



(De)Constructing Paula Radcliffe: Exploring media representations of elite running, pregnancy and motherhood through cultural sport psychology

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Little is known about elite athletes who are mothers within the context of sociocultural expectations concerning motherhood and sport. The aim of this study was to extend such understanding by examining how the media manages and constructs one elite athlete's (Paula Radcliffe) identities within the context of motherhood and sport.

Design: A qualitative approach grounded in cultural sport psychology was used to explore motherhood and athletic identity as socio-cultural creations shaped by cultural narratives (i.e., media). The psychological and behavioural implications were of interest.

Method: A textual analysis (see [McKee, 2003](#)) of two issues of *Runner's World* magazine (March 2008, October, 2010) surrounding elite British marathon runner Paula Radcliffe's pregnancies was conducted. Visual data analysis of 37 images (see [Griffin, 2010](#)) further contextualized textual meaning(s).

Results: Radcliffe's identities were constructed within a higher order narrative: pregnancy and motherhood as redemption. This narrative had fluid meanings depending on how it framed two contrasting identities: 1. athlete and mother as one and 2. primarily a mother; athlete as secondary. An athlete and mother as one identity reinforced an elite athlete identity and high performance narrative. A primarily mother, athlete as secondary identity was linked to athletic accomplishments being downplayed and/or sacrificed in favour of motherhood.

Conclusions: This study opens a new window of cultural understanding and possibility for research and application concerning motherhood and athletic identities. These findings add to the cultural sport psychology and qualitative literature exploring elite mothering athletes.

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Introduction

Pregnancy and motherhood have been highlighted as reasons why female athletes may end their sport careers or fail to reach their full potential in sport ([Nash, 2011](#); [Palmer & Leberman, 2009](#); [Spowart, Burrows, & Shaw, 2010](#)). The time required for training and competing may leave little time for motherhood, which is often positioned as unacceptable or something to be delayed until sport retirement ([Appleby & Fisher, 2009](#); [Currie, 2004](#); [Freeman, 2008](#); [Nash, 2011](#); [Spowart, Hughson, & Shaw, 2008](#)). Additionally, medical narratives that position exercise and/or sport training during pregnancy as incompatible or dangerous may also prevail to keep women from sport pursuits ([Jette, 2006, 2011](#); [Kardel, 2005](#); [Spowart et al., 2008](#); [Vertinsky, 1994](#)). However, recent media

interest in women pursuing athletics during pregnancy and beyond (e.g., British marathoner Paula Radcliffe, American marathoner Kara Goucher) suggests that pregnancy, motherhood and sport are not mutually exclusive. While "official" statistics on how many elite athletes are mothers are scant, one article (see [Farber, 2008](#)) reported that 20 of the 286 females on the USA team in the 2008 summer Olympics were mothers). The recent recognition that elite athlete mothers may have in promoting women's sport participation also places them in the global spotlight ([Nash, 2011](#)).

Only one study in sport psychology has explored elite athletes, motherhood and associated with the merging of these factors, the psychological implications ([Appleby & Fisher, 2009](#)). Results revealed that elite distance runners experienced an integration of their identities through the negotiation of socio-cultural stereotypes concerning motherhood vs. competitive athletics. Those who accepted such stereotypes adopted a *good mother identity* involving selfless care which led to psychological distress (see [Currie, 2004](#); [Miller & Brown, 2005](#)). Some athletes resisted the *good mother* ideal by viewing sport as pleasure and a way to enhance mental health,

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and thus did more sport training and experienced less psychological distress. This new perspective on *sport as pleasure and health* is a novel narrative that holds potential for resisting dominant cultural ideals concerning athletics and motherhood that create psychological distress and constrain performance and/or sport participation (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Spowart et al., 2010, 2008).

Studies outside of sport psychology (e.g., sport sociology, sport management, leisure studies) have echoed these findings, positing that pregnancy and/or motherhood give athletes an additional perspective on sport, decreasing pressure to perform and provide fulfilment in another sphere (Nash, 2011; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Spowart et al., 2010). Qualitative research on athlete-mothers has found that these women position themselves as positive role models for others (e.g., children, other women) (Freeman, 2008; Leberman & Palmer, 2009; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Spowart et al., 2008). At the same time, the notion of guilt, motherhood and athletics is complex, with time away from children identified as a cause of guilt despite a sense of control and well-being gained through athletics (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Freeman, 2008).

There is clearly a complicated interplay of social and cultural narratives concerning athletics, pregnancy, and motherhood influencing the psychological experiences and athletic pursuits of athletes who are mothers, which warrant further attention. Mothers' voices, nonetheless, are largely silent in sport research and little is known about how athletes manage multiple identities and the psychological implications of these identities, within the context of sociocultural expectations concerning motherhood and sport. Additionally, media representations of elite athlete's identities have not yet been explored by sport psychology researchers within the context of motherhood and the implications of these identities for sport psychology.

Cultural sport psychology: contextualizing athlete and mother identities

One way to extend understandings of athlete and mother identities in sport within a sociocultural context is to use a cultural sport psychology (CSP) lens. The contributions of CSP towards advancing understandings of marginalized identities have been outlined elsewhere in-depth (see Ryba, Schinke & Tenenbaum, 2010 for CSP research; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009 for CSP practice). As the genre of CSP is broad (Ryba et al., 2010), we highlight three central ideas within the CSP genre, relevant for understanding motherhood and sport within a sociocultural context. These ideas stem from a cultural studies approach (see Birrell & McDonald, 2000; McGannon, Hoffman, Metz & Schinke, 2012). The first of these points is that CSP perspectives highlight self-identity as *simultaneously* social and cultural, rather than reducing them to decontextualized mechanisms within the mind, as with mainstream sport psychology (McGannon & Mauws, 2000; McGannon & Spence, 2010; Smith, 2010). Following from this point, motherhood and athletic identities are viewed as the product of individual, social and cultural narratives which interact to create particular meanings concerning these cultural identities (McGannon & Mauws, 2000; Smith & Sparkes, 2009).

Because self-identities are the product of cultural narratives, the third and final point is that an understanding of such identities necessitates a focus on cultural narratives/discourses that (re) produce them (McGannon & Mauws, 2000; McGannon & Spence, 2010; Smith, 2010; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Central to this final point is the concept of a subject position (see Davies & Harré, 1990; McGannon & Mauws, 2000). People acquire a sense of self and identity and interpret the world from a particular perspective (i.e. subject position) by participating in narrative practices that allocate

meanings to particular categories and images (e.g. mother, female athlete, pregnant athlete). Identities are then positioned in relation to particular storylines articulated around categories and images and people may have particular psychological experiences associated with that world view (Davies & Harré, 1990; McGannon & Mauws, 2000). Research in exercise psychology exploring self-identity from this perspective is indicative that there are psychological (e.g., enjoyment, distress) and behavioural implications (e.g., exercise participation, withdrawal from exercise) linked to the subject positions women take up within particular cultural narratives/discourses (McGannon & Spence, 2010). Recent media work in exercise psychology exploring dominant discourses and subject positions within a women's health section of a Midwestern newspaper further revealed the media as a narrative practice that creates particular identities (i.e., subject positions) with potential psychological and behavioural implications (McGannon & Spence, 2012).

Sport media: extending understanding of athlete and motherhood portrayals

One way to explore and further identities and the implications from a CSP perspective is to focus on sport media representations of elite athlete mothers, specifically, the March 2008 and October 2010, issues of the popular magazine *Runner's World*, which featured British marathon runner Paula Radcliffe's two pregnancies. Cultural narratives within sport media such as this have received little attention in sport psychology, particularly in terms of the implications such narratives have for identity construction and psychological outcomes (McGannon et al., 2012). Despite a lack of emphasis on media portrayals of elite athlete mothers, studies on women and sport media suggest that there are compelling reasons to explore celebrity athletes in the context of pregnancy, motherhood and the associated psychological and behavioural implications. The media is a powerful source of representation and construction of meaning and ideology concerning athletes' identities (Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003; McGannon et al., 2012). The ideologies (i.e., expected behaviours based on cultural values and norms) surrounding women and sport create certain identities or subject positions with associated meanings. These identities impact the way(s) in which athletes may be perceived by society and by the athletes themselves as they navigate identity constructions and perceptions (Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003).

In Walton's (2010) examination of UK print media surrounding three major events in Radcliffe's career, her pregnancy was mentioned only in a postscript which stated "not surprisingly, injury and motherhood have been the focus of [Paula's] mediation since 2006" (p. 296). In her exploration of body projects in pregnancy through interviews with non-athlete mothers after birth, Nash (2011) called Radcliffe the ideal model for fit pregnancy because she embodied the "strong" pregnancy due to training throughout her pregnancy. Due to the publicity Paula and other athletes in similar positions have received, Nash (2011) asserted that in order to gain cultural power all mothers needed to exercise and follow Radcliffe's example. Within the context of pregnancy and dominant cultural ideals concerning motherhood and physical activity, such statements are loaded with meaning and have implications for how, or even if, women continue with physical training during pregnancy and beyond (Jette, 2011; Kardel, 2005; Nash, 2011; Spowart et al., 2008). Regardless, Radcliffe has become a symbol of elite athletics and motherhood, and her embodiment of both roles creates a complex interplay of mediated narratives surrounding motherhood and athletics worth exploring. However, other than briefly mentioning Paula's pregnancies in athletics, no

work has systematically explored the complicated media narratives constructing these identities.

Sport psychology researchers and professionals interested in learning more about the complexity of cultural representations and meanings surrounding women's sport, pregnancy and motherhood thus have much to gain by analysing sport media sources and the implications for identity constructions within them (see McGannon et al., 2012). An analysis of this context is not only novel within sport psychology, but contributes towards advancing the genre of cultural sport psychology (CSP) (Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009) by focussing on marginalized female athlete and mother identities within the context of sociocultural expectations concerning motherhood and sport.

Purpose and research questions

In order to extend understanding of the complexity of an athletic mother identity as a socio-cultural construction, further investigation into the complicated cultural narratives which (re) create an athlete-mother identity through sport media and the psychological implications are thus advantageous. The purpose of this study was to extend such understanding by examining how the media manages and constructs one elite athlete's identities (i.e., mother and athlete) within the context of motherhood and sport. A textual analysis (see McKee, 2003) of one sport media's (i.e., *Runner's World* magazine) portrayal of a female celebrity athlete (i.e., Paula Radcliffe) will shed further light on the contentious issue of how female athlete identities in relation to pregnancy and motherhood are mediated. This study opens a new window of sociocultural understanding and possibility for further research and application concerning motherhood and athletic identities in sport psychology. The following research questions guided the study: 1. how are elite female athlete and mother identities represented within sport media narratives and what meanings are associated with these identities and 2. what are the implications (e.g., psychological, behavioural) of these meanings for female athletes occupying these various identities?

Methodology

Sport celebrity: Paula Radcliffe

In answering the research questions of interest it is important to further contextualize Paula Radcliffe's life and running career. Radcliffe has had an illustrious running career in which she has won the London Marathon and the New York Marathon on three separate occasions as well as won the Chicago Marathon once. She set a world record of 2:15:25 at the 2003 London Marathon (PaulaRadcliffe.com, 2008; Radcliffe & Walsh, 2004). Her career has also been plagued with setbacks; the most devastating of which came during the 2004 Olympics when she pulled out of the marathon with only 6 km to go due to anti-inflammatory drugs which upset her stomach (PaulaRadcliffe.com, 2008; Radcliffe & Walsh, 2004). In 2006–2007, Paula took a break due to injury and announced the expectation of her first child, daughter Isla, shortly thereafter. Her second child, son Raphael, was born in 2010. The running magazine *Runner's World* covered both of her pregnancies in two different issues; the articles are in the March 2008 (first pregnancy) and October 2010 (second pregnancy) issues.

Sport media context: Runner's World magazine

Runner's World (RW) was launched in 1966, and claims to be "the world's leading magazine that informs, advises and motivates runners of all ages and abilities" (Runner's World, 2011). RW offers

15 international editions in 18 countries and has a total audience of 3,047,000 people world-wide (Runner's World, 2011). The website, which also features links to RW editions in 11 other countries, receives 1.4 million visitors monthly from the United States and 1.8 million visitors monthly, worldwide (Quantcast, 2011). The demographic profile on the website boasts the "youngest, most affluent audience of any magazine" with an average household income of \$120,887. Approximately 52% of readers are male, 48% female, with 62% of readers are married. The average reader age is 38.8, with 43% falling between 18 and 34 years of age. Closer inspection of RW covers reinforces this young, middle-class, White target audience as they feature young, fit, attractive runners who require sufficient resources to purchase the magazine, run/work out, and fly to travel destinations (e.g., France, various US states) for races. The scope of RW was therefore applicable to our purpose and intended analysis from a CSP perspective, as the readership and audience includes women (48%) and mothers who are also runners, suggesting that this audience is exposed to the texts. More will be said about this RW demographic and how it may have factored into broader consumer culture and the shaping of the narratives concerning Paula's identity, within our conclusions section.

Data collection

Copies of the March 2008 and October 2010 issues of *Runner's World* were ordered through the website www.runnersworld.com. Textual versions of the articles were also obtained online through *Runner's World's* website for ease of coding. The context of each issue was considered in our analysis, along with all textual articles and images (e.g., drawn images within the articles, pictures within articles and on the covers) concerning Paula Radcliffe. The March 2008 article titled "Pregnant Pause" by Cynthia Gorney contained nine pages of text. This main article was preceded by the cover and table of contents, which included two separate features related to the article. Within the main article were also two additional articles ("A Bump in the Road" by McDowell and "Marathon Queen" by Rinkunas). The October 2010 issue featured a nine-page article titled "Great Expectations" by Neitz, along with a cover description and contents feature. The four secondary articles found within the main article were titled, "Motherly Advice", "Come Back Strong" (Jhung), "Doctor's Orders" (Lee), and "Back on Their Feet" (Rinkunas). Both issues yielded a total of eight articles, and four feature descriptions within the table of contents for a total of 20 pages of analysable text. Delimiting our study to the foregoing articles in RW led to a focused, in-depth data collection, which provided enough media cases for theoretical saturation of categories consistent with sport media analysis recommendations (see Birrell & McDonald, 2000; McGannon et al., 2012).

Textual analysis

In-line with a CSP conceptualization of identity, textual analysis allows for the conception of identity as a socio-cultural construction (McGannon et al., 2012; McKee, 2003). A text can be defined as anything people make meaning from (e.g., films, magazines, art etc.). The production of meaning from texts infers a social constructionist viewpoint, emphasizing the complexity and diversity of multiple cultural interpretations and highlights the validity of all interpretations (Busanich, McGannon & Schinke, 2012; McKee, 2003). From this perspective, it is possible to estimate the interpretations of a text which are deemed "most likely", although many interpretations theoretically exist (Birrell & McDonald, 2000).

To analyse narratives within the stories and arrive at interpretation of meaning(s), hierarchical content analysis was used to code themes and track their (re)occurrences throughout the texts

(McKee, 2003). Initial coding categories were based on dominant motherhood representations (e.g., traditional motherhood ideals, supermom) and athlete roles (e.g., successful, competitive) identified from the literature. An “other” category was created to remain open to new themes and these were refined into new and/or higher order themes as analysis proceeded. Throughout all stages of analysis, it was important to keep in mind how language was used to convey particular, and sometimes multiple, meanings (McGannon & Mauws, 2000; McGannon & Spence, 2012; McKee, 2003). For example in the March 2008 article “Pregnant Pause”, author Gorney’s statement, “This just seems to be who she is. Great with child, running exceptionally fast. Nursing mother, running exceptionally fast” (p. 82) was coded as resisting traditional motherhood ideals as Paula’s athletic and mothering identities are positioned as compatible with sport training. This same piece of text was also coded as “supermom” since it implies that mothering female athletes do it all (e.g., they are great athletes who run with ease and take care of children with ease). All codes were refined into higher order categories as patterns were related to each other, the text as a whole, and to sport psychology and cultural studies research during the constant comparative and final stages of analysis (Birrell & McDonald, 2000; McGannon et al., 2012; McKee, 2003). From these coding procedures, two identities of Paula emerged, both of which fed into a higher order theme: *pregnancy and motherhood as redemption*. This overarching theme and how it specifically framed each of Paula’s identities, along with the implications (i.e., psychological, behavioural) will be presented in the “Results and Discussion” section. This final analytical step is an important aspect of critical interpretation and refinement of existing and newly emergent themes (Birrell & McDonald, 2000; McGannon et al., 2012; McKee, 2003).

Visual analysis

Visual methods can be used as an extension of textual analysis (McKee, 2003). Visual methods were used in this study to further facilitate our understanding of social and cultural constructions in terms of how we are able to see, made to see, and what we see as socially and culturally created (Phoenix, 2010). In line with CSP assumptions concerning identity, images thus produce culture, social interaction and experiences of people which in turn, permits awareness of how people view themselves, others and situations (Griffin, 2010; Phoenix, 2010). While visual data can be analysed and interpreted in a number of ways, the methods proposed by Griffin (2010) were used to guide interpretation of images in RW. Images (e.g., the picture of Paula on the cover of each RW issue) were explored in terms of what stories were suggested. For example, on the 2008 issue, a picture of a lean, smiling Paula wearing two piece Nike shorts and top, standing with her blonde ponytail, reveals an elite “girl next door” athlete who is fit post-pregnancy. The image not only suggests affluence, but health, happiness and fitness, despite having had a baby (Nash, 2011). To further make sense of suggested stories, it was also noted where the image was situated in relation to textual narratives, headlines and captions on the page, and what was included (McGannon & Spence, 2012). Finally, connections were drawn between narratives and images by exploring how the images and associated meanings interacted with the meanings identified in the textual analysis (Griffin, 2010; Krane et al., 2010) and with theory (e.g., social constructionism). The total number of images analysed between the two RW issues was 37. The March 2008 issue contained 17 images of interest. Of these images, 16 were of Paula or other women (i.e., other elite athlete mothers), two were illustrations (stork carrying baby), one was of Paula’s significant other (Gary Lough) and one was a photo of a child (Paula’s first baby, Isla).

The October 2010 issue contained 20 images of which 19 images were of Paula or other women (i.e., other elite athletes who were mothers or pregnant), 12 were equipment related (i.e., baby joggers), and two images contained pictures of Paula’s first child, Isla.

Results and discussion

The results and discussion are presented under a central, overarching theme identified in the RW texts, which constructed Paula’s elite athlete and motherhood identities: *pregnancy and motherhood as redemption*. This theme had fluid meanings depending on how it framed two specific contrasting identities of Paula: 1. *athlete and mother as one* and 2. *primarily a mother; athlete as secondary*. Discussing the findings under this central theme allows for the illustration of how the media narratives were connected, with sub-themes feeding into the cultural construction of each of Paula’s identities in relation to both pregnancies and motherhood. After discussing this central theme, each of Paula’s contrasting identities within the context of this theme, will be presented and discussed.

Pregnancy and motherhood as redemption

In a general sense, a pregnancy and motherhood as redemption narrative refers to Paula Radcliffe’s elite athlete identity taking on an additional mother identity by forming a newly melded identity that allowed her to be a better athlete and more complete person. In turn, pregnancy and motherhood as redemption emerged as meaning that being an elite athlete was not fulfilling enough. Related to this notion is that Paula’s pregnancy and her mother identity were also portrayed as allowing her to redeem her previous athletic failures (see Walton, 2010), for both herself and her Nation (to be discussed shortly). Pregnancy and motherhood were positioned in RW as providing women with the opportunity to enhance various aspects of life – whether through physical training and performance or an enhanced psyche and well-being – to make a more complete, fulfilled, happy person.

Media representations of motherhood outside of sport and exercise contexts have upheld similar ideals and narratives concerning motherhood and redemption. For example, Johnston and Swanson’s (2003a) content analysis of women’s magazines found a “maternal bliss myth” was perpetuated, whereby motherhood was positioned as the “joyful fruition of every woman’s aspirations” (Johnston & Swanson, 2003a, p. 22). By invoking these ideals within the media narratives, women were positioned as most fulfilled when in the domestic sphere, regardless of whether they worked outside of the home. This myth further implies that all women are truly only fulfilled by their children and do not require further pursuits to be happy.

These ideals of personal control, fulfilment and completeness associated with the pregnancy and motherhood as redemption narrative can be further located within a general phenomenon identified in broader media forms (e.g., television portrayals of motherhood, women’s magazines, newspapers) termed the *new momism* (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). The *new momism* “is a set of ideals, norms and practices, most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, that seem on the surface to celebrate motherhood, but which in reality promulgate standards of perfection that are beyond your reach” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 4–5). Such notions and ideals give the illusion that women have many choices and are empowered, but that they are only truly enlightened and fulfil their true calling through one primary choice: becoming selfless mothers who enjoy all they do (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

An article by Neitz (2010) from the 2010 RW issue entitled “Great Expectations” further exemplifies the pregnancy and motherhood as redemption narrative and the associated meanings:

If I wasn't able to accomplish the goal I've had since I was a little girl, of being a mom, that would have just taken away any enjoyment that I've had through running. I never thought the desire to train hard and be competitive would die in me just because I had a child. What I actually found was that it increased it, really, because for me, if I'm happy and balanced in my life, then I run much better. (Neitz, 2010, p.75)

At the same time, the pregnancy and motherhood as redemption narrative can be read as a form of resistance from traditional narratives that position motherhood and athletics as incompatible, as both RW issues portrayed Paula as believing that the birth of her children enhanced her running career via increased motivation and self-confidence. Reinforcing these notions, a photo of Paula within the first article (Gorney, 2008, p. 81) was featured directly opposite the title page. Paula was featured in the forefront wearing a short running top and shorts with her hand on her hip. She was adorned with drawings of laurels and medals around her neck. The background is an illustration of the stages of her “journey” through pregnancy, childbirth and return to running. Paula is positioned here as a more successful runner as a result of her pregnancy and childbirth, but at the same time, she is positioned as having gained redemption (e.g., medals around her neck) for her Nation and/or the possibility looms to be successful in the future. Thus, Paula's newly emerging melded identity as athlete and mother, is constructed, at least in part, by her past accomplishments and failures. For example, the March 2008 RW issue included a section entitled “Marathon Queen” (p.86–87) juxtaposed these two identities with the caption, “Paula Radcliffe has won every marathon she's finished, a feat no other woman has accomplished. The only setback was the Olympics, and she has another chance this summer” (Rinkunas in Gorney, 2008, p. 86).

The *pregnancy and motherhood as redemption narrative* can be shown to have fluid and nuanced meanings depending on how it framed two contrasting identities of Paula within RW: 1. *athlete and mother as one* and 2. *primarily a mother; athlete as secondary*. An *athlete and mother as one* identity was linked to enhanced physical training and performance, reinforcing an elite athlete identity and a high performance sport narrative (Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009). A *primarily mother; athlete as secondary* identity was linked to Paula's elite athlete identity being downplayed within the RW texts, with athletic accomplishments positioned as less fulfilling until one becomes a mother. Each of these identities and the implications are discussed in relation to the *pregnancy and motherhood as redemption narrative*.

Elite athlete and mother as one

As alluded to above, an *elite athlete and mother as one* identity meant that Paula's identities of athlete and mother were portrayed within RW texts as intertwined/melded together. Consistent with media forms that suggest women can do it all and do so successfully (see Douglas & Michaels, 2004), within the context of a pregnancy and motherhood as redemption narrative, this melded identity was positioned as allowing Paula to achieve *both* career and maternal success. In this sense, both identities of Paula were constructed within RW as enhancing each other, portraying Paula as able to overcome past failures, but also having the ability to set current and future high performance goals. In more traditional motherhood narratives portrayed within the forms of media outside of sport, it is often accepted that once children are in the picture a woman can no longer pursue a career (in this case an

athletic career) or that her return to work (in this case athletics) results in a sub-par performance (in this case sport performance) (Johnston & Swanson, 2003a; Keller, 1994). The article by Neitz in the 2010 RW issue further exemplifies how this notion of elite athlete and mother as one identity of Paula offers an alternative subject position/identity from which to resist traditional motherhood narratives (Spowart et al., 2008), showing the opposite as far as athletic success and performance are concerned as Paula is quoted discussing her first child:

But when the baby's born, you can see that they are fine, they are healthy, and you can leave them with someone while you run. Don't worry that you can't come back. You can enjoy your running and be a mom. (Neitz, 2010, p. 78)

Additionally, within the above article, another article is inserted, titled “Back on Their Feet” (Rinkunas, 2008), which highlighted “Fast moms and their amazing recoveries”, including other elite athletes (e.g., Ingrid Kristiansen, Colleen De Reuck) who completed marathons and set marathon records after giving birth. By constructing these women's elite athlete and mother identities as melded, Paula's melded identity of elite athlete and mother was further reinforced within the text, potentially showing readers how a successful mother and an elite athlete can be embodied, and that many athletes do so successfully without sacrificing performance goals (Kardel, 2005). At the same time the article title (i.e., “back on their feet”) is contradictory in its meaning, implying some sort of necessary leave from sport after giving birth, reinforcing traditional pregnancy and exercise narratives which position women as fragile and in need of medical advice and/or cautionary attention when it comes to intense training (Jette, 2011; Kardel, 2005; Nash, 2011; Vertinsky, 1994) or post-partum exercise (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004; Jette, 2006). By drawing upon the identities of other athletes as successful mothers and sport performers to construct Paula's identity, the RW texts may offer a subject position/identity of resistance to traditional motherhood narratives (Weedon, 1997). Yet on the other hand within the same story, traditional narratives concerning women's pregnant bodies as too fragile to train too hard or too soon post-pregnancy, are upheld, as women (in this case Paula and other female athletes discussed) are strongly advised to seek expert medical advice (Jette, 2011; Nash, 2011; Vertinsky, 1994).

Textual analysis allowed us to further reveal other subtle ways in which a melded identity of elite athlete and mother within a pregnancy and motherhood redemption narrative were constructed in ways that may resist *and* uphold traditional motherhood and athletics narratives. In this sense, within the RW stories, Paula's reasons for training were positioned as still partially reflecting an ethic of care. An ethic of care is a cultural expectation that women sacrifice their own needs, including leisure time, to take care of others. Originally proposed as an integral component of women's moral development (see Gilligan, 1982), an ethic of care has been empirically linked to women's lack of a sense of entitlement to leisure (Miller & Brown, 2005). The ethic of care is also connected with women's role as the primary caregiver within the family, and helps to explain how family commitment and family structure may constrain women's lives (Weedon, 1997). RW narratives further positioned Paula as knowing that her decision to continue running during and after both her pregnancies was a good thing to do for herself, but it was ultimately only permissible because it was best for *both* mother and child and allowed her to first and foremost be a better caregiver:

I think people genuinely thought I'd have a baby and not want to run anymore. But most people have a baby and then at some point go back to their career. You still have the same love of

running. If anything, it's intensified because you have someone to do it for. (Gorney, March 2008, p. 129)

The above excerpt also exemplifies that by creating Paula's identity as a melding of athlete and mother, RW world opens up an additional possibility concerning motherhood and: that sport careers may offer status and power outside of motherhood for women (Jette, 2011; Spowart et al., 2010). Creating this melded identity of Paula within the text may thus offer women another subject position within the motherhood and redemption narrative from which to resist dominant media portrayals of career and motherhood that position female athletes as having to choose between two identities (i.e., athlete vs. mother) (see Johnston & Swanson, 2003a). To further accomplish this melded identity, the stories also invoked examples of Paula's practical approaches to her training (e.g., running by feel as opposed to time, acknowledging that training is her job) as strategies to *consciously* resist dominant ideals concerning an ethic of care and motherhood, in order to avoid guilt. For example, when discussing her first pregnancy in the second issue of RW, Paula was quoted as saying:

You do have to get over the guilt trip. I never took Isla to the track. Because there, I need to be focused, and I didn't want to hear if she was crying. I knew she was being looked after and fine. Running is my time, and it's my job, so it needs to be done as well as possible. I don't train with a jogging stroller. My runs need to be quality training. (Nietz, 2010, p. 78)

RW continued to construct Paula's identity within the context of motherhood as melded, by further positioning her continuance with training as a "natural choice", perhaps because she has excelled in her sport and her success was an integral part of her past identity as a successful athlete. In the first RW issue, Gorney (2008) described the melding of Paula's past and present athletic identities with a mothering identity as such:

She rattles people. This just seems to be who she is. Great with child, running exceptionally fast. Nursing mother, running exceptionally fast. Radcliffe, 34, is the best female distance runner in the world, by almost any statistical accounting, even if she's never won an Olympic medal. This year she intends to do that, and to make people shut up about what happened in Athens 2004. (Gorney, 2008, p. 82)

In this example, Paula is portrayed as the so-called "perfect illustration" of a whole and rounded individual who has almost everything – except an Olympic medal (Nash, 2011; Walton, 2010). With the birth of Radcliffe's daughter, Paula is storied in RW as being offered a new beginning and a chance to redeem herself after her disappointment in Athens (e.g., "...this year she intends to do that, and to make people shut up about what happened in Athens 2004"). Having a child is thus positioned as a way to enhance Paula's performance and set new goals within the RW narratives, as opposed to detracting from performance and an athletic career. McDowell's section (in Gorney, 2008 issue of RW) entitled "A Bump in the Road: How carrying and delivering a baby affects running" further highlights the physiological and cognitive advantages that Paula gained during pregnancy:

Although no definitive link has been proven, the biological tools needed to build new fingers, kidneys, and quads could potentially boost a new mom's performance... Perhaps though, the most crucial gain is mental, thanks to having survived the worse-than-any-workout agony of childbirth. (McDowell in Gorney, 2008, p. 84)

The above insert was accompanied by a photo of Paula smiling mid-run, with a prominent pregnant belly, while a non-pregnant

runner looks on in awe. Within this image and the text accompanying it, Paula is represented as viewing her pregnancy and training as intertwined. While the biological component may be more relevant to some athletes (see Spowart et al., 2010), within the RW narrative it was the mental advantages that were positioned as having a positive effect on Paula's performance and psyche. Paula's mental techniques were further constructed as being an integral part of her identity in the 2008 issue of RW when "...she had won the ING New York City Marathon, fending off Ethiopian Gete Wami and powering herself through the last half mile by making a rhythmic internal chant of her 10-month-old daughter Isla's name" (Gorney, 2008, p. 82). This gain in motivation and enhanced focus can be related to the broader high performance narrative within which many elite athletes construct their identities (Busanich et al., 2012; Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009). Elite athlete identities are often constructed within this narrative as commitment to excellence in performance above all else and as a natural and necessary part of athletics (Douglas & Carless, 2009). In melding both mothering and elite runner identities within a high performance narrative in RW, Paula is further positioned as a deviant from the traditional motherhood role in which career is surrendered in favour of childcare. Through offering Paula's identity and associated athletic practices as tools for resistance of traditional motherhood ideals, Paula and other female athlete mothers are positioned within RW as being permitted to uphold the high performance sport narrative and continue to strive for high-performance goals.

However, the dedication to excellence described in RW by drawing upon the high performance narrative may have negative implications if and/or when the athlete fails (as Paula did in Beijing and Athens). In her media analysis, Walton (2010) highlighted how Paula was representative of Britain, and when she failed, she was positioned within the UK media/press as having embarrassed the country. After Paula dropped out of the 2004 Olympics, Walton wrote, "For the next year, Radcliffe became synonymous in Britain with quitting" (p. 294). Such depictions of Paula's identity within a high performance narrative limit Paula's identity portrayal within the media. It is important to remember that Paula's story and the identity constructed within these media narratives can also be viewed as multidimensional within the context of CSP. While the loss in Athens was a prominent topic in RW texts, such discussions concerning Paula's identity framed within the high performance narrative shifts and takes on new meaning once she is pregnant and has children, and repositioned within the texts as an athlete-mother. In turn, her losses are portrayed as redeemed and/or pushed aside through the birth of her children and the new beginnings of motherhood. In sharing her experiences with Kara Goucher (US marathon runner, and Paula's training partner during her second pregnancy and Kara's first) in the second October 2010 issue of RW, Paula's story was woven in to show that she related:

Motherhood is totally going to change your life in the best way. And yeah, there are times when you think, Oh God, will they stop crying? Will they sleep through the night? There are those times when it's hard, but there are so many more, big, rewarding times. (Nietz, 2010, p. 78)

Presented and narrated in this light, Paula's life and career are portrayed as having been positively changed as a result of pregnancy and childbirth, which often takes precedence in the texts. To further reinforce Paula's interaction with Kara and her melded identities, the two women are photographed laughing and touching one another's pregnant bellies. They are both wearing running gear and are placed on a city street where they may have been running (Nietz, 2010, p. 74). However, the above quote continues to reveal the complexity of meanings that such narratives

in RW convey concerning motherhood and athletics. To further explore this complexity we now turn to how the meaning of the pregnancy and motherhood as redemption narrative shifts in light of another identity portrayal of Radcliffe: more than an elite athlete, first and foremost a mother.

More than an elite athlete; first and foremost a mother

A second branch of Paula's identity formed within the *pregnancy and motherhood as redemption* narrative involved Paula's career fading into the background as her athletic accomplishments were positioned as paling in comparison to her new mother identity. With the construction of the *more than an elite athlete first and foremost a mother* identity, we see traditional ideals and values concerning motherhood and an ethic of care being upheld (Jette, 2011; Miller & Brown, 2005; Nash, 2011; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Pedersen, 2001). This particular portrayal of Paula's identity suggests that her athletic career is enhanced by pregnancy and the birth of her children, but only because she is positioned as having completed her "natural duty" as a woman and therefore became whole (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Johnston & Swanson, 2003b). The caption introducing the October 2010 article depicts the Paula and Kara Goucher pregnancies as "the most exciting time of their lives" directly following their description as "World-class marathoners" (Neitz, 2010, p. 71). By positioning motherhood and athletics in this way, *pregnancy and motherhood as redemption* takes on a different meaning, with running careers conceived of as secondary and/or downplayed in comparison to pregnancy and child rearing (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Freeman, 2008; Leberman & Palmer, 2009; Nash, 2011; Pedersen, 2001; Spowart et al., 2010).

Paula was discussed throughout the RW texts as having done everything she could in terms of self-monitoring her training (e.g., using a heart rate monitor, working out on specialized treadmills) and adjusting her diet as per medical advice (Kardel, 2005; Nash, 2011), which all women are positioned within the text as needing to consult before being active (Jette, 2011; Vertinsky, 1994). In the first RW article from 2008, Paula even related her anticipatory eating habits to possibly being pregnant, saying "I'd stopped drinking coffee even before the pregnancy test was positive" (Gorney, 2008, p.85). Critical analyses of exercise and fitness media concerning exercise and pregnancy, such as *Shape Fit Pregnancy Magazine* (see Dworkin & Wachs, 2004) and *Oxyen Fitness magazine* (Jette, 2006), have shown that the medical establishment plays a pivotal role in the production of disciplining knowledge concerning the pregnant body. Additionally, analyses of these media forms have also identified the link between media narratives and the growing role of the health and fitness industry in (re)creating consumer-based identities for readers in order to sell products. In turn, women are held personally responsible to first and foremost monitor their levels of exercise and training, as the health of the baby takes precedence (Jette, 2011).

Given the demographic of RW, as well as the pictures of various products and devices (e.g., baby jogging strollers, heart rate monitors, maternity running clothing) appearing with stories, RW may be drawing upon these dominant medical narratives concerning the pregnant body to construct Paula's mother identity with a specific intent: to sell products and running advice to help pregnant women be more "responsible consumers". By creating an identity of Paula of *more than an elite athlete, first and foremost a mother* in this manner, the woman consuming RW texts may become positioned as "a consumer who looks to an increasingly competitive marketplace for expert advice—in this case the pregnancy fitness industry" (Jette, 2006, p. 47). It is important to note that since we did not interview women who may be

consumers of RW, we cannot know for certain how such narratives around personal responsibility and self-improvement in consumer culture may inform pregnant women's or new mother's subjectivity.

Another strategy used within to construct Paula's identity as more than elite athlete, first and foremost a mother, was the drawing in of Paula's spouse/manager/coach Gary Lough into the narrative. After the baby was born RW reported that Paula further made sure that Isla had the best care as she and Gary were focussed on Paula's career. Gorney (2008) divulged, "People assume they must have a nanny, but they don't; this week Lough's mother was helping out, but Lough likes being the on-duty parent when Radcliffe is training..." (p. 128). Paula and Gary were positioned within the narrative as contemplating and structuring Paula's career in such a way that all the needs of their child are taken care of, reinforcing an ethic of care. This was further accomplished within the RW narrative by positioning Gary within a non-traditional role as father and Paula as a career woman (e.g., Gary looks after the child, so Paula can train), which is only permissible because the baby's needs are met first and foremost (Miller & Brown, 2005).

Within a pregnancy and redemption narrative, with the birth of her first child, Paula is now positioned within the RW texts as able to see her identity as something more than a runner and elite athlete, which as noted, was also positioned as not fulfilling enough on its own. Paula's body was also discussed as transformed as a result of pregnancy and motherhood, which created a profound and lasting change in her perspective on life and running. Further within this narrative, when discussing Paula's second pregnancy in the October 2010 issue, Paula was positioned as gaining additional redemption by becoming "the wise adviser" and role model for other running mums. In contrast to other athlete identities being drawn upon to reinforce an elite athlete and mother identity as melded, here, other athletes' identities are used within the story to downplay Paula's athletic accomplishments and reinforce her primary calling: childbirth and motherhood. An example of this comes from US marathon runner Kara Goucher when quoted about her pregnancy in relation to Paula's:

You see these books and you see the outline of the woman, and you think, I won't look like that, and then you do, and it's just a beautiful thing. It gives you a new respect for your body. I think we already respect our bodies because we're athletes, but your body is so much more complex than that, and it can do so much more than just run. (Neitz, 2010, p. 80)

Moreover, Kara is quoted above that the body can do more than just run, adding a new, and more important, dimension (i.e., being pregnant, being a mother) to an athletic identity. Now being the vessel for a new life has become the focus for these athletes who are positioned as solely responsible for the outcome of their pregnancies (Jette, 2006, 2011). The respect for their bodies fostered by their running careers is further positioned in RW as a deeper and more diverse understanding through pregnancy and childbirth, with running careers downplayed in favour of upholding traditional motherhood narratives (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Nash, 2011).

For Paula, the journey leading up to the birth of her first child, Isla, was positioned as long and strenuous in many ways throughout texts in both RW issues. In this regard, the stories noted how she suffered setbacks in her running career as well as her actual pregnancy and recovery, which were reinforced by drawing upon traditional narratives that often frame exercise and sport as a risk for women because of their biology (see Jette, 2006, 2011; Kardel, 2005; Nash, 2011; Vertinsky, 1994). When drawing upon these medical narratives within the broader *pregnancy and motherhood as redemption* narrative, the birth of Paula's first child by Gorney (2008) is positioned in such a way that almost paralleled

the arduous journey that Paula supposedly went on during her running career (see Walton's, 2010 media analysis):

First she was pregnant, delighted to be, but not much use for world-class racing; then she was in labour, for what seemed at the time like weeks on end; then she was recovering, battling setbacks that surprised and disheartened her; and then finally she was holding Isla aloft at the finish line for the international photographers in New York. (Gorney, 2008, p. 82)

The arrival of Paula's first child is clearly represented as a climax in her life and is used to downplay her career success and hard work and physical training in comparison within the narrative (e.g., "First she was pregnant, delighted to be, but not much use for world class racing"). Adding to this narrative, the March 2008 article features a full-page photo of Paula (p. 83), dressed in jeans and a t-shirt (as opposed to running gear), holding Isla out before her while they each smile at one another. Paula appears content and happy, although the photo reveals nothing regarding Paula's athletic identity other than her toned arm muscles. This photo portrays Paula as cheerful and complete as a result of being connected and bonded with her child, regardless of her career as an elite runner.

While we cannot know if the cultural narratives and identities of Paula created within RW enter into the everyday lives of female athletes, qualitative literature concerning athletes who are mothers is insightful, as it allows us to see if women may draw upon similar cultural narratives to construct their identities. Results from studies on elite athlete mothers have indicated that some women do experience a reduced sense of pressure and an increase in enjoyment of the activity as opposed to strictly competitive intentions for athlete mothers (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Leberman & Palmer, 2009; Pedersen, 2001). In the portrayal of Paula's identity in RW, it appears as though similar cultural narratives may have been drawn upon. Within the story, the author noted that the only time Paula mentioned feeling less pressure was when she was pregnant and more focused on the health of the baby over running for time or mileage, again reinforcing the notion of being first and foremost a mother over an elite athlete:

I think that if you're happy, then you are going to run better. And any worry that you're going to come back and not be as strong or that competitive instinct isn't going to be there—that's rubbish. That never goes away. The only time it goes away is when you have the priority of the baby inside you. (Neitz, 2010, p.78)

In this example, Paula is positioned as recognizing her desire to remain competitive and continue her career, yet quotes from her saying that she is happy primarily because she had the baby are also woven into the story to emphasize the importance of making motherhood and baby a priority. Here, as with traditional cultural narratives concerning motherhood, an ethic of care of prevails within the media narratives (see Gilligan, 1982; Miller & Brown, 2005).

In the construction of Paula's identity as *more than an elite athlete, first and foremost a mother*, the high performance narrative again remains imminent, and her child is often noted as a form of performance enhancement within this narrative:

You come back stronger because you're happier, because you have a child that you love and cherish, and it's something you really wanted in your life. You probably become a little bit more focused as well, because your priorities are sharpened. And the time away from intense training means that you come back more refreshed. (Neitz, 2010, p. 75–76)

Within the above example, Paula's "sharpened priorities" are positioned as the result of her child taking a considerable amount of her concern, and that running is enhanced with the birth of her

child in many ways (e.g., she is happier, more rested, more relaxed). Implicitly such enhancement is due to Paula having realized the "true calling" of a woman (i.e., motherhood) (Jette, 2011; Vertinsky, 1994), which has resulted in her becoming a more stabilized individual (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Although Paula is portrayed as not having given up her athletic career (and as of now, she has not), she is positioned as having embraced her mother identity first and foremost and used it to her advantage in other life spheres such as running (which have now become portrayed as secondary within the RW narrative) (Nash, 2011; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Pedersen, 2001).

Conclusions

In this article, we explored how an elite athlete and mother identity of a sport celebrity athlete (i.e., Paula Radcliffe) was represented within sport media (i.e., *Runner's World* magazine) narratives and the specific meanings of these identities and the implications. Textual analysis revealed an overarching theme which constructed Paula's elite athlete and mother identities: a *pregnancy and motherhood as redemption* narrative. This central narrative illustrated how the RW narratives were layered and connected, with sub-themes feeding into the cultural construction of Paula's identities which emerged in one of two ways: *elite athlete and mother as one* and *more than an athlete, first and foremost a mother*. It is important to consider that these contrasting identities are not wholly separate. As CSP from a cultural studies perspective allows us to suggest, identities are complicated, multi-dimensional and fluid, depending upon the broader narrative(s) within which they are formed (see; McGannon et al., 2012; Smith, 2010; Smith & Sparkes, 2009).

In terms of the mother and elite running identities constructed in RW media texts, it is unfair to assume a singular identity for athlete-mothers as a result of a predetermined narrative, or force an individual to choose an identity based on perceived moral wrongness and rightness (Nash, 2011; Smith, 2010). The contrasting identities created within the pregnancy and motherhood as redemption narrative in RW challenge the belief that an athlete must have a narrow focus on choosing a certain identity to embody (e.g., competitive athlete or mother). Identity can therefore be viewed as (re)negotiated endeavours which are formed through personal experiences, cultural and historical contexts and values preserved by surrounding narratives (Busanich et al., 2012; McGannon et al., 2012; McGannon & Mauws, 2000; Smith, 2010).

Positioned mainly within a high performance narrative, a particular portrayal of Paula's identity as a competitive athlete was reinforced in RW, with her motherhood identity constructed in RW as a way of maintaining high performance goals and outcomes (e.g., medalling in the London 2012 Olympics). Research outside of the sport media realm has shown that this high performance narrative on its own may be somewhat limiting for athletes. Career transitions can be difficult for athletes who have concrete, one-dimensional identification with their athlete identity (Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Grove, Lavallee, and Gordon, 1997). Douglas and Carless (2009) recently highlighted the importance of athletes constructing their identities outside of high performance narratives for more adaptive transitions within, and outside of, sport.

It is also important to note that Paula's identity may have been constructed in particular ways within RW in order to perpetuate a certain portrayal of running and motherhood, to sell products (e.g., baby jogging strollers, heart rate monitors) to affluent RW consumers. Consumer products such as exercise devices, clothing, and advice endorsed by "successful" celebrity athlete mothers such as Paula Radcliffe, can perhaps motivate women to be active,

dispelling myths about sport and motherhood. At the same time, RW drew upon multiple, though limited, narratives in constructing Paula's identity as a mother. Such constructions were linked to other constructions of motherhood in other media sources (e.g., women's magazines) identified as limiting women's mother identities and choices. As media outlets continue to grow, the speed with which representations can reach people in multiple forms can create a circulation of ideas or a vortex effect (see Whannel, 2002), whereby the media representations may become limited as they feed off of one another. Within the context of pregnancy, motherhood and sport, consumer culture can also be problematic as it encourages the purchasing of products and self-surveillance devices that women may not need, cannot afford or that won't deliver the narrative identity promised (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004; Jette, 2006). As with any cultural "product", sport celebrities may not be consumed by audiences in the way(s) in which those manufacturing their identities intended (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). Regardless of the intended celebrity athlete portrayal, when a sport celebrity such as Paula Radcliffe is constructed within limited narratives, the "representative subjectivity" given may feed into perpetuating limited gender, class, sexuality, and race constructions (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Birrell & McDonald, 2000).

Finally, the narratives created within the RW texts surrounding Paula's identity are narrow in their depictions of the reality of having a child and a sport career (Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Spowart et al., 2008). As our study was a textual analysis of media, we cannot know for certain how cultural narratives identified in the construction of Paula's identity may inform athlete's subjectivities. Mounting research continues to suggest that not all athletes who are mothers are as fortunate as elite athletes who are White, upper class females afforded with privileges (Jette, 2011; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Researchers will need to explore new mothering athletes from social and cultural different backgrounds (e.g., minority athletes, single mothers) who may lack the narrative and material resources necessary to (re)negotiate their identities as new mothers in light of sport and career goals (Spowart et al., 2010).

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