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5 Female athletes' experiences of positive growth following deselection in sport

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Abstract

7 The purpose of this study was to explore female athletes' experiences of positive growth
8 following deselection from provincial sport teams. Interviews were conducted with 18 females
9 (M age = 22.45 years, SD = 1.38) who were deselected from provincial soccer, ice-hockey, and
10 volleyball teams as adolescents. Interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology (Smith,
11 Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) was used. Analysis was guided by Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004)
12 model of posttraumatic growth. Results showed that participants questioned their identity and
13 ability as an athlete following deselection. Growth was a gradual process that unfolded over
14 several years, experienced through a greater appreciation of the role of sport in their lives and
15 sport becoming a priority, an enhanced sense of personal strength, developing closer social
16 relationships, and a recognition of new and other opportunities. These findings show that
17 cognitive processes and social relationships are critical components in the process of positive
18 growth.

19

20 *Keywords:* youth sport, posttraumatic growth, phenomenology

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22 Traumatic and adverse events can cause people significant distress, yet individuals can
23 experience positive growth from their struggle with such events (Baker, Kelly, Calhoun, Cann, &
24 Tedeschi, 2008). Studies have shown, for instance, that some survivors of natural disasters and
25 serious illnesses report positive growth in the aftermath of their experiences (e.g., Cryder,
26 Kilmer, Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2004; Hefferon, Grealy, & Mutrie, 2009). Positive growth
27 typically includes changes in perceptions of self (e.g., enhanced self-efficacy, personal strength),
28 relationships with others (e.g., renewed appreciation of family and friends), and one's philosophy
29 about life (e.g., seeing new possibilities in life; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun,
30 2004).

31 Researchers have highlighted the need for further study of the different social contexts in
32 which positive growth may occur (Lepore & Revenson, 2006). Sport is one such context that has
33 received relatively little attention in the literature until recently (e.g., Howells, Sarkar, &
34 Fletcher, 2017; Tamminen & Neely, 2016). Positive growth in sport has been associated with a
35 range of highly stressful and potentially traumatic events, such as injury, performance issues,
36 physical abuse, and sexual abuse (Galli & Reel, 2012; Howells & Fletcher, 2015; Sarkar,
37 Fletcher, & Brown, 2015; Tamminen, Holt, & Neely, 2013; Wadey, Evans, Evans, & Mitchell,
38 2011). The current study was designed to add to the literature by exploring female athletes'
39 experiences of positive growth following deselection ('getting cut' from a competitive sport team
40 based on the decisions of a coach; Neely, Dunn, McHugh, & Holt, 2016).

41 From a clinical perspective, trauma is defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of
42 Mental Disorders (DSM) as exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual
43 violence through: directly experiencing the event; witnessing, in person, the event occurring to
44 others; learning that such an event happened to a close family member or friend; or experiencing
45 repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of such events that causes recurrent, involuntary

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46 and intrusive distressing memories and/or recurrent distressing dreams in which the
47 content/affect of the dream are related to the traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association,
48 2013). In contrast, in **the psychological research literature**, the conceptualization of trauma is
49 often “broader and less restrictive” than the DSM criteria, “describing sets of circumstances that
50 represent significant challenges to the adaptive resources of the individual, and that represent
51 significant challenges to the individuals’ ways of understanding the world and their place in it”
52 (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1). Here, Tedeschi and Calhoun draw from Janoff-Bulman’s
53 (1992) ‘**shattered assumptions**’ conceptualization of trauma, whereby traumatic events are
54 described as those that cause psychological crisis and challenge the fundamental components of
55 individuals’ assumptive world. **The assumptions that are challenged include beliefs in a just,**
56 **benevolent, and predictable world in which individuals possess competence and worth. When**
57 **individuals experience an event that damages their worldview, they no longer perceive the world**
58 **as benevolent and predictable or themselves as competent and invulnerable. Hence, a central**
59 **premise is that “trauma symptoms are caused by shattering of worldviews” (Edmondson et al.,**
60 **2013, p. 358).**

61 On a superficial level, deselection may not appear to be ‘as traumatic’ as events that
62 involve the sudden onset of a serious illness or injury, death of a loved one, or natural disaster. **In**
63 **fact, sport and exercise psychology researchers have argued that the term *posttraumatic growth***
64 **should only be used for individuals who have “truly suffered traumatic experiences” (Wadey,**
65 **Clark, Podlog, & McCullough, 2013, p. 216) -- which reflects a clinical-type of interpretation --**
66 **and that the term *adversity* should be used for ‘less traumatic’ experiences (Day & Wadey,**
67 **2017). However, trauma is based on a person’s subjective interpretation of an event rather than**
68 **the objective characteristics or consequences of the event (Joseph, 2011). Indeed, Janoff-Bulman**
69 **(1992) argued that “it is not the recognizable, readily apparent external losses—of one’s health,**

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70 home, community, or a loved one—that define an experience as traumatic, but rather the internal
71 disorganization and disintegration that follows from our psychological unpreparedness. Traumas
72 are shocks to our inner worlds” (p. 83). Hence, a defining aspect of trauma is that the event
73 causes physical or emotional harm and leads people to challenge assumptions about themselves
74 and the world in which they live (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

75 In designing the current study, we made the assumption that deselection has the *potential*
76 to be perceived and experienced as a traumatic event that challenges athletes’ views of
77 themselves and the social (i.e., sporting) world in which they operate. This assumption was based
78 upon research showing that following deselection athletes have reported clinical levels of
79 psychological distress (Blakelock, Chen, & Prescott, 2016), heightened depression, anxiety,
80 anger, and humiliation, as well as a loss of self-esteem, reduced friendships, and a lowered sense
81 of connectedness (Barnett, 2007; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Munroe, Albinson, & Hall, 1999).
82 Studies have also shown that athletes can experience a loss of athletic identity (i.e., the degree to
83 which an individual identifies with an athletic role; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993) and a
84 reduced sense of self following deselection (Brown & Potrac, 2009; Grove, Fish, & Eklund,
85 2004). For instance, Grove et al. (2004) found that athletic identity significantly decreased
86 among female adolescent athletes from the United States who failed to make state all-star teams.
87 On the basis of this evidence, it seems reasonable to propose that deselection can be appraised
88 and experienced as a traumatic event that may lead some athletes to seriously question
89 assumptions about themselves, their ability, their identity, and their place in the social world of
90 competitive sport.

91 Given the apparent potential for deselection to be appraised and experienced as a
92 traumatic event, we return to the question of determining whether deselection may precipitate
93 positive growth for athletes. Recent research conducted by Neely, McHugh, Dunn, and Holt

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94 (2017) examined how female adolescent athletes (*M* age = 15.0 years) and their parents coped
95 with deselection from provincial level soccer, basketball, volleyball, and ice hockey teams.
96 Results showed that athletes and parents shared the responsibility and some cooperative coping
97 actions (such as parents helping their children with positive reframing) and individual coping
98 strategies (such as athletes increasing effort) appeared to provide ways to view deselection as an
99 opportunity for personal growth. However, the short time-frame covered within Neely et al.'s
100 study (participants were interviewed 10-12 weeks following deselection) did not allow for
101 analysis of how positive growth may occur because growth can take several years to be realized
102 following a traumatic event (Frazier, Conlon, & Glaser, 2001; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Meyerson,
103 Grant, Carter, & Kilmer, 2011).

104 The current study focused on Canadian female athletes who had been deselected from
105 provincial teams during adolescence. Provincial teams are extremely important in many sports in
106 the Canadian youth sport system. They are created through rigorous and extensive selection
107 processes where athletes are invited to attend competitive 'try-out' camps that are evaluated by
108 experienced coaches and their staff (Neely et al., 2016). These teams then compete at national
109 (and sometimes international) competitions, and include athletes deemed to be the best in their
110 age group in the province. Provincial teams are important stepping stones toward gaining
111 lucrative college scholarships and for some athletes provide a pathway to national teams. We
112 focused on the deselection during adolescence because this is typically a period when individuals
113 are highly invested in sport and have a strong athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993). Female
114 athletes were sampled because they may have fewer coping resources than males (Lewis &
115 Frydenberg, 2004), and may be particularly vulnerable to the stress of deselection because they
116 tend to place high value on social relationships (Neely et al., 2017; Smith, 2007). Furthermore,
117 research in the psychology literature has shown that females experience greater levels of positive

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118 growth than males due to their increased likelihood to seek social support (Kesimci, Göral, &
119 Gençöz, 2005). Thus, we chose to sample in a context where there appeared to be a strong
120 possibility that deselection could be subjectively appraised as a traumatic event that could
121 precipitate positive growth.

122 Howells et al. (2017) recently called for more precise definitions of terms and theories
123 used to study positive growth in sport in order to enhance the conceptual clarity of the literature.
124 As noted earlier, we used Janoff-Bulman's (1992) definition of a traumatic event (i.e., a highly
125 stressful event that causes physical or emotional harm that significantly challenges the adaptive
126 resources of an individual and an individual's way of understanding one's self, the world, and
127 their place in it). Several theories and models describe the notion of positive growth. These
128 include the functional-descriptive model of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996,
129 2004), stress-related growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), organismic valuing theory (Linley &
130 Joseph, 2004), thriving (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995), and perceived benefits (McMillen & Fisher,
131 1998). Although these theories and models have specific definitions and conceptualizations, **they**
132 **are generally complementary (Joseph & Linley, 2006)** and propose that the process of struggling
133 and coping can result in positive changes that propel an individual to a higher level of
134 psychological and emotional functioning than that which existed prior to the adverse event
135 (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

136 We used the functional-descriptive model of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun,
137 1996, 2004) to examine if/how positive growth may have occurred in response to deselection
138 during adolescence. **This model is "the most comprehensive theoretical description of growth"**
139 **(Joseph & Linley, 2006, p. 1044)**. As such, we posited that the functional-descriptive model of
140 posttraumatic growth *may* be useful for understanding and accounting for ways in which athletes
141 may experience positive growth following deselection, while acknowledging that the model has

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142 not been used previously to study growth in the context of deselection. Given that we used a
143 phenomenological approach with an exploratory focus, the functional-descriptive model of
144 posttraumatic growth was appealing because it is an ‘experiential’ model and, as Tedeschi and
145 Calhoun (2004) explained, the five domains of posttraumatic growth are “a good representation
146 of the breadth of growth that people can experience” (p. 14). Hence, we decided this model
147 would be useful in guiding our analysis of the types of positive growth experiences individuals
148 may accrue while maintaining the exploratory and phenomenological aspects of the study.

149 In the functional-descriptive model of posttraumatic growth, a traumatic event serves as a
150 ‘seismic challenge’ that shatters individuals’ pre-existing schemas about the self, their goals, and
151 their beliefs about the world (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004). According to this model, the
152 ensuing struggle individuals have with the aftermath of trauma can result in five domains of
153 growth: greater appreciation of life, personal strength, relating to others, new possibilities, and
154 spiritual change. Greater appreciation of life includes an increased appreciation of what is
155 important, recognition of the value of things formerly taken for granted, and a change in
156 priorities. Personal strength refers to positive changes in perceptions of self and an enhanced
157 sense of personal strength, especially in terms of ‘if I got through that, I can get through
158 anything.’ Relating to others involves closer, more intimate and more meaningful relationships
159 with others, an enhanced valuing of family and friends, and an increased sense of compassion
160 towards others. New possibilities reflect an awareness and acknowledgment of previously
161 unrecognized opportunities and/or taking a new and different path in life. Spiritual change
162 involves religious or spiritual growth, either through a deepening of faith or a significant change
163 in beliefs.

164 A traumatic event in and of itself does not lead to positive growth in these five domains;
165 rather, it is the cognitive processing, coping, social support, and affective engagement that occur

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166 in the aftermath of the event that are thought to lead to growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). For
167 example, cognitive processing and the reappraisal of one's circumstances help people deal with
168 their emotional reactions to the trauma as they try to make sense of what has happened. Although
169 distressing, a rebuilding of views and beliefs often occurs through ruminative processes.
170 Rumination is repeated thinking that can include intrusive thoughts as well as reminiscing,
171 problem solving, and trying to make sense of the trauma (Martin & Tesser, 1996). Another
172 ruminative process involving cognitive engagement is regret and counterfactual thinking (e.g.,
173 repeated consideration of how the trauma could have potentially been avoided). These thoughts
174 often occur when the cause of trauma is certain and other people are responsible for causing the
175 trauma.

176 Researchers who study positive growth in sport and physical activity contexts have also
177 highlighted the importance of cognitive processes and social support in the growth process. For
178 example, in the context of competitive sport, Tamminen et al. (2013) explored experiences of
179 adversity and perceptions of positive growth via interviews with five elite female athletes. These
180 athletes had represented Canada at international competitions in individual (long-distance
181 running, track and field, and swimming) and team (basketball) sports. Adverse experiences cited
182 by athletes were performance slumps, coach conflicts, bullying, eating disorders, sexual abuse,
183 and injuries. Shared features of participants' experiences of adversity included
184 isolation/withdrawal, emotional disruption, and questioning one's identity as an athlete.
185 Participants sought and found meaning in their experiences by identifying opportunities for
186 growth, using social support, and reappraising the importance of sport in their lives. Aspects of
187 positive growth included athletes realizing previously unrecognized strength, gaining perspective
188 of their problems in the wider scope of their lives, and a newfound desire to help others. While
189 Tamminen et al.'s study describes experiences of growth following multiple and different types

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190 of stressful and adverse events, the negative events were experienced during childhood,
191 adolescence, and emerging adulthood. It may be possible to shed more light on the process of
192 positive growth, and perhaps specific coping processes that lead to positive growth for female
193 athletes, by exploring the growth experiences of individuals who have coped with the same type
194 of negative event (i.e., deselection) during a similar developmental period (i.e., adolescence).
195 **Indeed, our decision to focus on the same type of negative event is consistent with the well-**
196 **established methodological advice that researchers should “study one stress or trauma at a time”**
197 **(Roth & Cohen, 1986, p. 818) and focus on responses specific to each particular stressful context**
198 **(Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; Somerfield & McRae, 2000).**

199 Posttraumatic growth among breast cancer survivors who were involved in dragon boat
200 teams has been examined, albeit from a physical activity rather than competitive sport
201 perspective (McDonough, Sabiston, & Ullrich-French, 2011; Sabiston, McDonough, & Crocker,
202 2007). Results from this research revealed that dragon boating provided opportunities for
203 participants to gain personal control, develop new identities as athletes, and overcome physical
204 challenges. It also enabled participants to self-disclose, expand their social network, and to give
205 and receive informational and emotional social support. These experiences contributed to closer
206 and more meaningful relationships with other survivors, enhanced physical and mental strength,
207 recognition of new opportunities to enjoy life, and a renewed appreciation for personal health
208 and life in general (Sabiston et al., 2007). Findings also demonstrated the prominence of positive
209 social relationships and that support through multiple pathways, including self-disclosure,
210 facilitated enhanced posttraumatic growth (McDonough et al., 2011). Whereas there are some
211 promising findings with regard to posttraumatic growth in physical activity settings, there
212 remains a need to understand more about the growth experiences, cognitive appraisal processes,
213 and social interactions that may facilitate positive growth in athletes (Tamminen & Neely, 2016),

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214 particularly in response to trauma that is caused by and experienced within the sport context.
215 Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to explore female athletes' experiences of
216 positive growth following deselection from provincial sport teams.

217 **Method**

218 We adopted interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which is a methodology that
219 can be used to understand how individuals make sense of significant life experiences (Smith,
220 Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA can be particularly useful "when one is concerned with
221 complexity, process, or novelty" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53). Deselection was conceptualized
222 as a significant, and potentially traumatic, life experience (Neely et al., 2017) and positive
223 growth is a process (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), therefore IPA was deemed to be a suitable
224 methodological approach. When using IPA, "the researcher has to interpret people's mental and
225 emotional state from what they say" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 54). There are multiple levels of
226 interpretation in IPA, including participants interpreting and articulating their own experiences,
227 researchers interpreting the participants' accounts via the analytic process, and using theory to
228 help make sense of the common themes in the participants' accounts (Smith et al., 2009). With
229 regard to the use of theory, the functional-descriptive model of posttraumatic growth was a
230 useful framework for analyzing and interpreting participants' experiences because it is an
231 'experiential' theory in that the domains of growth refer to the types of growth *experiences*
232 individuals encounter (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

233 IPA research is underpinned by three main concepts: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and
234 ideography (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology is concerned with first-person accounts of lived
235 experience, which were captured via individual interviews during which participants were asked
236 to recount their experiences of, and following, deselection. Hermeneutics deals with
237 interpretation and IPA involves a double hermeneutic approach whereby the researcher is trying

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238 to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their own experience. We used the
239 analytic process to interpret commonalities in the participants' experiences (searching for such
240 commonalities is an appropriate approach in IPA studies that include a relatively large sample
241 size as was the case in the current study; Smith et al., 2009), and used a suitable theory to further
242 advance our interpretation of these themes (Landridge, 2007). Ideography refers to an in-depth
243 analysis of single cases before producing any general statements (Smith et al., 2009). Our
244 analysis began at the individual level before moving toward the identification and interpretation
245 of shared commonalties across the participants' experiences. These principles align with the
246 interpretivist paradigm, which focuses on understanding individuals' unique perceptions of their
247 experiences and assumes knowledge is co-constructed through researcher-participant interactions
248 (Sparkes, 1992). That is, participants reconstruct their experiences via the interviews and the
249 researchers engage with these data to interpret and co-construct the accounts presented in the
250 results.

251 Participant Recruitment

252 A homogeneous sampling strategy was used (as recommended by Smith, 2017), which is
253 appropriate when the purpose of a study is to address issues relevant to a particular group of
254 interest (in this case, female athletes who may have experienced positive growth following
255 deselection). The sampling criteria were that participants must (a) have been deselected from a
256 provincial level sport team in the U-15 to U-18 age categories, (b) be aged 21-25 years old at the
257 time of data collection, and (c) responded to a call for athletes that have experienced positive
258 growth following deselection. Participants aged 21-25 years at the time of data collection were
259 recruited because this ensured a minimum of three years since deselection (if participants were
260 deselected at U18), which provides a time-frame consistent with findings in the general positive

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261 growth literature that have shown growth remains stable three years after a traumatic event
262 (Linley & Joseph, 2004).

263 Participants were recruited through two main strategies. In the first strategy, head coaches
264 of university and college female soccer, basketball, volleyball, and ice hockey teams in a western
265 Canadian city were contacted via email and asked to forward the study information letter to the
266 athletes on their teams. The information letter provided the purpose of the study, sampling
267 criteria (including the statement that we wished to recruit “athletes who have experienced
268 positive growth after being cut”), and described what would be required of participants. Athletes
269 who fit the sample criteria were instructed to contact the researcher if they wished to participate.
270 The second recruitment strategy was snowball sampling (Patton, 2015), whereby participants
271 were asked to share the details of the study with friends they knew who fit the sampling criteria.
272 All but three participants who expressed interest in the study met the sampling criteria (two
273 participants did not meet the age criterion, and one participant was not deselected from a
274 provincial team).

275 Typically IPA studies involve 3-6 participants, but Smith et al. (2009) explained that a
276 good IPA study can still be done with larger samples. We estimated, a priori, that at least 10
277 participants (interviewed on two occasions) would be necessary to attain adequate data saturation
278 based on sample sizes that have been used in previous studies of positive growth following
279 adversity in the sport psychology literature (e.g., Galli & Reel, 2012, Wadey et al., 2011).
280 Furthermore, given that positive growth following deselection has not been specifically
281 examined previously, we anticipated a larger-than-normal sample would be necessary in order to
282 obtain a comprehensive account of the phenomenon. Our recruitment protocols were, in fact,
283 more successful than we anticipated and a total of 18 individuals volunteered for, and were
284 eligible to participate in, this study. We included all those who volunteered because we did not

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285 want to turn away a person who wanted to share a potentially traumatic event with us.

286 Institutional research ethics board approval was obtained and participants provided written

287 informed consent prior to the onset of their interview.

288 **Participants**

289 Participants were 18 females (M age = 22.45 years, SD = 1.38) who had competed in
290 competitive youth sport as adolescents and were deselected from a provincial soccer (n = 9), ice
291 hockey (n = 8), or volleyball (n = 1) team between the ages of 14 and 18 years (M age when
292 participants were deselected = 16 years, SD = 1.14). All participants were either completing or
293 had completed a post-secondary degree at the time of data collection. Eight participants had been
294 deselected from a provincial team on more than one occasion, and seven of the participants were
295 subsequently successful in making an older age-group provincial team. In instances where
296 athletes experienced deselection from a provincial team on more than one occasion, they initially
297 described all of their experiences but our conversations focused on the particular experience of
298 deselection that they deemed traumatic and had the greatest impact on them.

299 On average, participants began involvement in their sport recreationally at the age of
300 seven years (SD = 1.86, range = 4-11) and began playing more competitively on a club team at
301 10.5 years of age (SD = 1.58, range = 7-13). All participants continued to play their sport on a
302 club team at the competitive level until the end of youth sport (i.e., U18). Fourteen of the
303 participants competed in their sport at the college/university level, two participants competed in a
304 different sport at the college/university level, and two participants played their sport at a
305 recreational level while attending university. All participants self-identified as Caucasian-
306 Canadian.

307 **Data Collection**

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308 Data were collected through two individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews.
309 Interviews were conducted by the first author and audio-recorded. All eighteen participants
310 completed the first ‘main’ interview that lasted, on average, 42 minutes ($SD = 11.1$, range = 32-
311 72). Three days before the interview participants were emailed a copy of the interview guide and
312 asked to think about their experience of deselection to help stimulate recall and enable them to
313 provide detailed examples during the interview. The interview guide was developed based on
314 IPA recommendations by Smith et al. (2009) and qualitative interviewing guidelines by Rubin
315 and Rubin (2012). The interview guide included introductory, main, and summary questions,
316 starting with general questions and becoming more specific as the interview progressed. Follow-
317 up questions and probes were used throughout the interview to maintain the flow of conversation
318 and encourage participants to expand on their ideas which provided clarity, depth, and more
319 detail about their experiences of positive growth (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

320 Introductory questions were used to gain demographic information and develop rapport
321 with participants. The main questions were broad and open-ended and were designed to
322 encourage participants to talk about their experience and to facilitate the discussion of relevant
323 topics (Smith et al., 2009). The first set of these broad and open-ended questions invited
324 participants to reflect on their experiences. For instance, they were asked about deselection (e.g.,
325 ‘Can you tell me about your experience of being cut?’), coping (e.g., ‘What did you do to try and
326 deal with being cut?’), and identity (e.g., ‘Can you tell me how you thought/felt about yourself
327 after being cut?’).

328 The next main section of the interview guide, again using broad and open-ended
329 questions, was guided by domains of growth from Tedeschi and Calhoun’s (2004) model of
330 posttraumatic growth—namely, appreciation of life, personal strength, relationships with others,
331 recognition of new possibilities, and spiritual change. In posing the questions we took care not to

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332 unduly ‘force’ the model onto the participants’ experiences. For example, in the growth domain
333 of appreciation of life we asked questions like, ‘In what ways did your priorities as an athlete or
334 a person change after being cut?’, ‘How do you think being cut has personally impacted you?’
335 (personal strength), ‘In what ways did relationships with people change as a result of being cut?’
336 (relationships with others), ‘What do you think influenced your decision to quit/continue to
337 play?’ (recognition of new opportunities), and ‘Can you tell me if or how religion or spirituality
338 has changed because of your deselection experience?’ (spiritual change). Finally, participants
339 were asked summary questions to further reflect on the deselection process, which also provided
340 them with an opportunity to discuss any other aspects of their deselection experience not covered
341 by the main questions.

342 Seventeen participants completed a second ‘follow-up’ interview (one participant failed
343 to respond to repeated attempts to organize a second interview). The second interviews lasted, on
344 average, 22 minutes ($SD = 4.7$, range = 15-29) and took place approximately two months after
345 the first interviews, thereby providing sufficient time to analyze each participant’s first interview.
346 The second interviews focused on understanding more about participants’ experiences of
347 positive growth following deselection and offered participants opportunities for reflexive
348 elaboration on recollections they discussed in the first interviews. The second interview was
349 therefore an opportunity to re-engage the participants and allow them to further elaborate on
350 some themes. There was no formal interview guide for the second interviews because these
351 interviews were based on the themes that arose from the first interviews. For instance, the
352 researcher would explain a theme and ask the participants about how it may have resonated with
353 their own experience. Participants were also asked other broad questions like, ‘Other than your
354 parents, were there any other relationships that changed for you after being cut?’

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355 Participants were also given a written summary of the initial results from the first
356 interviews and asked to comment on our interpretations. This feature of the second interview
357 served a type of representative member-checking function. For instance, participants were asked
358 questions such as ‘How do these themes fit with your growth in terms of personal strength?’ and
359 ‘Overall, how does this interpretation compare with your experience of deselection and growth?’
360 Data from the second interviews were transcribed and included in the analysis (and treated in the
361 same way as data from the first interviews). Therefore the second interviews were an opportunity
362 for the participants to further engage in the co-construction of knowledge and assist in our
363 interpretation of their stories about trauma and growth.

364 Data Analysis

365 Audio-recordings from both interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional
366 transcribing service, which produced a total of 435 pages of single-spaced data (179,915 words).
367 Athletes were given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity and all other identifying information
368 (e.g., coaches’ names, names of teams) was removed. Prior to beginning analysis, transcripts
369 were checked with audio-recordings to ensure accuracy of transcription and to re-familiarize the
370 lead researcher with the interviews. Data analysis began as soon as the first data from the first
371 interviews were collected and transcribed; this continued in an iterative process throughout the
372 study, including during the second interviews phase which enabled the researcher to become
373 immersed in the data (Smith et al., 2009). The first author conducted the data analysis, and
374 presented her interpretations of the data and discussed emerging results with co-authors on a
375 regular basis.

376 Data analysis followed IPA guidelines outlined by Smith et al. (2009). The steps in IPA
377 are designed to identify themes, beginning with a focus on the individual before moving to
378 establishing themes that represent shared experiences across the group. However, IPA is not

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379 prescriptive; rather it is a process that allows for flexibility in terms of the detailed analysis
380 emphasized at the individual and group level (Smith et al., 2009). Inductive idiographic analyses
381 of individual transcripts from the first interviews were initially completed. This involved a five-
382 step process of dealing with each transcript in turn. First, each transcript was read and re-read to
383 gain an overall sense of the participant's experience. The second step involved inductive noting
384 about initial thoughts and impressions. The third step involved transforming notes into emergent
385 themes within the data and concise phrases or codes were given to pieces of text to capture the
386 essential meaning. In the fourth step, connections across emerging themes were explored. Step
387 five involved moving to the next transcript and repeating the analytic process. This idiographic
388 approach produced a list of themes and questions that informed the second interviews.

389 Next, following the second interview, the analytic process advanced to produce the
390 findings reported herein. Data from each participant's second interview were merged with the
391 themes derived from the first interview. In IPA studies with larger samples it means that results
392 tend to focus on the "key emergent themes of the whole group" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 106).
393 Hence, we searched for patterns across all the cases and shared commonalities of positive growth
394 following deselection. In doing so, following the advice of Smith et al. (2009) for analyzing data
395 from relatively large samples for an IPA study, we ensured that the "group level themes are still
396 illustrated with particular examples taken from individuals" (p. 106). The process of identifying
397 group level themes involved a more deductive approach because, as Langdridge (2007) noted,
398 themes should "reflect broader, perhaps more theoretically significant concerns" (p. 111).
399 Therefore, in analyzing the themes at the group level, concepts from the functional-descriptive
400 model of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) were used to help interpret and
401 advance the analysis, reflecting the use of a more deductive logic. We took care to avoid unduly
402 forcing the model on the data, demonstrated by the fact that we do not present data regarding

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403 spiritual change because it was not a salient feature of participants' positive growth experiences.
404 The final step involved writing, whereby we moved from final themes to the construction of a
405 narrative account of athletes' experiences of positive growth following deselection. Direct quotes
406 and short extracts from participants were selected to reflect the core of their experiences and
407 provide context for our interpretations.

408 Quality and Validity Criteria

409 Smith (2011) provided guidelines for 'what makes a good IPA paper' which, it should be
410 noted, have been debated in the literature (e.g., Chamberlain, 2011; Shaw, 2011). Adopting a
411 relativist approach, we used some of these guidelines to design the study and inform the
412 reportage of the results (also see Ingstrup, Mosewich, & Holt, 2017). IPA studies should have a
413 clear focus and typically involve a homogeneous sample, which we articulated. They require
414 'strong' data derived from good interviews, which requires close awareness of the interview
415 process. The quality of data collected determines how 'good' a study can be, so high-quality data
416 are paramount (Smith et al., 2009). We addressed issues related to 'strong' data by engaging the
417 participants in two interviews. Additionally, the interviewer had extensive qualitative
418 interviewing training and experience derived from conducting several previous studies. We
419 addressed sensitivity to context (Yardley, 2008) by ensuring the interview consistently connected
420 back to the context of sport and experiences of deselection and positive growth. The lead
421 researcher was a former soccer player who had been deselected from a club team during
422 adolescence, so she maintained a reflexive journal to help ensure a balanced awareness of her
423 interpretations of the participants' accounts. In addition, the research team regularly engaged in
424 discussions about the interviews and the analysis, and provided critical and supportive feedback
425 on the emerging results. This reflective engagement was important because the results of IPA
426 studies are co-created by researchers and participants (Smith et al., 2009).

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427 **Results**428 **Deselection as a Traumatic Experience**

429 Athletes experienced deselection as a traumatic event. Some said it was “heartbreaking”
430 (Hayden, Interview 1) and “just honestly so devastating” (Tiffany, Interview 1). As athletes
431 recounted their experiences of deselection, they talked about how sport was their ‘world’ and
432 being deselected felt like they had lost everything. For instance, Becky said:

433 I was definitely like crushed and I was so mad, I was so upset, and embarrassed
434 almost. I think it was just so who I thought I was, and then it was all of a sudden
435 like no, you aren’t that ... like at the moment it seems like the biggest thing in
436 your life, like you can’t imagine moving on from this, it seems like the end of the
437 world (Interview 1).

438 Many athletes questioned their identity after being deselected from a provincial team. For
439 example, Kate said being deselected “was the end of the world when I was 16” (Interview 1) and
440 went on to say, “I’d always identified as a soccer player and then after I got cut I just wasn’t”
441 (Interview 1). Melissa also questioned her identity after being deselected from a provincial-level
442 ice hockey team. She said:

443 My identity was completely wrapped around hockey... I wanted my identity to
444 always be hockey, like when people thought of me I just wanted to be known for
445 hockey, I just wanna be the hockey player. Getting cut was so hard because I’m
446 like if I’m not an elite hockey player, who am I? What am I? (Interview 1).

447 Being deselected also made athletes question their ability because they came into the
448 provincial program as one of the top players on their club teams. As a result, they wondered if
449 they had the skills to compete at a higher level. For instance, Harper stated, “getting cut really
450 made you question yourself as an athlete. ‘Am I not gritty enough, do I not have the best leg?’”

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451 (Interview 1). Likewise, Quinn vividly recalled sitting in the dressing room and struggling after
452 being deselected, asking herself, “like am I good enough? Do I even wanna play hockey? Can I
453 even play hockey or am I just fooling myself out here?” (Interview 1). These examples suggest
454 that deselection was indeed traumatic for the participants. Deselection caused emotional harm
455 and challenged their identity, sense of self, and view of their sporting abilities, which appeared to
456 be founded on their identification as a high level athlete.

457 Gradual Process of Growth

458 The process of realizing positive growth appeared to be gradual. As Olivia explained, “I
459 don’t think it was like a boom, ‘I feel really great about this now,’ it was definitely a step-by-step
460 process” (Interview 1). Although many participants began the process of ‘rebuilding’ in the
461 aftermath of deselection, it seemed to take several years to perceive positive growth had
462 occurred. Although the process was gradual, the time frame for positive growth varied across the
463 athletes. Alexa explained that her perception of deselection “shifted as time went on from not
464 viewing it as such a negative experience but as a learning experience. But that took a very long
465 amount of time, it wasn’t instant, it was probably another year or two later” (Interview 1). Other
466 participants said it was “probably like two years after, two to three [years]...it wasn’t an
467 immediate thing, definitely not” (Kate, Interview 1) or “when I got to play university...so I guess
468 maybe three or so years to deal with it” (Becky, Interview 2). Similarly, Harper said:

469 My perspective changed when I actually made the team [the following year] and
470 you kinda see wow, ‘this is why I was working so hard.’ I think I was able to
471 reinterpret it in my university years and young adult years (Interview 2).

472 Hence, positive growth occurred over an extended period (years rather than months), but
473 this gradual process of growth was not uniformly shared (in terms of time frame) across
474 participants. Nonetheless, the athletes shared some experiences (domains) of growth that

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475 were consistent across these different, and gradual, time frames; these shared experiences
476 are reflected in the theme ‘domains of growth’ that is shown below.

477 **Domains of Growth**

478 **“I reprioritized what was important to me.”** As a consequence of not being able to
479 play at the provincial level, athletes reflected on the importance of sport in their lives. For
480 Brittany, being deselected was meaningful because “it made me realize how much I wanted
481 hockey and that I wanted to be good. It took me three times [of being deselected] to realize it, but
482 I realized it in the end” (Interview 1). Quinn said she “went back every year just because I loved
483 it [ice hockey] too much. I couldn’t let it go. It’s like the love of my life” (Interview 1).
484 Similarly, Melissa said, “I think at the end of the day just my love of the game and my love to
485 play just like that ‘no, I’m going further’” (Interview 1). Hence, we concluded that participants’
486 passion for their sport helped them gain a greater appreciation of the meaningfulness and
487 importance of sport in their lives.

488 Some participants harboured thoughts of quitting sport entirely, although all eventually
489 continued to play. For example, Lauren explained that “there was a short period right after
490 getting cut of ‘this sucks, I don’t want to do this’... But I think one of my strengths as an athlete
491 is to say ‘no I want this. I need this in my life’” (Interview 1). Reflecting on how the process of
492 growth was not uniform across participants, two athletes actually quit their sport for a year
493 following deselection. However, they both returned to their sport the next season because they
494 came to realize how important it was in their lives. Janna said, “it actually took me taking a
495 season off to really love it. Once I came back, I was there to take it seriously and I don’t know if
496 it was a maturity thing or just a renewed appreciation for it” (Interview 1).

497 The other athletes, who did not quit for a year, seemed to more quickly recognize and
498 understand the importance of sport in their lives. Harper explained:

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499 When you get something taken away it's a little humbling to your own mindset
500 about how you are as an athlete, which kinda rings into the other thing, so that it's
501 a bigger priority, you set bigger goals, you train that much harder to get better to
502 potentially next year make the team. So I would agree with that 100% that it [my
503 sport] became a higher priority (Interview 2).

504 For Elizabeth, deselection was a turning point in her life where hockey became her top priority.
505 She said, "I missed so much school for hockey stuff or because I'd been up late the night before
506 with a game so school and friends kinda took a back burner and hockey took the forefront"
507 (Interview 1). Participants also gave up other activities they had participated in to dedicate their
508 time and energy to their sport. Melissa said, "I actually took out [i.e., quit] all other sports, so
509 instead of playing school volleyball, school basketball and kinda diversifying, I quit all of that. I
510 was strictly focused on hockey [after being deselected]" (Interview 1). Therefore, all the athletes
511 engaged in some kind of reappraisal of the role of sport in their lives. For two athletes, it took a
512 period of time away from their sport to come to this realization. Others more quickly recognized
513 the importance of sport in their lives and sacrificed other activities (e.g., other sports, socializing
514 with friends).

515 **"It's definitely made me a way stronger person."** With time, deselection enabled
516 participants to gain an enhanced sense of their personal strengths. For example, Sarah said that
517 her "mentality was definitely stronger" (Interview 1) and Madison said she developed a "tougher
518 skin" (Interview 1) as a result of experiencing deselection. Furthermore, Melissa stated:

519 A younger me probably wouldn't have listened to this but I just would tell myself,
520 "this is gonna make you a stronger person later on in life." At the time, you
521 definitely wouldn't understand why. Like this sucks, I don't get it but now being

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522 older and stuff, you're like, yeah, this has made me a stronger person and if I want
523 something, I will work that much harder for it (Interview 1).

524 In fact, being deselected from the provincial team was the first time in many participants'
525 lives when they had experienced a significant personal failure in sport, because prior to
526 deselection they had been successful athletes at a lower (club) level of competition. Indeed, their
527 success at lower levels was the reason they were even under consideration at the provincial team
528 level. Going through this significant personal experience in sport, often for the first time in their
529 careers, gave participants a new understanding of the strengths they possessed. This was
530 primarily manifested by a realization of their ability to persevere. Becky said:

531 Deselection was definitely the hardest thing in sport that I ever had to deal with...
532 definitely the first time that I had to actually get through something in sport in a bigger
533 way so it definitely taught me to not just give up and keep going and persevere through
534 whatever was happening (Interview 2).

535 Similarly, Emma was able to persevere through other hardships in sport because of going
536 through deselection the first time. She said, "I think that it's just that underlying strength, like
537 mental strength I guess of knowing, 'OK I've gone through this shit before and I can do it even
538 though I might not think I can'" (Interview 1).

539 The enhanced understanding of personal strength that participants' developed after being
540 deselected translated to other areas of their lives. Specifically, participants realized that by
541 coping with deselection from sport they had attributes that enabled them to cope with other life
542 events. For instance, Olivia said, "I think that having that experience under my belt has let me or
543 reminded me how to cope with things that maybe aren't getting cut but are still negative,
544 traumatic things in my life" (Interview 1). In a similar sense, Lauren was able to reinterpret a
545 valuable lesson from her experience of deselection when she said, "learning what to do at a

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546 young age to fix the kind of situation you're in, now, like being 21, I definitely have realized that
547 failing actually makes you stronger and gives you more tools in your toolbox" (Interview 1). We
548 interpreted that recognizing their ability to persevere and handle adversity experienced later on in
549 life reflected psychological and emotional growth, which contributed to an enhanced sense of
550 personal strength following deselection.

551 **"It made our relationship stronger."** Participants drew on other people (parents,
552 siblings, teammates) to deal with deselection and this, in turn, enabled them to form stronger
553 bonds and closer social relationships with these people. Almost all of the athletes talked about
554 the role their parents played in helping them cope with being deselected. For example, Lauren
555 said:

556 My dad definitely helped a lot. He was the one that was there willing to go every
557 step of the way with me to improve my game... I think it grew my bond with my
558 dad a lot because he was there with me and he wanted to see me succeed so he
559 was willing to learn with me and push me to do my best (Interview 1).

560 After Quinn was deselected her mother's support was invaluable:

561 I think having my mom to encourage me was probably the only thing that got me
562 through... It was mostly just like, "let's get over it and move on," and that's what
563 we did, and we became kinda best friends because of all that (Interview 1).

564 Lisa explained that her father, who had been her coach and a "mean coach guy" was
565 sympathetic. As a result of supporting her, their relationship grew "not stronger, just in a
566 different sense. He wasn't just my coach anymore, he was my dad" (Interview 1). We interpreted
567 that athletes' relationships with their parents were strengthened due do the reliance on their
568 parents for different types of support (i.e., emotional and instrumental support) and through
569 athletes and parents coping together with deselection.

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570 Athletes believed their relationships with siblings and teammates were also strengthened
571 as a result of dealing with deselection. Madison explained that her relationship with her brother
572 changed. She said, “him and I have always been close but that was kinda like OK, he has my
573 back, no matter what.” Through his support, Madison realized “he actually really does care about
574 me especially in this aspect of my life, and I didn’t really see that part of him before” (Interview
575 1). Participants were also able to connect with teammates on a new level that brought them
576 closer together. Alexa said “I could relate to them [teammates] in another way that I couldn’t
577 before” (Interview 1). In a similar sense, Madison said, “I have better understanding for other
578 players that have been cut, like you’re able to help them cope with it too because you’re like,
579 OK, I’ve been through the same thing and it’s shitty right now but it will get better” (Interview
580 1).

581 Although developing closer social relationships with parents and teammates was a shared
582 commonality across participants, it should be noted that some athletes initially experienced a
583 short-term breakdown of certain social relationships. That is, relationships did not instantly
584 become stronger. For example, Elizabeth reflected on the breakdown of her friendships with her
585 best friends on her club team. She said:

586 I think I strained the relationships with my friends on my team because I was angry at
587 them for making the provincial team. Whereas it wasn’t their fault at all, they just got
588 chosen over me. So it was weird that I pushed them away instead of using them as a
589 resource to get better. But the same people I strained the relationships with, those are
590 people I’m better friends with now (Interview 2).

591 As Elizabeth’s example revealed, although there was a short-term breakdown in some of her
592 relationships, these relationships eventually became stronger. Hence, while some of the
593 processes may have varied between the athletes, all found ways to make their relationships

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594 stronger. We interpreted that as a result of being deselected, social relationships became closer
595 through the process of sharing feelings. Emma explained that “when you go through something
596 with someone, your relationship with them is stronger and it’s more binding because you’ve had
597 that shared experience and you’ve talked about bad stuff and good stuff with it” (Interview 1).

598 **“There were still so many opportunities to play later on.”** Participants eventually
599 became more optimistic about the future and recognized they had other opportunities to play
600 their sport at a competitive level. As Madison explained:

601 You might think it’s the end of the road but not even. Being cut from [provincial
602 team] I still had the opportunity to play club and for my school team... There’s so
603 many different options just because that one door was closed doesn’t mean that I
604 was gonna be cut from every other team that I tried out for (Interview 2).

605 It was important for athletes to realize that these opportunities existed and to stay positive about
606 reaching their goals. For Lisa, she explained that after being deselected, she “looked at it like I
607 have next year, like I have a whole year to get better and make sure to make that team... so I
608 think I was always optimistic it could happen” (Interview 1). Many athletes shared a similar view
609 in that it was necessary to adopt an optimistic outlook for future sport opportunities.

610 Athletes’ parents often helped them recognize the opportunities they still had to play.
611 Elizabeth said her parents constantly reinforced “you can’t take one downfall as the end of a
612 career. There’s still 30 games [for club team] and there’s other teams to make” (Interview 2).
613 Emma also explained that her parents helped her to be positive and realize the chances she would
614 still have to compete. She said her mother told her, ““You’ve got [club team], you’ve got all
615 these wonderful opportunities, you guys are gonna go to Mac’s [tournament] again’, that sort of
616 stuff. So turning it around so it’s not focused on the bad” (Interview 1). Perhaps an element of

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640 This study offers conceptual and empirical contributions to the literature. Conceptually, it
641 suggests that four of the five domains of growth in Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) functional-
642 descriptive model of posttraumatic growth provide a relevant framework for capturing athletes'
643 positive growth in sport—a social context that has received relatively little attention in the
644 positive growth literature (Lepore & Revenson, 2006). Empirically, these findings provide
645 further support for the emerging proposition that certain aspects of participation in the sporting
646 context can precipitate positive psychological and emotional growth (e.g., Howells et al., 2017;
647 Tamminen & Neely, 2016). Specifically, the current findings suggest that deselection was
648 experienced as a traumatic event for participants during adolescence, and adds to our
649 understanding of positive growth in sport, where most research has tended to focus on growth
650 following physical trauma or injury (Day, 2012; Day & Wadey, 2017). Finally, in addition to
651 identifying domains of growth, the results revealed the ways in which athletes understood and
652 interpreted positive growth through cognitive processing, reappraisal, emotional disclosure, and
653 social relationships as they rebuilt perceptions of themselves and of the role that sport played in
654 their lives, in a gradual process that took several years to unfold.

655 Deselection as a Traumatic Experience

656 On the surface it perhaps seems surprising that deselection was traumatic given that other
657 research suggests traumatic events include natural disasters (Cryder et al., 2006) or, in sport,
658 sexual and physical abuse (Tamminen et al., 2013). However, the degree of trauma one ascribes
659 to an event is dependent on factors such as subjective appraisal, attribution of blame, and
660 perception of meaning associated with the event, and an event must be 'traumatic enough' to
661 disrupt an individuals' sense of self in order to precipitate growth (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).
662 Previous research shows emotional distress, including feelings of increased depression, anxiety,
663 anger, and humiliation (Barnett, 2007; Blakelock et al., 2016; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Munroe et

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664 al., 1999) and reduced sense of self (Grove et al., 2004) are associated with deselection. Our
665 findings add to this literature by suggesting that deselection was ‘traumatic enough’ to foster
666 positive growth because it led participants to question their identity, their abilities, and the role of
667 sport in their lives. **These findings reflect components of shattered assumptions theory (Janoff-
668 Bulman, 1992), with participants perhaps no longer perceiving their sporting world as benevolent
669 and just. They described deselection as “devastating,” “heartbreaking,” and “the end of the
670 world” and questioned their sporting competence, their athletic identity, and assumptions about
671 their sporting world (“Who am I? What am I?”). Therefore, if trauma symptoms are caused by a
672 shattering of worldviews (Edmondson et al., 2013), it appeared that participants’ worldviews
673 were, to some extent, shattered by deselection.**

674 A key factor to consider in this respect is the importance of the provincial team in the
675 athletes’ lives and the fact that participants were adolescents at the time of deselection, a
676 developmental period when they may have adopted a strong and exclusive athletic identity
677 (Houle, Brewer, & Kiluck, 2007). During adolescence, developing a sense of identity is often
678 related to an individual’s self-concept (Harter, 1999), which is comprised of self-perceptions,
679 self-esteem, and perceived competence in multiple domains. For adolescents who are intensely
680 involved in sport, it is likely that the sport domain is most important to their self-concept and
681 becomes their dominant identity (cf. Erikson, 1968). As such, deselection appeared to represent a
682 threat to their identity and sense of self. While a strong athletic identity has been associated with
683 an over-commitment to the athletic role—a potential risk factor for emotional difficulties during
684 transitions away from sport—it can also provide the motivation and discipline necessary for
685 intense training that is often a prerequisite condition for success in competitive sport (Brewer,
686 Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000). The enhanced motivation and commitment (or re-commitment) to
687 sport that apparently resulted for many athletes following deselection (albeit over different

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688 lengths of time) may have been predicated upon having a strong athletic identity in combination
689 with the re-appraisal that took place regarding the role of sport in their lives. Clearly more
690 research is required to examine the extent to which athletic identity may play a role in
691 precipitating positive growth in sport.

692 Gradual Process of Growth

693 Research in non-athlete populations shows that the passing of time may be a necessary
694 component that provides individuals with opportunities to increase their perceptions of positive
695 growth by virtue of subsequent experiences and reflections they have following a traumatic
696 event (Affleck, Tennen, Croog, & Levine, 1987; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; Frazier et al., 2001;
697 Linley & Joseph, 2004; Meyerson et al., 2011). Our findings showed that, although the time
698 frame was not uniform, positive growth occurred over a period of years. It was not clear when
699 growth became stable, although research outside of the sporting context suggests stability occurs
700 after three years (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Again, the age of individuals at the time of trauma
701 may be a contributing factor to the gradual process of growth that was depicted. For example,
702 adolescents may experience more positive growth than children (Meyerson et al., 2011) due to
703 their enhanced cognitive maturity and capacity for greater self-awareness and more developed
704 self-schema (Wolchik, Coxe, Tein, Sandler, & Ayers, 2009). However, Schmidt, Blank,
705 Bellizzi, and Park (2017) recently argued that more research is needed on the process of growth
706 among adolescents and emerging adults (i.e., individuals 18-25 years) because their experiences
707 of growth may be confounded by normative maturation processes. Although we did not examine
708 normative maturation in our study, the current findings suggest that positive growth occurred as
709 the participants entered early adulthood, supporting the idea that a certain level of cognitive
710 ability and maturity is needed to find meaning in the traumatic event (Milam, Ritt-Olson, &
711 Unger, 2004; Schmidt et al., 2017). Continued research with this age group, particularly from a

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712 development perspective, will provide valuable insight into how the process of growth unfolds
713 during adolescence and emerging adulthood.

714 Domains of Growth

715 Cognitive processing and reappraisal were important for positive growth, particularly in
716 the domains of athletes understanding the importance of sport in their lives, enhanced sense of
717 personal strength, and becoming more optimistic for the future. Some participants appeared to
718 engage in rumination, which can include reminiscing, problem solving, and trying to make sense
719 of the trauma (Martin & Tesser, 1996). They learned to understand and reappraise the
720 importance of sport in their lives and gained a sense of personal strength. These findings echo
721 the results of Tamminen et al.'s (2013) study, where participants identified opportunities for
722 growth, reappraised the importance of sport in their lives, and gained perspective on previously
723 unrecognized strengths. Hence, our findings further show that the cognitive processing of an
724 event, rather than the traumatic event itself, is fundamental to understanding positive growth
725 (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

726 An enhanced sense of personal strength has also been reported in other studies of positive
727 growth in sport (e.g., Galli & Reel, 2012; Howells et al., 2017; Tamminen et al., 2013; Wadey et
728 al., 2011). For example, athletes who have experienced severe injuries have reported becoming
729 more dedicated, focused, and mentally tougher than they were before their injury (Galli & Reel,
730 2012). Enhanced personal strength was realized in participants' ability to persevere as well as
731 their ability to cope with adversity experienced later on. We speculate this may be because
732 deselection was one of the first traumatic experiences in sport (and life in general) that the
733 participants had to overcome and may have enabled them to begin to develop coping skills.

734 Through gaining perspective, participants recognized new and other opportunities they
735 could still attain in their sport. Parents were evidently important in helping athletes realize these

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736 opportunities. In a previous study of deselection in youth sport, Neely et al. (2017) suggested that
737 the cooperative coping action (i.e., between athletes and their parents) of positive reframing may
738 set conditions that enable positive growth for adolescent athletes. The current findings further
739 demonstrate that parents play an essential part in facilitating the positive growth process
740 following deselection in sport. Adolescents may require assistance in reframing and making
741 sense of trauma (from adults) due to developmental constraints (Meyerson et al., 2011). As such,
742 we propose that parents will likely play a particularly important role around the emotional
743 disclosure and ruminative processes that adolescent athletes may experience in competitive sport.
744 This is an important practical implication as parents can be educated not only on ways to help
745 their daughters cope with deselection (Neely et al., 2017) but also how they can be involved and
746 provide support, and encourage cognitive processes that foster positive growth.

747 Previous research has shown that social relationships are a feature of positive growth in
748 sport and physical activity settings (e.g., McDonough et al., 2011; Sabiston et al., 2007;
749 Tamminen et al., 2013). However, the precise nature of these social relationships and how they
750 relate to growth was previously unclear (Day, 2012). Our results showed that being able to share
751 thoughts and feelings following deselection was particularly important in building closer
752 relationships with others. This reflects the idea that emotional expression is a predictor of
753 posttraumatic growth (Manne et al., 2004). In a sport context, Salim, Wadey, and Diss (2015)
754 previously showed that injured athletes who disclose their emotions are more likely to
755 experience positive growth, and further evidence suggests that verbal emotional disclosure is
756 more beneficial for positive growth following injury than written disclosure (Salim & Wadey,
757 2018). Disclosure of emotions and perspectives on the trauma, combined with how others
758 respond to this self-disclosure, is further thought to stimulate cognitive processing (Tedeschi &
759 Calhoun, 2004). As such, relationships with parents, siblings, and teammates appear to be crucial

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760 factors associated with positive growth because they provide opportunities for emotional
761 expression and cognitive processing.

762 There may be some unique features associated with the sporting context with regard to
763 relationships with siblings and teammates. Research conducted outside of the domain of sport
764 has shown that support seeking from siblings and peers was not significantly related to any
765 dimensions of posttraumatic growth among adolescents who had experienced parental
766 bereavement (Wolchik et al., 2009). We speculate that the inherently social context of team sport
767 may create an environment that promotes interpersonal coping, such as athletes receiving
768 additional social support from teammates when they returned to their club team (also see Neely
769 et al., 2017). In line with this, a previous study showed that team sport athletes reported more
770 adversarial growth after ACL surgery than individual sport athletes (Brewer, Cornelius, Van
771 Raalte, & Tennen, 2017), presumably because of the greater opportunities for social relationships
772 in the team sport context. Thus, the nature of team sports may also provide increased
773 opportunities for emotional disclosure for adolescent athletes beyond their parents. One caveat to
774 consider, however, is the competitive level of team sport from which an athlete is deselected. In
775 instances where an athlete is deselected from a provincial team—arguably the highest level of
776 competitive sport for many youth athletes—teammates on their (lower-level) club team can be a
777 source of support. In contrast, a player who is deselected from a club team may not have the
778 same social support from a sporting peer group, in which case parents may have a more
779 important role in the emotional disclosure process.

780 Participants did not report spiritual change (despite the fact they were directly asked if
781 they experienced any religious or spiritual changes following deselection). This ‘non finding’
782 was somewhat surprising given that other studies in sport have revealed strengthened religious
783 beliefs and increased spirituality following traumatic events (e.g., Galli & Reel, 2012; Howell &

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784 Fletcher, 2015). The absence of spiritual change in the current study may be because the
785 millennial generation is generally less religious than previous generations (Jones, Cox, &
786 Banchoff, 2012). More research is required with this generation to determine the role of
787 spirituality in the growth process and specifically if spiritual change is to be regarded as a
788 relevant domain of growth in Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) functional-descriptive model of
789 posttraumatic growth in both sport and non-sport contexts.

790 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

791 Key strengths of this study include the sampling strategy and the use of two interviews,
792 which provided opportunities for enhancing data saturation and for participants to reflect and
793 elaborate on emerging interpretations of the data. Given the findings highlighted the critical role
794 of social relationships, a direction for future research would be to interview parents, teammates,
795 or siblings, who may be able to provide additional insights into the social relationships inherent
796 to positive growth. We decided to focus on the common (shared) aspects of growth, but it may
797 be that individuals experience different trajectories of growth. In the future, longitudinal studies
798 may permit the analysis of individual growth trajectories. Furthermore, we sampled athletes from
799 team sports, which likely have a greater emphasis on social relationships (e.g., between
800 teammates) than individual sports. Future research examining differences in positive growth by
801 sport type (e.g., team versus individual) may shed more light on the nature and relevance of
802 social interactions across differing sport settings.

803 Another factor that should be considered in evaluating the overall strengths and
804 limitations of this study pertains to our decision to use Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004)
805 functional-descriptive model of posttraumatic growth to inform our interview guide and the
806 subsequent application of the model as an interpretive framework during the latter stages of the
807 analysis. **Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) model offers the most comprehensive theoretical**

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808 description of growth (Joseph & Linley, 2006), so it is unlikely that the use of this model unduly
809 restricted the analysis. Nonetheless, the application of a different model/theory of growth may
810 have produced subtly different interpretations of the data. For instance, Joseph and Linley's
811 (2005) organismic valuing theory (OVT) of growth through adversity has been most widely used
812 in sport and exercise psychology (Day & Wadey, 2017). OVT holds that individuals have a
813 completion tendency, or a need to integrate new trauma-related information, which may be
814 accomplished via accommodation or assimilation. Accommodating traumatic information
815 requires a supportive social environment that fulfills basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy,
816 relatedness, and competence). If individuals do not engage with the significance of the event and
817 rather attempt to engage the pre-trauma schema, assimilation is likely to occur, leaving the
818 individuals' assumptive work fragile to future fragmentation. We did not specifically examine
819 concepts from OVT, but it is possible that growth experiences facilitated accommodation and
820 searching for meaning, and that the levels of functioning individuals attained were influenced by
821 their completion tendencies. In the future, it may be useful to examine the extent to which
822 cognitive processing, reappraisal, emotional disclosure, social relationships, basic need
823 fulfillment, and completion tendencies facilitate accommodation and searching for meaning
824 within the social context of sport.

825 Conclusion

826 This study suggests that deselection was subjectively appraised as a traumatic experience
827 that precipitated positive psychological and emotional growth (e.g., Howells et al., 2017;
828 Tamminen & Neely, 2016). From a practical perspective, it is important to realize that the
829 gradual process of growth evolving over time was not uniform, suggesting that individuals
830 process events in different ways. Participants engaged in cognitive processing of deselection, and
831 this may require a certain level of cognitive maturity that comes with age (e.g., entering early

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832 adulthood). Social relationships were important features of growth and may be important assets
833 to utilize when assisting athletes to cope with traumatic events. Ultimately, the results suggest
834 that four of the domains of growth depicted in Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) functional-
835 descriptive model of posttraumatic growth are helpful in understanding and interpreting positive
836 growth in sport.

837 Finally, as Tamminen and Neely (2016) noted, there is somewhat of a paradox in that by
838 studying concepts such as positive growth in relation to sport participation, researchers may
839 implicitly contribute to the legitimization of circumstances that could perpetuate damaging or
840 highly stressful situations in sport. Whereas our findings show that growth can occur following a
841 negative sport event, it does not follow that traumatic experiences should be 'inflicted' on
842 athletes as a justification or means for creating growth. To this end, and with specific reference
843 to deselection, it remains important for coaches and sport organizations to approach deselection
844 in a considerate and thoughtful way, taking into account the potentially disruptive consequences
845 of their deselection decisions.

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