

THE ROLE OF BODY SELF-COMPASSION IN ADOLESCENT WOMEN ATHLETES'
PERFORMANCE PERCEPTIONS AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

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By

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ABSTRACT

Although participating in sports can be a highly rewarding experience, it can also involve some unpleasant and potentially negative experiences. These experiences may include failing to meet one's performance goals and negative body image related concerns, which can have a detrimental impact on one's psychological well-being (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). Body image concerns do not only affect an athlete's psychological well-being, but may also affect how one performs or perceives his/her performance in sports. Women tend to experience more self-criticism and rumination than men (Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackleford, 2015). Therefore, it is critical to understand the impact that negative or unpleasant sport experiences may have on women athletes. Self-compassion has been identified as a potential resource for women athletes, and involves being kind and understanding to oneself in times of personal failures (Neff, 2003a). Previous research has found that extending compassion towards the self is related to decreased anxiety and rumination, as well as increased optimism, happiness, and connectedness (Neff, 2003a; Neff & McGehee, 2010). Self-compassion is also associated with positive body image and research suggests that it may be relevant for women athletes' sport experiences (Albertson et al., 2015; Mosewich, Crocker, Kowalski, & DeLongis, 2013; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of body self-compassion in adolescent women athletes' performance perceptions and emotional well-being. Seven women athletes (14-17 years old) participated in two, one-on-one semi-structured interviews and a journal entry process. The first one-on-one interviews included getting to know each participant's sport history and introducing self-compassion and body self-compassion. At the end of the first interviews, participants were provided with journals to document their compassionate body experiences during trainings and competitions over a two-week period. The second one-on-one

interviews were used to review the participants journal entries and body self-compassion experiences. A narrative strategy of inquiry was used to understand and draw meanings from the stories of the participants. Journals provided a reflection process for the participants to detail their experiences of body self-compassion, which were discussed during the second one-on-one interviews. Interviews and journal data were analyzed using a holistic approach to narrative analysis.

Four themes emerged that capture the athletes' perceived role of body self-compassion in their performance and emotional well-being: (a) *Compassion for and confidence in my body* (i.e., what body self-compassion means to the athletes and its relevance), (b) *"Their" thoughts and my body* (i.e., the important role others play in the athletes' body self-compassion experiences), (c) *I will play to my potential* (i.e., how body self-compassion may influence the athletes' performance), and (d) *My strength is in my emotions* (i.e., body self-compassion as an emotion regulation strategy in relation to sport). These findings are consistent with the conceptualization of self-compassion (Neff, 2003a) and body self-compassion (Berry, Kowalski, Ferguson, and McHugh (2010). By respecting and treating their bodies with kindness, positive emotions such as satisfaction with the body were strengthened, and an adaptive focus was placed on performance. As such, being body self-compassionate may regulate a woman athlete's emotions and her sport performance perceptions. Future research should consider exploring the meaning(s) of body self-compassion in other populations to better understand its role and operationalize the phenomenon. Scale development should also be considered for assessing levels of body self-compassion and working towards ways of enhancing body self-compassion.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Mom, Tosin and Titi. For always encouraging me to be the best version of myself, I am truly grateful.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Psychological health and well-being are important and highly valuable components of a person's life. Through the journey of life, an individual generally tries to maintain a sense of stability in his/her physical and psychological health. Keyes, Dhingra, and Simoes (2010) claim that positive psychological states have the ability to decrease vulnerability, increase resilience, and enhance the likelihood of positive developmental outcomes in both adolescence and adulthood. As a way to improve positive psychological states, some individuals choose to participate in sports. Individuals engage in sporting activities for a variety of reasons such as being a part of a team, learning new skills, competing, improving other skills, and many other beneficial motives (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006).

There are many benefits associated with participating in sports as either a child or an adult. Findlay and Copland (2008) found that children who participated in organized sports were more assertive, exerted more self-control, and reported more positive affect and well-being than those who did not participate in sports. In addition, children who participated in sports were more confident in their physical appearance than those who did not. This demonstrates the importance of sport participation for children and adolescents, with the possibility of translating into adulthood. Acquiring such cognitive and social skills at an early age in life can prepare an individual for challenging situations throughout the lifespan.

Although participating in sports can be a highly rewarding experience, it can also involve some unpleasant and potentially negative situations such as failing to meet one's own performance goals, being on a team but not playing, and body image related concerns (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). When faced with negative or unpleasant sport experiences, these difficult situations could influence one's overall athletic

experience (Mosewich et al., 2013). As women tend to experience more self-criticism and rumination (i.e., repetitive negative emotional thoughts) than men (Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackleford, 2015), it is critical to understand the impact that negative or unpleasant sport experiences have on women athletes. Research suggests that some unpleasant experiences that women athletes encounter are related to body image concerns (Albertson et al., 2015; Grogan, 2008). These concerns are often a result of body preoccupation, or the tendency to be excessively concerned with one's own body (Grogan, 2008). Body preoccupation is prevalent in women athletes and is related to additional negative self-evaluations such as social physique anxiety and objectified body consciousness (Mosewich et al., 2013). When an athlete is preoccupied with her body, her negative self-evaluations do not allow her to focus on the positive aspects of sports, her athletic performance, or her abilities as an athlete outside of her appearance. The emphasis being placed on outward appearance may also affect a woman athlete's emotional well-being, an aspect of well-being.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2013) describes well-being as a positive outcome comprising the absence of negative emotions, the presence of positive emotions and moods, satisfaction with life, fulfillment, and positive functioning. Well-being can be thought of as an umbrella term that encompasses a number of other concepts such as quality of life; life satisfaction; happiness; mental, social, and physical well-being; and, most relevant to the current study, emotional well-being (CDC, 2013; Stewart-Brown, 2000). The state of being comfortable with oneself and having positive emotions is important for development from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. Adolescence is an especially critical stage in life because of the rapid social, biological, psychological, and emotional development occurring at this time (Laski, 2015). These developmental changes represent the transitional phase into

adulthood, where identity formation becomes more established. However, the rate of developmental changes taking place may leave an adolescent feeling secluded, and he/she may seek ways to cope and avoid feelings of loneliness. Adolescent developmental changes may therefore impact the various aspects of psychological well-being. Adolescents may often feel isolated because of the different phases of development and maturation, which may intensify negative mental states of self-criticism and self-pity (Neff & McGehee, 2010). Acting compassionately towards oneself during the phases of adolescent development may counter some negative affective feelings and therefore be an important tool in adolescents' emotional well-being, which is one aspect of psychological well-being.

Self-compassion, the act of being compassionate and understanding to oneself in times of suffering and personal failures, has been found to be related to positive psychological functioning (Neff, 2003a). Studies have shown that extending compassion towards the self is related to decreased anxiety, rumination, and depression, as well as increased optimism, happiness, self-kindness, personal initiative, and connectedness (Neff, 2003a; Neff & McGehee, 2010). This shows that self-compassion may have relevance particularly for one's emotional well-being because of its relation to decreasing depression and increasing happiness. Research also suggests that participating in sports and recreational activities is associated with positive emotional well-being (Steptoe & Butler, 1996). Emotional well-being comprises the positive and negative affect reflective of a person's emotional state at a point in time (Larsen & Prizmic, 2008). The positive relationship between sports and emotional well-being encourages participation in sport, which provides knowledge acquisition and skill development for children and adolescents (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006). For instance, an athlete who is more compassionate to his/herself may show more positive emotions and more confidence in his/her

performance. Moreover, Mosewich et al. (2013) claims that promoting a self-compassionate mind frame plays a positive role in women athletes' sports experiences. Previous research has also found that women who reported being self-compassionate also reported greater satisfaction with their physical selves, showing a relationship between body image and self-compassion (Albertson et al., 2015).

Expanding on the link between self-compassion and the body, Berry et al. (2010) explored the phenomenon of *body self-compassion* as a way to be understanding and compassionate to one's body. They found that body self-compassion has three essential structures: appreciating one's unique body, taking ownership of one's body, and engaging in less social comparison. Given that many of the difficult experiences facing women athletes stem from the body (i.e., body image concerns, physical performance in sport), the body self-compassion phenomenon may play a role in women athletes' experiences.

1.1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 2005, Statistics Canada stated that men are more likely to participate in sports than women (Ifedi, 2008). The 2005 statistics showed a decline in the number of women actively participating in sports from 26% to 21% between 1998 and 2005 (Ifedi, 2008). More recently, according to one report on the status of female sport participation in Canada by Brunette et al. (2016), 59% of girls in Canada between 3 and 17 years participate in sports. Although there appears to have been an increase in the percentage of girls that participate in sports, there has also been a drastic increase in the dropout rate. When reaching the age of adolescence, the percentage of girls that participate in sports drops to a disturbing 22% (Brunette et al., 2016). In order to improve longevity and the quality of sport for women, which is an identified goal of the

Government of Canada (2015) in the Sport Policies, Acts, and Regulations, more research attention is needed on women athletes' sport experiences.

While research on women in sport is growing (Albertson et al., 2015; Ferguson, Kowalski, Mack, & Sabiston, 2014; Mosewich et al, 2013; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), four areas are being overlooked: (1) adolescent women athletes, (2) women's performance perceptions, (3) emotional well-being and (4) *body* self-compassion. Knowing that adolescence is especially a vital stage in human development, and that women tend to be more self-critical than men, the current research study focused on this crucial period during young women's development. Sport has a heightened focus on the body, which influences an athletes' body image. Body image concerns do not only affect athlete's psychological functioning, but might also affect how one performs or perceives her performance in sports (Donaldson and Ronan, 2006). However, taking a compassionate approach to the body might be key to creating more positive sports experiences for women and girls. Exploring the role of body self-compassion in adolescent women athletes' performance perceptions and emotional well-being could be a step in the right direction for fostering positive body image and enhancing the quality of participation in sports for young women.

1.1.2. PURPOSE

With the difficulties that adolescent women athletes may experience in sport, such as body image related concerns and performance evaluations, investigating the potential role of a positive psychological construct on perceived performance and emotional well-being could highlight a niche area of research that has the prospect of contributing to positive sport experiences. Hence, the purpose of my study was to explore the role of body self-compassion in adolescent women athletes' performance perceptions and emotional well-being.

1.2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research has shown the influence of body image in the lives of women and women athletes (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005; Duarte et al., 2015; Morrison et al., 2004), and many studies have found that body image is associated with self-compassion (Albertson et al., 2015; Duarte et al., 2015; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Also, other studies have shown a link between self-compassion and positive psychological functioning (Neff, 2003b; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). Furthermore, the connection between the body and sport performance cannot be ignored, as physical performance consumes a large part of sport. Thus, the following constructs – and how they are relevant to adolescent women athletes – were addressed in this literature review: body image, self-compassion, body self-compassion, performance perceptions, and emotional well-being.

1.2.1. BODY IMAGE

Body image can be defined as the picture the body forms in one's mind, which is the way in which the body appears to one's self (Schilder, 1950). This definition emphasizes the singularity of personifying body image to individuals. However, body image is also a reflection of interactions with others, which influences a person's opinion of his/her body, including thoughts, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with one's body (Grogan, 2008). Body image is highly subjective and a multifaceted construct that includes weight satisfaction, size perception accuracy, body satisfaction, body concern, and body esteem, amongst many other elements that influences an accurate description of an individual's body (Grogan, 2008). With body image being a multifaceted construct, a person could have positive and/or negative thoughts and feelings about his or her body.

Body dissatisfaction, one facet of body image, includes the negative evaluations of one's body size, weight, shape, and muscularity as compared to an ideal body, and is associated with increased levels of depression and anxiety (Albertson et al., 2014; Grogan, 2008). Grogan (2008) claims that body dissatisfaction could be evident in individuals as young as eight years old in the Western world. Body dissatisfaction could be at least partially attributed to significant developmental changes occurring during adolescence that include changes to physical appearance and self-image (Ricciardelli & Yager, 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). These changes often take place during puberty, when adolescents become more aware of their bodies (i.e. body weight and shape). Adolescence is a particularly vulnerable point in development because body image is predominantly noticeable while going through significant physical and psychological changes. Women are more susceptible to having a less positive experience during adolescent development compared to men because of a number of negatively perceived physical and psychological changes, such as increased body fat, widened hips, and an increased desire for social acceptability (Ricciardelli & Yager, 2016). Due to the developmental changes taking place during adolescence, Klump (2013) stated that many young women reported higher levels of body dissatisfaction and poorer self-image during this developmental period because of being preoccupied with their bodies.

From a Social Comparison Theory perspective, women often evaluate their appearance by comparing themselves to cultural ideals presented in the media (Festinger, 1954). Social comparisons could result in body and appearance dissatisfaction. A test of social comparison on body image evaluation and investment among adolescents found that social comparison was a significant predictor of body image evaluation and investment, such as self-esteem and physical appearance (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). Specifically, engaging in social comparison

was negatively related to body image evaluation (i.e., appearance self-esteem and body satisfaction), and positively related to body image investment (i.e., weight loss and weight control practices). These findings suggest that social comparisons may have an effect on body-image evaluation and investment in adolescents (Morrison et al., 2004).

A study on body image and eating disorders among 320 female athletes between the ages of 17 and 30 years found that females competing in leanness-focused sports (e.g. rhythmic gymnastics, featherweight and lightweight boxing, judo, lightweight rowing) reported engaging in more disordered eating patterns when compared to female athletes competing in non-leanness focused sports (e.g., football, soccer, hockey, water polo, heavyweight rowing; Kong & Harris, 2015). The study also reported that a large proportion of the participants in the leanness-focused sports competing at elite levels experienced pressure to maintain low body weight or lean physiques from their coaches, which contributes to body dissatisfaction among the athletes (Kong & Harris, 2015). Although a larger proportion of athletes in the leanness-focused sports experienced body weight pressure, non-leanness focused sports also experienced body image pressures. Being preoccupied with one's body is related to social physique anxiety and objectified body consciousness in women (Mosewich et al., 2013). Women's heightened focus on the body takes attention away from other aspects of life. For instance, being preoccupied with the body in a competitive sport environment where more emphasis could be placed on improving one's performance and developing one's skills may be detrimental to one's success in sports. Perhaps in response to the pressures and evaluations placed on women athletes, a growing area of research has focused on extending understanding and kindness towards the self. Self-compassion is associated with positive body image, and a growing body of research suggests that

it may have promise for women athletes' sport experiences (Albertson et al., 2015; Ferguson et al., 2014; Mosewich et al., 2013; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).

1.2.2. SELF-COMPASSION

Similar to having compassion towards others, self-compassion entails being compassionate and understanding to oneself in times of personal failures, and embracing all aspects of one's experiences with kindness (Neff, 2003a, 2003b). According to Neff (2003a), self-compassion is comprised of three components, which include self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. She describes self-kindness as being kind and understanding to oneself during painful experiences or failures, rather than being overly self-critical. Common humanity involves recognizing that imperfections are a part of the shared human experience and seeing each experience, regardless of the difficulty, as connecting rather than isolating (Neff, 2003a). The final component of self-compassion is mindfulness, which Neff describes as “a balanced state of awareness that avoids the extremes of over-identification and disassociation with experience and entails the clear seeing and acceptance of mental and emotional phenomena as it arises” (p. 88). The three components of self-compassion are linked together and interact with one another to establish a self-compassionate mindset.

Self-compassion benefits a person when going through times of failures and shortcomings, by allowing an individual to show kindness to him/herself rather than being overly self-critical (Neff, 2003a). Self-compassion includes having knowledge and clarity about one's limitations, and identifying and expressing emotions in a psychologically adaptive way. In other words, people do not have to hide their failures and shortcomings from themselves in order to avoid harsh self-judgments (Neff, 2003a). Self-compassion has also gained increased research attention because of its association with psychological health (Albertson et al., 2015). Many

studies on self-compassion suggest that a compassionate approach towards the self is positively related to desired outcomes, such as life satisfaction and intrinsic motivation, and negatively related to undesired outcomes, such as anxiety and depression (Wasylikiw, MacKinnon & MacLellan, 2012).

Neff and McGehee (2010) proposed that self-compassion could be highly relevant to the adolescent experience. Their study examined the role of self-compassion on the psychological health of adolescents, and they predicted findings similar to those that have been found in adult samples boasting psychological health associations with self-compassion. Adolescents (235 males and female) and young adults (287 males and females) participated in the study. Findings showed that self-compassion levels were similar between the adolescents and young adults. Furthermore, participants who were more self-compassionate reported less depression and anxiety, suggesting that self-compassion may be a significant predictor of mental health in both adolescents and young adults. Neff and McGehee (2010) claim that the self-kindness component and associated feelings of self-acceptance inherent to self-compassion should reduce harsh judgments in both adolescents and adults. Additionally, the mindful aspect of self-compassion should help prevent adolescents from ruminating and having pessimistic thoughts and emotions. This shows the relevance of self-compassion in the lives of adolescents.

Self-compassion is emerging as a potential resource for young women in sports, as it may provide them with the avenues needed to excel psychologically and maneuver through the evaluative aspects of their experiences as athletes (Ferguson et al., 2014; Mosewich et al., 2013). A seven-day self-compassion intervention that focused on processing negative events in sport was found to be successful in a group of varsity women athletes (Mosewich et al., 2013). The intervention consisted of a psychoeducation component and writing exercises completed over a

week, designed to target self-compassion, self-criticism, rumination, and concern over mistakes. This study included 60 women athletes (self-compassion intervention $n = 31$; attention control group $n = 29$) and found that promoting a self-compassionate mind frame through psychoeducation and writing exercises had the potential to help women athletes manage self-criticism, rumination, and concern over mistakes. More specifically, the researchers found that the intervention group had higher levels of self-compassion and lower levels of self-criticism, rumination, and concern over mistakes when compared to the control group (Mosewich et al., 2013). The study primarily focused on teaching athletes a self-compassionate frame of mind to cope with difficult events experienced in sport. In doing so, participants were encouraged to use the components of self-compassion and apply them to those negative situations. Being mindfully aware of difficult experiences in sport, realizing that other athletes experience similar hardships, and alleviating feelings of failure with the underlying kindness of self-compassion may help athletes in a competitive sports environment.

A study by Ferguson et al. (2014) explored the relationship between self-compassion and eudaimonic well-being (i.e., striving for human potential) among young women athletes. The mixed methods study included 83 women athletes between the ages of 16 and 25 years who participated in a variety of sports at different levels of competition. In the quantitative phase, participants completed measures of self-compassion, eudaimonic well-being, passivity, responsibility, initiative and self-determination. The researchers found that self-compassion was positively correlated with eudaimonic well-being. Both constructs were also positively related to initiative, self-determination and responsibility, while negatively related to passivity in young women athletes (Ferguson et al., 2014). The positive relationship between self-compassion and

eudaimonic well-being illustrates the role a compassionate approach to the self might play in one's well-being; potentially by reducing passivity and taking initiative.

To further understand the relationship between self-compassion and eudaimonic well-being, Ferguson et al. (2014) qualitatively explored the role self-compassion may play in psychological flourishing, and if and when self-compassion might be useful in sports. Ferguson et al. (2014) included 11 young women athletes for one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions on personal challenges or difficult times in sports. Although some participants reported that being self-compassionate may not always be in their best interest as it may “let them off the hook” and become complacent in sport, the participants recognized that self-compassion might be useful during difficult times in sports and has the potential for use as a personal resource (Ferguson et al., 2014). Four themes emerged as to how self-compassion may be useful to flourish in sport; by promoting positivity, perseverance, and responsibility, as well as decreasing rumination. The finding that self-compassion may help athletes flourish in their sport further suggests that athletes can engage in evaluating their difficult times, rather than overtly criticizing themselves. These results support previous findings on the usefulness of self-compassion for women athletes and its potential to serve as a resource for sport-related issues (Mosewich et al., 2013).

A recent study by Wasyliw et al. (2012) explored the link between self-compassion and university women's body image concerns. One hundred and forty-two female undergraduates participated in the study by completing measures of self-compassion, self-esteem, and body image. The results indicated that body image was positively related to self-compassion and self-esteem. Women who reported being satisfied with their physical selves also reported being more self-compassionate. Moreover, their findings suggested that women who reported being self-

compassionate were less preoccupied with their bodies, had fewer concerns about their weight, and showed greater appreciation towards their physical selves (Wasylikiw et al., 2012). Upon further analysis on the nature of the relationship between self-compassion and body image, specifically examining the subscales of the self-compassion measure that reflect the components of self-compassion, women who reported being more judgmental and critical of themselves experienced more body preoccupation than women who reported being less critical and judgmental. This is particularly important as it suggests that the more kindness one shows to the physical self, the less negatively engrossed one would be with the body.

An intervention study where women participated in self-compassion meditation training indicated that increased levels of self-compassion significantly decreased body dissatisfaction (Albertson et al., 2015). Two hundred and twenty-eight women between the ages of 18 and 60 participated in this study and were randomly assigned to a waitlist control or intervention group. The intervention group participated in a three-week self-compassion meditation program and completed online surveys of self-compassion, body dissatisfaction, body shame, and self-worth before and after the meditation program. The self-compassion meditation program consisted of listening to podcasts containing 20-minute self-compassion meditations. The results suggested that self-compassion meditation training positively impacted the women's body image and self-compassion. Specifically, women in the self-compassion meditation program experienced higher levels of self-compassion and body appreciation, as well as lower levels of body dissatisfaction, body shame, and self-worth based on appearance compared to the control group (Albertson et al., 2015). These findings highlight a critical link between self-compassion and body image, and they suggest that taking a compassionate approach to one's body may be a viable strategy for overcoming some of the challenges related to body image in women.

1.2.3. BODY SELF-COMPASSION

An extensive amount of literature has found that self-compassion is associated with body image in adults (Albertson et al., 2015; Duarte et al., 2015; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). These studies have shown that the more self-compassionate people are, the less self-critical they are about their bodies and the less negative feelings they have towards their bodies. The notion of taking a compassionate approach to the self and its relationship with body image suggests that a compassionate approach to the body in particular may be an important area for further consideration. Berry et al. (2010) proposed the phenomenon body self-compassion. Using an empirical phenomenology, the researchers explored the experiences of young adult women exercisers' body self-compassion. Participants in their study were five women exercisers between the ages of 23 and 29 years who self-identified as being more understanding and less judgmental towards their bodies, and who were willing to describe instances where they used positive attitudes towards their body. Through one-on-one interviews and a focus group, participants described in detail their experiences of body self-compassion. Three essential structures emerged based on the women's descriptions of their body self-compassion: appreciating one's unique body, taking ownership of one's body, and engaging in less social comparison (Berry et al., 2010). A possible fourth facilitating structure was also introduced, which was the importance of others. As a result of the essential structures, Berry et al. proposed body self-compassion "as a kind, understanding and nonjudgmental attitude individuals extend towards their body in response to their perceived physical imperfections, limitations, and failures" (p. 295).

Berry et al. (2010) argue that body self-compassion has similar, yet distinct, components to the more general self-compassion construct. For instance, appreciating one's unique body

appears to be similar to self-kindness. That is, rather than trying to conform to a standard of beauty, the women acknowledged that there are many perspectives to beauty and the sense of appreciating one's own body allowed them to feel empowered. In addition, by being kind to themselves rather than being overly critical of their bodies, some of the women could explore and understand their body's limitations. Taking ownership of one's body is consistent with positive psychological functioning that can be associated with self-compassion. An important aspect of being compassionate towards one's body was described by the women "as learning about their bodies and developing their knowledge of their bodies' structure and function" (Berry et al., 2010, p. 301). This is like the mindfulness component of self-compassion as it allows one to be aware of one's body, while also learning from it. Furthermore, by engaging in less social comparison, such as unrealistic standards and comparisons to other women's bodies, one can develop a positive attitude towards her body, which is not dependent on how one is measured up to others. Common humanity was evident by some of the women identifying important others, such as role models, family members, and teammates, whose stories about their body experiences made them more relatable. The women identified that having a sense of support from others facilitated their body self-compassion experience. Overall, developing a compassionate approach towards one's body reduces the focus on evaluation, which is an inherent feature of self-compassion (Neff, 2003a).

Body self-compassion is unique in comparison to other body-related constructs such as body appreciation. One unique aspect of body self-compassion is that it might be described as a coping method for issues directly related to the body (Berry et al., 2010). Moreover, whereas other body-related constructs consider *either* the positive or negative thoughts and feelings about the body, body self-compassion allows for *both* negative and positive feelings towards one's

body to exist as part of appreciating one's unique body despite its flaws or limitations. It allows one to recognize that the body is not without its flaws and has its strengths. As part of being compassionate to the body, one must respect all aspects of the body. Therefore, one can acknowledge negative feelings towards the body, but not over identify with them, which stems particularly from the mindfulness component of self-compassion (Berry et al., 2010). Body appreciation on the other hand, is the extent to which women like, accept, and respect their bodies despite weight, shape, and imperfections. Body appreciation is a psychological strength that has been linked to optimism and life satisfaction (Avalos et al., 2005). In the development of the Body Appreciation Scale, Avalos et al. (2005) found that the Body Appreciation Scale contained aspects central to positive body image such as positive body attitudes, cognitions, and behaviours.

Compared to other body-related constructs such as body appreciation and body satisfaction, body self-compassion does not simply focus on how satisfied one is with her body. Instead, body self-compassion combines three essential structures that create a coping process to allow one to acknowledge the positive and negative feelings towards one's body (Berry et al., 2010). Many of the issues related to the body that were identified in Berry et al.'s (2010) study are similar to those that have been identified by women athletes in past studies (Killham, 2014; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). For example, social comparison to ideal standards, body dissatisfaction, and self-criticism are issues that have been identified as relevant body-related challenges in previous literature. Taking a compassionate approach to the body may be highly valuable for women athletes as a personal resource that can be developed and used as a type of coping process for various body-related concerns in sports. Although Berry et al. (2010) explored body self-compassion among women exercisers, the phenomenon may be relevant to

young women *athletes* because of similarities in the contexts of exercise and sport. Furthermore, it may be particularly relevant given the heightened focus on the body in sport. Women athletes may face difficulties or may struggle with their body image because of the various physical-related requirements in their sport and demands placed on the body to train and compete.

1.2.4. PERFORMANCE PERCEPTIONS

Engaging in competitive sports means that one is inevitably being evaluated – both by the self and others – on one’s skills and performance during training and competitions. Evaluation of performance could originate from coaches, parents, peers, and spectators, which may influence a person’s confidence in her abilities as a competitive athlete. Although some evaluations may have a more objective process with outcome evaluations such as “you had four rebounds” and “your jump height was lower than usual”, athletes may become critical when analyzing their own performance. Horn and Hasbrook (1987) found that a sample of adolescent (boys and girls) soccer players engaged in both peer comparison and internal standards of evaluation to determine their perceived competence or self-confidence. A meta-analysis by Woodman and Hardy (2003) on the relative impact of self-confidence and cognitive anxiety on sport performance revealed that self-confidence (i.e. self-attitude, morale) was more strongly related to sport performance than cognitive anxiety (i.e., negative expectations, cognitive concerns about the situation at hand, and potential consequences). The sex of an athlete was also a significant moderating variable for the relationship between self-confidence and performance, with men showing more self-confidence in sport than women. This finding supports previous studies on sport performance and psychological functioning in which women athletes are less self-confident in competitive sports than men, and women tend to experience more self-criticism and rumination-repetitive negative emotional thoughts than men (Albertson et al., 2015; Krane &

Williams, 1994; Lox et al., 2014). Overall, these findings suggest that women athletes' confidence and self-attitude may have an impact on how they perceive their competence and performance.

Performance perceptions are significantly understudied in sport psychology research, which has resulted in unclear direction on the conceptualization of sport performance. Perceptions of performance are important to understand as they might impact one's actual performance, since perceptions indicate how a person views their abilities and examines their successes or failures (Woodman & Hardy, 2003). Stemming from Butler's (1996) conceptualization of sport performance and Butler's (1997) perceived competence of daily performance evaluation, performance perceptions will be defined in the current study *as the views and cognitions that athletes attribute to their performance in sport during a competition or in training that increases or decreases perceived competence*. The subjectivity afforded by this definition of performance perceptions emphasizes athletes' meanings and experiences about how certain factors influence performance perceptions. For instance, the perception an athlete has about her body in sport is critical because it could influence how she plays that sport. Donaldson and Ronan (2006) found that a higher level of participation in sports was related to enhanced emotional well-being and perceived competence to perform. The connection between sport participation and perceived competence highlights the important role that perception plays in sport and how perceptions could influence performance and well-being. Although subjective, perceived competence, or one's performance perception in sport, is an area that should be further explored. Athletes' emotional states – whether they be positive or negative – are also likely to be connected to performance perceptions. Working to better understand athletes' performance

perceptions may provide insight into athletes' frame of mind on performance goals and/or expectations as well as their emotional well-being.

1.2.5. EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

As previously stated, emotional well-being is the positive and negative affect that reflects a person's emotional state at a point in time (Larsen & Prizmic, 2008). Having a positive emotional state encourages psychological cognitions related to optimism and subjective well-being. Sport participation may influence one's emotional well-being. Children who participate in sports tend to report more positive affect and well-being than those who do not participate in sports (Findlay & Copland 2008). This is partly because physical activity has been found to improve moods and reduce anxiety. Steptoe and Butler (1996) suggest that participating in sports and recreational activities is associated with positive emotional and psychological states. Engaging in competitive sports has its benefits, and young women report a variety of goals and reasons for participating in sports such as, skill development, creativity, building meaningful relationships, and constant growth and development (Ferguson et al., 2014). Sport has the potential of playing an important role in promoting positive development in adolescence by increasing attributes for social growth and development (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). Participation in sport programs also provides an avenue for positive skill development and body confidence. However, boys tend to engage in more sports and vigorous recreational activities than girls, and girls are more likely than boys to be classified as emotionally distressed on general health (Steptoe & Butler, 1996). Steptoe and Butler's (1996) findings suggest that women athletes' emotional well-being needs attention.

Donaldson and Ronan (2006) tested if there was a relationship between sport participation and young adolescents' emotional well-being by examining 203 adolescents with

an average age of 12 years and 4 months. Participants self-reported social emotional development, behavioural well-being, and sport participation. It was found that a higher level of participation in sports was related to enhanced emotional and behavioural well-being, as well as perceived competence. Although adolescents may not be at their peak performance in sport, participants who had a higher perceived competence in sports reported fewer emotional and behavioural problems (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006). This relationship between perceived competence and emotional well-being highlights the significant role perceptions plays in the lives of athletes.

Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009) explored 22 adolescent competitive swimmers' positive and negative developmental experiences in sport ($n = 5$ males and 17 females). The researchers asked participants two primary questions and other probing questions during interviews, which focused directly on each participant's positive and negative developmental experiences. The authors found that the athletes were challenged by many factors in sport, such as demanding commitments, discipline and perseverance, social norms, work ethic, pressure from coaches, and high expectations (Fraser-Thomas and Côté, 2009). The athletes also reported having meaningful peer and adult relationships, experiencing a sense of community, overcoming stress, and developing resilience. However, in addition to many identified positive experiences in sport, negative experiences were also discussed. The swimmers were negatively influenced by their peers in terms of poor work ethic when others skipped practice, jealousy and negativity towards each other, and at times experienced a difficult psychological environment due to excessive stress that is generally experienced in sport. These seemingly conflicting findings highlight both the positive and negative impacts that sport can have on athletes' emotional well-being. Having resources to manage the difficult aspects of sport is therefore important for athletes' well-being.

When one uses positive emotions to deal with difficulties, they are better able to cope with such difficulties than when negative emotions are used. Positive emotion is associated with expanded capacity for thinking, improved coping, and an upward spiral towards emotional well-being (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Self-compassion, which is based on feelings of care and non-judgmental understanding during times of failures, has been found to have similar tendencies as a potential coping resource. By treating oneself kindly, accepting that as humans it is our nature to not be perfect, and focusing on the interconnected phases of life experiences, this can help reduce self-evaluative anxiety (Neff et al., 2007).

In a study by Neff et al. (2007), 91 undergraduates (men and women) participated in a mock job interview scenario to examine if self-compassion protects against self-evaluative anxiety. Individuals were asked to write down their greatest weakness and then write answers to two other job interview questions for five minutes. Participants were then asked to complete measures of self-compassion, negative affect, and anxiety. The authors found that self-compassion was significantly associated with less anxiety after considering one's greatest weakness (Neff et al., 2007). Also, participants' references to self and others when writing about their greatest weakness differed based on self-compassion levels; that is, higher levels of self-compassion helped to buffer against anxiety unlike those with lower levels of self-compassion. The researchers also examined whether changes in self-compassion are linked to changes in well-being using the Gestalt two-chair dialogue – an intervention that helps participants in challenging, maladaptive, self-critical beliefs and allowing them to become more empathic towards themselves. Results suggested that participants who experienced an increase in self-compassion also experienced an increase in social connectedness and decreased self-criticism, depression, rumination, thought suppression, and anxiety. These findings suggest that self-

compassion helps protect against self-evaluative anxiety and negative affectivity as there is a lesser need to avoid painful cognitions, resulting in adaptive psychological functioning.

1.3. MOVING FORWARD

Given the connection between athletes' physical self (i.e., body image, performance demands) and various aspects of psychological well-being (Albertson et al., 2015; Ferguson et al., 2014), having compassion for one's body might influence one's performance, thoughts, self-attitudes, and well-being. To the best of my knowledge, only one published study has explored the notion of taking a compassionate approach to one's body, and research is needed to consider if body self-compassion may be relevant for women athletes given the heightened focus on the physical self in sport. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of body self-compassion in adolescent women athletes' performance perceptions and emotional well-being. Exploring if a kind and understanding approach to one's physical self is useful for adolescent women athletes may suggest resources that are useful in competitive sports to nurture athletes' sport experiences.

CHAPTER 2

2.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

As a researcher, my philosophical worldview is a social constructivist. A constructivist philosophical worldview embraces a commitment to multiple realities and meanings, and typically employs qualitative research designs (Creswell, 2013). As such, a qualitative strategy of inquiry was employed for the purpose of this study. Because the goal of this study was to understand adolescent women athletes' unique experiences of the body, performance, and well-being in sport, it was important to not make assumptions, generalizations, or categorize ideas, but rather to ask open-ended questions so that participants can construct and share meanings (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research allows the researcher to interpret and develop patterns of meanings of what participants infer about the world. The goal of using a qualitative research design is to rely on the views that each participant has on the phenomenon being discussed; and this allowed me to look for the complexities of each point of view rather than simply narrowing the meanings of my interactions with participants (Creswell, 2013). In order to understand the complexity of each participants' shared meaning, my intent as a qualitative researcher was to co-construct meanings of experiences by considering my interactions with each participant. By doing so, I attempted to make sense of the meanings the participants have about body self-compassion and its role on their perceived performance and emotional well-being in sport.

2.1.1. NARRATIVE

Narrative inquiry is defined as the way human beings make sense of random experiences by the imposition of story structures (Bell, 2002). Individual experiences are expressed in lived and told stories as a spoken or written text to give an account of an event or series of events or a phenomenon. In line with Smith and Sparkes' (2009a) definitions of narrative inquiry

terminology, and for the purposes of my research, *story* will refer to the tales participants tell, while *narrative* will refer to properties such as structures, tellability, thematic content, consequences and sequences of speech act that comprise stories. Smith and Sparkes (2009a) state that there are basic assumptions that inform the process of a narrative inquiry,

...in narrative inquiry *meaning is basic to being human and being human entails actively constructing meaning... meaning is created through narrative, and is a storied effort and achievement... we are relational beings, and narratives and meanings are achieved within relationships... narratives are conceptualised as both personal and social... selves and identities are constituted through narratives, and people do and perform storied selves and narrative identities relationally. Being human is to live in and through time, and narrative is a primary way of organizing our experience of temporality... the body is a storyteller, and narratives are embodied* (pp. 3-5).

A narrative study allows the researcher to gather data from a collection of stories, by reporting and ordering the meanings of individual experiences (Creswell, 2013). Narrative studies are best suited for detailing the stories of the lives of individuals, and understanding what each story can reveal about the individual. It goes beyond simply telling stories, but into an analytic examination of the assumptions that each story represents (Bell, 2002). Narrative focuses on the human experience by shedding light on individual identities, and how they may see themselves. Narrative permits a researcher to present rich and complex stories and experiences in a holistic manner, allowing for an interpretation of the underlying assumptions and insights that the story illustrates (Bell, 2002). Narrative style of inquiry was used to understand the potential role of body self-compassion in adolescent women athletes' performance perceptions and emotional well-being. Narrative provided me with the inquiry approach to collect in-depth details of individuals' meanings and experiences through stories. Given that each athlete had unique experiences to retell, my goal as a researcher was to understand each experience and simultaneously gather meanings from them. The data revealed

the meanings the athletes attach to body self-compassion in the context of sport, their performance, and emotional well-being.

The use of narrative is becoming more popular in sport and exercise psychology research. Smith and Sparkes (2009b) highlight four points that make narrative inquiry relevant in this field, and for my research in particular. First, stories and the analysis of stories can breathe meaning into lived experiences because individuals try to make experiences meaningful and thus, develop behaviour from these meanings. This is true in sport because an athlete can explore the meanings that she has formed over the years, which can contextualize experiences for the researcher to analyze such meanings. In my research, this is especially relevant because understanding the lived experiences of body self-compassion amongst the participants provided a pool of narratives to draw meanings. Second, narrative inquiry can inform the personal and social aspects of our lives by considering how our society and culture shape our activities and health behaviours. This provides a level of shared response towards people and their behaviour, which is similar to the common humanity component of self-compassion and allows me to understand the level to which social interactions and society play a role in each participants' experiences. Third, narrative inquiry embodies the complexity of being human through lived experiences by allowing for subjectivity, intentions, and patterns of reasoning to find meanings in experiences. The process of interviewing, which was included in the current study, creates an avenue to retain the complexity and messiness that gives room to subjectivity through each individual's thoughts and emotions. Lastly, stories have the capacity to take care of people by encouraging behaviours that are valuable in sport such as social and emotional support. The more stories people have, the more opportunities they have to enhance themselves and others

around them. By telling their stories, the participants had the opportunity to not only learn from their experiences, but also improve themselves by analyzing these experiences.

Very few studies have utilized a narrative strategy of inquiry in sport psychology research (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b), which limits the pool of narratives that may shape athletes' experiences. By conducting this research, the field of sport psychology and the meanings that shape athletes' experiences can be expanded. In the sport context, sharing narratives can provide a certain level of understanding into experiences that have remained unexplained, and help expand the opportunities for an athlete to fit their lived experiences into a more appropriate pool of narratives (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b).

2.1.2. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As earlier stated, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of body self-compassion in women athletes' performance perceptions and emotional well-being. The primary goal of this research was to answer my central research question, which is: What is the role of body self-compassion in performance perceptions and emotional well-being of adolescent women athletes? To understand the role body self-compassion plays in performance perceptions and emotional well-being, it is important to understand how adolescent women athletes describe body self-compassion. Hence, the secondary goal of this study is to answer the question: How do adolescent women athletes describe body self-compassion?

2.1.3. PARTICIPANTS

Seven adolescent women athletes were recruited for this study. The use of the word "women" over "females" was purposeful in my effort to embrace the self-identification of a gender over a biological sex level. Three of the women athletes were 14 years old, two were 15, one was 16, and another was 17. The sports represented were soccer, swimming, badminton,

basketball, volleyball, and softball. All the women were currently participating and had participated competitively in their sport within the last year. Two types of sampling methods were used during the course of this study. One of the sampling methods, purposeful sampling, is a process where the researcher selects those participants that can best answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Marshall, 1996). The second type of sampling was snowball sampling, which draws on referrals from people who know of others that qualify to participate in the research (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). This method allowed for recruiting individuals who were not easily accessible through the initial sampling strategy. As depth of information and not breadth was required for this qualitative research, multiple avenues for data generation were used to provide rich data (Creswell, 2013). The inclusion criteria were: (a) middle to older adolescent women between the ages of 14 and 17 years, and (b) currently participating and have participated in an individual or team competitive sport in the past year. Because of maturation and identity formation during adolescence, adolescents tend to be harder on themselves, or feel isolated because of the inability to integrate their own experiences with those of others (Neff & McGehee, 2010). As such, this is likely a developmental stage where the components of self-compassion could be useful.

Adolescents are able to think of possibilities and relativities as they go through the different phases of adolescence (Bluth & Blanthon, 2014), and they have the capacity for critical thinking, which increases their ability to formulate their own beliefs and values (Marcia, 1980). With their capacity to formulate their own beliefs, middle to older adolescents are at a developmental level where they are able to comprehend questions at the level needed for this study. For the purpose of this study, sport was defined as “an activity that involves two or more participants engaging for the purpose of competition. Sport involves formal rules and

procedures, requires tactics and strategies, specialized neuromuscular skills and a high degree of difficulty and effort” (Ifedi, 2008, p. 15). These inclusion criteria are similar to those used in previous sport psychology (e.g., Sutherland et al., 2014) and graduate level research at the University of Saskatchewan (e.g., Killham, 2014).

2.2. PROCEDURE

2.2.1. RECRUITMENT

After receiving ethical approval from the University of Saskatchewan (see Appendix A), participants were recruited via social media advertisements and posters (see Appendix B) from sport clubs across Saskatchewan. Participants expressed interest in the study by contacting me, and those participants that qualified to participate were provided with assent (see Appendix C) and consent forms (see Appendix D & E). Athletes and/or athletes' parents/legal guardians (for those participants under 16 years) indicated their consent to participate in the study by signing consent forms and providing verbal assent (for those participants 16 years and older).

2.2.2. DATA GENERATION

As this was a narrative study, a sense of order established from contents and stories was used to understand body self-compassion across three phases of research and two data generation methods; semi-structured interviews and journaling (Hays & Singh, 2012).

2.2.2.1. Phase One: One-on-One Interviews

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews place an emphasis on the participant's experiences and responses. The specific goal of the phase one interview was to introduce body self-compassion to the athletes, as well as discuss their experiences of the phenomenon in their varying sports. Using semi-structured interviews created an avenue for flexibility during the interviewing process, where I did not have to follow an overly structured format, but had an

open-ended style conversation with guiding questions. During the interviews, I had the opportunity to let each participant's experience and stories guide my probing questions. This allowed for a more genuine interaction and response to the athlete's experiences, and subsequently better understanding of the narratives to formulate meanings. As each account was unique to the individual, this style of interviewing is governed by the participant's voice to provide a richer picture of the body self-compassion phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012).

After obtaining informed consent, interviews were scheduled with participants. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in the Social Behavioural Sciences Lab at the University of Saskatchewan or at a location convenient for the participant. The Social Behavioural Sciences Lab is located in the Physical Activity Complex on campus. At the start of the interview, participants were asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F). I established rapport with participants to make them feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with me by relating to them. This was done by telling the participants something interesting about me and asking them to tell me something interesting about them. For instance, I told one of the participants that I sing in a choir, and she told me that she plays a musical instrument – piano. After creating an environment conducive to story-telling, participants were invited to discuss their sport involvement, introduced to self-compassion (participants watched a short video by Dr. Kristin Neff about self-compassion – an approach used in previous research; Ferguson et al., 2014; Sutherland et al., 2014), and body self-compassion was discussed. Participants were provided with brief handouts on self-compassion to facilitate comprehension of these concepts for the remainder of the interview. In an attempt to ascertain an understanding of body self-compassion for these adolescents, each participant was asked to explain and define what body self-compassion meant to her after watching Neff's self-

compassion video (i.e., “what would you say being compassionate to your *body* in particular would be?”). It is important to note that the athletes were only provided with Berry et al.’s (2010) definition of body self-compassion after establishing their own meanings of the phenomenon (i.e., “a kind, understanding and nonjudgmental attitude individuals extend towards their body in response to their perceived physical imperfections, limitations, and failures” (p. 295)). The athletes were given the opportunity to modify their definitions of body self-compassion after introducing Berry et al.’s (2010) definition. Some of athletes included one or two more phrases in their definitions, while others made no changes to their original definitions as they felt their own definitions captured the essence of Berry et al.’s (2010). Thus, the participant’s definition contained elements of Berry et al.’s (2010) conceptualization of body self-compassion, suggesting a level of understanding of the phenomenon. Each participant’s definition of body self-compassion was written into her corresponding journal to serve as a guiding definition for phase two data generation (i.e., when journaling about compassionate body experiences). Sample interview questions in phase one included:

1. Tell me about your sports background.
 - a. When did your interest in sports first begin?
 - b. What level do you play?
 - c. How long have you played at your level?
2. Are you familiar with the concept of self-compassion?
3. Now that you have been introduced to body self-compassion, do you see yourself as being compassionate to your body?
 - a. If so what does it look like, if not why not?
 - b. Can you tell me about a time when you were compassionate towards your body?

See Appendix F for the full semi-structured interview guide. All interviews were audio-recorded.

2.2.2.2. Phase Two: Journaling

Given that some aspects of the current study may be difficult for adolescents to openly discuss (e.g., body image, performance evaluations, emotions), journaling provided a less invasive method for data generation. Journaling can help provide more understanding about a phenomenon by allowing participants to reveal experiences that they may not have identified in a face-to-face interview. Topics that participants may not feel comfortable sharing verbally can be expressed in journals, which will provide more in-depth information about the participant's experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). Journaling also highlights the ability to show change over a certain period while displaying the context of the experiences. By using two forms of data generation, I was able to generate more richness in the accounts of each athlete's narrative of body self-compassion, performance perceptions, and emotional well-being.

Following the interviews in phase one, participants were provided with journals to write about their experiences for a two-week duration. Each participant's definition was included in the first page of her journal, which was a mixture of self-definition and Berry et al.'s (2010) definition. Participants were invited to use the journals to document information on moments that being body self-compassionate (or lack thereof) played a role in their sport performance and their emotional state. Journaling provided an ongoing and personal opportunity for participants to reflect on their daily experiences and how being compassionate to the body may or may not influence perceived performance and emotional well-being. These journal entries focused on a reflective process and structured each participant's story, to provide information on personal

meanings in varying situations (Creswell, 2013). A sample instruction that was given to participants includes:

“Please spend the next two weeks keeping a journal about your experiences with being compassionate, or not compassionate, to your body in sport. Try to focus on times during training or competitions where your emotions and attitudes of your performance during games were a result of being/not being body self-compassionate.”

See Appendix G for full journaling instructions, which were provided to participants at the end of their first one-on-one interview. Participants were sent reminder emails once a week to write in their journals (see Appendix H), and were encouraged to journal three to five entries of their experiences. Participants were encouraged, but not expected, to enter a journal entry daily, and the amount of detail entered was at the participant’s discretion. However, participants were encouraged to be as detailed about their experiences as possible to provide more context for discussion in their second one-on-one interview. After the period of journaling, participants returned for another one-on-one interview to discuss the process and the contents of their journal entries. All the participants had a minimum of three journal entries for discussion.

2.2.2.3. Phase Three: Follow-up Interviews

The goal of the second one-on-one interview was to review and discuss the participants’ journal entries. Participants were asked to bring their journals to the interview and discuss as much information they like, and were encouraged to share three to five key experiences that focus on body self-compassion (or lack thereof), performance, and emotional well-being. This was an opportunity to collect detailed information on participants’ experiences of body self-compassion in sport. Questions in this phase of data generation were developed from discussions in the initial interview and evolved from the discussions that transpired when sharing

the participants' journal entries (see Appendix I for full interview guide). Sample questions included:

1. How did you find the journaling process? Did you find it beneficial, frustrating, helpful, difficult, or emotional?
2. Were you able to express your emotions and thoughts fully while using the journal?
3. How, if at all, did your attitude toward your body influence how you thought you performed during a competition?
4. Please tell me about the emotions that arose when you wrote about this experience, and now that you are discussing the experience.
5. How did being compassionate (or *not* being compassionate) to your body influence your training and/or competition?

See Appendix H for the full interview guide. All interviews were audio-recorded.

2.2.2.4. Exit Procedures

At the end of the second interviews, participants underwent standardized exit procedures. This included thanking them for their time and contributions, reassuring them of confidentiality, and providing each participant with my contact information should they have any questions. Participants were asked if they would like a copy of the results, and were provided a transcript release form (see Appendix J for full exit package).

2.2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

A holistic manner of narrative analysis was used to understand themes from each individual and from the data set as a whole. The stories collected from the interviews and journal entries were collated and reorganized in sequential order into a framework of the key elements of each story to create a *restory* (Creswell, 2013). A narrative analysis allowed me to organize participants' stories into sequences, by summarizing the main plot of each narrative.

More specifically, my data analysis followed Hays and Singh's (2012) six steps for qualitative data analysis to analyze the interviews and some of the journal entries. First, memoing and summarizing took place, which is the initial analysis and began after phase one (i.e., initial one-on-one interview) of data generation. Memos can be used to summarize preliminary findings and provides an initial narrative to be expanded on throughout data generation and analysis. Second, organizing the text comprises transcribing the one-on-one interviews and expanding upon my interview notes. Data management was also created at this step such as transcription procedures, filing, and tracking systems. Preliminary data analysis was ongoing throughout data generation, as I did not wait to have all of my data to begin the analysis process. Third, the transcribed text and selected journal data were coded to allow each data set to evolve based on meanings derived from experiences. Salient quotes and key phrases were identified during this coding process. Fourth, themes and patterns that emerged from similarities, frequency and sequence of events, co-occurrence of codes and corroborations were identified. The coding system used in the third step helped generate themes, and permitted for a creative process of data analysis to help identify and create relationships when constructing themes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Fifth, a codebook to document a list of codes, sub codes, and patterns used was created, alongside their definitions and descriptions. Last, identified patterns and themes from one-on-one interviews and journals were brought together and examined to develop narratives. By constructing the narratives, I analyzed how these themes related back to my research questions and to each other.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, after which some minor grammatical changes were made to improve the flow. All participants were sent their interview transcripts for member checking and only one participant made changes to hers; others approved the transcripts without

corrections. Transcribed interviews were reviewed and analyzed on paper for patterns and themes and interpreted directly as presented (Creswell, 2014). NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software) was also used for organization of codes and themes. The first one-on-one interviews primarily provided a means to answer my secondary research question: “how do adolescent women athletes describe body self-compassion?” Following the first interviews, I reviewed the meanings participants attributed to body self-compassion and began informing this research question. The journals and second one-on-one interviews were primarily aligned in an attempt to answer my central research question: what is the role of body self-compassion in adolescent women athletes’ performance perceptions and emotional well-being? The journals allowed the participants to record their compassionate body experiences, while the second one-on-one interviews allowed them to construct meanings from and reflect on their experiences. Still, I allowed my analysis process to be open to having all the data (i.e. from phases one, two and three) inform both my central and secondary questions. Some of the journal entries were used as raw data and included in the analysis process. The entries that were chosen from the journals for inclusion in the analysis process were entries that supported certain stories told during the interviews, which were approved by the participants as being included as data. My understanding of the participants’ experiences and journal entries shaped my interpretations and meanings of the role of body self-compassion. These interpretations are thereby reflected in the findings section of this study.

To answer my central research question: “What is the role of body self-compassion in performance perceptions and the emotional well-being of adolescent women athletes?” and my secondary research question: “How do adolescent women athletes describe body self-compassion?” results of data analysis are organized around four themes and presented as

narratives. Presenting narratives helps the reader to understand the complexity of each individual's story, and reveals the subjectivity, feelings, and multi-layered nature of human experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Sparkes and Smith (2014) state that this style of data presentation allows the researcher to preserve the wealth of detail contained in each story.

2.3. *TRUSTWORTHINESS*

Given the qualitative research design of this study, validity was addressed in terms of the truthfulness of my findings, and specifically that the conclusions are based on the participants' voices. Trustworthiness is important in qualitative research, as it addresses why a study is worth paying attention to. Four criteria established by Guba (1981), which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, were used as a starting point to address the quality of this research. Credibility refers to how believable a study is by determining if conclusions make sense in a qualitative study. Thorough member checking, debriefing participants, triangulating methods, and establishing a structural corroboration by testing my interpretations were some efforts to strive for credibility in the current study. Establishing structural corroboration involves testing my interpretations against the documents used during data generation to avoid inconsistencies. Transferability is the extent to which findings can be applicable to other contexts and other participants. In qualitative research, transferability permits researchers to provide detailed descriptions of the research process. This allows the reader to make decisions about how the findings are applicable to them and in their settings. Collecting thick and descriptive data through interviews and journals allowed for comparison from this context to other contexts (Guba, 1981). Through the prolonged engagement with my participants (three study phases) and generation of rich data, I intended to provide sufficient information for the reader to know whom my research is applicable. Dependability refers to the stability of the

data collected and the consistency of results over time (Guba, 1981; Hays & Singh, 2012). Dependability addresses the question of finding similar results if the study were to be replicated. By overlapping data generation methods, such as the triangulation process in using multiple one-on-one interviews and journal entries, the weaknesses in one method can be compensated for by the strengths in the other. The multiple and ongoing forms of data generation contributed to the consistency of data generation and results. Confirmability is the degree to which the findings are a genuine reflection of the participant's stories. Confirmability can be done by checking and re-checking the data collected throughout the study to limit the researcher interference with the data. In addition, peer debriefing was carried out with my supervisor to strive for confirmability.

CHAPTER 3

3.1. FINDINGS

Below are the narratives of seven adolescent women athletes. These narratives are based on the stories these women shared with me during their interviews and in their journals. Their stories reveal the subjectivity and multilayered nature of their experiences in answering my central research question: “What is the role of body self-compassion in performance perceptions and the emotional well-being of adolescent women athletes?”. The women’s stories are organized into four overarching themes. Each theme has been written based on clustered codes that were thematically constructed from the women’s stories and journal entries, to help inform the research questions (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008).

3.1.1. PROLOGUE

The stories that follow are those of the adolescent women athletes and not mine, which I am retelling based on my understanding of their experiences. As a qualitative researcher, I understand that my personal experiences can influence the research process. *When I was a young athlete throwing shot put, I had instances where I struggled with my body image and performance. I often did not feel like I was strong enough to shoot the distances required to qualify for the podium.* My own experiences served as a guide to be sensitive while listening to these women’s stories over the course of my data generation process. My role in this process was that of a listener, interpreter, and storyteller. As a listener, I gave an attentive ear to the women athletes as they told me their stories. As the interpreter, I provided a translation of my understanding of the women athletes’ stories. Finally, as a storyteller, I ultimately drew conclusions from distinct stories of each participant and constructed them into the themes that represent the narratives of the seven women athletes. Being the interviewer, I interacted with each athlete prior to data collection and throughout the data generation process. I spent time

listening to each athlete's story and re-listening to our recorded conversations from which I began to draw initial meanings from their stories while transcribing. I fully immersed myself into the athletes' stories by creating connections with each one of them as they drew me into specific experiences that reminded me of my own experiences as a young athlete. Taking into consideration my own experiences throughout the research process, I shared a couple of my sport stories with the women to establish a connection, which made them feel more comfortable during the interview. In doing so, I was able to delve deeper into the athletes' experiences and attempted to retell their stories based on my understanding of the stories and an analytic examination of the assumptions that each story represents (Bell, 2002). The athletes' stories have been retold in form of co-constructed narratives.

3.2. THE ATHLETES

Seven adolescent Canadian women (see Table 1), who identified themselves as athletes, participated in two semi-structured interviews and a journaling process. The athletes ranged in age from 14 to 17 years, with a mean age of 15 years. The athletes had an average height of 165.7cm and an average weight of 63.3kg. The women athletes reported that they participate in a range of sports, both individually and/or in a team. At the time of data generation, the athletes were competing at various competition levels, including local, provincial, regional, national, and elite. The highest level these women athletes had ever competed ranged from regional to international. Each athlete's story was reflective of her experiences in her sport career thus far, and these individual stories form the narratives of these adolescent women collectively.

Table 1

Summary of participants

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Current Sport (s)	Current Level	Ethnicity
Casie	17	Softball	Provincial	Caucasian
Claire	15	Soccer	Regional	Caucasian
Ella	14	Swimming	Regional	Caucasian
Emma	16	Basketball, Badminton	Local Club	Caucasian
Jenny	14	Swimming	Regional	Caucasian
Kale	14	Volleyball, Softball	National	Caucasian
Sally	15	Soccer	Elite	Caucasian

3.3. NARRATIVES

The adolescent women athletes' stories have been co-constructed and organized into four overarching themes regarding the role of body self-compassion in their performance perceptions and emotional well-being. The themes are (a) *Compassion for and confidence in my body*, (b) *"Their" thoughts and my body*, (c) *I will play the best I can*, and (d) *My strength is in my emotions*.

3.3.1. COMPASSION FOR AND CONFIDENCE IN MY BODY

The first theme focuses on the athletes' descriptions of body self-compassion, which entailed having confidence (or lack thereof) in their bodies' abilities (and inabilities) to perform their best in sport at any given time. Only one of the athletes was familiar with the concept of self-compassion at the start of her interview, and she was already beginning to adopt self-compassion. Others noted that they were hearing about self-compassion or body self-

compassion for the first time during their first one-on-one interviews. As the athletes recalled their sport experiences, specifically from their first interviews to their second interviews, their stories evolved into embracing body self-compassion. When asked to initially explain what they thought it was, the women athletes described being compassionate to their bodies as being confident in their bodies. To them, having confidence in their bodies included many things, such as taking care of their bodies, knowing how their body works and maintaining its composition to be strong, avoiding comparisons to others, and being kind and positive towards their bodies.

Claire, a soccer player, described body self-compassion as:

...hmm I would describe body self-compassion as, looking at yourself and noticing what you need to do to make it better or what you need to maintain it. And understand how to compliment yourself and constructively criticize yourself as well. Knowing how your body works, if you are prone to losing or gaining weight.

Jenny and *Emma* explained what body self-compassion meant to them, respectively:

...that it's feeling, like just kind of being positive towards your body. And that much like treating it right, once again I think that's a really big part of it and learning to feel comfortable in the body you're given and not compare it to other people's.

...being wholehearted and recognizing your own suffering. Don't worry about the negative things other people say, focus on the positive.

These athletes noted that important aspects of body self-compassion are being comfortable in their bodies and taking care of it. Some of the women athletes stated that being compassionate to their body was not only taking ownership of it, but also knowing that although training may sometimes be difficult, it results in being better athletes and more confident players.

Claire described a time she went through an intense training session for about a week.

Throughout the week, she complained about how difficult it was, but at the end of the training she was feeling stronger, which made her appreciate the difficulties through the week. *Jenny*, a regional swimmer, also explained a similar situation:

During the break I did a more intense training program, where we did 45 minutes in the gym and 2 hours swimming. This made me feel really good about my body because it made me stronger. The harder you train the better you feel about your body. And I think that's like something that's really true. Because like after working really hard for a while, you just kind of feel like really confident.

When *Kale* described body self-compassion, she stated that training her body well and eating healthy creates a balance for her that allows her to feel confident in her body. She also explained that body self-compassion meant telling herself that it is okay to make mistakes, and that sometimes this meant that she might feel down, but making mistakes happens to everyone. *Kale* further explained that it does not matter what anyone else thinks, if she feels good, is happy with her body, and respects her body, she is able to play with confidence.

The women also described how showing compassion to their bodies helped them recognize moments where they did *not* feel confident in their bodies, and how they had to remember to be understanding and kind to their bodies during those moments. *Emma* talked about a time when she arrived late to a training session, and upon arrival she had to catch up with her team who already had begun warm-up by running lines on the basketball court. *Emma* is an asthmatic athlete who uses her inhaler before training and competing. In this situation, however, she had not used her inhaler in time for the practice because she was running late and in a rush to get to practice. She very quickly noticed that the gym felt hotter than usual that day, and that made her uncomfortable. Feeling out of breath and trying to catch up to her teammates put her “off” from the onset. *Emma* started wheezing and thought negatively of her body's inability to do what others were doing so comfortably. For the rest of practice most of her shots were misses and she soon realized that she spent more time trying to keep up with her teammates.

Emma realized that she could not continue focusing on how difficult the training environment was and how her body appeared to be responding negatively. Instead, she pushed

those negative thoughts aside and tried to complete the training. She continued playing until practice was over and was happy when she was able to breathe properly again. When reflecting on this experience, *Emma* thought she could have been even more understanding of her body, considering that she had used her inhaler later than usual. In this experience, *Emma* thought negatively of her body's endurance abilities, and compared her body and her performance to that of her teammates. But she also realized that spending time thinking negatively about her body was hindering her from playing her best. *Emma* expressed that she would have liked to be more compassionate to her body because her body is indeed different from others and there was no reason for her to compare herself to others.

Comparison amongst athletes is not uncommon, but these adolescent women athletes still exude a certain level of confidence in themselves and in their bodies; especially when they refer their sport performance in relation to body self-compassion. *Ella* described a situation where she initially felt confident in her body at the start of a swim meet, but soon started losing confidence in her body as she approached the finals. She was feeling tired from training and competing for a long period of time, and when it came time to compete at finals she wanted to quit. Nevertheless, by being compassionate to her body and remembering that she had worked hard to get to where she was, she was able to change those thoughts very quickly. She explained:

I felt really confident in how I was swimming. But then on the last day, that's usually like the worst day, because you are tired and it's been super long, and I added a lot of time to one of my races. And so I was really mad at myself, and I didn't want to do my finals because I felt I wasn't going to do good at it anyways. But I ended up making it to finals and I took off time from the morning, and that made me feel better. I think being compassionate to my body helps, like, it just helps me think more like about, like it helps me get more confident in myself, and like how I can do better.

Jenny, on the contrary, talked about a situation where after putting on her swimsuit for a swim meet, she was initially not confident in how she looked because she felt like she had gained

some weight. But she quickly brushed off those feelings and focused on her performance; especially since that race was important in determining whether she would make it to the podium.

...today my race went really well. I have to admit that when I went to go put on my racing suit, it felt tighter than usual. Which made me feel like there was a possibility that I gained weight. This made me feel a little uncomfortable for a bit. I knew that I had to brush off these feelings so I could race well so that's what I did. I felt very confident after my races. The pain from working so hard was like a badge of honor—and I use that expression a lot because it's just like something that kind of makes me feel really good about myself. And like any not-confident feeling just kind of goes away. So I think it started off not so positive and ended positive.

These women are not always confident in their bodies, especially when they compare themselves to others. Comparisons to others sometimes make them conscious of certain aspects of themselves that they had not noticed or paid attention to in the past, which as the athletes explained can impact their sport performance. *Casie*, an elite softball player, explained how sometimes she feels different from other athletes because others can “do it all”. She explained further that she tries not to focus too much on what makes other athletes better players than she is; instead, she tries to focus her energy on constantly improving herself. *Casie*'s story is one example where being compassionate to her body is vital in keeping focused on performing at her best, rather than overly criticizing her body or comparing herself to other athletes.

This theme identifies how the women athletes describe body self-compassion, and how being considerate of their unique bodies allows them to be confident in it. The athletes' descriptions of body self-compassion included taking care of their bodies, being wholehearted, recognizing their suffering, and being positive towards the body. By showing concern and recognizing their suffering, the women athletes are demonstrating compassion and care for their bodies. This is key to becoming a body self-compassionate athlete, because showing compassion for one's body could allow one to always be satisfied with the body. In sport where

there is constant attention and comparisons amongst athletes, having confidence in the body for these women athletes is paramount for successful performance.

3.3.2. “THEIR” THOUGHTS AND MY BODY

When referring to their bodies, the women athletes stated that the opinions of significant others such as coaches and teammates sometimes influences their thoughts and feelings about their bodies and their sport performance. To avoid disappointing these significant others, some of these women are in a mental battle on how to remain poised in their body and skills, while also taking criticisms on their performance. *Casie*, a softball player, described a time when her coach encouraged the team to get fitter, but she struggled with some of the physical trainings because of her body shape. As such, she couldn't play as good as her teammates, which meant she had less playing time on the field. This experience made her feel like she was not contributing as much as she could to the team. Hence, she thought she was letting her team down because of her body's inability to run as fast as the others. An important thing to note in *Casie's* story was that because her coach thought she was not playing well enough, she got less playing time compared to other athletes and as such she was left feeling discouraged and disappointed in her performance. Upon reflecting on this experience, *Casie* stated that being compassionate to her body would have meant focusing less on what her body could not do, and more on what she could have improved, without having a feeling of disappointing her coach or teammates.

Having feelings of discouragement brought on by an important person in one's sport could negatively influence one's performance, just like in *Casie's* experience. Although the intention may not have been to discourage *Casie* from playing longer on the field, the outcome of her own struggles with the physical trainings made her feel discouraged. This then led to

feeling as if she had disappointed her coach and teammates. *Casie's* performance was also influenced as she received less playing time than she normally would have. Her reduced playing time made her criticize her skills, body, and overall performance perceptions. In contrast, when positive feedback is received from significant others in sport, these women athletes soar in their performances. For instance, receiving encouraging words about an athlete's body from a coach could provide a boost to one's ego. *Jenny* shared an experience in swimming where her coach's words served as a form of encouragement for her and provided her with positive thoughts about her body. *Jenny* said:

...I guess I would have to say like my coach, she's like talked to me a couple times saying like, like you're really strong like in your upper body so, don't be scared to use your arms like a lot and I think that moment kind of replayed in my head and I thought about it on and on, I mean so it helped. Because it made me feel confident...

The words from *Jenny's* coach were the thoughts she kept in her mind during her swim competition, which made her perform well and feel confident in her body during her swim meet. *Jenny* also stated that there are many things that can contribute to how she feels about her body; even something as simple as someone looking at her in a certain way can boost or diminish the confidence she has in her body and her abilities to perform. Because of the potential negative impact that others may have on her performance, *Jenny* makes a concerted effort to focus internally on her own attitudes by being compassionate to her body. Consequently, to an extent, both verbal and non-verbal cues from important others in sport may have a significant impact in influencing these women athletes' thoughts about their body and performance.

Some of the athletes explained that, at times, they are actively seeking reassurance from others, either their teammates or coaches to reaffirm confidence in their bodies. For instance, *Claire* talked about the role her teammates and coach play in the thoughts she has about her body when playing soccer. *Claire* explained that during games she is sometimes looking to her

teammates to positively influence her thoughts and feelings, and subsequently her performance. When she has some doubts while playing, she often looks to her teammates for positively reinforcing comments from the sidelines. These comments help her feel self-assured in her playing time on the field and structure her mind to be calm. *Claire* said:

...I thought that players on my team would help influence me in a positive way, just because they are trying to set me up to do well, and yeah. So, my coach from the sideline, you know was like talking, if he wants me to do something specific, or not. So that was helping too.

Receiving such feedback during her games helps reassure *Claire* that she is on the right track while playing. If *Claire* fails to receive these reassuring cues from her teammates and coach, she explained that she might fall short in her performance.

In contrast to the supportive impact that important others may have on athletes' confidence in their bodies and performance, many of the athletes explained that receiving cues from teammates and coaches that are less encouraging may result in a loss of focus and a subsequent negative influence on one's performance. *Casie* described a situation during a game where she felt she was working as hard as she could, but got upset when her coach was getting mad at her for not doing her job properly, unlike her teammates. She began feeling like she wasn't good enough to support her team. Also, with the team losing the game, she couldn't help but feel like she was letting her team down. While trying to give her best, her hips started to hurt, and she thought it could be because she did not stretch properly prior to the start of the game. She then began thinking that she did not train enough to make her body stronger, which could have caused the pain she was experiencing. Subsequently, she lost more confidence in her body because of her coach's opinion of her performance during that game. In her reflection after the tournament, *Casie* said:

... our first two games didn't go very good, so I was kind of mad at myself and my team. And then we went to a third game and we won, so I felt really good

after that and I felt like I could do something, like I contributed to the team. And then, I started to think, after the whole tournament, even though we didn't win, I started to think that I may not have the perfect body type, but as long as I take care of myself, I'm healthy and I'm able to do what I want to do, it doesn't matter. And who cares what others think, as long as you love yourself, it's all that matters. And everyone is different, a different version of perfect and if you are confident with who you are, you will live a more happy and full life.

Casie's reflection after the tournament is an example of how showing compassion to the body could change her mindset and thoughts. Being body self-compassionate provides an avenue to acknowledge any negative feelings she has towards her body. Although the women may receive criticisms on their skills and performance, they strive to be mindful in applying feedback to their practices. The athletes recognized that coaches, teammates, and others may play an instrumental role in their compassionate body experiences. This means that in becoming body self-compassionate they are not ignoring the thoughts of others about their bodies. Instead, they recognize them as opinions that may influence their own thoughts about the body. By extending compassion to the body, the athletes created time to properly process the thoughts of significant others. Hence, they identified certain elements in the received feedback as constructive rather than negative. In turn, when these women accept their bodies as unique they feel confident that they can accomplish many of their goals in sport.

3.3.3. I WILL PLAY TO MY POTENTIAL

The women provided various reasons for playing sports, such as their love for the sport, having a good relationship with teammates, and growing up with family members who played sports, among others. All the athletes indicated that watching other elite athletes and reaching the highest level possible in their careers as athletes keeps them motivated to play. They train to be better athletes by attaining a standard of high performance to achieve their goal of remaining in sport for as long as they physically can. However, meeting this goal entails overcoming many

obstacles throughout their sport careers, which includes accepting criticisms about their performance regardless of their own perceptions about their performance. An example is provided by *Kale*, who experienced body criticism when she joined a new team.

Kale was recently drafted to a new volleyball team, and at her first practice with the new team her new coach discussed body shape in relation to the positions each player would be playing. *Kale* apparently did not meet the body requirements for the position she had played in the last four seasons, and did not feel comfortable when she was appointed to her new position. *Kale* had always played middle in volleyball and had gotten comfortable with that role. Knowing that she had to switch to a power position because she did not have the proper body shape to play middle, she became uncomfortable with her body. The experience made her feel unhappy because she knew she could not do anything to change her height, and she thought she had always excelled as a middle player. *Kale* stated that her old coach had even told her that "...it doesn't matter what your size is, you can still play any position, you just might have to work a little bit harder", but her new coach did not appear to echo the same thoughts. When her new coach informed her that she was not tall enough to play middle, it affected how she played during that practice, and it was very noticeable that she did not play as well as usual.

Kale explained:

It makes me uncomfortable with my body because now I'm questioning some of my sport decisions such as playing certain positions. So like hmm, I was a middle for all of my volleyball and he switched me to power because he said I wasn't tall enough so I didn't really feel too good about that. And hmm, there's a couple of girls that are an inch taller than me that got the spot in the middle and they've only been playing for a year. So I wasn't really too happy about it and I didn't feel good.

For some of the athletes, their perceptions about their performance or abilities as an athlete differed from the perceptions of their coaches. Still, some of the athletes who recognized the differences in opinions worked very hard to try and have their perceived performance match

the expectations of their coaches. This level of persistence, some say, allows the athletes to grow and gain the skills they need to be excellent high-performance athletes. In *Kale's* case, she was initially unhappy about her new position with the team. As we further discussed her experience she noted that initially she thought the experience was:

...probably negative at the time, and then coming back now I'm probably thinking it was kind of a positive one. Not necessarily saying that I was kind of short, but just getting the experience playing in different positions...

Reflecting on this experience made *Kale* realize the opportunity she has to grow in a different area of volleyball which will improve her power skills and better prepare her for future try outs for teams. *Kale* is now attempting to understand her coach's perspective of her performance, and recognizes the difference in their perspectives.

Similarly, *Ella* shared an experience where her perceptions of her performance were different from that of her coach. *Ella* often gets nervous before a swim meet, and sometimes thinks of reasons why she should not be competing. For instance, she might think that she is not physically ready or good enough to compete. Although she mentally reminds herself to clear out those thoughts and eventually finds her way into the pool, it is the encouraging words from her coach that makes her feel more self-assured and think positively before she begins her race. At one of *Ella's* swim meets, she was feeling discouraged because she had added a few seconds to her most recent time and knew she would have to work harder in the final round of qualifications. She went home that day feeling defeated and disappointed in her body, but hoped that she could do better in the finals. At the finals, she was overcome with nervousness, and thought less of her body's capabilities to swim because she was feeling mentally and physically exhausted. *Ella* thought her body was giving up on her and that she could not possibly succeed given her depleted mental and physical states. Before the race, she had a conversation with her coach who encouraged her to think positively. *Ella* explained:

I always have to think about the best that I can do. Cause that morning I was like, I really don't want to swim this race. And I was telling the girls that I don't think this is going to be a good race... Well I was really nervous, and then I was like telling my coach how I really didn't want to swim. And she just kind of talked me through it and she was like you just have to think positive and it will work out.

To *Ella*, this was a meet that she did not think she could compete in, but her coach thought differently than her. Her coach saw that *Ella* could compete and make the final rounds of qualifications. *Ella* knew she had to have a good mindset to go forward in her race and that meant hearing those words of encouragement from her coach and reminding herself to be compassionate to her body and its capabilities. After the conversation with her coach, *Ella* reminded herself that she *had* made it to the finals and although she was feeling tired, she had to be understanding of the fact that she had just gone through a weekend of non-stop competitions. She needed to recognize that her body had worked hard to make it that far. *Ella's* story provides an example of how an athlete may view her own performance abilities differently than a coach. Sometimes, coaches and important others can play a positive or facilitating role in changing one's perceptions, which could create an attitude more conducive for performing in sports. Other times, the athletes rely on themselves for the support and encouragement they need to work hard, or are inspired by others to be better athletes.

As a soccer player, *Claire* prides herself on hard work and dedication to excel as an athlete. *Claire* told me about a time where baseline measurements were taken at the start of a season and how she responded to that experience and prepared herself for baseline measurements in subsequent seasons. When she first joined the team, *Claire* felt small compared to her teammates; she played with a group of athletes who were older and more muscular than she was. She admired her teammates' talent and dedication, and decided that she was going to train even harder to measure up to their standards. At the start of the next season when baseline

measurements were taken, *Claire* was happy because the hard work she had put into training was showing; she had grown in many ways and her performance had improved. She recalled:

...we had to do something called baseline testing. I guess you measure the growth of like your thighs and your calves and stuff, and they measured mine and like mine stood out because they were bigger than most people's I guess you could say. So yeah that felt good because I had been working on it, trying to make myself have like bigger muscles to play better. So I thought that maybe that positively influence how I played.

Claire was inspired by her teammates to be an equally good player, and to do so she worked on her body to be stronger and to perform better. She didn't always feel particularly encouraged while training because some days were harder than others. However, she continued to push through by recognizing the areas she needed to improve and reminding herself of her goal to be better at soccer. To this end, she was understanding of her body's abilities and strived for improvement while being body self-compassionate. This included reminding herself to be kind to her body and to trust what her body is capable of doing without overworking it.

Regardless of who encourages these women to be better athletes, their goal is to always play their best. *Jenny*, a swimmer competing at the provincial level, stated:

I think if you go in with the mindset of like "hmm, oh I'm tired and not feeling well". Then your mind trips you out...You have to be compassionate, you have to be like, "it's okay, but you can still do this". You have to be more like a teammate would...

Jenny explained that when she does not perform as well as she would have liked (such as not getting the time she desires in a race), she often gets upset with her body because she was unable to push her body to the limits she wanted. As a result, she often feels frustrated from sensing inadequacy in her body and performance. However, *Jenny* does not stop trying her best at the next competition or in practice, and she actively takes the advice she is given by her coaches to improve. These athletes continue to recognize that their perceptions of their sport performance sometimes differ from that of their coaches. The differing perceptions provide them with an

alternative perspective on their sport performance. As such, body self-compassion allows the women athletes to be open to alternative perceptions of their performance. This encourages them to be mindful, a key component of self-compassion. The women then begin accepting others' perceptions, noting that some of these perceptions may have key takeaways to improving their skills and helping them play to their potential. As such, a body self-compassionate athlete may be more aware of her body's abilities and skills and thus competence to perform.

3.3.4. MY STRENGTH IS IN MY EMOTIONS

The athletes discussed how their emotions can motivate them or hinder them from playing at their best. Emotions play an important role in the lives of these adolescent women athletes, and they explained that their emotions often drive their will to play on any given day. As the women became more aware of body self-compassion, they began identifying how their emotions direct their attitudes towards their bodies and influence their performance. Some of the women's awareness led to recognizing their positive and negative thoughts during their time in this study. These thoughts are what direct their attitudes and feelings towards performing in sports and engaging throughout the day. For instance, *Sally*, a provincial soccer player, shared a story where her day started off with negative thoughts, which got worse as the day progressed.

Sally stated:

I feel like when I was rushed or I was feeling bad, I just like, every time I made a mistake I just kind of like dug myself deeper to this hole like, "oh I can't do this". Like, my thoughts throughout the whole day was just negative, and whenever I did something that I didn't want to do, it just kept getting worse and worse. But I think I felt better about myself, I was like, you know it's okay, I can still do this. Because, maybe I had more positive attitude throughout the whole day maybe. And it just kind of carried into my training.

When *Sally's* mindset changed, those negative thoughts became positive and the way she approached things for the rest of day changed. The change in her mindset and subsequently her

emotions also influenced how her training proceeded. While reflecting on this experience, *Sally* stated that at some point during that day she wanted to change her thoughts to be less critical and more positive. Hence, she thought about being kind to herself and began creating a balance in her mind towards being positive. By changing her mindset, she became more empathetic to herself and transitioned to a happier and more self-accepting attitude, which then allowed her to focus on playing better.

Like *Sally*, *Emma* told me about a time when she was annoyed with her body during a basketball game. As a result the emotion she was experiencing, she was not having fun. During a quick time out, she asked herself why she was missing her shots and why she was upset with herself. *Emma* made a mental note that she was not having a good game and began correcting her thinking and saying, “hey like you know, that’s fine”. She explained that it was almost as if she was forgiving herself when she had realized that she was not being compassionate to her body; and as soon as she forgave herself, there was a shift in her mind where she was no longer down on herself. *Emma* stopped being overly critical of her body on the basketball court and began being kind and understanding to her body.

At the start of the interviewing process, *Claire* thought of herself as a jolly and body confident person, and as such believes that her positive mindset allows her to be focused during practices and competitions. She never thought of herself as having any negative feelings towards her body, and rarely compares herself to others. When reflecting on and discussing her journal entries, she explained that it was interesting to see specific times that she was not being positive or compassionate to her body like she thought she always had been. For instance, there was a time she experienced feelings of uneasiness when she went to the gym and was overwhelmed by

the people around her and their workout regimes. This feeling of uneasiness was unlike the confident and jolly person that Claire believed she was. *Claire* recalled:

...this one was where I felt a bit, not kind of negative, but almost. So, it was hmm, we had a break, kind of, in soccer. So, I go to the weight room at our school, and then so it was kind of, not my first time, but just a while since I had been there. So, when I walked in, there was a bunch of guys lifting like a bunch of weights, taking up the whole gym and I kind of was a little uneasy. Just kind of like, “where am I going to go?”. Like, so that was a little bit, kind of a negative impact.

Claire found herself in unfamiliar territory with her emotions, and she was feeling anxious and intimidated in a room she had always felt comfortable in. Feeling less confident in her body influenced how her workout routine progressed that day. When she returned the next day to workout, she mentally prepared herself to be proud of the strong athlete that she is and to be compassionate to her body. That was exactly what she did, and she recalled having an outstanding workout in the gym.

Another experience *Claire* shared was when she was pulled up to play in a senior’s tournament even though she is a junior in her soccer program. She got more time on the field than she expected and was initially nervous because she was playing against U-20 players. These were not competitors she was used to competing against, and her nerves and negative thoughts were getting to her. *Claire* explained that she felt she was not good enough to compete at a higher level. Being nervous subsequently made her miss patterns in the game and make simple mistakes she normally would not make. *Claire* stopped for a moment to shake out the jitters, and began thinking positively, saying to herself that she could do it. *Claire* knew she had to play her best, so she began giving herself encouraging comments, which helped her play better. She was aware of what her and her body were capable of, and knew how far she could push her body. When *Claire* began positive self-talk and was more optimistic, she executed better. She recalled that her performance improved and she felt an overall sense of

accomplishment. *Claire* noted that anytime she did something good on the field, she would give herself a positive compliment which helped her stay calm and focused.

Emma described a time during her badminton practice where her emotions and mindset kept her in high spirits despite the results of the game:

...what a magical basketball practice. There was only seven of us and on the rare occasion, I can say I did great. I had good memories in the gym, which I think boosted my mood. My lungs did good – plus we didn't do a lot of running. Drills went swiftly when we played a game, instead of just assisting like I usually do, I scored! Multiple times. I was calm and collected and positive with myself and my team, which greatly contributed to our success. Even though we lost, it was very rewarding and made the rest of my evening go along with more energy.

Emma explained that her emotions each day determine how her mind allows her to stay afloat. Whether she is happy, sad, frustrated or excited, it is how she manages her emotions and continues to be body self-compassionate that will keep her focused on her games. In developing her body self-compassion, *Emma* aspires to be whole-hearted and recognize her own suffering. She expressed that she recognizes her body can do so many amazing things, but the moment she doubts her body's abilities and has negative thoughts, she does not perform as well as she knows she can. By recognizing her suffering, she would be able to avoid letting her negative thoughts and emotions affect her performance and become more compassionate to her body. She said:

...very quickly into the game I realized I wasn't going to win and in the moment, I subconsciously failed to embrace the challenge and turned it into a swarm of self-doubt and put downs. It wasn't until after the game I realized the opportunity I had wasted. I certainly did not play my best, physically and mentally. When I got home that night, I was more upset about how I reacted than the fact that I lost.

Like *Emma*, *Kale* said the more compassionate she is to her body, the more positive and happy she is and she would spend less time worrying about her body when she should be focused on her competitions. When identifying how emotions direct her attitude towards her body and influence her performance, *Kale* explained that by being compassionate to her body she feels

good and can push out negative thoughts and feelings such as feelings of inadequacy, sadness, and frustration. Being compassionate to her body gives her the opportunity to find inspirations to be a better and well-rounded athlete; an athlete that allows her emotions to positively influence her sport performance. Becoming a well-rounded athlete was an echoed thought amongst many of the athletes in the current study. By respecting their bodies and treating them with kindness, the athletes are creating more positive emotions, such as satisfaction, which in turn gives them room for growth and improvements. These positive emotions may be better established because the athlete is becoming more compassionate to her body experiences. Thus, a compassionate approach to the body may have shaped body self-compassion as an emotion regulation strategy for the women athletes in this study. This was indicative of the women athletes' emotions directing their body attitudes and mindset in preparation for their sport performances.

CHAPTER 4

4.1. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of body self-compassion in adolescent women athletes' performance perceptions and emotional well-being. Body self-compassion has been defined as extending a kind and nonjudgmental attitude towards the body despite perceived physical imperfections and failures (Berry et al., 2010). Having a positive body image in sports is highly important for adolescent women athletes. Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) argued that more research focused on positive body image is necessary to help shape our understanding of the construct of positive body image. The present study contributes relevant information to the literature on positive body image, especially for middle to older adolescent women athletes.

Despite the mounting focus on the construct of self-compassion, very little research has explored body self-compassion. There has also been no focus on the role that body self-compassion plays for athletes. Berry et al. (2010) explored the potential role of body self-compassion in women exercisers and found that three essential structures (appreciating one's unique body, taking ownership of one's body, and engaging in less social comparison) and a facilitating structure (the importance of others) arose. In the present study, the athletes' descriptions and understandings of body self-compassion extend the findings of Berry et al. (2010). Like in Berry et al.'s (2010) study, the women athletes recognized the negative and positive feelings they had towards their bodies, and hence appreciated their unique qualities. Particularly, learning to be compassionate to the body created a process of stabilizing their emotions. This meant engaging in less negative and more positive emotions, a process of balancing their emotions which was reflected in their body attitudes and their sport performance. Similarly, Wood-Barcalow, Tylka and Augustus-Horvath (2010) found that the young adults in their study did not simply accept their bodies; instead, they showed love for their bodies through

their emotions, thoughts, and tolerance of perceived flaws. The current study showcases similar findings to Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010); as the athletes began understanding body self-compassion, they began to show compassion to their bodies, thus allowing them to strengthen the satisfaction they had for their bodies. The women athletes reported actively caring for and showing kindness to their bodies. Mainly, the athletes were comfortable with their bodies and showed the body respect by eating healthy, treating the body right with regular exercise, and acknowledging their perceived physique imperfections. For instance, *Emma* discussed how being body self-compassionate meant that she could respect her body's uniqueness and treat it with understanding; and as such, would like to continue being more compassionate to her body. With the acceptance of their bodies as is, the athletes in the current study spent less time reveling in their bodies' inabilities and focused more on playing better and recognizing their successes.

The women athletes in the current study are in a period of adolescence where more body awareness and changes to physical appearance and self-image occurs, and could result in body dissatisfaction (Ricciardelli & Yager, 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Body dissatisfaction involves evaluations of one's body size, weight, shape, and muscularity as compared to an ideal body and is associated with increased levels of depression and anxiety (Albertson et al., 2014; Grogan, 2008). The adolescent athletes in the current study, such as *Jenny*, *Casie*, and *Claire*, stated that being compassionate to their bodies made them more aware of instances where they had negative body evaluations brought on by their appearance evaluations or by comparing themselves to others. However, by internalizing compassion for their bodies the women athletes were able to recognize these moments of negative body evaluation. This brought on showing kindness to the body and being mindful of negative thoughts and feelings, an important recognition for adolescents who are experiencing developmental and psychological changes

(Ricciardelli & Yager, 2016). The current study therefore contributes to the growing literature on adolescent women athletes' sport experiences. Although adolescents are undergoing many developmental changes, they may be able understand and apply knowledge of body self-compassion to influence the quality of their sport experiences.

Though not specifically focused on body self-compassion, Magnus et al. (2010) studied the role of self-compassion in women's motivations to exercise and found that self-compassion did not emphasize comparisons to others and could act as a potential buffer against negative self-evaluation. By not comparing oneself to certain social norms and embracing compassion, there is a potential to avoid negative self-evaluation. Neff et al. (2005) suggested that being self-compassionate promotes less self-evaluation and a greater sense of self-worth. The athletes in the current study described how they sometimes compared their athletic skills to that of their teammates or competitors. Some of the comparisons were self-evaluative in nature, which the athletes recognized often influenced their own performance. However, when the athletes engaged in less social comparison and were compassionate to their bodies, they began acknowledging the skills and abilities that makes them strong players and competitors.

Morrison et al. (2004) argued that engaging in social comparison is negatively related to body image evaluation (i.e., appearance self-esteem and body satisfaction). In *Casie's* story, she noted that when she compared herself to others she would become overly critical of and dissatisfied with her body. However, she would like to extend compassion to her body and work on improving her athletic strength and endurance. *Jenny* echoed similar thoughts of investing time and energy in comparing her body to others but would rather not engage in such behaviours. Instead, *Jenny* worked towards embracing her body with a compassionate approach during the course of this study. Similarly, Homan and Tylka (2015) found that self-compassion protected

women's body appreciation by facilitating a kind and accepting response when comparing one's body with peers. Studies continue to show an inverse relationship between body comparison and body appreciation (Berry et al., 2010; Homan & Tylka, 2015; Morrison et al., 2004). The findings of the current study provide qualitative support for this pattern that when one does not engage in social comparison, one can show understanding, confidence, and appreciation to one's body. An important extension that this study adds to the literature is the potential for body self-compassion to facilitate the process of engaging in less social comparison. The athletes expressed less preoccupation with social comparisons and more acceptance of their bodies' unique qualities as they either continued to or began embracing body self-compassion.

Developing body self-compassion through the athletes' lenses meant building confidence in their bodies' abilities, as well as better focus while playing. The growth in the athletes' compassionate approach to their bodies revealed how the perceptions of their sport performance influenced how they played. This is similar to the meta-analytic findings of Woodman and Hardy (2003) on the relative impact of self-confidence and cognitive anxiety on sport performance. Woodman and Hardy (2003) found that self-confidence was more significantly related to sport performance than cognitive anxiety. A positive relationship between self-confidence and sport performance shows that the more confident an athlete is, the more reflective this confidence is in their performance. All the athletes in the current study described having confidence in their bodies and their athletic skills as two of the most important attributes needed for them to be well-rounded athletes. These attributes would also be needed in maintaining their skills to reach an expert level in their sport. The athletes described body self-compassion as having confidence in their abilities; as such body self-compassion could be critical to achieving an expert level in sport.

Durand-Bush and Salmela (2010) investigated the perceptions of ten athletes at the World and Olympic levels in the development and maintenance of expert athletic performance. They found that athletes generally progressed through four stages throughout their careers: (a) Sampling Years, (b) Specializing Years, (c) Investment Years, and (d) Maintenance Years. Durand-Bush and Salmela found that at the “investment years” of their careers, athletes were immersed in their sport, and coaches and teammates played an instrumental role in the lives of the athletes. At this stage, some athletes were in high school while others were in university. The investment years stage was deemed important because it involved self-confidence, competitiveness, and motivation. It was also a stage where the athletes were confident in their abilities to perform and succeed in their sport (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2010). These are some of the same characteristics that the athletes in the current study referred to, as well as the vital role their coaches and teammates played. Perhaps, body self-compassion could become a useful resource for athletes in their investment years. The athletes in the Durand-Bush and Salmela study stated that their coaches were motivating but also demanding. The athletes also experienced external pressures and high expectations, which sometimes led to unsuccessful performances in their sport. The athletes in the current study referred to confidence multiple times when describing body self-compassion and how building confidence involved being compassionate to their bodies. These athletes are striving for excellence, balance in their lives, and continued support from coaches and teammates. As such, becoming body self-compassionate may help buffer some of the body and performance challenges that the women experience in the investment years stage, along with combating the pressures they face from coaches and significant others.

The performance expectations the women athletes' coaches and teammates have and their own perceived confidence in meeting those expectations influenced the athletes' performance both positively and negatively. In other words, self and others' expectations either fostered or lowered athletes' perceived competence. The athletes either continued to play strongly because the opinions of these significant others were well received and aligned with their own views, or the athletes felt stressed because they were falling short of such high expectations. Durand-Bush and Salmela (2010) found that the expectations of significant others created pressure and stress for athletes in their research, which affected the athletes' performance. Some of the athletes in their study had a fear of failure and letting others down, but with more sport experience they developed their sport skills and confidence. The pressures faced by athletes that stem from high expectations of significant others have an impact on athletes' perceived competence and hence performance.

As athletes in the current study became more familiar with body self-compassion, they recognized that what they originally perceived as negative feedback from coaches and teammates about their own performance was potentially a more objective evaluation of their performance. Acknowledging that the feedback from important others could be objective reflects how the athletes became mindful; an important component of self-compassion. Mindfulness involves accepting one's emotional and mental state in a balanced state of awareness, whilst avoiding the extremes of over-identification and dissociation (Neff, 2003a). Body self-compassion may also include taking an objective approach to one's body by being mindful rather than being consumed by or ignoring certain aspects of the body. By becoming more compassionate to their bodies, the athletes revisited their own perceptions constructively and accepted the differences in views, while managing the pressures they were faced with in sport.

Berry et al. (2010) suggested that body self-compassion could be described as a coping process for women experiencing dissatisfaction with their bodies. The women in Berry et al.'s study described situations where they dealt with negative experiences about their bodies, such as comparing themselves to societal ideals or others around them, which contributed negatively to their self-concept. Hence the three essential structures (appreciating one's unique body, taking ownership of one's body, and engaging in less social comparison) and a facilitating structure (the importance of others) proposed by Berry et al. (2010) position body self-compassion as a coping process. Berry et al. (2010) explained this coping process as experiencing more body-related self-compassion, where one begins to engage in less social comparison. The current study showcases similar findings in the stories of *Jenny* and *Casie*, who considered body self-compassion as a coping process. These women showed appreciation and satisfaction for their bodies rather than being critical of it. Also, rather than comparing their bodies to others, they accepted their bodies unique abilities. Body self-compassion helped them in offsetting physique and performance comparisons to others. Thus, being compassionate to their bodies also encouraged them to be more confident players; an attitude that the athletes now extend to themselves in response to their perceived physical imperfections and limitations. A couple of the women athletes' experiences in the current study suggested that body self-compassion may be a useful resource for when they find themselves thinking negatively of their bodies or when engaging in self-evaluative thoughts.

The exercisers in Berry et al.'s (2010) study and some athletes in the current study had similar ideas in the use of body self-compassion as a coping mechanism. Neff and McGehee (2010) suggested that the adolescent experience of self-compassion is similar to that of adults. The current study found that middle to older adolescent women athletes shared similar

experiences as the adult women exercisers in Berry et al.'s (2010) study. As the women athletes reflected on the potential usefulness of body self-compassion, they stated that they experienced more feelings of happiness, gratitude, and satisfaction with their bodies when extending compassion to their bodies. Both positive and negative emotions directed their attitudes towards their sport performance. Positive emotions such as happiness and satisfaction were elicited by being compassionate to the body, and these positive emotions are key in leading a successful sport performance. Nevertheless, the more the athletes embraced their bodies, the more positive their emotions were, and the better they reported playing. The athletes' stories suggested that as they focused more on their sport performance during competitions and practices and less on their bodies, they performed better. This is similar to the findings of Wasyliw et al. (2012), which suggest that the more kindness a person shows to his/her physical self, the less negatively occupied one would be with the body. Hence when an athlete is more kind and confident in her body, she can focus less on what might be labeled as "negative", and more on her performance. As an athlete who uses an inhaler, *Emma* described how often she fixated on her lungs' capacity while playing, which often hindered her performance. However, when she acknowledged how distinct her body is, she spent less time fixating on her lungs. This made her more optimistic, and hence played more actively during her practices and competitions.

Steptoe and Butler (1996) found that sport participation and vigorous exercise had favorable effects on the emotional state of adolescents. Particularly, greater participation in vigorous sport was associated with lower risk of emotional distress and positive emotional well-being. Similarly, Donaldson and Ronaan (2006) found that greater participation in sports was related to enhanced emotional and behavioural well-being. Participants in the current study reported feeling little to no emotional distress from their sport participation. But contrary to

Steptoe and Butler, as well as Donaldson and Ronan's findings, the athletes also experienced some negative emotions towards their bodies due to their participation in sports, as well as feelings of inadequacy and frustration as they engaged in social comparisons against their competitors. An interesting finding was how the women began recognizing that they had these negative emotions about their bodies when they reflected on their compassionate body experiences. In their reflections, some of the athletes mentioned how documenting their experiences in the journals allowed them to realize certain negative emotions such as disappointment in themselves. The athletes also acknowledged their positive emotions and made an effort to balance their negative emotions with positive emotions, such as satisfaction. This balance shows the role being compassionate to one's body plays in one's emotional well-being and sport performance. Contentment with the body allowed for more positive emotions without disregarding the negative emotions, which were reflected in the descriptions of the athletes' perceived competence and performance perceptions. women who reported being more judgmental and critical of themselves experienced more body preoccupation than women who reported being less critical and judgmental.

A thought that may linger in the mind of a reader is whether my participants fully understood body self-compassion. One of the goals of my study was to answer the question: how do adolescent women athletes describe body self-compassion? The participants were presented with Berry et al.'s (2010) definition of body self-compassion after they had an opportunity to construct their own meanings following a self-compassion video by Kristin Neff. I cannot be completely certain that my participants truly grasped the phenomenon of body self-compassion based on the one definition they were presented. The participants difficulty with comprehending the phenomena may have been further exacerbated because they likely do not

use the terms self-compassion, or body self-compassion, in their day-to-day lives. However, as a social constructivist, I believe that meanings are varied and multiple. As such, I strived to find complexities in views rather than narrowing my participant's meanings into a single definition of body self-compassion (Creswell, 2014). There is also the potential that my methods of data generation (i.e., journaling process) could have changed the participant's perspectives and experiences of body self-compassion. Though not intended as an intervention, the journaling process is similar to exercises that have been used in previous self-compassion intervention studies (i.e., Mosewich et al., 2013; Neff et al., 2007). One could also note a shift in the mindset of the women athletes in the current study because of the reflection process the journals provided. It is also important to note that each participant developed subjective meanings of her unique experiences of body self-compassion. Nevertheless, my translation of the athletes' explanations and descriptions showcases elements of Berry et al.'s (2010) definition of body self-compassion. This suggested to me that all my participants had some level of understanding of the phenomenon in order to provide me with stories of their compassionate body experiences.

CHAPTER 5

5.1. CONCLUSIONS

Body self-compassion is a relatively newer and under-researched construct in the body image and self-compassion literature. To my knowledge, this is the first study that has introduced body self-compassion to a group of athletes in an attempt to understand its role in their sport performance and emotional well-being. The findings from the current study support the growing literature that emphasizes the usefulness of self-compassion in buffering against negative sport and body experiences (Albertson et al., 2015; Ferguson et al, 2014; Mosewich et al., 2013). The current study advances the literature by focusing specifically on a compassionate approach to the body. By being compassionate to one's body, a woman athlete may be more confident in her body to perform. Importantly, the confidence is harnessed in a kind, gentle, and accepting manner. The findings also show that the athletes' experiences of body self-compassion generally support Berry et al.'s (2010) conceptualization of body self-compassion and Neff's (2003a) conceptualization of self-compassion.

This study also highlights the importance of body self-compassion for adolescent women athletes' emotional well-being, as being body self-compassionate may help regulate emotions that impact sport performance. The women athletes spent some time during the study exploring their body self-compassion, though some of the athletes embraced compassion for their bodies faster than others. All of the women stated that it was important for them to continue to be body self-compassionate because it helped them become more conscious of their emotional states. By being aware of their emotions, they were essentially exercising being mindful in a balanced state of awareness. This means that the women were not only aware of their emotional states, but they acknowledged both their negative and positive emotions, and began understanding why they

were having some negative feelings either about their bodies or performance. By being body self-compassionate, the women were also more confident in their bodies and their sport performance, as well as focused on their skill development. Still, little is known about how much of a role body self-compassion plays in individual lives. The current study emphasizes the need for further research to explore the role of body self-compassion and its potential benefits in the sport context.

5.2. STRENGTHS

An important strength of this study was the introduction of body self-compassion to a group of adolescent women athletes to form their own meanings of the phenomenon. Sparkes and Smith (2009) state that taking the responsibility of a listener in understanding what is being said while allowing decisions to challenge one's prejudices are qualities of an expert. Although Berry et al. (2010) had established the components of body self-compassion, it was important to allow the athletes in this study to form their own understanding and descriptions of the phenomenon, as well as allow body self-compassion to shape their experiences. To this end, I could recognize similarities between the findings of the current study and those of Berry et al. (2010). The women in the current study stated that body self-compassion is having confidence in their bodies, being kind and taking care of their bodies, knowing how their body works and maintaining its composition to be strong whilst avoiding comparisons to others. These were some of the same thoughts echoed by the women exercisers in Berry et al.'s (2010) study. Not only did the athletes describe what body self-compassion meant to them, their stories provided suggestions on its relevance to them. Specifically, the experiences of the participants from both studies suggest that body self-compassion could be considered a coping mechanism.

Another strength was the use of narrative inquiry, which allowed for uniqueness and diversity of shared experiences while providing depth in creating meanings (Smith & Sparkes 2009b). This strategy of inquiry provided an avenue to truly generate richness of data because of its emphasis on retelling stories that although are unique to individuals, still outline the connections that created narratives in the present study. An example is found when considering the similarities and differences in *Sally's* and *Emma's* stories about experiencing negative emotions that influenced their performances in their varying sports. Both athletes recognized the impact of their negative self-talk in their performance and subsequently began changing their attitudes and mindset. Their individual experiences were different and telling their stories showed the level of uniqueness and complexity in their lived experiences. However, their stories also included elements that connect the athletes together. Narrative inquiry permitted for presenting richness in the data as the narratives that shaped the experiences of these women athletes.

The use of multiple forms of data generation methods (interviews and journals) to provide rich, thick descriptions and depth to my data was another strength of this study. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility in probing different questions to each individual based on her unique stories. Interviewing each participant twice, before and after the journaling process, allowed the athletes to dive into their sport experiences both before and after the introduction of body self-compassion. Following the introduction of body self-compassion, the athletes then spent time journaling their experiences and preparing for a reflective process during the second interviews. These multiple semi-structured interviews provided more depth to the data set than a single interview would have permitted. The journals provided details that participants did not share during the interviews, or may not have felt comfortable sharing

verbally. Journals can also show change over a period of time in the context of an experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). Journals and interviews both provided unique details and accounts of the athletes' experiences of body self-compassion, allowing for an overall rich thick description of the research (Shenton, 2004). Using multiple data generation methods also reinforced the trustworthiness of this study through triangulation; using more than one method to gather data in an attempt to explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour (Creswell, 2014).

Other strategies that strengthened the trustworthiness of this study include member checking, peer debriefing, in-depth accounts of participant experiences, and the use of a researcher reflective journal. With member checking, the athletes were given the opportunity to review and edit their interview transcripts before data analysis begun (Creswell, 2013). This allowed the athletes to add/delete any information from their interviews to ensure that their stories were being told like they wanted. Only one participant took advantage of making changes to her interviews, by adding more details to some of her responses. The remaining participants approved their transcripts as originally provided to them. Throughout data generation and the data analysis process, I met with my supervisor to debrief and provided her with my preliminary findings where she challenged some of my analytical strategies such as going back to explore some of the athletes' stories. This re-review of my data provided a different perspective to my analysis, which I had not initially considered or was aware of.

The current study also allowed for in-depth accounts of the athletes' experiences for rich, thick descriptions of their narratives. By probing for further details from each participant during the interviews and allowing their experiences and stories to progress, I was able to delve deeper into the meaning-making process as a qualitative researcher (Kowalski, McHugh, Sabiston, &

Ferguson, 2018). Throughout the course of this study, I kept a journal to help me reflect on how my own thoughts influenced the research process. More specifically, maintaining a reflective journal gave me an opportunity to reflect on my experiences, biases, and values, and how they inform my research. Reflexivity permitted me to consider my subjectivity as a researcher and how this could affect the ways in which the research is being conducted and findings are interpreted (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). I was also able to evaluate the research process, methods, and outcomes, while examining the impact of my perspective as a researcher (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

5.3. LIMITATIONS

While there are many strengths in this study, the current study is not without its limitations. One of the limitations of this study is my own biases as a novice researcher, even though I have done my best to set them aside. My experiences with body image as a young athlete undoubtedly guided the research process, and I used a reflective journal to comment on my impressions, thoughts, and feelings throughout the data generation process. Though keeping a journal helped me reflect on my thoughts and personal feelings during the research process, I could not have fully reserved my own biases. However, my reflective journal and peer debriefing helped me consider my subjectivity as a narrative researcher, and allowed me to evaluate my initial impressions and thoughts of the data (Shenton, 2004). It is important to note that the athletes' stories are told based on my understanding of their experiences. My interpretation of their stories could be missing vital elements of their accounts. Though the stories are shaped through my lens, another researcher or individual could interpret the athletes' stories differently. However, I attempted to maintain a level of neutrality to ensure that

participants' experiences and meanings are not merely a function of my biases, but a reflection of the stories I was told and have now interpreted as narratives (Kowalski et al., 2018).

Although multiple methods of data generation is certainly a strength of this study, a potential limitation pertains to one method of data generation in particular; semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Interviews were a great way for me to develop rapport with each athlete and discuss their experiences in a safe and confidential environment. Semi-structured interviews are governed by the participant's voice to provide a richer picture of their experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). However, using a focus group at some point during the process of data generation may have allowed for dynamic discussion amongst the women athletes that could not have occurred with just me. The athletes could have interacted with one another and shared similar experiences, potentially providing more details and sharing a common humanity experience. Focus groups are useful in allowing individuals to provide candid responses while building on each other's ideas (Leung and Savithri, 2009), and can help in the exploratory phases of a study (Kreuger, 1988). A focus group could have directed the athletes into an interactive setting that produces a discussion amongst each other, which could create a different dynamic to understanding the role of body self-compassion during the data generation process.

One challenge experienced in this study pertained to participant recruitment. I proposed inviting adolescent women athletes ages 14-17 years to participate in my study. Recruitment was done through posters, social media, visitations to clubs, and word of mouth. After meeting with clubs, I initially had many athletes show interest, but after following up with all interested and qualified potential participants, only a few followed through with participation. It was a trying process recruiting this age group directly from their sport clubs, as I often had to navigate both athlete and parent schedules. This challenge inevitably prolonged the recruitment process

and subsequently delayed data generation and data analysis. Working with this age group provided thoughtful insight into the experiences of adolescent women athletes, an age group that has been the focus of little research attention in the self-compassion and sport literature. Though, as a result of delays with recruitment, a couple of the athletes were heading into their off-season by the time they were scheduled for their second one-on-one interviews. It was important for the women to be in-season during data generation in order to discuss the experiences they had during their trainings and competitions. But with a couple of athletes at the end of their season, they were only able to journal a few experiences of body self-compassion during their final trainings and competitions prior to their second interview. Nevertheless, with less journal entries than other athletes, the women athletes still provided in-depth accounts of their experiences.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The literature on positive body image is still growing. Based on the findings from this study and current body of literature in the area of self-compassion, I have some recommendations for future research. The first is continued research on body self-compassion, as there has only been one study that has explored the construct of body self-compassion. In the two studies that have explored body self-compassion thus far; Berry et al. (2010) and the current study, both have shown the important role it may play with young women exercisers and young women athletes. However, more research could improve on this knowledge and provide even more information on the relevant role of body self-compassion. This would contribute to the growth of literature on positive body image (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015) and the capacity for happiness, satisfaction with the body, and enhanced emotional well-being (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006; Neff, 2003b). Body self-compassion may hold different meanings for different age

groups, cultural groups, and in different settings (Berry et al., 2010). Middle to older adolescent women in the current study embraced the construct of body self-compassion and allowed themselves to be familiar with its potential benefits. It remains unknown if others might benefit from being body self-compassionate as well.

In addition to exploring the meanings body self-compassion may hold to different populations, it is important to consider developing intervention studies for building compassionate body attitudes amongst women athletes. Numerous intervention studies have been conducted to increase self-compassion (Albertson et al., 2015; Mosewich et al., 2013; Neff & Germer, 2013), and most of these studies have focused on how self-compassion would benefit the self by decreasing rumination, depression, stress, and body shame, while increasing optimism, body appreciation, and happiness. It is important for future research to develop and examine a *body* self-compassion intervention that aims to build compassionate attitudes to one's body and emotional experiences. A compassionate approach to the body has been shown to be favorable in varying populations (Albertson et al., 2015; Duarte et al., 2015; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). The women in the current study were briefly introduced to body self-compassion, and they noted that a compassionate approach to their bodies could shape their performance and emotional experiences. Thus, a body self-compassion intervention may help build compassionate attitudes to the body, and potentially be helpful for women who experience social physique anxiety, rumination, and body dissatisfaction.

Another step for future research could involve developing a body self-compassion measure. Although self-compassion has its own self-report measure (Neff, 2003b), which uses positively and negatively worded items to describe self-attitudes; there is no focus on the body. Instead the self-compassion scale entails countering negative self-attitudes and maintenance of a

positive self-image when faced with personal suffering. A total self-compassion score is calculated to represent the general construct of self-compassion, which includes self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity (Neff, Whittaker & Karl, 2017; Neff, 2003b). While there are other positive body image scales such as the Body Appreciation Scale (Avalos et al., 2005) and Body Satisfaction Scale (Slade et al., 1990), these constructs do not cover the negative feelings that people may have towards their bodies. The inclusion of negatively worded items on a scale about the body would allow for the acknowledgement of negative body emotions that participants may have. Acknowledging negative emotions about the body allows one to engage in a process of mindfulness; which involves accepting one's emotional and mental state in a balanced state of awareness (Neff, 2003a). A body self-compassion scale could describe and measure internal processes, be operationally defined, and used to relate to other constructs and variables such as performance. Price, Jhangiani and Chiang (2015) state that the development of a measurement scale is a systematic way of assigning scores to individuals which represent the characteristics of interest, in this case, body self-compassion. We cannot simply observe body self-compassion or accurately assess its influence without measuring it. By constructing a scale for body self-compassion, there is the potential to create a beneficial tool for individuals who suffer from negative body attitudes. Measuring body self-compassion will present patterns and behavioural tendencies that are not directly observable (Price et al., 2015). Consequently, we can assign scores to individuals regarding their level of body self-compassion, and gather quantitative information about the variable (Stevens, 1946). These levels will operationalize how compassionate a person is to their body. In identifying the level of compassion someone has for their body, one can either maintain the level of compassion or work on improving their body self-compassion.

5.5. A CLOSING REFLECTION

I became interested in studying body image in women athletes because of some of the unpleasant experiences I had as an adolescent athlete. I dropped out of sports quicker than I should have because I lacked a sense of belonging within my own sport and never felt like I was good enough to compete. I often struggled with body image and my performance criticisms and these guided me to understand the experiences of other women athletes that are not often highlighted in the sport psychology and performance literature. Before beginning my research, I was unfamiliar with the self-compassion construct. However, I began learning about self-compassion, body attitudes, body image, and body self-compassion, and all of these knowledge began to inform my research interests and personal approach. I chose to take a more compassionate approach to my body than my previous evaluative methods when I didn't meet some of my fitness goals. I initially took a coping mechanism approach to my use of body self-compassion, because I only thought about body self-compassion after I had engaged in an overly critical behaviour. For instance, I went for a run one morning with the intention of completing a 5km distance. After about 2km, I felt exhausted and returned home feeling defeated and blaming my body for not being able to complete my goal. Later that week while writing in my journal, I thought I could have been compassionate to my body since I was injured and was just returning to running again. Though I initially embraced body self-compassion as a coping resource, being compassionate to my body soon became a part of who I am in my day-to-day activities and life. While planning my future runs, I took in account my bodies abilities and was pro-actively being kind and understanding of my body.

When I began deducing my research question, I realized the importance of documenting my thoughts throughout this research process. In keeping my own reflective journal, I spent

some time before and after each interview documenting some of my thoughts and immediate reflections. For instance, after *Ella*'s first interview, I wrote the following:

Ella appears to be a confident but introverted young lady, she is not much of a talker. She's not yet sure how relevant body self-compassion will be to her. And I am not sure she fully understands what it is. Remember to ask her again at phase III what she thinks body self-compassion is... Also, ask more about her emotions during her games. Maybe consider probing more or rephrasing the question for those times she says she really doesn't know. This may help her open up more about her experiences.

My journal served as guide to help me realize my subjectivity as a qualitative researcher during the data generation and analysis process. In addition to containing my own thoughts about the research process, my journal also served as a resource to document my own answers to the questions I would ask my participants during the interviews. Prior to interviewing my first participant, I did a mock interview of myself by asking myself some of the same questions and documenting my responses. In questioning myself I was reminded of the young athlete I once was, and my experiences with negative body image and the influence that others had on my body attitudes and sport performance. In reflecting on my answers, I realized how some of my preconceived notions of sport experiences could influence how I asked certain questions. Following my own interview, I ran pilot interviews with two of my colleagues while keeping my own preconceptions in mind. The pilot interviews provided me with experience on facilitating interviews without offering leading questions, and helped refine my interviewing skills. For example, I learned that silence is not necessarily a bad thing as it gives a participant time to think about answering questions. Similarly, I learned when and how to probe for further details when I thought the participant could offer more insight about a subject. During the pilot, I often attempted to fill blanks and silent moments with some of my own thoughts. When conducting the actual interviews, I was more comfortable with silence in allowing the athletes to reflect on their own thoughts. Also, body self-compassion was well received from both pilot participants,

and they expressed how the construct could be relevant in their lives. I also conversed with my family about my research and introduced body self-compassion to my siblings. My sister in particular, identified with the construct and noted that it could be useful in a clinical setting, such as with women diagnosed with cancer.

The interviews with the athletes taught me to listen with patience, and to be empathetic of each participant's situation and experiences. It was a challenge to remain completely neutral during the interviews as I could relate to some of the stories the women shared with me. However, I was constantly reminding myself to be a listener in the process, and to get as much detail about *their* stories as possible. Listening to the women's stories taught me a great deal about some of the challenges that women face in sport, even at the young age of 14 years and how some of these experiences could, in the athletes' opinions, "make" or "break" them. These women athletes were particularly strong and confident young women who were determined to succeed in sports with no signs of dropping out anytime soon. Body self-compassion was deemed a potential resource for the athletes, and an avenue to show kindness and acceptance to their bodies.

As data generation progressed, I met with my supervisor a few times to discuss preliminary codes and general thematic ideas that were beginning to emerge. I began my analysis following each interview as I was constantly reflecting and forming emerging findings. It was challenging to create co-constructed narratives during my analysis process, because each initial theme was broad and included elements of isolated stories. In an attempt to merge the women's stories with my own interpretations, I began formulating narratives that included similarities in stories as well as differences that reflected the individuality of each experience. Overall, my experience during this study was illuminating to the potential role of body self-

compassion in adolescent women athletes' performance and emotional well-being; as well as what I still need to learn about the construct of body image. As a novice researcher, I am beginning to understand the role I play in shaping my findings. By reading the wealth of literature available on body image, self-compassion, and qualitative methodology, and immersing myself within relevant body image and self-compassion research, I began thinking of the practicality of my findings and what they mean to me. Through this process, I have learned to be thoughtful in my words and even more patient than I already was. I have learned that receiving feedback and constructive criticism does not mean I am doing something wrong, but an avenue to think outside the box and broaden my knowledge. While reflecting on the whole research process, I realized that my interaction with others and communication skills have gotten better, and I am more confident in discussing my area of research. All in all, I have seen a different version of me than the person who began this research journey.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:
Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Leah Ferguson

DEPARTMENT
Kinesiology

BEH#
16-372

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED
Physical Activity Complex (PAC) University of Saskatchewan

STUDENT RESEARCHER(S): Abimbola Eke

FUNDER(S): UNFUNDED

TITLE: The Role of Body Self-compassion on Adolescent Women Athletes' Performance Perceptions and Emotional Well-being

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE
12-Oct-2016

APPROVAL ON
25-Oct-2016

APPROVAL OF:
Application for Behavioural Research Ethics Review
Recruitment Poster
Information Questionnaire:
Participant Consent Forms [3]
Email Reminder Script
Email Communication Script
Phase One Semi Structured Interview Questions
Phase Three Semi Structured Interview Questions
Debriefing Form
Transcript Release Form

EXPIRY DATE
24-Oct-2017

Full Board Meeting ☐

Delegated Review ☒

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <http://research.usask.ca/for-researchers/ethics/index.php>

Vivian Ramsden, Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:

Research Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Box 5000 RPO University, 223-110 Science Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 5C9
Telephone: (306) 966-2975 Fax: (306) 966-2069

Appendix B:
Recruitment Poster

COLLEGE OF KINESIOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

WOMEN ATHLETES INVITED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY ON: SPORT PERFORMANCE AND WELL-BEING

Can I participate in this study?

This study might be a good fit for you if:

- You are a young woman between the ages of 14-17 years
- You currently participate, and have participated in a competitive sport in the last 12 months

What will I do in this study?

- If you decide to take part in this study you would be asked to:
- Take part in two one-on-one interview with lead female researcher Abi Eke.
- You will be asked to discuss your attitudes to your body and how it influences your performance and emotional well-being.
- Keep a journal entry for about two-weeks of your in-sport/in-training body attitude experiences
- Partake in a second one-on-one interview discussing your journal entries.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

*Abimbola Eke, Graduate Student Researcher, College of Kinesiology,
University of Saskatchewan
(778)-242-1441, abimbola.eke@usask.ca*

*Dr. Leah Ferguson, Researcher, College of Kinesiology, University of
Saskatchewan
(306)-966-1093, leah.ferguson@usask.ca*

**This study has been reviewed by, and received approval
through, the Research Ethics Office, University of Saskatchewan.**



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

usask.ca

Appendix C:
Assent Form



Participant Assent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *The Role of Body Self-compassion in Adolescent Women Athletes' Performance Perceptions and Emotional Well-being*. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Student Researcher: Abimbola Eke, Master's Student College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan, abimbola.eke@usask.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Leah Ferguson, College of Kinesiology, 306-966-1093, leah.ferguson@usask.ca

What is this study about? This study explores the role of body self-compassion in adolescent women athletes' performance perceptions and emotional well-being. For this study, self-compassion is defined as treating oneself with kindness during times of suffering or failure.

Do I have to participate? Participation in this study is completely voluntary and optional and is not part of your regular involvement in your sport.

What will I have to do if I become involved? If you want to become involved, you will be invited to participate in two one-on-one interviews and write journal notes of your sport experiences. Each interview will be with the female graduate student researcher, Abimbola Eke, and will be done at a time and place that is comfortable for you.

Phase One involves a one-on-one interview that will be conducted at the Physical Activity Complex, at a time is that convenient for you. The interview will focus on discussing your experiences of being compassionate to the body within a competitive sport context. The interview is anticipated to last between 45-60 minutes. Once the interview is complete instructions regarding phase two of the study will be explained.

Phase Two involves journaling. You will be provided with a journal and asked to keep journal entries of moments where you acted, or did not act, compassionately to your body in your sport or during training. Your journal entries may include notes about why and how each moment represents your experiences discussed in the first interview. An example will be shown to you in order to give you a better idea of what we are looking for. You will have 2 weeks to journal your experiences, and you will be invited to select three to five journal entries to talk about in phase three.

Phase Three involves a one-on-one reflexive interview that will focus on discussing your selected journal entries.

Both interviews will be audio taped, and field notes will be taken. The audiotapes will be transcribed (written out) word for word in order for the research team to review what was said and develop a rich narrative of the experiences presented. As a participant, you will be asked to provide feedback on the accuracy of the transcripts.

Are there any risks involved? You will not be subjected to any physical or psychological risk. You have the right to refuse to answer any question, at which time the discussion will be redirected. Not answering a question or withdrawing from the study will result in no penalty to you or anyone else. Although we do not expect any psychological risk, the research project may be sensitive in nature for you. If you feel participation is placing you under stress we will discontinue your involvement in the study, again resulting in no penalty. If you wish, any data collected prior to this point will be omitted from the study and destroyed. Below is a resource you can use if you would like professional help dealing with your personal experiences. You can also contact the researchers at any time during the study from the contact information listed above.

Mental Health Services - services available to the public, no fee

Phone # 306-655-7950

- Youth Mental Health Services (for adolescents 12-19 years old)

Are there any benefits to doing this study? Although no benefits of participating in this study can be guaranteed, this study will assist in providing an opportunity for an increased understanding about body self-compassion and how it can play a role in sport performance and well-being. This is important for researchers to better understand the role of body self-compassion in sport. Little research has been

conducted in the area of body self-compassion, so the results generated from this study may be beneficial to you and other young women athletes.

Will other people know who I am or what I said? The data from the study will be used to produce a research paper that might be published or presented at a conference as part of the student researcher's program. However, your identity will be kept confidential. Although we might report direct quotations from the interviews, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym (made up name) and all identifying information (name, school, address, coaches etc.) will be removed from our report. Only the research team will review the original audiotapes and transcripts. No other athletes, parents, or coaches will see the original data. It is important that you are aware that there are certain types of information that the researchers cannot keep secret (e.g., child abuse, intent to do violence, etc.).

Can I drop out of the study? Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from (drop out of) the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort and the decision to withdraw will not affect any of your current or future activities. No one will be angry or upset if you drop out. You can withdraw the information you have given for the study up until data is pooled and analyzed. You may choose to not answer individual questions, again without any penalty. Prior to each interview, you will be asked if you still wish to participate. You will be told of any new information that may influence your decision to participate.

What if I have a question about the study? If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to contact the researcher. You are also free to contact the researcher if you have questions at a later time.

- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

Consent to participate:

I have read and understand the description of the research study provided above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I agree to have participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw my consent to participate at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

I give permission for my journals to be used under the following conditions only:

_____ As raw data, not to be viewed outside the research team,

_____ For educational purposes (professional and research presentations) and research publications.

Name of Parent/Guardian *Signature* *Date*

Researcher's Signature *Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix D:
Participant Consent Form



Participant Consent Form

Project Title: The Role of Body Self-compassion in Adolescent Women Athletes' Performance Perceptions and Emotional Well-being

Student Researcher: Abimbola Eke, Master's Student, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan, abimbola.eke@usask.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Leah Ferguson, College of Kinesiology, 306-966-1093, leah.ferguson@usask.ca

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of body self-compassion in adolescent women athletes' performance perceptions and emotional well-being. Self-compassion is defined as treating oneself with kindness during times of suffering or failure.

Procedure:

Your participation is completely voluntary, and consists of three phases.

Phase One involves a one-on-one interview that will be conducted at the Physical Activity Complex, at a time is that convenient for you. The interview will focus on discussing your experiences of being compassionate to the body within a competitive sport context. The interview is anticipated to last between 45-60 minutes. Once the interview is complete instructions regarding phase two of the study will be explained.

Phase Two involves journaling. You will be provided with a journal and asked to keep journal entries of moments where you acted, or did not act, compassionately to your body in your sport or during training. Your journal entries may include notes about why and how each moment represents your experiences discussed in the first interview. You will have 2 weeks to journal your experiences, and you will be invited to select three to five journal entries to discuss in phase three.

Phase Three involves a one-on-one reflexive interview that will focus on discussing your selected journal entries.

Both interviews will be audio taped, and field notes will be taken. The audiotapes will be transcribed (written out) word for word in order for the research team to review what was said and develop a rich narrative of the experiences presented. As a participant, you will be asked to provide feedback on the accuracy of the transcripts.

Potential Risks:

There are no known or anticipated physical or psychological risks associated with participating in this study. You have the right to refuse to answer any question. Not answering a question or withdrawing from the study will result in no penalty to you or anyone else. You are encouraged to contact the researcher at any time (before, during, or after the study) to ask any questions that you may have. In the

event that you would like to further discuss your feelings regarding the issues discussed in the study, Saskatoon Mental Health Services can assist her:

Mental Health Services - services available to the public, no fee
Phone # 306-655-7950

- Youth Mental Health Services (for adolescents 12-19 years old)

Potential Benefits:

Although no benefits of participating in this study can be guaranteed, this study will assist in providing an opportunity for an increased understanding about body self-compassion and how it can play a role in sport performance and well-being. This is important for researchers to better understand the role of body self-compassion in sport. Little research has been conducted in the area of body self-compassion, so the results generated from this study may be beneficial to you and other young women athletes.

Confidentiality:

The data from the study will be used as part of the student researcher's program, to produce a thesis document towards the completion of the researcher's Master's Degree, and to produce a manuscript in hopes of publishing in a scholarly journal and/or being presented at a conference. However, *your identity* will be kept confidential. Although we might report direct quotations from the interviews, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym (made up name) and all identifying information (name, coach, school, address, etc.) will be removed from our report. Although you will be asked to provide an email address, it will only be used to send reminder emails to you about filling out your journal, and scheduling a time for the interviews. After all data has been collected, your email address will be removed from the data file and replaced with a participant number. Written reports of the data will be reported in summarized form so that it will not be possible to identify individuals.

After your interviews, and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit. Also, it is important that you are aware that there are certain types of information that the researchers may be obliged to report to relevant authorities (e.g., child abuse, intent to do violence, etc.).

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. The decision to withdraw will not affect any of your current or future activities. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until data is pooled and analyzed. After this, it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data. You may also refuse to answer individual questions, again without any penalty. You will be advised of any new information that may have a bearing on your decision to participate. Prior to each interview, you will be asked if you still wish to participate.

Storage of Data:

All research material will be securely stored in the office of Dr. Leah Ferguson at the University of Saskatchewan, for a minimum of five years post publication of the findings.

Questions or Concerns:

- If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to contact the researcher. You are also free to contact the researcher if you have questions at a later time.
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to

that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

Consent to participate:

I have read and understand the description of the research study provided above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I agree to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw my consent to participate at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

I give permission for my journal to be used under the following conditions only:

_____ As raw data, not to be viewed outside the research team,

_____ For educational purposes (professional and research presentations) and research publications.

Name of Participant *Signature* *Date*

Researcher's Signature *Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix E:
Parent/Guardian Consent Form



Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Your daughter is invited to participate in a study entitled The Role of Body Self-compassion in Adolescent Women Athletes' Performance Perceptions and Emotional Well-being. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Student Researcher: Abimbola Eke, Master's Student, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan, abimbola.eke@usask.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Leah Ferguson, College of Kinesiology, 306-966-1093, leah.ferguson@usask.ca

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of body self-compassion in adolescent women athletes' performance perceptions and emotional well-being. Self-compassion is defined as treating oneself with kindness during times of suffering or failure.

Procedure:

Your daughter's participation is completely voluntary, and consists of two phases.

Phase one involves a one-on-one interview that will be conducted at the Physical Activity Complex, at a time convenient for your daughter. The interview will focus on discussing your daughter's experiences of being compassionate to the body within a competitive sport context. The interview is anticipated to last between 45-60 minutes. Once the interview is complete instructions regarding phase two of the study will be explained.

Phase Two involves journaling. Your daughter will be provided with a journal and asked to keep journal entries of moments where she acted, or did not act compassionately to her body in her sport or during training. Her journal entries may include notes about why and how each moment represents her experiences discussed in the first interview. She will have 2 weeks to journal her experiences, and she will be invited to select three to five journal entries to discuss in phase three.

Phase Three involves a one-on-one reflexive interview that will focus on discussing her selected journal entries.

Both interviews will be audio taped, and field notes will be taken. The audiotapes will be transcribed (written out) word for word in order for the research team to review what was said and develop a rich narrative of the experiences presented. As a participant, your daughter will be asked to provide feedback on the accuracy of the transcripts.

Potential Risks:

Your daughter will not be subjected to any physical or psychological risk. She has the right to refuse to answer any question, at which time the discussion will be redirected. Not answering a question or withdrawing from the study will result in no penalty to her or anyone else. Although we do not expect any

psychological risk, the research project may be sensitive in nature for your daughter. If your daughter feels participation is placing her under stress, we will discontinue her involvement in the study, again resulting in no penalty. If she wishes, any data collected prior to this point will be omitted from the study and destroyed. Below is a resource your daughter can use if she would like professional help dealing with her personal experiences. You can also contact the lead researchers at any time during the study with the information listed above.

Mental Health Services - services available to the public, no fee
Phone # 306-655-7950

- Youth Mental Health Services (for adolescents 12-19 years old)
- Adult Community Mental Health and Addictions
Services for adults 19 years and up

Potential Benefits:

Although no benefits of participating in this study can be guaranteed, this study will assist in providing an opportunity for an increased understanding about body self-compassion and how it can play a role in sport performance and well-being. This is important for researchers to better understand the role of body self-compassion in sport. Little research has been conducted in the area of body self-compassion, so the results generated from this study may be beneficial to your daughter and other young women athletes.

Confidentiality:

The data from the study will be used as part of the student researcher's program of research to produce a thesis document towards the completion of the researcher's Master's Degree, and to produce a manuscript in hopes of publishing in a scholarly journal and/or being presented at a conference. However, *your daughter's identity* will be kept confidential. Although we might report direct quotations from the interviews, she will be asked to choose a pseudonym (made up name) and all identifying information (name, coach, school, address, etc.) will be removed from our report. Although your daughter will be asked to provide an email address, it will only be used to send reminder emails about filling out her journal, and scheduling a time for the interviews. After all data has been collected, your daughter's email address will be removed from the data file and replaced with a participant number. Written reports of the data will be reported in summarized form so that it will not be possible to identify individuals.

After the interviews, and prior to the data being included in the final report, your daughter will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit. Also, it is important that your daughter is aware that there are certain types of information that the researchers may be obliged to report to relevant authorities (e.g., child abuse, intent to do violence, etc.).

Right to Withdraw:

Your daughter's participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. The decision to withdraw will not affect any of her current or future activities. Your daughter's right to withdraw data from the study will apply until data is pooled and analyzed. Your daughter may also refuse to answer individual questions, again without any penalty. Your daughter will be advised of any new information that may have a bearing on her decision to participate. Prior to each session, she will be asked if she still wishes to participate.

Storage of Data:

All research material will be securely stored in the office of one of the lead researchers, Dr. Leah Ferguson at the University of Saskatchewan, for a minimum of five years post publication of the findings.

Questions or Concerns:

- If you or your daughter have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to contact the researcher. You are also free to contact the researcher if you have questions at a later time.
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

Consent to participate:

I have read and understand the description of the research study provided above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I agree to have my daughter participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw my consent for her to participate at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

I give permission for my journals to be used under the following conditions only:

____ As raw data, not to be viewed outside the research team,

____ For educational purposes (professional and research presentations) and research publications.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Parent/Guardian</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	
<i>Researcher's Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>	

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix F:
Demographic Questionnaire

Information Questionnaire

This questionnaire contains 13 questions and is intended to collect descriptive information about who is participating in this project. We ask that you complete this questionnaire with as much accuracy as possible. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. What is your pseudonym (chosen/fake name) in this study? _____
2. What is your email address? _____
(to contact you for reviewing the typed out audio file)
3. What is your date of birth?

__	__	/	__	__	/	__	__	__	__
M	M		D	D		Y	Y	Y	Y
4. What is your age? _____ yrs _____ months
5. What is your nationality? _____
6. Is English your first language? YES ☐ NO ☐
7. How would you describe yourself? You may select more than one or specify, if applicable.

Arab	<input type="radio"/>
Black	<input type="radio"/>
Chinese	<input type="radio"/>
Filipino	<input type="radio"/>
Indigenous	<input type="radio"/>
First Nations	<input type="radio"/>
Métis	<input type="radio"/>
Inuit	<input type="radio"/>
Japanese	<input type="radio"/>
Latin American	<input type="radio"/>
South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani etc.)	<input type="radio"/>
Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian etc.)	<input type="radio"/>
West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan etc.)	<input type="radio"/>
White	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please Specify)	<input type="radio"/>

Section 2: Current Weight and Height

8. What is your current estimated height? _____ cm **or** _____ feet/inches
9. What is your current estimated weight? _____ kg **or** _____ lb

Section 3: Sports Participation and Training History

10. What is the primary sport you are participating in as an athlete?

Ice Hockey	<input type="radio"/>
Archery	<input type="radio"/>
Track and Field	<input type="radio"/>
Boxing	<input type="radio"/>
Rowing	<input type="radio"/>
Speed Skating	<input type="radio"/>
Wrestling	<input type="radio"/>
Volleyball	<input type="radio"/>
Basketball	<input type="radio"/>
Gymnastics	<input type="radio"/>
Soccer	<input type="radio"/>
Football	<input type="radio"/>
Golf	<input type="radio"/>
Swimming	<input type="radio"/>
Field Hockey	<input type="radio"/>
Cross-Country Running	<input type="radio"/>
Rugby	<input type="radio"/>
Tennis	<input type="radio"/>
Swimming	<input type="radio"/>
Downhill Skiing	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify) _____	<input type="radio"/>

11. What is the highest level of competition you have **ever** competed at in your primary sport?

Local ☐
(Competing against athletes from your city/town/community)

Provincial ☐
(Competing against athletes from around the province)

Regional ☐
(Competing against athletes from the Western provinces)

National ☐
(Competing at National Championships)

Elite for Age ☐
(Competing at an international level against athletes of the same age group)

International ☐
(Competing for your country of Citizenship at an international level)

Other (please specify) _____ ☐

12. What is the highest level you are **currently** (the past 12 months) competing at in your primary sport?

Local ☐
(Competing against athletes from your city/town/community)

Provincial ☐
(Competing against athletes from around the province)

Regional ☐
(Competing against athletes from the Western provinces)

National ☐
(Competing at National Championships)

Elite for Age ☐
(Competing at an international level against athletes of the same age group)

International ☐
(Competing for your country of Citizenship at an international level)

Other (please specify) _____ ☐

13. How many years have you competed in your primary sport at your current level?

≤ 1 year ☐

1 to 2 years ☐

2 to 5 years ☐

5 to 10 years ☐

More than 10 years ☐

Appendix G:
Phase One Interview Guide

PHASE ONE: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Remind athlete of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty for any reason until data is pooled and analyzed- GO OVER CONSENT.

Gaining rapport:

- Play two truths and a lie game.
- Please tell me about a little bit out your sporting background
 - When did your interest in sports first begin?
 - How many years have played?
 - What position/level do you play, and how long have you played at this level?
 - What is your favourite part of this sport?
 - How did you end up where you are today in your sport?
 - Is there a part of your sport that you think is different from other sports?
 - Can you tell me an experience that stands out to you as a nice memory in your sport?

Specific experiences discussion:

As a competitive athlete in a competitive sporting environment, you may have had some experiences where your attitudes towards your body influenced your emotions and how you thought you performed at a game or in training.

For the purpose of my study, I would like you to tell me about a time that the way you felt about your body played a role in your sport performance experience during a competition; and the emotions you felt during this time.

probe: What attitudes did you have towards your body?

probe: How did your body attitude make you feel about your performance?

probe: What types of emotions arose from this experience?

probe: Do you have anything else to add regarding that experience?

Introduce Self-compassion:

Have you heard of the idea of having compassion towards yourself?

probe: What do you think being compassionate towards your self looks like?

Self-compassion can be described as an act of being kind and understanding towards yourself in times of difficulties and personal failings, rather than harshly criticising yourself. (show three-minute YouTube video of leading researcher Kristen Neff explaining self-compassion; <http://www.self-compassion.org/video-clips/self-compassion.html>).

Do you have any questions about the concept of self-compassion?

Introduce Body self-compassion:

Now that you are a little more familiar with the term self-compassion, I will like to introduce a something called body self-compassion.

When I talk about body self-compassion, what do you think of?

probe: What does body self-compassion feel like?

probe: What would you say are the important parts of body self-compassion?

Performance:

Would you say being body self-compassionate influences your performance?

probe: How or how not?

probe: Does your attitude towards your body determine how you perform in sport?

probe: How do you manage thoughts and attitudes about your body?

Probe: Would you say your body attitudes positively or negatively influences the way you think you perform in sports? How?

We are interested in the potential role of body self-compassion in your thoughts about your performance and emotional well-being. One definition of body self-compassion is having a kind, understanding and nonjudgmental attitude towards your body in response to your perceived physical imperfections, limitations and failures. Provide short handout about body self-compassion.

probe: Do you have any questions about the concept of body self-compassion?

probe: What are your initial reactions or thoughts about body self-compassion?

probe: Would you say you are compassionate towards your body? How and how not?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Explain journaling component for phase two (Participant will receive information sheet on this).

The next phase of this study involves keeping a journal. Provide participant with a journal. Please spend the next two weeks keeping a journal about your experiences with being compassionate, or not compassionate, to your body during your sport. Try to focus on the times during training or competitions that your emotions and the way you thought you performed was because your attitude towards your body. Write down these experiences as best you can.

You are not expected to enter a journal entry daily, but be as detailed as you can with your entries. You will be invited to bring your journal back to our second one-on-one interview to share those experiences, and to submit your journal.

During the second interview, we will discuss three to five specific experiences that you have captured in your journal that you would like to discuss.

Ask participants if they have any questions.

Appendix H:
Email Reminder Script

Email Reminder Script

Subject: Body Self-Compassion Study | Journal Entry Reminder

Body:

Hello _____,

Thank you again for completing the first phase of this study.

This is a friendly reminder about the second phase of our study, the journaling component. Please spend some time writing about your sport experiences, and specifically if/how your attitude, thoughts, and feelings towards your body influenced how you thought you performed and/or your emotions at competitions and trainings.

These journals are intended to be very open-ended, and you can write as detailed as you like. We appreciate your ongoing involvement in this study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at Abimbola.eke@usask.ca.

Thank you,
Abimbola Eke

Appendix I:
Phase Two Interview Guide

PHASE TWO: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for completing the journaling phase of the study. Remind athlete of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty for any reason until data is pooled and analyzed.

To start, I would like to get your thoughts on how you felt the journaling process was.

1. How did you find the journaling process? Did you find it beneficial, frustrating, helpful, difficult, or emotional?
2. Were you able to capture your emotions through your journal entries?
3. Did you have a plan in mind when journaling, or did something happen that sparked emotions and prompted an entry? Why did you choose to do it this way?

Thank you for bringing your journal with you today, for this part of the interview we will now go through your journal entries and you can walk me through your experiences of each entry.

Can you walk me through your entries? And talk about the ways these journal entries captured your experiences in which you felt your body image played a role in your performance and emotional well-being.

Things to bring up with Journals

1. What does it mean?
2. Please tell me about the emotions that arose when you wrote about this experience, and now that you are discussing the experience.
3. What emotions are present in this entry for you?
probe: What emotions were you trying to portray?
4. Walk me through what you were thinking about when you experienced being compassionate to body during a competition or at training?
probe: Were there other people involved?
probe: How did it make you feel?
probe: How did it affect your performance during the game?

Can you tell me how you feel about your journal entries? Are they positive, negative or neutral feelings?

probe: How has your attitude towards your body been effected by these entries?

probe: In what ways has your attitude changed?

probe: Would you say you have a better understanding of yourself and your body image experiences after this journaling process?

How did your attitude towards your body influence your performance?

probe: how did it influence how you thought you performed?

Experiences of Body Self-compassion:

1. Can you think of a situation where you had to deal with difficult emotions about your body?

probe: Would you say you were compassionate to your body? Why or why not?
probe: Tell me about when you treated your body with kindness and understanding?
probe: When have you acknowledged a painful or difficult experience in sport that had to do with attitudes towards your body?

2. Why was this experience different from other challenges and events you have experienced in your sport?

Conclusion

Do you have anything else you would like to add regarding your journal?

As we conclude our conversation, I would like to ask you:

- Do you have an additional comments?
- Is there something else that you think would be important to add to this research?
- Do you have any further questions or comments?

I want to take the time to thank you for your participation in this interview today. Without your time and willingness to participate, this research would not be possible. Again, thank you very much for your time and contributions

- Remind participants that if they have any questions or concerns, they can contact me. Information needed is also provided in the exit package.
- Give the participant exit package

Appendix J:
Exit Package



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Debriefing Form

Dear Participant:

Thank you for completing the phases of the research study “The Role of Body Self-Compassion in Adolescent Women Athletes’ Performance Perceptions and Emotional Well-being”. Your participation is highly valued. The research being conducted in this study focuses on how body self-compassion influences one’s perceived performance during competitions and training, as well as the state of one’s emotional well-being.

This research will be used to fulfill the requirements of a Master of Science Degree at the University of Saskatchewan. The results from the research will also be prepared for presentation(s) and manuscript(s) for publication in research journal(s).

To formally request the results from this research project please contact Abimbola Eke at abimbola.eke@usask.ca or Dr. Leah Ferguson at leah.ferguson@usask.ca. The results of this study will be presented in both a written Master of Science thesis and defense. The results of this study will become available in the fall of 2017.

I sincerely hope that you have enjoyed this research process and I am very thankful for your participation.

Sincerely Yours:

Abimbola O. Eke



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TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

THE ROLE OF BODY SELF-COMPASSION IN ADOLESCENT WOMEN ATHLETES'
PERFORMANCE PERCEPTIONS AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Abimbola Eke. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Abimbola Eke to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of researcher