morning sickness" (November 13, 2006).

Women are aware of the possibility of becoming “sick” in the mornings after the recent onset of pregnancy, and Radcliffe was informing her audience that she did not have this experience. The common bodily signals of the onset of pregnancy have been termed a “sickness” and Radcliffe’s use of this term signifies that she was consistent with Western culture’s ideologies of medicalizing the body’s reaction to pregnancy.

Goucher clearly referred to her pregnant body in a medical context when she blogged about experiencing a “normal risk [pregnancy] for first time mothers” (May 18, 2010). Through the ways in which she wrote her narratives, Goucher seemed aware that medical professionals had identified a risk value for those experiencing pregnancy for the first time and she wrote of being a part of this medicalized statistic. She also referred to her pregnant body in a medical context when she described the progress of her pregnancy by writing “at last check I was 3 cm dilated” (September 22, 2010). Goucher used a medical measurement to inform her audience of her body’s progress with pregnancy, rather than providing personal descriptions of her progress with her pregnant body.

Goucher also relied on medical terminology to describe her actions just prior to the child’s birth. She attributed her actions as something biological when she blogged “Something about crossing the threshold of seven weeks to go before my due date seems to have tripped some hormonal switch in my body, and now I find myself obsessively preparing for the baby’s arrival” (August 11, 2010). Goucher wrote of attributing her actions to a biological “switch” in her body, as if preparing

for her unborn child's arrival was outside of her conscious control. By describing her actions as something produced by hormonal changes in her body, Goucher's quote suggests that her written attributions had been influenced by medical and scientific knowledges.

Although the previous quotes provide few examples of the medicalization of the pregnant body, it is significant to note that Goucher did not provide unique written descriptors without a medical influence. Describing her body with a few medical references are the sole personal descriptions of her pregnant body throughout her blog entries. Instead, the majority of the references to both Radcliffe and Goucher's pregnancies, medical or not, were written about their unborn children rather than specifically their pregnant bodies.

Influenced by Medical Expertise

Western culture is perpetually dependent on deriving common sense from expert knowledges. Expertise is especially valued for the regulation of medical practices. Consistent with this, on several occasions throughout Goucher's blog entries, she referred to the expertise and experiences of medical professionals.

Goucher wrote about the progress of her pregnancy as being confirmed by "my doctor's measurements" (May 18, 2010). She explained that she had a "genetic councilor" who was the professional to inform her that the baby was developing normally. Towards the end of her pregnancy, she relied on the expert knowledges of her doctor when she wrote "My doctor says the baby will come any day now"

(September 22, 2010). Overall, Goucher mainly described the progress of her pregnancy as what appears to be a reiteration of her doctors' prognoses.

Not only did Goucher use the medical experts' knowledges to confirm the written content of her pregnancy progress, she also wrote of the value of their advice. Goucher had considered foot surgery during the last month of her pregnancy and "After consulting with my doctors I decided to have the procedure done..." (June 30, 2010). Writing this quote appears to suggest that Goucher wanted her audience to know that she consulted with professionals about having the surgery during pregnancy, rather than making the decision on her own.

Not only did Goucher write of the value of medical professionals' advice, but she also seemed to value their personal experiences. She placed an emphasis on the value of a medical professional's experiences when she wrote "My own doctor was running again five days after she gave birth" (September 22, 2010). In Western society, doctors are valued for their medical knowledges, however Goucher further reinforces her value for their expertise by writing about her doctor's personal experiences with pregnancy and athleticism.

Discussion of the Medicalization of Pregnancy

Throughout the blogs written by both Radcliffe and Goucher, there was a predominant influence from medical practices. Both runners described their unborn children in manners which were influenced by Western medical terminology. Goucher, specifically, described her lived experiences of her pregnant body with

terminology likely derived from her doctors and placed value in the expertise and experiences of medical professionals.

Dominant Medical Connotations

Both Radcliffe and Goucher wrote about their unborn children with medical terminology and connotation. As Oakley (1979a) suggested, since women's wombs and their contents are now revealed, it is presently not necessary to speak to mothers about their attitudes. Medical scrutiny has generalized women's experiences and prescribed society with a set of medical terms used to describe the pregnancy process.

In both Radcliffe and Goucher's blogs, the act of pregnancy and the unborn child were written about in a very medical manner. However, through the use of employing phenomenology, it was interesting to find that the written content surrounding the runners' bodies were not as deeply embedded with medical connotations; in fact, their own pregnant bodies were barely referred to. This could be explained by Young (1990) who suggested "Medicine's self identification as the curing profession encourages others as well as the woman to think of her pregnancy as a condition that deviates from normal health" (p. 161). Radcliffe and Goucher may not have written extensively about their pregnant bodies because pregnancy is traditionally considered a "weak, dysfunctional, and psychologically unstable (dis)order" (Longhurst, 2000, p. 461).

Berlant (1994) explained, that before the existence of modern medical technologies, when it was impossible to see the child within, the mother's growing pregnant body was both a representation of the unborn child's body and simultaneously acting as a shield - as armor - from the outside world. This suggests, in part, that the mother's body was once the focal point for the image of pregnancy. The pregnant body was both representing and protecting the contents within. Now that medical technologies provide images of the unborn child, Radcliffe and Goucher may not have focused their blogs on their own pregnant bodies because the pregnant body is no longer the primary concern. Attention is directed towards the unborn child.

It is a major finding that Radcliffe and Goucher did not significantly write about their lived experiences with their pregnant bodies, but they did provide rich and plentiful descriptions of their unborn children. Women in general, pregnant or not, are identified as having a heightened concern for their body image (Selby, Weinstein, & Bird, 1990). Bartky (1988) suggested that women are conscious of the fact that they are primarily identified as merely their bodies. Since there are few descriptors of the runners' bodies, this suggests that they have redirected their attention away from their pregnant bodies, and instead, replaced writing about their pregnant bodies with writing about their unborn children.

Also, in the past, the pregnant body, even when concealed with clothing, has been rejected in popular culture. Even though visual technologies have normalized images of the contents in women's uteri, much of society still conceals the pregnant

body (Stabile, 1992). This may reflect why the athletes failed to write about their pregnant bodies. It is more acceptable for the runners to describe the “fetus” within.

The Unborn Child as a Separate Entity

Throughout the narratives of both Radcliffe and Goucher’s lived experiences with pregnancy, the women's quotes suggest that their unborn children were something separate, distinct entities, from their own bodies. Goucher exemplified the distinction when she blogged about pregnant mothers as having “lumps in their bellies” (May 31, 2010). Describing the progress of pregnancy as resulting in a growing “lump” in the bellies of pregnant women, suggests that she did not write about unborn children as part of mothers’ bodies.

Goucher described her own unborn child as being a “grapefruit size fetus in [her] womb” (July 14, 2010) and referred to him/her as “the little critter inside [her]” (August 11, 2010). According to these descriptions, Goucher described her unborn child as *in* her, but not *a part* of her. By calling it a “grapefruit” and a “critter” she wrote about it being something other than herself.

Radcliffe wrote of the distinction between her self and the unborn child when she explained:

I have of course had the tiredness that comes along with it on some days. It's amazing how the body prioritises everything for the baby and I get whatever energy, nutrients and now increasingly lung and bladder space that is left over!
(November 13, 2006)

Radcliffe also wrote of the unborn child as a distinct entity when she wrote “We had the first trimester scan last week and it was amazing to see the baby moving around and kicking its legs” (July 12, 2010). Even before the birth, Radcliffe was already describing the unborn child as having its own ability to move around and independently move its legs. Current medical technological advancements in Western society have made it possible to view the unborn child. This visual image has given the unborn child a form of autonomy (Nash, 2005), further creating the distinction of being something separate from its mother. When Radcliffe wrote about the use of “the first trimester scan” to see the movements of the unborn child, she was supporting the current ideology of the autonomy of an unborn child.

Goucher also wrote about the use of technological advancements when she stated “The problem was that the screening did not confirm the baby was fine” (May 18, 2010). Goucher wrote of an experience where, during the doctor’s investigations, it was determined that there was a substantial risk for her pregnancy. She clearly wrote about the unborn child not being “fine” and did not write whether *she* was “fine” or whether *they* (the unborn child and herself) were “fine”. Despite the physical material connection between the unborn child’s body and its mother, by informing her audience that it was solely the unborn child who was not fine, Goucher’s narratives suggest she acknowledged the division between her and her unborn child.

Despite having the ideology of this division, Goucher made a very interesting connection. After a training session during her pregnancy, she wrote a blog quote to suggest that she understood the connection between her body and that of her unborn child. In giving her audience a story, she blogged:

When I run by myself I have my most intimate thoughts. I look for meaning in some of my important memories, I work through present difficulties, and I try to chart the best course for my future. I also do a lot of dreaming when I run. I can't tell you how many state championships I won in my mind back in high school, how many NCAA titles I won in my fantasies at the University of Colorado, and how many Olympic medals and major marathons I've won in my head in the past few years.

About a month ago I did a tempo run on the treadmill during which my imagined self ran the last 10 km of the Boston Marathon—and won, of course. I was worried that my fantasy might be interrupted by the need for a bathroom break, as I can't hold my water very well lately, but I made it through. When I stepped off the treadmill I thanked the child in my womb for letting me break the tape this time.

Then a strange thought came to me. I was struck by the realization that my unborn son has been present for all kinds of private dreams, thoughts and feelings since his conception in mid-January. Since I never share a lot of these dreams, thoughts and feelings with anyone outside of myself, my unborn son already knows me better than anyone, in a sense.

You probably think I've lost my mind. Let me be clear: I know my child is not really a witness to the contents of my mind when I run or at any other time. But I can't help feeling as though he is anyway. And it's not as if the developing fetus is totally uninfluenced by what its mother thinks and does while it's developing. That's why a lot of expecting mothers play music for and read to the lumps in their bellies these days. So you never know, there might be something to this idea I have that my son will come into this world in a few months understanding me pretty well. (May 31, 2010)

Goucher wrote that the unborn child and her were connected - one - in the sense that he may have been able to hear her thoughts from within the womb. This blog post stands out from all of Goucher's other entries and should be recognized as an example of an intuitive account of lived experience. However, she revoked the authenticity of her story by writing to her audience that "You probably think i've lost my mind" and continued to clarify that she knew "my child is not really a witness to the contents of my mind". By these clarifications, she was confirming to the public that she understood that the unborn child and she were separate entities - whereas, it seems like within herself, she knew there was more of a connection.

Discussion of the Unborn Child as a Separate Entity

Despite the moment when Goucher regarded, and then disregarded, a connection with her unborn child, both Radcliffe and Goucher wrote about their unborn children as separate and distinct entities from their own bodies.

Unborn Child's Autonomy and Runner's Individuality

The unborn child, considered a distinct entity from its mother, is a result of medical technologies and practices (Stabile, 1992). The technologies that are used routinely to monitor pregnancy have convinced society that the “unborn child is indistinguishable in any way from us” (Berlant, 1994, p. 172). Meaning, society views the unborn child as already human, its own entity, and not an extension of its mother's body. This picture provided by medical imaging technologies, of a separate being existing within the womb, reinforces women to describe the baby as something distinct - separate - from her own body. Radcliffe and Goucher's narratives express that they were not immune to this technological/medical influence. Their unborn children had already received autonomy.

Medical technologies used to “check-up” on the unborn child have not just tangibly displayed, but also projected the child as a person. Until recent medical advancements, the unborn child was not autonomous; presently, however, there is an increasing dichotomy between mother and child (Stabile, 1992).

The pregnant body is, by nature, two bodies in one. This means that while pregnant, the pending mother is herself, and yet at the same time, not herself (Nash,

2006). Johnson (2010) had similar findings to this study and stated “The body was therefore experienced as both alien and connected” (p. 252). Bailey (1999) suggested “that the process of individualization... recedes with the imminence of motherhood” (p. 344). By giving the unborn child autonomy, the mother then maintains individuality. The word “individual” means something is single, and cannot be divided. This means that “pregnancy is...the exact antithesis of individuality” (Franklin, 1991, p. 203). Women are used to being identified as merely their bodies (Bartky, 1988), so by referring to the unborn child as something separate from their bodies, Radcliffe and Goucher appeared to be clinging on to their individuality. Their narratives appeared to give their child autonomy so that they could maintain their individual identities.

Elite Athleticism Despite Pregnancy

Both Radcliffe and Goucher dedicated a significant portion of their blogs to writing about the maintenance of their fitness during pregnancy and their plans to regain elite athleticism after pregnancy. Over several years, Goucher had experienced an injury to her toe that was subsequently getting worse. She was in need of surgery to resolve the issue and decided to have it done during her pregnancy. In explaining this decision to the public, she wrote:

After consulting with my doctors I decided to have the procedure done in early September, in the last month of my pregnancy, when I would not be running

much anyway. This would make the recovery least disruptive to my training.

(June 30, 2010)

Goucher explained to her audience that the timing of her surgery was best suited to be least disruptive to her training. It is interesting to find that even though she was one month away from giving birth, Goucher did not write about how experiencing the surgery may have disrupted her pregnancy, but only how it would not affect her training.

Looking back at a quote I analyzed previously in this thesis, Radcliffe had boldly exclaimed:

With my foot injury this year it was only reinforced to me that I am a long way from wanting to retire competitively but at the same time feel ready to start a family so we had to fit it in somewhere along the line! (July 12, 2006)

In this narrative, she blogged about her decision to become pregnant as something secondary to her elite running body; she “had to fit it in somewhere”. Radcliffe then affirmed her determination to continue training during pregnancy when she wrote “Anyway more updates to follow as I learn how I have to adapt my training as my belly gets bigger!” (July 12, 2006).

This tenacity to train during pregnancy was also exhibited by Goucher, who wrote:

My first run consisted of a minute of waddling followed by a minute of walking, repeated several times. Yes, I'm being cautious, not so much out of concern for my toe, which seems fine, or because I'm hugely pregnant, but because of my low back. (August 3, 2010)

Despite that Goucher defined her training as “waddling”, it appears that she wrote about being concerned for her body, i.e. her “low back”, and did not write about a concern for her pregnancy, when it came to running while pregnant. In the following quote, it appears that writing about her training was her priority, rather than writing about her pregnant body. She blogged about her priority to focus on regaining her elite athleticism after the birth of her child. She blogged:

My attention isn't completely focused on the prospect of my water breaking. I'm also looking ahead to after the baby comes and I begin the long process of getting ready to race again. I've come up with a loose plan that I'm pretty comfortable with. I've intentionally created a conservative schedule that accounts for the likelihood of sleepless nights, post-partum sluggishness, small injury setbacks, and all of that. I'm going to take it slow no matter how well things go in my first days, weeks, and months of motherhood. I think that's better than going as fast as the situation allows and getting frustrated when stuff happens and slows me down. (September 22, 2010)

Goucher wrote of her attention towards planning to regain her training and fitness after the pregnancy rather than directing her attention completely towards the pending birth. She openly admits that she “isn’t completely focused on the prospect of [her] water breaking”. Instead, she wrote of an awareness of the post-partum “setbacks” that could affect her “process of getting ready to race again”, which reads that her training was her primary focus. Following this blog entry, Goucher was very specific when writing about her plans for post-partum training. She wrote:

Paula Radcliffe was training again five weeks after she gave birth, but I will devote the whole second month after my labor—November—to slowly getting ready to train again. I may do some 12-milers, but no 20-milers. I may do some fartlek and strides and light workouts, but no crazy tempo runs or track sessions. (September 22, 2010)

The specificity of Goucher’s training plans affirms that writing to her online audience, about her goals to return to elite running status, was of primary importance. During a time when Goucher would have been balancing both training and pregnancy, she dedicated more of her blog to writing about her future plans to regain elite athleticism, rather than the present pregnancy.

Radcliffe’s narratives had a different focus during her task of balancing both training and pregnancy. In the following blog entry she wrote:

At the moment I am still running twice a day, doing workouts and feeling fine - but obviously this does mean that I will not be racing competitively for the rest of this year. However I fully believe that I will be back stronger than ever next year. Having a family has always been an important goal for us and most important now is that the baby is strong and healthy. Being happy always translates well to my running and I will be refreshed and recharged after the break too. I also know that I will miss racing so will be eager to get back to it with my new number one supporter watching on! (July 12, 2006)

Radcliffe wrote of her goal to continue racing competitively and that she even expected to return to racing, after her pregnancy, “stronger than ever”. She blogged of how family is very important to her, but so was her competitive career; however, she clearly explained that the most important thing during her pregnancy was the child within. Radcliffe suggested that happiness derived from having a healthy child would translate well into her running career. She was eager to race again, but racing post-partum would have a whole new meaning with her child as a spectator on the side lines. Overall, Radcliffe wrote of a sense of balancing both training and pregnancy and clearly explained that her primary focus during pregnancy was the health of her child. Later in her pregnancy, Radcliffe wrote:

I have learned to be more flexible with my training and adapt according to how I feel each day. I am now over seven months [pregnant] and up until now have been able to run each day as well as using the stationary bike or going in the

water. Now that the baby is getting heavier though, my bladder is starting to get sore when I run as the baby bounces on it, so some days are just run/walk and I can see I will have to switch more and more of my training to the pool or the bike. I will certainly miss the running but it's not worth being in pain or stressing my body too much if I can maintain fitness in other ways.

(November 13, 2006)

Radcliffe wrote of her experience with pregnancy as having taught her to listen to her body more attentively. During the challenge of pregnancy and her choice to omit running from her training, Radcliffe wrote of understanding the importance of making adjustments to her training for her body's sake. When she wrote about not stressing her body through training, Radcliffe did not specify if she was concerned about her athletic body or her pregnant body. However, it is interesting to note that she did not specifically write about a concern for her pregnant body, or the unborn child within, when she blogged about reducing her training at seven months into her pregnancy.

Discussion of Elite Athleticism Despite Pregnancy

It is clear that both Radcliffe and Goucher dedicated more of their blogs to writing about their training during pregnancy and their plans to regain elite athleticism, rather than writing about the lived experience of pregnancy itself.

The Priority of Remaining an Elite Runner

By informing their audience of their training plans, Radcliffe and Goucher were writing in a way that revealed they were attempting to maintain their identity as elite runners despite pregnancy. Their training plans became public interest and both athletes were applauded for their tenacity in continuing intense training (Gullan, 2007). Using phenomenology as a form of inquiry revealed that their lived experiences of pregnancy disrupted their elite identities and yet they fastened themselves to who they were - elite runners. In a study by Wiles (1994) it was suggested that pregnancy is one temporary state when it is acceptable for a woman to be fat. Becoming pregnant, which brings the risk of gaining weight and losing fitness, goes against the elite runners' years of dedicated training to sculpt their athletic bodies. Radcliffe and Goucher's narratives of elite training suggest that they did not accept this ability to be fat - clinging on to their athleticism, and proving to their audience that they would maintain their elite identities. This is supported by Earl (2000) who argued that pregnant women adopt a pragmatic approach to their pregnancies to comply with the pressures to remain - or obtain - a slim body.

By analyzing the blogs written by both Radcliffe and Goucher it was revealed that they had varying priorities for what they blogged about between pregnancy and elite athleticism. Radcliffe wrote about the challenges of reducing her training but assured her readers that it was the right decision during her final months of pregnancy. This is consistent with Nash (2010) who had a high-exercising

participant that negotiated her fitness and risk during pregnancy. This participant was very clear about her worry for potential pregnancy risks caused by exercise.

In the past, it has been a cultural ideology that expectant mothers were to focus on child bearing and were considered unfit mothers if their priorities were directed away from their pregnancies. In today's culture, women are more and more expected to balance the challenges of both reproduction and employment (Nash, 2010). Radcliffe and Goucher's narratives suggest that they were both consistent with the present culture of mothers who balance pregnancy and employment, but Radcliffe specifically placed an emphasis on the health of her unborn child.

Differing from past common ideologies and expectations for women, Goucher wrote as though she did not consider her body as solely a vessel for reproduction. Instead, she wrote of maintaining her focus on the athletic performance of her body. Elite runners need to claim priority over their bodies for training purposes; however, so do expectant mothers. It was not identified that Goucher had a conflict between balancing her priorities to blog about running and pregnancy. She very clearly blogged more about her intentions to maintain training and her priority of returning to elite athleticism. Goucher, who would be considered an intense exerciser prior to her pregnancy, did not write about negotiating health risks of her unborn child during exercise. This finding is consistent with Symons Downs and Hausenblas (2003) who argued that women who are extreme exercisers, and maintain the motivation to exercise during pregnancy, ignore the risks of intense exercise during pregnancy. Also, striving for a body that looks like it has never

been pregnant is becoming the norm. This expectation is especially prevalent for women planning to return to work; in this case, return to marathon running. Erasing the image of the maternal body is considered successful in the women's running careers.

Furthermore, both runners exemplified their priority for elite athleticism when they wrote of justifications for decisions affecting their training schedules. Radcliffe justified her timing of pregnancy with what worked best for the remainder of her running career. Goucher justified her foot surgery (that took place during her last month of pregnancy) by explaining that it was the best timing to suit her upcoming training schedule.

The past expectation for mothers to be only concerned with reproduction, is being revised into a new expectation (Stabile, 1992). Typically, society views the pregnant body as foreshadowing a shift in the woman's ability to complete her professional goals. However, women of Western society are now expected to take on both domestic and economic challenges (Bordo, 1993). For Radcliffe and Goucher, elite marathon running is their job. Just like welders need their torches or carpenters need their hammers, the elite runners' tools for their careers are their bodies. Their bodies are their livelihood. In today's society, mothers need to ensure their own survival while simultaneously affirming the safety and life necessities of their children (Stabile, 1992). Radcliffe and Goucher were, in part, maintaining focus on their running careers because, just like any other career, this is how they make their money; this is how they will be able to support their children.

Summary of Findings

By using the paradigmatic analysis of narratives on the blogs written by the elite marathon runners Radcliffe and Goucher, four significant categories were inductively located in respect to experiences with their pregnant bodies. This thesis suggests that the runners appeared comfortable with describing their experiences with their pregnant bodies through the simple act of writing a blog available to the public. It was interesting to find that Radcliffe and Goucher primarily wrote about their unborn children in a medical context, but referred very little to their own bodies with medically derived descriptions. Instead, this study identified that the runners wrote about their bodies as something distinct and separate from the unborn child within. Furthermore, it was found that even during pregnancy, the runners dedicated significant portions of their blogs to explanations of their training during pregnancy and their plans to regain elite athleticism after the birth of their children.

Despite the commonalities, there are distinctions between how the two runners wrote about their individual experiences during pregnancy. When encompassing all relevant blog posts, Goucher was much more descriptive and wrote about her experiences in the form of stories. Radcliffe wrote briefly and to the point. Even though both athletes' blog quotes revealed the categories in my findings, it is apparent that Goucher's blogs are denser and provided more fodder for analysis. Both Radcliffe and Goucher wrote unique blogs and their differences and similarities have provided insight into how these two elite female marathon runners

wrote about their experiences during pregnancy. These findings come together to create an interesting conclusion about the women's identities.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This study has revealed some interesting findings about the life and perceptions of two elite marathon runners who each experienced pregnancy for the first time. The runners' personal narratives, written during pregnancy, reveal a story about the runners and the world from which they came. Their blogs have revealed social patterns through the lens of individual lived experience and provide understanding of the life and culture that created the athletes' stories (Patton, 2002).

The runners wrote from the perspective of having a public pregnancy; they appeared to have written about their pregnancies to prove to society that they were, in fact, going to be suitable mothers. Dominant medical understandings of pregnancy directed the women's descriptions of their pregnancies and influenced the perspective that their unborn children were autonomous beings. By giving their children autonomy, the runners maintained their individuality, and in doing so, they clung to their identities as elite marathon runners. Just like chapters to a story, these findings build on one another to conclude a story of life, running and pregnancy.

Pregnancy and the Athletic Body

This thesis presented two women who were both pregnant and athletic, two bodily experiences that are significantly influenced by medical and scientific practices. Even though both pregnancy and athleticism can be explained as idiosyncratic bodily experiences, the women's blogs were not especially unique

stories of individual lived experience because of the use of prescribed medical terminology to describe their pregnancies.

In this study, phenomenology was originally intended as a tool to highlight the elite marathon runners' lived experiences of their pregnancies, however, it identified a lack of unique lived bodily experiences with pregnancy. In lieu of written accounts of unique lived experiences, using phenomenology as a form of inquiry helped this study to distinguish both preexisting medically prescribed descriptions and culturally stimulated expectations that resonated within the runners' narratives. Sparkes (1997, 1998) claimed that learning how to tell stories about one's body helps to develop order to unique bodily experiences and to make sense of the happenings in life. The women in this study had the opportunity to do this through their blogs, but instead, the way they wrote their blogs appeared to be too influenced by normative (medical and cultural) descriptors of pregnancy. Being influenced by medical practices and understandings is explained by society's perpetuated reliance on expert knowledges to describe and explain their own personal experiences with their bodies.

The inability to uniquely describe lived bodily experiences may be overtly exemplified by specifically elite athletes. Sporting knowledge of athletic bodies have been predominantly broadcast through medical and scientific perspectives. Athletic bodies have been scientifically measured in every dimension and these knowledges have come to dominate the sporting world's understanding of the body.

Athletes may be exposed to only scientific descriptors of the body, consequently limiting and generalizing their own descriptors of their bodily lived experiences.

Phenomenology is a tool for explaining unique lived experience, however, society in general does not employ phenomenology as a way of looking at and explaining meanings of their experiences. The body is constructed with more than just biological processes; how people both think about and describe the body is influenced by both social and cultural undertones that reflect the present culture (Blaikie et al., 2004). The runners may not have had the ability to conjure their own unique descriptions since one's body image is directly correlated with cultural views of what the body *should be*.

In this study, phenomenology was a good tool for determining the lack of descriptors for unique lived experiences; however, employing phenomenology as a form of inquiry may help people to become aware of the opportunity to uniquely describe, for themselves, their own interpretation of their lived experiences.

Evolving Identities

The main conclusion drawn from this study is that the pregnant runners' blogs revealed an identity struggle. Their blogs revealed evidence that both of the runners wrote about their lived experiences with pregnancy in an array of ways which resulted in several complex positionings of their identities.

Goucher's blogs appeared to suggest that her order of priorities, for the purpose of writing on her blog, was to first write about her elite running body, her unborn

child, and then her pregnant body. Radcliffe's blogs appeared to suggest that the purpose for writing her blog was prioritized as first writing about her unborn child, her elite running body and then her pregnant body. The commonality here, is that by not referencing concern for their pregnant bodies, both women placed blogging about their pregnant bodies as a lesser concern to that of their running bodies and their unborn children. This limits their sensitivity to their unique lived experiences with their pregnant bodies, because as Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) explained, individuals should be their own "subject of perception...we know the world through the body, just as that body produces the world for us" (p. 117). The runners' priorities of concern also revealed that they wrote about themselves as having several identities; they were "refracted" (Bailey, 1999). The women failed to write about themselves as having one identity. They wrote of being elite runners separate from writing about being pregnant women. Society is accustomed to looking at the body in an objective manner and does not engage the body as something lived and experienced (Rintala, 1991). Lived experience, with the help of phenomenology, is explained as something that encompasses all aspects of one's being. Yet, these women exemplified that their perceptions of their selves were categorized. They experienced one sensation at a time and did not write in a way that revealed they could make sense of two experiences at once; they did not write about experiencing both pregnancy and athleticism as one unique experience, in and of, itself.

As Bauman (1996) explained, people of the postmodern era are seeking to avoid binding identities. The struggles here were to maintain their original identities as elite runners while simultaneously adopting the new identity of pregnant women, followed by both the pending identity and role of motherhood. They appeared to be juggling culturally and medically prescribed ideas of pregnancy, their elite identity, mothering identity, their unborn child as a distinct entity, celebrity status and expectations from society in all of these domains. As Marshall (1991) suggested, society expects women to leave behind their original identities and only promote the interests of their child. Radcliffe and Goucher did not conform to this expectation as it appears they held on to their original identities as elite marathon runners.

This identity struggle is best described by the theory of Cartesian dualism (mind/body separation) which has been at the helm of Western thought since the Enlightenment period. Employing a dualism between one's body and one's unborn child, and between one's identities before and after pregnancy, allows "a sense of continuity whilst bodily changes [are] taking place" (Bailey 1999, p. 340). They wrote of being accepting of the unborn child and the process of pregnancy but they did not define themselves as a pregnant body, just that they were going through the process of pregnancy - like it was some external event, rather than a personal bodily experience. This is the challenge that phenomenology faces. The women described their bodily experiences as if they were an event to be witnessed, not an event they felt and experienced with their own body. There seemed to be this

disconnect from their own bodies as being pregnant bodies. Consistent with the prevalent mind-body duality, the women wrote about their lived experiences with pregnancy as something separate from themselves - separate from their identities as elite marathon runners.

The conclusions from this study regarding the runners changes in identity are supported by theories on the relationship between the body and self-identity (Giddens, 1991; Schilling, 1993). Schilling (2003) argued that “in conditions of high modernity, there is a tendency for the body to become increasingly central to the modern person’s sense of self-identity” (p. 1). Radcliffe and Goucher’s identities were directly correlated with their bodies performance as elite marathon runners. However, becoming pregnant produced postmodern examples of fragmentation, in that the women were living a disjuncture from taking on additional and evolving identities. The women both separated their lived experiences as runners and their lived experiences as pregnant women; they were attempting to maintain an identity they already had during a time when they were gaining a new identity. Writing on their blogs was a way of showing the public they would be suitable mothers - that they could balance both elite athleticism and motherhood. Their narratives appeared as though they were constantly considering some balance between their personal lives and a social responsibility. They were employing “practices of the self” (Rose, 1990), by both negotiating change and cementing continuities with their identities. In studying the narratives of pregnant women, Bailey (1999) came to the same conclusion as this study; Radcliffe and

Goucher were exclaiming the importance of the pre-pregnancy activities they excelled at in preparation for the new addition to their identities and their new roles as mothers.

Limitations of Study

A limitation of this study was being unaware of the runners' purpose and intent in producing their blogs. Many bloggers boldly differentiate themselves from the mainstream media, while some bloggers are disguised, hired and stationed members of mainstream media organizations, pushing messages to the public. These writers may be strategically highlighting aspects of a news story with the intent of manipulating the viewers perspective of an event (Entman, 1993). Many people use internet formats, such as blogs, so that they can read free-form producers of a story instead of just being passive consumers of the mainstream media's interpretations of events (Dart, 2009). The growing trend of blogs has also raised the interest of marketing companies to create 'fake blogs'. These fabricated blogs are produced when a company creates a fictional blog as a marketing tool to promote their products (Gogoi, 2006). Thus, a limitation to this study is being unaware of the runners' intent to produce their blogs.

Using only one source of information for my analysis also created challenges. By using strictly personal narratives, this study may have been limited by not having the opportunity to cross-reference the findings. Cross-referencing my interpretations with other sources of information could have increased the

credibility of my findings, however it also objectifies and generalizes them. There was the option to also study mainstream media articles about the runners, however I did not review them because I wanted to avoid the contamination of other people's interpretations. Also, I did not interview the athletes. Many studies benefit from the direct, rich information that may be gathered from personal interviews with participants. Not performing interviews may have been a limitation because by analyzing the runners' blogs, I did not provide the runners with the opportunity to confirm or refute my interpretations. There still exists limitations in interviews, for if I were to use interviews for my study, when determining the veracity of the runners' answers, there could have been the possibility that the runners would tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. A similar limitation may have existed for the researcher; when reading the narrations there is always the possibility that I, as the researcher, may have read what I wanted to read or interpreted what I wanted to interpret. I also had to consciously remind myself that I was not analyzing the people, I was exclusively looking into their narratives, analyzing how they write their stories of lived experiences with pregnancy.

Since people typically do not employ phenomenology as methods for viewing life events, the athletes' abilities to describe their experiences through forms of narrative could have been limited by their ability - or inability - to write about their perceptions of lived experience. Also, the words chosen for written descriptions could have been different than how the runners may have verbally described their pregnancies. However, this was not a concern of mine, since I was interested in

how they wrote about their experiences with their pregnant bodies and not how they verbally spoke about their bodies.

It is likely that being a runner myself may have influenced the analysis of the elite runners' narratives. I have existing notions of how to describe a runner's body because of the way I would describe my own. Any researcher, looking at this same topic, with the same athletes, may yield different interpretations. Some researchers - especially those in the sciences - may find this to be a limitation; however, it is also a strength because my interpretation is generated from within the culture that created me. My interpretations help to tell a story about running culture.

Eichelberger (1989) noted that if various researchers with different backgrounds, use of methods, and purposes were to study the same narrative, they would have different reactions to the story, emphasize certain aspects of the details and, overall, develop varying scenarios.

Contributions to Body Image Literature

This study contributes to body image literature by highlighting the importance of giving attention to women of minority populations i.e. elite athletes and pregnant women. It has been made clear that women are defined as a population who have heightened concerns for their body image. Elite female athletes and pregnant women are not exempt from this. If anything, they may be even more affected by cultural expectations of body image since both their elite athletic and pregnant bodies exist outside the norm.

This study may help pregnant athletes to use their agency to define - for themselves - the perspectives they have of their own pregnant bodies, rather than resorting to the influence of generalized cultural norms and expectations. Pregnant women may practice more agency and listen to how their bodies feel, rather than selecting preprogrammed socially accepted descriptions of what it feels like to be a pregnant body. By researching elite athletes who intended to maintain their elite status and athleticism after pregnancy, this study hopes to change the way women who reproduce are traditionally thought about and how they think about themselves. This study contributes to body image literature in that it provides examples of two women whose bodies are not just mothers set only on a life path of mothering (Bordo, 1993). Since women are conscious of the fact that they are primarily identified as merely their bodies (Bartky 1988), this study may contribute to a revised understanding and acceptability of women's capacities beyond merely their bodies.

Implications of this Research

The lack of scholarly discourse on the pregnant athletic body suggests that scholars have overlooked the importance of women's lived experiences with their moving pregnant bodies. This research may broaden people's understanding of pregnancy as an individual lived experience and come to the understanding that pregnancy is presently highly influenced by both medical practices and cultural expectations. By incorporating an appreciation for individual experiences, revisions

to the common ideologies surrounding pregnancy may work in tandem with the dominant, and generalized, medical perspective. Paying attention to unique individual experiences may help medical professionals and pregnant women to have a better understanding of each pregnancy, as something unique to each woman.

As the number of female participation in sport is reaching near that of males, coaches could practice a more holistic approach to females experiences of pregnancy and mothering. This study may help change the way coaches understand their athletes' female bodies and the complex balance of their roles as athletes and mothers. Coaches may benefit from understanding the shifts in elite females priorities during pregnancy and motherhood and help monitor athleticism during pregnancy. This research may effect the sport of running through an increased acceptance for participation in running during pregnancy. Women may use this research to support their decision to train both before and after pregnancy.

Blogging, as a form of narrative, is a method for telling stories; it invites the reader to locate themselves within the story. The narratives may have influenced me to compare the runners' experiences to my own experiences and question how I may describe my own body or predict how I may feel if I am ever a pregnant runner. Integrating myself into the narratives by attempting to illuminate the women's experiences may even enlighten my passion for the sport, my interest in motherhood or my curiosity for whether I, myself, am capable of running pregnant and writing a story about it.

Both this research, and the act of the runners presenting their experiences of pregnancy and running to the public, may influence other mothers to attempt to attain comparable levels of athleticism as Radcliffe and Goucher. This may be problematic for the average mother-to-be who has not committed to a life of elite athleticism. However, when considering the results of this study, one must remember that the results are context dependent; this study reveals new knowledges on specifically Radcliffe and Goucher. My conclusions are unique to these two marathon runners and may not be generalized to other sports. Consequently, the results produced from this study may have limited application to other women. The lived experiences of Radcliffe and Goucher were set in a specific context, so the findings of this study do not claim universal validity.

Future Research

Since the blogging phenomenon is relatively new and unstudied, and pregnancy has been mostly studied from a medical perspective, there are many options warranted for future research. First of all, future research could focus on both a larger, more generalized population of women or more specifically on the individual experiences of one woman.

To perform a study that produces new knowledges that benefits the most people, future research could focus on studying recreational or non-athletes' experiences with pregnancy. There are so few elite athletes compared to the non-elite athlete population that this fact may divert researchers from focusing on the

development of new knowledges that applies to so few. In my preliminary search for elite runners' blogs, I became aware of numerous blogs written by recreational runners who blogged about their running during pregnancy. Focusing on these women may provide information useful to a larger population when interested in the phenomenon of running during pregnancy.

To really get to the heart of the individual experiences with running while pregnant, future research could also be derived from analyzing one athlete's blog. This idea could even yield an interesting study if the researcher were to conduct a study on their own personal blogs during pregnancy. Analyzing one's own written accounts of pregnancy may yield insight into the phenomenon of unique lived experiences with one's body while running during pregnancy.

Authors of blogs typically allow their audiences to record comments on the blog posts that are then available for other online readers to read. Both Radcliffe and Goucher's blogs had this option with numerous comments posted by their readers. This study did not look into the content of the comments because the purpose was to focus on the lived experiences of the runners, rather than how the world perceived their experiences. Analyzing the comments through future research may yield interesting information on new forms of cultural communication. Comments made by the audience, may also provide valuable insight into how the world views the written accounts of pregnant elite runners.

Also, as mentioned in the literature review, mainstream media and marketing companies are taking advantage of the use of blogs for the purpose of

advertisement. Knowledge of this may sensitize the general public to distrust the content of blogs as anything but authentic. Researchers who analyze blog content will need to be diligent in deciphering true blogs from those with a commercialized pitch.

An interesting topic to study that can build off of this research is to look at how elite athletes' bodies are their careers. Research on this subject could really help to further explain why these women exemplified more of a focus on their athleticism than their pregnant bodies. It would also be interesting to study elite athletes' perceptions of lived experience during motherhood, since this study was limited to specifically pregnancy experiences. Researching how pregnancy effects coach/athlete dynamics would also be interesting, as would studying cultural perceptions of pregnant elite athletes. With such limited research on both psycho-social and socio-cultural aspects of pregnancy and athleticism this study hopes to inspire more research in these domains.

Future research could also look at whether or not people have a significant ability to describe their lived bodily experiences in unique ways. If it is determined that people find these descriptions difficult, then research could branch off to determine the reasons why people are unable to describe their bodies uniquely. This line of future study would greatly benefit from an in depth review of how concepts of phenomenology are employed in everyday peoples lived experiences outside of strictly academic forms of analysis.

Summary of Conclusion

The two runners wrote blogs that revealed struggles with identity changes from being an elite athlete to becoming a mother-to-be. The runners were simultaneously attempting to balance pregnancy and elite athleticism, all the while conforming to society's expectations for motherhood. Here I present a note from Stabile (1992), who summarized a suggestion for societies perceptions of pregnancy. She wrote:

The most difficult task ahead lies in disarticulating the pregnant body from the maternal body. And although feminists must insist that pregnancy is not identical with mothering, they must also insist that both are “biosocial” experiences - that pregnancy, like mothering, is something that occurs within a specific social, economic, cultural and historical environment and that the experience of pregnancy, as such, is structured by social relations. It is work that women may not, or may, decide to undertake. What is at stake in this framework is not reducible to “choice”, but inclusion in decision-making processes that affect women's health and economic circumstances. Pregnancy, thus situated in and of itself is neither a good nor a bad thing. It only acquires a positive or negative valence within a very specific set of circumstances.

(p. 199)

This study hopes to maintain scholarly interest in issues of body image and inspire research on specifically elite female athletes. I hope to have generated interest in pregnancy as a socio-cultural and idiosyncratic phenomenon and further

hope that society will come to celebrate unique lived bodily experiences with pregnancy. The understanding of pregnancy will be greatly enhanced with further research from socio-cultural and psycho-social viewpoints, especially with the use of phenomenology to make sense of every day lived experiences. This thesis is an attempt to recognize the pregnant form as an idiosyncratic experience worthy of awareness and support. As both athleticism and pregnancy are healthy endeavors for individual livelihood and the continuation of humanity, I hope to generate awareness for the importance of pregnancy and athleticism as positive and unique lived experiences.

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