

Running head: WOMEN ATHLETES' EXPERIENCES OF EMOTIONS

Narratives of Young Women Athletes' Experiences of Emotional Pain and Self-compassion

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ABSTRACT

Self-compassion is an adaptive way of relating to the self kindly when experiencing personal failure and difficult life experiences. However, there is little research in the area of self-compassion and sport even though recent investigation shows it might act as a potential buffer to painful emotions for athletes. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and present narratives of six young women athletes (15-24 years) from a variety of sports, about their experiences of emotional pain associated with failure and the role of self-compassion. Each woman took part in two individual interviews, one of which involved reflexive photography. They were asked to reflect on a difficult experience with a personal perceived failure in sport, followed by discussions around the potential role of self-compassion in their experiences. The interviews, combined with reflexive photography, helped build a rich narrative organized around the following themes: (1) Broken bodies, wilted spirits, (2) Why couldn't it have been someone else?, (3) I should have, I could have, I would have, (4) You are going to make me ugly over this and, (5) Fall down seven, stand up eight. Their narratives also suggested that self-compassion can potentially be beneficial for athletes if developed and learned properly. In addition, some women saw self-compassion as another tool athletes could use to help improve their mental game; something that might not be needed all the time, but could be very useful during specific situations. While self-compassion might buffer painful emotions experienced in sport, concerns were expressed that being too self-compassion may lead to mediocrity. Further research is needed on young women athletes' difficult emotional experiences in sport, and more specifically on the role that self-compassion plays as both a potential facilitator and barrier to emotional health and performance success in sport.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful husband Ryan. Thank you for your continuous encouragement, and for always giving me a reason to smile. Your work ethic and commitment to everything you do is inspiring, and I am forever grateful for you in my life. Without all your love and support this would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

Young women athletes often experience physical, mental, and emotional challenges while participating in sport, in part because of the many evaluations made by themselves and others. These various evaluations can create negative experiences and can be difficult to endure, especially when there is emotional pain that stems from personal mistakes, failures, or inadequacies. Young athletes often experience a diminished sense of self and achievement, guilt, emotional costs, negative self and social evaluation, and a loss of motivation after experiencing failure in sport (Sagar, Lavalley, & Spray, 2007).

A qualitative approach, utilizing one-on-one interviews and reflexive photography, provided a rich account of the meanings young women athletes attributed to their experiences in sport, and allowed me, the researcher, along with the participants to explore and describe the experiences of emotional pain associated with failure, and the role of self-compassion in their failure experiences. More specifically, I took a narrative approach to my research, which is a complex genre that routinely contains a point and characters along with a plot connecting events that unfold sequentially over time and space to provide an overarching explanation or consequence (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). The “failures” I was interested in were not objectively defined failures, but rather the perceived failures the athletes ascribed to thoughts and feelings of letting themselves or others down. Furthermore, no studies to date have looked at the role of self-compassion in specific sporting experiences such as failure.

The narrative of the athletes' experiences was organized around five themes: (1) Broken bodies, wilted spirits, (2) Why couldn't it have been someone else?, (3) I should have, I could have, I would have, (4) You are going to make me ugly over this and, (5) Fall down seven, stand up eight. Each theme illustrates the emotional pain experienced by the women. Following the presentation of themes, the role of self-compassion in the women's failure experiences was discussed in detail for an overall exploration of young women's emotional pain associated with failure and the role of self-compassion. Self-compassion entails being kind and understanding toward oneself in instances of pain or failure rather than being harshly self-critical; perceiving one's experiences as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as isolating; and holding painful thoughts and feelings in mindful awareness rather than over-identifying with them (Neff, 2003b). Recent results from Mosewich, Kowalski, Sabiston, Sedgwick, and Tracey (2011) suggest that self-compassion may be a potential resource for young women athletes by aiding in the development of positive sport experiences. Exploring the journey of emotional pain prior to self-compassion in the athlete's experiences was necessary for identifying and clarifying the potential role of self-compassion in difficult sporting experiences. Hence, the results are organized and presented in a similar order, even though self-compassion was of primary interest in my research.

Through a qualitative narrative and photography methodology, my study shows that young women athletes' do experience emotional pain associated with failure while participating in sport. In addition, the women's narratives expressed that self-compassion would be beneficial for an athlete if it was developed and learned properly. Further, my study supports the potential of self-compassion as a buffer to painful emotions described by Mosewich et al. (2011), although the question of whether self-compassion leads to mediocrity still remains.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Self-Compassion

Compassion is a complex and multilayered phenomenon that umbrellas many other emotional phenomenon such as loving-kindness, empathy, attachment, and caregiving. Often when an individual thinks of compassion, it is seen as a motivation or as an emotion. It is motivating because it can mean having the desire to help others by providing relief to those who are suffering; it is emotional because it involves feelings of sympathy and concern (Gilbert, 2005). Dalai Lama (2001) once said “What is compassion? Compassion is the wish that others be free of suffering. It is by means of compassion that we aspire to attain enlightenment. It is compassion that inspires us to engage in the virtuous practices that lead to Buddha hood. We must therefore devote ourselves to developing compassion” (p. 91). Compassion is one way of relating to others, but also can be a way for individuals to relate to the self.

The concept of self-compassion, although relatively new to Western cultures, has existed in Eastern philosophical thought, mostly Buddhism, for centuries (Kernochan, McCormick, & White, 2007). Kristen Neff, a leading researcher in the area of self-compassion, recently identified a link between Western psychology and Buddhism (Neff, 2003a), and has been leading researchers to new ways of learning and understanding health and well-being through the means of self-compassion. Embracing the potential of self-compassion can be important when addressing the basis for overall health and wellness. Neff, Kirkpatrick, and Rude (2007) suggested that “it could be argued that the construct of self-compassion is most useful when viewed as a skill that people can develop to facilitate mental health” (p. 146).

Buddhist practices are used to eliminate suffering in oneself and others, and centre on happiness that comes from relieving suffering (Kernochan et al., 2007). Self-compassion has

been an important virtue in Buddhism, and although it is relatively new to Western psychology, it is relevant to self-process and self-concepts that are studied in several disciplines of social, health, and behavioural science (Neff, 2003a). Currently, the Western view on compassion revolves around having compassion for others, whereas Buddhists believe it is equally as important to feel compassion for the self. Similarly, Western traditions often distinguish a difference between the mind and emotions, whereas Eastern traditions do not make this distinction; rather the heart (i.e., emotions) and mind are seen as one (Kernochan et al., 2007). Compassion is at the core of what it means to be human, and self-compassion is an adaptive way of relating to the self kindly when experiencing personal failures and difficult life events (Neff & McGehee, 2010).

Previous research has shown a link between self-compassion and well-being among adolescence and young adults (Leary, et al., 2007; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Neely, Schallert, Mohammed, Roberts, & Chen, 2009). Experiencing self-compassion requires one to take a warm and balanced approach to negative events in order to recognize that human nature is imperfect and is something that is experienced by everyone. Realizing that struggles are a part of life and that one's difficulties are usually no worse than other people's difficulties can contribute to individual well-being (Leary et al., 2007). It has been suggested that self-compassion acts like a buffer, moderating reactions from negative life events such as anxiety, embarrassment, and depression (Neff et al., 2007).

Self-compassion involves three elements: self kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Neff, 2003a). All three elements are important to how one approaches negative life events or personal failures. First, self kindness entails being warm and understanding towards oneself, instead of ignoring the pain or being self critical during times of suffering or feelings of

inadequacy. One cannot always have everything that is desired, and the associated frustration will often lead to feelings of isolation. Second, common humanity recognizes that human suffering is a human condition and that people are naturally flawed. There are many external factors that come into play for an individual in which there is no control (i.e. gender, race, environmental conditions, etc.). Once one realizes and accepts that there might not be a choice in some areas of life, an acknowledgement of these difficulties and failures with non-judgmental compassion, as well as kindness towards oneself, begins. Third, mindfulness requires one to take a balanced approach to negative life events in order to avoid over-identifying with them. Being mindful allows one to approach painful emotions and feelings with openness and clarity, as well as to relate to experiences by others who are experiencing similar situations. Mindful awareness is a non-judgmental state that allows one to observe thoughts and feelings without exaggeration or suppression (Neff, 2003a). This third component has been looked at more extensively than the first two in the current literature. Various mindful training strategies have been shown to improve one's overall well-being (Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Ortner, Kilner, & Zelazo, 2007; Orzech, Shapiro, Brown, & McKay, 2009; Shapiro, Astin, Bishop, & Cordova, 2005; Sharpiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007) and have made important contributions to clinical treatment protocols. Mindfulness interventions have shown to be instrumental and beneficial for both clinical and non-clinical populations by increasing feelings, such as happiness, and individual characteristics, such as optimism.

1.2.2 Self-esteem and Self-Compassion

In previous literature, self-esteem has been shown to play an important role for people dealing with personal failures. There is little doubt that low self-esteem is problematic

(Courtney, Gamboz, & Johnson 2008; Neff & Vonk 2009). While it has been acknowledged that low self-esteem can be related to negative psychological outcomes, such as lack of motivation and depression (Harter, 1999), there are also potential negative effects of high self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to our own sense of worth and how we perceive ourselves and our value (Neff, 2009). Although self-compassion and self-esteem are both ways of relating to oneself, self-esteem is often based on how different we are from each other or how special we are. However, there are potential negative effects that are involved with enhancing one's self-esteem. One of these negative effects includes narcissism, which is defined by the American Psychiatric Association (2000) diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-IV-TR) as "a grandiose sense of self-importance" and a tendency to "exaggerate their accomplishments and talents, and expect to be noticed as 'special' even without appropriate achievement" (pp. 349-350). Data from a recent study conducted by Neff et al. (2009) indicated that self-esteem had a substantial positive association, while self-compassion had close to zero association, with narcissism. Therefore, boosting one's self-esteem may lead one to adopt a narcissistic behaviour, often leading to one putting others down to feel better about oneself.

To date, we have not seen these same negative effects of self-compassion in the literature, perhaps because research on self-compassion is still relatively new. Alternatively, the potential negative effects of self-esteem might not occur with self-compassion. Self-compassion is not centered on a self-evaluation process; therefore, self-compassionate individuals focus on compassion towards oneself and do not rely on evaluations from the self or others. Self-compassion allows one to examine the self with warmth and kindness, as well as to focus on common humanity instead of positive or negative self-judgements (Neff 2003a). Despite the

benefits of self-esteem, it is contingent on self-evaluations, judgments, and comparisons to determine self-worth (Harter, 1999).

Neff and Vonk (2009) compared self-compassion and self-esteem as they relate to ego-focused reactivity. Self-compassion predicted more stable feelings of self-worth and had a stronger negative association with social comparison, public self-consciousness, anger, and self-rumination compared to self-esteem; in addition, self-esteem was positively associated with narcissism. Both self-esteem and self-compassion are distinct ways of thinking and feeling about oneself. They can be used to examine psychological functioning and have been linked to positive states, such as happiness and optimism (Neff & Vonk, 2007). However, while self-esteem rests on positive self-evaluations and involves cognitive representations of the self, self-compassion does not rely on particular self-evaluations; rather, it is purported to allow one to approach personal experiences with an open-hearted awareness.

1.2.3 Young Women Athletes

Over the past 30 years there has been an increase in women's participation in sports. In general, sports and physical activity had primarily been considered male domains; however, the acceptance of women in sport and women participation has increased over the past 30 years (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1983), and continues to increase. Statistics Canada (2005) reported 21% of Canadian women actively participate in sport. It is important that women participate in sport and develop skills that promote lifelong athletic participation. Sport and physical activity can be an empowering means for women to challenge themselves, gain a sense of identity, and learn about their physical capabilities (Krane, Waldron, Michalenok, & Stiles-Shiple, 2001), not to mention the psychological, sociologic, and physiologic benefits associated with physical activity and

sport (Van de Loo & Johnson, 1995). Through involvement in sport, women can achieve a positive outlook for oneself and develop the skills, abilities, and relationships that are needed to increase overall health and wellness (Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity 2003). Positive sporting experiences may also help build self-confidence, self-esteem, and positive body images among young women (Jaffe & Manzer, 1992).

Despite the benefits of sports participation, there are some potential negative experiences young women athletes might encounter. Both men and women athletes may be faced with evaluative criteria within a sporting context, including appearance and performance-based evaluations. In comparison to men, however, women are generally exposed to a higher critique of appearance-based evaluations from the self and others, which may elicit a higher degree of negative self-conscious emotions, such as shame and guilt (Mosewich, et al., 2011). Striving for excellence may result in emotional pain stemming from personal mistakes, failures, or inadequacies experienced by athletes. Constantly trying to achieve challenging goals and reach high standards, athletes tend to equate performance success with self-worth and failure as a sign of being worthless (Tangney, 2002). These types of self-evaluations and emotions are often unfavorable and can create problems for young women (Neff, 2009).

Sport is a significant and popular domain for young women and may sometimes present challenging experiences of failure. Essentially, failure in sport can be two dimensional; it has both a performance factor and a consequence or reaction. Further, failure is the inability, for whatever reason, to satisfy personal and/or others standards of goal-related performances, which can then lead to negative consequences involving emotional pain (Ball, 1976). These types of failure experiences can have a negative effect on individuals' athletic career as well as other areas of their lives (Sagar et al., 2007). Results from Sagar et al. (2007) suggested that young athletes

experienced a diminished sense of self and achievement, guilt, emotional costs, negative self and social evaluation, and a loss of motivation after experiencing failure in sport. Further, negative feelings from failure involve thoughts around not accomplishing goals, wasting an opportunity, not controlling things that can be controlled, doubting of abilities, loss of confidence, and disappointing of self, and others (Conroy, Poczwadowski, & Henschen, 2001). As such, failure is one of the most difficult challenges athletes will inevitably face; and it might be more often the rule, rather than the exception to the rule, in the process of obtaining challenging goals (Smith, Kass, Rotunda, & Scheider 2006). In summary, participation in sport can be challenging when experiencing emotional pain associated with failure.

Negative self-evaluations and self-criticisms might increase when athletes experience emotional pain associated with failure in sport. It has been suggested by Taylor and Brown (1988) that individuals with high self-esteem are able to access more positive thoughts and evaluations about themselves after experiencing emotional pain. In contrast, individuals with low self-esteem don't have this strategy and often doubt the positive attributes that they possess. The desire for success is present in both groups; the difference is that those individuals high in self-esteem are able to reject and dismiss the negative emotions associated with failure, whereas those with low self-esteem will attribute negative events, such as poor performance internally (Dodgson & Wood, 1998). Self-esteem has long been recognized as a potential resource for athletes. While boosting one's self-esteem rests on having positive self-evaluations and may help athletes deal with emotional pain, as mentioned earlier, it is sometimes also associated with negative traits, such as narcissism. Therefore, it might not be the only resource that can enable a healthy self-perspective.

As discussed earlier, self-compassion is an adaptive way of relating to the self kindly when experiencing personal failure and difficult life experiences. Unlike self-esteem, self-compassion does not rely on particular self evaluations; rather, it allows one to approach personal experiences with an open-hearted awareness. Currently, there is little research in the area of self-compassion and sport; even though recent investigation shows it might act as a potential buffer to painful emotions for young women (Mosewich et al., 2011). In an effort to better understand self-compassion as a potential resource for young women athletes, Mosewich et al. (2011) explored relations among self-compassion, proneness to self-conscious emotions (i.e., shame, guilt-free shame, guilt, shame-free guilt, authentic pride, and hubristic pride), and potentially unhealthy self-evaluative thoughts and behaviours (i.e., social physique anxiety, obligatory exercise, objectified body consciousness, fear of failure, and fear of negative evaluation) of 151 young women athletes. The women completed a series of questionnaires and findings showed self-compassion to be negatively related to shame proneness, guilt-free shame proneness, social physique anxiety, objectified body consciousness, fear of failure, and fear of negative evaluation. Self-compassion was positively related to two emotions that can be considered adaptive (i.e., shame-free guilt proneness and authentic pride), and also explained unique variance beyond self-esteem on shame. Results from Mosewich (2011) suggest that self-compassion development may be beneficial in cultivating positive sport experiences for young women.

In addition, recent studies by Leary et al. (2007) found that self-compassionate individuals showed increased resilience to emotions and more adaptive responses to daily difficulties. Specifically, one study by Leary et al. (2007) explored whether self-compassion moderates emotions, thoughts, and behavioural inclinations to specific events differently than

self-esteem. Results suggested that self-compassion might buffer individuals against negative self-feelings when imagining distressing events; one of these events being sport.

In the exercise domain, Berry, Kowalski, Ferguson, and McHugh (2011) explored how young, physically active women experienced self-compassion in relation to their bodies. Through interviews and focus groups with participants, they found that the essential structures to emerge indicated a link between self-compassion and positive body related-attitudes (i.e., appreciating one's unique body, taking ownership of one's body, and engaging in less social comparison). In addition to the essential structures, a facilitating structure, importance of others, was also reported. These structures can contribute to women's overall health and well being as they are part of the conceptualization of self-compassion. The structures can also be seen as strategies for helping women who are dealing with negative experiences and body attitudes. In conclusion, self-compassion allowed for acceptance of one's own body and personal imperfections as well as providing motivation for a change, one that is focused on health rather than self-worth. In another study by Magnus, Kowalski, and McHugh (2010) with women exercisers, self-compassion was related to motives for exercise and various outcomes of exercise. Results showed that women who had a self-compassionate attitude had fewer evaluative outcomes and less introjected motivations (i.e. internalized motivation); indicating that self-compassion may help women become more self-accepting and allow them to stay motivated in the exercise domain.

1.3 Purpose

Self-compassion is a relatively new construct in Western culture, and research is still in the early stages. Steps are being taken in order to advance the clarity of the definition and meaning surrounding self-compassion. To help with this clarification Neff, Hseih, and Dejittthirat

(2005) identified self-compassion as being an attitude individuals extend towards themselves in response to their perceived imperfections, limitations, and failures. Based on previous literature reviewed, there is a need to explore the understanding and meaning of self-compassion in individuals' experiences.

Research in this area has primarily used quantitative methods to evaluate individual experiences with self-compassion. Quantitative methods can limit what can be learned about the emotions and meanings that an individual gives to an event (Sandelowski, 2000). Therefore, there is a need for (a) a deeper, intimate understanding of their experiences and (b) a way for athletes to share their stories and express the meanings and emotions, through exploratory methods, which may capture the essence of a particular event in their lives. With a qualitative approach, the interest is on learning and understanding human experiences, and the interpretation of those meanings. Therefore, qualitative methods seem particularly useful when exploring the meaning of self-compassion in individuals' difficult experiences of emotional pain associated with failure. The role of self-compassion in young women athletes' experiences with failure in sport has not been introduced in the literature, and is important for advancing the clarity of self-compassion. Mosewich et al. (2011) provided an important first step in defining the relevance of self-compassion to young women athletes, and highlighted a next step as examining the role of self-compassion in sport specific situations, such as failure.

Therefore, the purpose of my study was to explore and present narratives of young women athletes' experiences of emotional pain and self-compassion. Phase one included an interview discussing a difficult time in which emotional pain associated with failure was experienced. Phase two was a reflexive photography interview in which athletes were asked to take photographs and then talk about the photographs they had taken to express their previously

discussed experiences of emotional pain associated with failure. The potential role of self-compassion in athlete's emotional experiences was also discussed in phase two.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodology used to explore young women athletes experiences of emotional pain associated with failure in sport and the role of self-compassion in their experiences. First, I will describe the methodology involved in both narrative and reflexive photography . Second, I will describe the participants in the study, the design and procedure, instruments and apparatuses used. Third, I will describe the two phases of the research and the data analysis process, and finally, I will discuss trustworthiness.

2.1.1 Narrative

Smith and Sparkes (2009) defined a narrative as “a complex genre that routinely contains a point and characters along with a plot connecting events that unfold sequentially over time and space to provide an overarching explanation or consequence” (p. 2). It is a constructed form of understanding ourselves and the world around us. People ascribe meanings to their experiences and strive to make sense of these meanings. By making our experiences meaningful, we generate behavior (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) stated that narrative inquiry involves studying experience,

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience (p.479).

Further, narrative inquiry is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In summary, a narrative is a means of making sense of the world by connecting events over time to stories.

Narrative accepts that we live in a storied world and that we interpret the actions of others and ourselves through the stories we exchange (Murray, 2003). The strength lies in the fact that narratives are memorable ways in which a reader is drawn into an experience. Narrative inquirers study the individual's experience in the world, an experience that was storied both in the living and telling and that could be studied by listening, observing, living alongside others, and writing and interpreting texts (Clandinin, 2006). The knowledge gained from narratives is shared and is open to a variety of ways of knowing. Narratives are not mirrors; storytellers do not just reproduce the past; rather, they interpret it. Through imagination and strategy, individuals are able to tell their stories by connecting events and making them meaningful for themselves and others.

There are some basic assumptions that come with narrative inquiry. First, a philosophical interpretive lens is used that assumes there is no social reality independent of us. Realities are multiple, subjective, fallible, and created by us. Because of this assumption, narrative falls under the epistemological view of social constructionism, which is rooted in phenomenology. From these assumptions some basic characteristics of a narrative are created: (1) Meaning is basic to being human, and being human entails actively interpreting meaning; (2) Meaning is created through narratives; (3) We are relational beings, such that narratives and meanings are constructed through relationships; (4) Narratives are both personal and social; (5) Selves and identities are constituted through narratives, and people do not perform storied selves and narrative identities rationally; (6) Being human is to live in and through time; and (7) The body

is a storyteller, and narratives are embodied (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Narratives can be used as a primary method for organizing experiences in time.

Although the study of narrative is becoming more popular in social sciences, there is still a gap in the research in regards to how narratives can play a role in sport and exercise psychology. Smith and Sparkes (2009) provided support for why and how a narrative inquiry is a useful method in sport and exercise. Individuals place an importance on meaning in their lives, and narrative helps researchers analyze the meanings people attach to experiences through the stories they tell. Narratives provide a rich account into what sport and exercise mean to individuals, how they contextualize these meanings, and how these meanings have shaped their experiences and feelings. Secondly, narratives take into account not only individual experiences, but also how their stories are derived from the fabric of society and culture; narratives look at both the personal and social sides of storytelling. By looking at both sides of the story, researchers can glance at how society might be shaping or limiting individuals' experiences with sport and exercise. Narratives are often lengthy, complex, and messy, but these distinguishing features are good for researchers who are looking to attain a rich account of lived experiences and the meanings attached to them. Finally, narratives allow people multiple resources for providing care. The more stories people have access to, the more opportunities and flexibility they have to live in diverse and meaningful ways.

One concern in the sport and exercise literature is that athletes do not have a large pool of narratives to draw on in order to help give meaning to their experiences (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). By expanding the narrative literature, athletes will have the opportunity to fit their lived experiences with the stories and experiences of others, thereby preparing and opening up new possibilities for care and understanding. Narratives differ from

many other forms of qualitative or quantitative research in that it puts an emphasis on the how relations between people shape, enable, and hinder lives; we are relational beings. The knowledge expressed and gained from narratives is particularly powerful for understanding the fullness and uniqueness of human experiences (Oliver, 1998). Narrative inquiry used in sporting domains focuses on how constructs, such as self-esteem and self-compassion, arise through a storied process of social interaction (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Narratives are not only cultural but they are personal, and are able to get at the athletes' personalized world by revealing a great deal about their experiences with emotions, motivations, and feelings faced during sport. If we hope to improve sporting experiences we must first understand the experiences of athletes. Narrative inquiry can broaden the lens and provide a deeper level of understanding into the lives of the athletes and their experiences in sport.

2.1.2 Reflexive Photography

Photographs provide us with a language of visual communication. They can be used to communicate issues, emotions, and truths about an individual's experiences. In the past, photographs theoretically have played a minor role in social research, mainly because disciplines, including psychology and sociology, are heavily word-based, but also because the use of images in order to get at the truth has been questioned in past literature (Harper, 2002). However, there has been an increase in the use of photographs in social research. They can provide powerful portrayals and insights into the contexts of individuals' experiences; emphasizing the potential significance and trustworthiness of photography as a research method (Simco & Warin, 1997).

There are many ways in which photographs can be used as a method for data collection. Reflexive photography, similar to photo-elicitation or auto-photography, has a phenomenological orientation and allows individuals to elaborate on and express their emotions and feelings through the lens of a camera (Collier & Collier, 1986). It has been found that reflexive photography is a useful form of data collection when exploring experiences of marginalized groups as it limits the power imbalance between the researcher and participant (Packard, 2008). Individuals choose the images they want to present and speak to what they would like to highlight in the photographs. The photographs are a way to assist in the elicitation of stories and the meanings given to a personal experience. Therefore, reflexive photography can be a useful tool for generating sport-related narratives. Frith and Harcourt (2011) outlined four key issues that are important to consider when combining interviews and photographs as a way to explore what individuals may be experiencing. First, asking participants to take photographs that represent their experiences allows them to be creative; as photographs can be used as a documentary, recording events and activities accurately. Secondly, photographs can be used as a symbol for feelings as well as symbolism for relationships. Reflexive photography allows the participants to be in control of images generated of themselves and their experiences. They choose what they want to show and share and can retain control over when, how, and how often they engage in the research. Thirdly, it is important to recognize the significance of the conversations that take place around the photographs taken. The process of deciding which photographs to take, the photographs that may be “missing” from the collection, the stories they represent, and the feelings generated from viewing the photographs are just as important as the photographs themselves. And finally, reflexive photography can be a useful tool for capturing events over time. The photographs can be viewed as a whole, and they can be compared and

contrasted to allow new insights to develop. Photographs have the ability to capture an experience and emotions involved with that experience as well as the process of coping with that experience.

Reflexive photography enables an opportunity to present another layer of depth into an individual's lives and it allows a researcher to see the world through the participant's eyes (Phoenix, 2010). Photographs not only elicit new information but can evoke different and sometimes deeper elements of human thought and consciousness. Morrow (2001) stated that research is often a matter of "finding the right question" (p. 266), and using photographs as a way to produce the right question is often useful. Photographs have no meaning in and of themselves. Therefore, the interpretation and explanation provided by the participants as to why they generated the images makes the taking of photographs an effective tool for enriching narratives. Including photography as part of the narrative allows a researcher to go beyond oral and textual accounts, and represent the narrative in a different way than just the interviews themselves. For my study, reflexive photography provided access to the private emotional experiences in the everyday worlds of young women athletes.

2.2 Participants

Six young women athletes participated in this study. Two of the athletes were 16 years old, one was 17, two were 21, and another was 23. The sports represented included figure skating, cross country, pole vault, basketball, rugby, and wrestling. All the women participated in their competitive sport within the last year, and each experienced emotional pain associated with failure while participating in sport. An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that can adequately answer the research questions. Further, as the study progresses the number of

participants needed becomes obvious at the point of data saturation; the time when new categories, themes, or explanations stop emerging from the data (Marshall, 1996). Two types of sampling methods were employed in this study. Purposeful sampling, in which a researcher actively selects participants who can best answer the research questions (Creswell, 1998; Marshall, 1996) and snowball sampling, which draws on referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of the research interest (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). These methods allow for recruitment of individuals or “hidden populations” who are not easily accessible through other sampling strategies.

The inclusion criterion for my study included (a) adolescent and young adult women between the ages of 15-24 years, (b) participation in an individual or team competitive sport in the past year, and (c) experience with emotional pain associated with failure in sport. ‘Sport’ for this study was determined by using Sport Canada’s definition which states that “a sport is 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” (Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 15). Competition can be seen as a device which people use to evaluate themselves (Coakley, 1990). I was aware that emotional pain associated with failure could take on different meanings, and may include unique experiences for each individual athlete. Potential examples identified prior to the study that could create emotional pain associated with failure in sport included things like thoughts around not accomplishing goals, wasting an opportunity, doubting of abilities, loss of confidence, and disappointment of self and others (Conroy et al., 2001). Once identified, individuals were contacted with my studies recruitment ad (Appendix B), including a message explaining the purpose, goals, and benefits of the research study. All athletes were able to self-

select, and if interested a consent form (Appendix C) was sent. The participants were asked to bring a signed consent form to the first interview. All participants in the study came to me through individual or informants who are in my social and academic network.

2.3 Design and Procedure

Prior to beginning, this study received ethical approval from the University of Saskatchewan's Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Due to the complexity of these young women athletes' experiences, a unique paradigm was needed in order to better understand and elucidate the experiences of emotional pain associated with failure that these athletes are facing, along with how self-compassion may play a role. Each individual expresses experiences, feelings, and emotions differently; which is why using multiple methods helped me gather information that was beneficial to my study. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to be flexible with my questions based on the responses of the women. Unlike a structured interview, semi-structured interviews are open-ended and use a conversational style, which prevents the interviewer from being tied down to certain questions that can be asked. Also, in semi-structured format, the questions and topics usually start out general and then move to a specific interest, with the order dictated by the participant's train of thoughts (Millwood & Heath, 2008). Interview guides (Appendices D and E) were used to help me stay focused on the research questions while interviewing, but did not limit me to specific questions. Probes were used to follow up on what was already said for deeper responses and examples, or for clarification. Notes were made in a research journal following each interview.

The present study used a similar design to Harrington and Schibik's (2003) study on the freshman-year experience. My study involved two phases in which the participants were asked to

(a) take part in a one-on-one semi-structured interview (i.e. phase one), (b) take photographs and record their thoughts (i.e. phase two), and (c) take part in a reflexive photography one-on-one interview (i.e. phase two). Conducting in-depth interviews and combining two different means of data collection enabled me to show concrete examples and present rich accounts of athletes' narratives of emotional experiences associated with failure in sport. The participants chose the dates and times for the interviews, and all interviews lasted between 40 to 120 minutes. Pilot interviews were conducted with former a teammate and a lab group member to ensure that the questions were appropriate and clear.

2.3.1 Apparatus and/or Instruments

As the main researcher in this study, I acknowledge that ultimately I was the instrument used for this research process (Patton, 1999). However, as mentioned earlier, interview guides were used to help conduct the semi-structured interviews. In addition, although 27-exposure disposable cameras and notebooks were available to the participants in order for her to fulfill the reflexive photography interview protocol, none of the participants needed the camera or notebook; they all had their own materials. An audio tape recorder assisted in the data collection process and was used during each interview. The audio tape recorder helped to enhance the credibility and dependability of the study by reducing the risk of missing important information shared during the interview, as it serves as a cross checking mechanism.

2.3.2 Phase One

Prior to starting the first interview, the participant's signed consent form was verbally reviewed and a pseudonym was selected to ensure confidentiality. The pseudonyms the

participants chose were Molly, Martha, Rachael, Janelle, Lexi, and Lauren. The participants were referred to by their pseudonyms in the transcripts and throughout the remainder of my thesis. Once the consent form was reviewed and pseudonyms were chosen, the data collection process began. The beginning of the interview focused on gaining a rapport with the participant in order to ease the interaction and allow the participant to become comfortable. Since I was an elite athlete myself, I informed the participant about this shared love for sports in hopes that she would feel comfortable sharing her experiences in sport with me. As soon as I felt like I had gained an adequate rapport with the participant I began the interview process with general questions designed to obtain background information. Some examples of questions used were as follows (See Appendix D for full interview guide):

1. Please tell me about a little bit out your sporting background
 - When did your interest in sports first begin?
 - How many years and what level did you play?
2. How did you end up where you are today in your sport?
 - How did you get involved?

Questions then flowed from general to more specific. The purpose of this first interview was to reveal, in detail, some of the experiences young women athletes are having; and more specifically, I was interested in their emotional pain associated with failure. Here are some questions that I used to probe the participants to talk about their personal experiences:

1. What kinds of challenges or events arise in your sport that you would describe as a failure?
2. Are there any specific situations you can talk about that could possibly occur in your sport that may result in athletes feeling like they have failed?

3. Now that we have talked a little bit about what could potentially happen in your sport is there one specific experience or situation you can tell me about where you have gone through a difficult time in your competitive sport where you felt you have failed? By this I mean a situation where you feel like you have let yourself down or maybe you didn't meet a personal goal or expectation.
4. What type of emotions did this experience bring up for you?
-Can you talk a bit about each of those emotions?

Once the interview was finished, phase two was verbally explained to each participant. This included a description of the photograph procedure and requirements, as well as the benefits of using photography as a method of data collection. A photo release form (Appendix F) was given to each participant and the protocol was verbally explained.

2.3.3 Phase Two

The second phase of the study was twofold. In part one the participants were asked to take as many photographs and corresponding notes as needed to best represent their experiences discussed in phase one. There was no maximum or minimum requirement for the number of photographs that could be taken. Once the participants completed the photograph procedure they contacted me. Most participants (i.e., all but two of them) printed their own photographs; in which case, they then emailed me the photographs to have printed. Part two was a reflexive photography interview in which we discussed the participants' photographs and notes. After discussing the photographs, the focus of the interviews changed to the role of self-compassion in their failure experiences. The reflexive photography interview took place approximately 3-4 weeks following the first interview.

The interview began with me asking for feedback on the photography assignment (e.g., whether the participant found it beneficial, helpful, challenging, etc.). The interview then proceeded with the participant presenting me with her photographs in whichever order she chose. During this time we specifically worked through each image presented; I asked her to explain the image to me. Some sample questions used to guide this interview were as follows (See Appendix E for full reflexive photography interview guide):

1. Were you able to express your emotions fully through the photos and your captions?
2. Why did you decide to take this picture?
3. How does this picture represent your experiences of emotional pain?
4. Can you talk about your feelings while taking the photographs?
5. How has your behaviour been affected by these experiences of emotional pain? And how does the picture illustrate this?

This stage was important for the research process in order to clarify the content (i.e., what was in the photographs), the process (i.e., how was the photographs presented), and the meaning (i.e., why were the photographs taken).

The first objective of this reflexive photography interview was to draw out perhaps new or deeper meanings than those expressed in the initial one-on-one interview. Once the participants had discussed their photographs, I used the end of our interviews as an opportunity to ask questions regarding self-compassion, which was the second objective of phase two. A self-compassion video (Self-compassion, 2009) by lead researcher Kristen Neff was shown to each of the women before moving forward on our self-compassion discussion in order to help clarify the concept of self-compassion. I wanted to explore self-compassion in difficult sport experiences, as well as the potential role of self-compassion in the participants' emotional

experiences associated with failure in sport. Sample questions included (See Appendix E for further questions regarding self-compassion):

1. Have you heard of the term self-compassion before?
- Can you talk a little bit about what you believe having self-compassion means?
2. Based on our previous discussions, do you think that you acted self-compassionately during your difficult time?
3. Do you typically think that you act self-compassionately when faced with negative experiences?

Self-compassion was intentionally not explicitly mentioned up until this point in the study. In phase one I wanted to focus solely on the participants' emotional pain associated with failure in order to get a detailed story of their difficult experiences. Because of this, I felt the participants were better able to learn and talk about self-compassion in their experiences. Following an exploratory discussion on self-compassion, the data analysis process was verbally explained to each of the participants. Final copies of their transcripts were sent to each of the participants for review. After the participants read and approved their transcripts they were asked to sign the transcript release form I sent to them (Appendix G). Once this was completed, I met with the participant's separately to collect the signed transcript release form. The women were again reminded that a final product of the study would be available to them, if requested.

2.4 Data Analysis

Narratives do not speak for themselves; they require interpretation. There are many different ways to read, interpret, and analyze life stories. For example, holistic versus categorical and content versus form involve different interpretations (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber,

1998). For the purpose of this study, I used a holistic-content mode of analysis since I wanted to understand the themes in relation to one another as a dynamic whole. I was specifically interested in the story of the individual and the content that was presented by the story as a whole. By focusing on the major themes presented in the interviews, difficult experiences with failure in sport were identified, and the emotional pain these young women athletes were experiencing was highlighted. This type of approach allowed me to answer and evolve my research questions.

Since I had both visual and textual means of gathering data, both types needed to be analyzed accordingly. Collier and Collier (1986) stated that "photography is an abstracting process and as such it is in itself a vital step in analysis" (p. 69). It also needs to be recognized that there is no single recipe for analyzing photographic data (Harper, 1986). It is often the case that the photographs by themselves do not necessarily provide information or insight; rather, it is when the photographs are combined with the interviews that their value becomes significant (Collier & Collier, 1986). In addition, Rose (2007) stated that the finished research tends to be presented in a way in which the discussions between the researcher and participant take precedence over the photographs themselves. No two interviews are alike, and the uniqueness of the narratives is manifested in extremely rich data (Lieblich et al., 1998). Following each of the interviews, I tried to adopt the qualitative posture of "indwelling". This means "to live within...understanding the person's point of view from an empathetic rather than sympathetic position" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 25). I did this by listening to the tapes several times, transcribing, and reading through the transcripts; making notes and impressions along the way.

After completing both interviews with each participant, and collecting the photographs and complementary notes, I followed Creswell's (2003) outline for qualitative analysis. For each

participant, both interviews were transcribed verbatim. Next, I combined the textual and visual data sets for each participant into one cohesive set of narrative data. When finished I was left with six complete but separate narratives. By doing this I was able to look closely at and develop understanding and meaning for each of the individual stories told. I then read and re-read each narrative until I felt comfortable with the material. The multiple readings enabled me to get a sense of how the narratives were structured. To begin the coding process, the textual and visual data were broken down and separated into broad categories. The coding process was done using different coloured markers. Once the extensive coding process was complete, common themes were explored. Eventually I was able to build a more complex analysis, which involved interconnecting the themes into storylines. Finally, I began writing my results in narrative form where I, the researcher, had the position of a story teller. While photographs can tell stories by themselves, and anyone is invited to see the images in a certain way, as a researcher it was necessary for me to be familiar with the meanings that the participants gave to the photographs and relate them back to the research questions (Phoenix, 2010). Therefore, the images were interpreted alongside the spoken text of the participants, with the intended result of narratives exploring young women athlete' experiences of emotional pain and self-compassion.

2.4.1 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research concepts such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are used to help describe the trustworthiness of the study (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). These concepts are in place of truth value, reliability, and validity respectively. Credibility deals with the focus of the study. It involves the confidence in how well the processes of data collection and analysis address the intended focus (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). I

chose participants, through purposive and snowball sampling, with diverse experiences allowing me greater possibility of shedding light on various aspects of my research questions. Exploring the experiences of emotional pain associated with failure, and the role of self-compassion in young women athletes' experiences is a complex phenomenon; therefore, appropriate methods for data collection were important when assessing trustworthiness (Patton, 1999). Interviews and reflexive photography were my two methods of choice for forming the narratives. Both were appropriate means for collecting and analyzing rich and detailed accounts of individual experiences. This study required prolonged engagement, which included speaking to a variety of young women athletes, developing relationships and rapport in order to build trust, and indwelling in the research. The credibility was also shown in how well the categories and themes covered the data received. All relevant data were included and irrelevant data were excluded. Participants were asked to recognize and confirm the findings as a way to triangulate and member check the data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the most crucial technique for establishing credibility is through member checking.

Dependability refers to the degree in which the data changes over time and the modifications made by the researcher during the analysis process (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Through the use of interview guides I was able to enhance dependability by addressing similar questions in each of the participant's interviews. The participants and I acquired new insights leading to follow-up questions or the narrowing of the focus of the interview. Also, the interviews were all audio tape recorded and transcribed verbatim to help enhance the data analysis process.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. I documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data

throughout my study. Triangulation of data took place between me, the researcher, the interviews, and the photographs taken by the women in order to confirm the findings. I also chose to make my experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible and an acknowledged part of the research process. Through keeping reflective journals and using them in writing up the research I was able to show the constructed nature of the research outcomes. And, after the study, I conducted a data audit that examined the data collection and analysis procedures which helped me to make judgements about the potential for bias or distortion.

Finally, the last way in which I ensured trustworthiness of my study was through transferability. Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other groups or settings. Ultimately the decision of how well the findings can be transferred to another context is up to the individual reader (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). In order to aid the reader I presented my study clearly by giving distinct descriptions of the participant selection procedure, data collection, and the process of analysis. I attempted to present the findings in rich detail by highlighting both the uniqueness and commonalities found between participants. I also provided insight into how the narratives of the women helped me to answer my research questions.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Results

What follows are the narratives of six young women athletes. The narratives are based on the stories shared during our interviews and the photographs they took to represent their difficult experiences of emotional pain associated with failure in sport. This results section is organized around five themes, followed by a discussion of the potential role of self-compassion in sport. Each theme was presented through individual stories and photographs as separate chapters. Although the themes were all presented as separate chapters, the narratives of the women did overlap with each other. Further, each chapter was written with a specific intent in mind. Chapter titles included: (1) broken bodies and wilted spirits, (2) why couldn't it have been someone else? (3) I should have...I could have...I would have, (4) you are going to make me ugly over this and, (5) fall down seven stand up eight.

Prologue

Everyone has a story and everyone has something to say. Failure in sport can be, and often is, a very difficult experience for young women that can create very personal feelings and painful emotions. However, it does not have to be a lonely experience. Sharing stories, both good and bad, with one another helps to unite us and teach us that failure in sport is a shared human experience. The stories we tell are subjective and rooted in time, place, and personal experience; which are exactly why they are so valuable. The opportunity for young women in sport to have a voice and to mesh their lived experiences with the stories and experiences of others is rare, but it is necessary for opening up new possibilities for self-care and understanding.

This story isn't about me. I am a twenty-seven-year-old "ex" woman athlete. I have participated in competitive sports for as long as I can remember, and I have formed my identity and developed my passion within the sport of basketball. Basketball has taken me to several different places around the world, taught me many valuable lessons, created lifelong relationships, gave me a sense of purpose, and has played a major role in shaping the person I am today. It has also brought me two season ending injuries, several personal goals not met, lost championships, performance anxiety, and too many tear-filled moments to count. As an athlete I have failed more times than I have succeeded.

I was able to adopt the creative role as an active listener in this journey. Through the lived experiences of six other brave female athletes, I was able to find a bit of myself and my experiences in sport in each and every one of their voices. I was drawn into these difficult experiences through interviews and photographs, both allowing us the opportunity to be creative and to openly share experiences with one another in a mutual search for a greater understanding.

My lived experiences were often woven in theirs throughout the interviews, as I reacted to the stories shared with me. As the athletes became more aware that I was, at one time, an elite athlete with moments of failure just like them, they became more comfortable telling me the difficult times they had in their sports. The connections we make in these journeys are what I believe gives purpose and meaning to our lives; and the ability to feel connected is why we share our stories.

I am aware that my personal experiences and biases can influence the research process. The process allowed me to be open and honest; and to connect with the painful emotions and the role they played in the young women's experiences. I believe it is those personal influences and biases that enabled me to have an increased sensitivity to the shared stories, as well as allowed me to really indwell within my research. Each athlete contributed a voice and took me on a different journey through their personal struggle with failure in their sport and the difficult emotions that they felt. This story presents the narratives of six young female athletes who, like me, have experienced personal failure in sport.

The Women

Female pole vault athlete breaking onto the international pole vault stage.

Puts everything on the line only to receive a silver medal.

Always comparing **herself** to other **women**

Twenty-three-years old.

Has failed.

Passionate figure skater trying to return back to a place where life makes sense.

Rachael.

Broken collar bone 12 days before biggest competition of **her** life.

Doesn't believe that everything happens for a reason.

Sixteen-years old.

Failed **herself**.

Molly.

Cross country and track and field athlete constantly pushing her physical boundaries.

Missed almost a complete track and field season with an inflamed IT band.

Blamed others for her injury when **she** was responsible.

Twenty-one-year old **female**.

She failed.

Confidently **she** tops the charts in wrestling in Canada for young **women**.

Martha.

Underestimates **her** opponent and loses cities match.

Loses all control of **her** emotions.

Seventeen-years-old.

Feels failure.

Lauren.

Basketball player who has a dream and will overcome anything to reach it.

Torn ACL causing **her** 9 months of rehabilitation and sitting out.

She is physically hurt and mentally weak.

Sixteen-years-old **female**.

Let **herself** down.

Rugby player who continues to find **herself** and **her** place in rugby

Janelle.

Injured at **women's** National team tryout and has to sit out.

Easily influenced by the opinions of others

Twenty-one-years-old.

Fails in sport.

Lexi.

Chapter 1: Broken bodies, wilted spirits

My body is broken, my spirit has wilted
Overwhelming with hurt, and given no choice
There is pain in my limbs, and also in my heart
I am damaged both inside and out, I can barely move
I do not feel whole, I am injured

My body is broken, my spirit has wilted
The core of my strength, I have been rocked
I should push through pain, but my heart still hurts
I wish this pain would ease, why is time so still?
I do not feel whole, I am weak

My body is broken, my spirit has wilted
Everyone else is complete, my mind shut down on me
Upset with disappointment, crying with pain
This is the worst part, I bet you know that
I do not feel whole, I have failed

My body is broken, my spirit has lifted
The pain has ceased, the hurt has dulled
It was unavoidable, but I heal with time
My mind is at peace, feeling stable
I am whole, I am only injured

Experiencing the struggle of overcoming physical and mental brokenness caused by an injury is something many athletes can relate to. Not only does injury create physical limitations for the athlete, it also creates pain in the athlete's heart and mind. Four of the six women I talked with discussed a time of personal suffering; a time of personal failure due to being injured.

...the next day my knee was huge. I had been icing it and icing it and elevating it and taking care of it as much as I could; like I kept it wrapped up. We were warming up and the coach walked up to me and he says 'hey, you're going to sit out of the first part of practice' and I was like 'no I'm fine' and he was like 'no you're going to sit out, we appreciate that you want to keep playing but it's in your best interest to not'. I was trying so hard not to cry on the field. So I went and sat down and there were a couple other girls who were sitting out too. I just remember watching everybody do what I wanted to do and I was like 'this is my first time here and I'm just breaking into the circuit and I'm on the sidelines'. It set me back, like it rocked me. It wasn't even my choice like I got taken out of practice and it made me feel like even more of a failure because I wasn't being strong enough to show that I could play through pain. When my coach told me I was sitting out I just thought 'this is what I came here for why did I let this happen to myself', even though it was an unavoidable situation. Like I got hit from behind making a pass, there was nothing that could be done. It was nobody's fault it was just the way it happened. And I see that now, but then I felt like there should have been a way I could have avoided it. It didn't matter what anyone said to me I was still upset, and I had the moment where I felt like I had failed myself. When I got hurt I felt broken and not just physically broken but mentally too. I broke down the night of the injury and I cried in my bed. I had called home and was just upset. Not only did my body feel broken, but my mind just shut down on me. I was disappointed and I don't know I guess I was disappointed and upset and mad all mixed together, and it was all from this one thing that happened. Like if I wouldn't have gotten hurt I still would of been nervous and scared and had all those emotions, but I don't think I would have been upset and disappointed in myself. I think that was because I got hurt (Lexi).

Lexi is a shy young rugby player who got invited to try out for the National Senior (Sr.) Women's team. She arrived at the five day long training camp. Not only was she the youngest player at the camp, but she also knew very few of the other women trying out. Day 1 was fitness testing, something that was tough for Lexi; but she tested well and that allowed her to 'get her feet under herself'. She started to feel like she belonged there and that she could actually compete with the other women. This did not last long for Lexi. She began to feel lost and out of place the second day. They were practicing unfamiliar plays that she had never seen or done

previously. She spent the rest of her evenings at the camp in her dorm room reviewing the huge book of plays. She felt a strong sense of being overwhelmed. It continued to get worse from there. On the third day, Lexi was running in a drill and about to pass the ball when she got hit from behind. This caused her to fall hard onto her knee. Her knee had ‘blown up’, but she continued to play on it in hopes of not drawing attention to herself in a negative way. Eventually, the pain was too much. She sought out a trainer and found out she had hit a bursa.

The next day Lexi tried to hide that she was hurt again. She didn’t want anyone to think she was weak. That didn’t last long. As she was warming up for the morning session the coach came over to her and pulled her from the practice. She has never had a serious injury before, and this was the first time she had something take her out of her sport. Deep down she knew something was wrong with her knee and that she shouldn’t be playing on it. But having someone tell her that she couldn’t continue to play was too much to swallow. The point of participating in the camp was to show her talent. Being sent to the sidelines took away her ability to prove herself and show all of her hard work. She was there to play. But she wasn’t playing.

Injury showed signs of weakness. She expected herself to perform when asked or when the sport demanded it of her. To physically show that she couldn’t do it meant she no longer had the ability to do what she wanted to. She was upset, frustrated, and disappointed with herself. These emotions were overwhelming. She blocked out the physical pain, but was unable to slow her mind and emotions down. She couldn’t change what had happened, and was disappointed that she let her body get the best of her. The limitations of the Lexi’s body didn’t allow her to continue playing, or physically perform when she needed too. She expected herself to just push through it. But she couldn’t.

...I figured that I should be better by now because I was working so hard at it. Then I would try to run again and I thought I would be good and I would work myself up to the moment. I

was thinking it was going to be awesome. Then I would run 100m and have to stop because it would really hurt. It just felt like every time it happened I knew that meant another 5 weeks on the bike was coming up, and I would get so upset because I didn't seem to be getting better. Every time I came back and tried running it would hurt and I would get super frustrated and sad at the same time and stuff because I wasn't getting better faster (Martha).

Martha coming off a very successful cross country season felt 'invincible'. She never thought the day would come when she would be forced to stop running. The running high, created from her recent success, gave her elevated feelings of happiness. But it also blinded her to her body's signs of fatigue. During the weeks that she was supposed to be recovering from her cross country season, she continued to train. Martha knew that she should be taking time completely off of running. She decided since she was feeling so great that she would keep pushing the boundaries of her training. Injury was never in her plan. The physical recovery necessary between cross country and track seasons was not taken. Martha slowly began to experience pain in her left knee. Again, she just ignored the signs of her body and continued to push herself until her knee was so badly inflamed that it hurt her to even walk.

Initially she blamed her extremely inflamed Iliotibial (IT) band injury on 'bad luck'. It was something that she didn't want to take responsibility for; she believed it was out of her control. It wasn't until she started physiotherapy that she realized perhaps it was in her control. It was her decision to keep running through the recovery phase of her training schedule. This was the most difficult time in her running career. She was away from the sport she loved, and had feelings of frustration the entire time she was sitting out.

When she felt like she was ready to move on from the injury, her body would continue to fail her. After the constant effort of building herself up in physiotherapy for several weeks, she mentally and physically felt like she was able to try to start running again. But, every time she tried returning to running she got broken back down. She would have to return to physiotherapy

and remain out of the sport she loves. These ups and downs are what caused most of her feelings of frustration and negative thoughts. All of her hard work up until that point had been useless.

Martha often thought about missing out while watching her teammates on the track from a stationary bike.

...I think I was partially jealous because they [teammates] got to run and I didn't. I don't know, I just felt like all of my training I've done over the last year or two would be gone, and they would be better than me. I always thought that I would never catch up to them again, and I would never be at the same level anymore (Martha).

Martha was always comparing herself to others while she was sitting out. She kept thinking they were improving and getting better every day; she was not. Thoughts of why she wasn't getting better faster were on her mind. She was ready to go but her body wasn't.

...I don't know, I'm pretty mentally tough and I'm physically tough kind of thing, so if I get hurt I'm just going to get back up it's not going to really affect me. I may be hurt but I'll just suck it up. So my coach thought that I would just get back up, but after like 30 seconds to a minute she knew something was wrong because I was still screaming and crying in pain. She knew that was wrong...there was something wrong. So I think that's when she like came over and she knew. I just saw the look in her eyes and I knew this wasn't good. I knew that when it happened kind of thing. Seriously, going to practice and sitting at practice is so hard to do. Like I bet you know that. Especially when it is not that you don't want to be there because you are sick or something. Going back there every day knowing that you can't physically do it I think was the worst part. Looking at all the days I've missed and thinking 'oh my goodness, I've not played for like 100 and some days' like that is just a ridiculous amount of time to go without something that you love so much. Missing lots of days was obviously very difficult for me just because I wanted to be playing, but I knew at the same time that if I persevered through it this long that it would pay off and I knew I would get through it (Janelle).

When I was thinking of the words hurt and injury, physical pain comes to my mind. That instant nauseating feeling you get when you realize something with your body feels wrong.

Janelle, a young talented basketball player, had that feeling the moment she got a rebound and tried to pivot so no one could steal the ball away from her. Rebounding is something she had done a million times before. This one time someone was standing on her foot while she was trying to pivot, causing a torn anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). The moment resulted in months

of 'being hurt'. Nine months to be exact for Janelle; yet the only time she even mentioned the physical pain the injury caused was when she walked me through the moment she tore her ACL. It was the brokenness and pain she felt in her heart and mind. The emotional and mental pain of her injury is what caused her feel like she let herself down.

As an athlete she was able to take the excruciating physical pain that came with having an injury. What she had difficulty with was the other types of pains that go along with being injured. Along with feelings of lost self control, Janelle talked about the pain of not being able to participate. She had to sit out and wait. For her there was nothing to do but sit and wait. Wait for an appointment with a specialist. Wait for a new physiotherapy exercise. Wait for the swelling to go down in the spot that use to resemble her knee. Janelle had a tally going for the number of days she was away from basketball. Every day that she had to sit and wait created feelings of sadness and frustration. But at the same time, seeing the number of ticks on her tally board symbolized her journey to recovery.

Molly trained an entire year for her figure skating triathlon competition. She broke her collar bone 12 days before the competition while participating in high school wrestling match. An opportunity shattered by injury.

...I heard it snap but wasn't sure if it was broken or whether it had just popped out of place. So I rolled over on my stomach and then I could tell that it was broken. I got pinned and that really hurt because she was pressing my shoulders back, I guess you can say that a competitive athlete would fantasize about how you could keep on going to show how hard you trained but I couldn't. After the match my coach didn't really know what was going on because girls cry all the time in wrestling, so he left. I felt my collar bone then reached over to my twin sister's collar bone and realized mine was missing. Then I knew something was really wrong, like my collar bone just wasn't there. It was a failure because it stopped all my hard work, because I couldn't continue to show off anything that I've learned or practiced before. I would never get to show the practice for the triathlon, like it made me not so much a failure in wrestling but because of my wrestling injury I wasn't able to show what I've practiced for and that made me a failure in figure skating. My coach always would tell me that 'everything happens for a reason' after I broke my collar bone and I suppose that is a nice philosophy but to this day I still haven't found a good reason or outcome for why this happened. Nothing became of it

other than I was off the ice and that is never good. I felt guilty for everything that comes along with an injury. Guilt weighs heavy on the soul; it is always in the back of my mind and makes me feel unhappy. I felt like I was betrayed by fate kind of. Obviously I felt the disappointment and let down when not being able to compete, sadness because of not being able to compete or skate, and guilt for the money and time that I had wasted. In the end I just ended up feeling down, everything had ended up to be disappointing. I still find that nothing good came from this injury and I look back and wonder how it would have turned out if I hadn't broken my collar bone. There wasn't any happiness there was only crying because I couldn't do what I wanted to do, and there was realization that that [figure skating] is all I wanted to do. All my hard work that never got to be proven and not living up to my expectations as well as others expectations (Molly).

There are few worse feelings for athletes than having to sit out and watch as others participate in something they are most passionate about. The injury happened 12 days before Molly was to be competing in a figure skating triathlon. It was an event that she had been training really hard for, and something her family had invested a lot of time and money into. She trains all year-round for figure skating, consistently on at least 5 days a week. Her family had put a lot of money into her skating programs for the triathlon competition. She truly loved performing the triathlon. It was 'where she belonged'. For her to break her collar bone 12 days before the only offered competition was shattering for Molly. Not only did she not get to compete in the event the year she was injured, it was the last year for the triathlon event because the competition venue lost a sponsor. This news was even more upsetting than her injury. All of her training for the triathlon was useless. The program would never get to be performed.

Molly explained feelings of helplessness during her time off the ice because she always had some sort of 'athletic outs'. Everyday there would be something she could do, and when she was injured it was like being sentenced to bed rest. What she loved to do was sports. And not being able to play sports because of her injury was very painful for Molly. It was apparent to me, how painful talking about this experience was for her. There were many silent moments during our discussion that were only filled with sniffles and tears. Her injury had caused her to miss an

opportunity to perform and reach her goal. And she knew it. Mentally knowing she could not perform was too much for Molly to bear. And it brought on extended feelings of sadness, frustration and disappointment.

Four young women shared with me their stories of pain after experiencing an injury in sport. Each one of them suffered through different injuries, but all of them shared in the painful emotions that followed. Their injuries lead them on a journey of brokenness. Having physical limitations not only left them with sadness, anger, frustration, and disappointment; but it also had an influence on their mental toughness. The often hidden thoughts of personal weakness, isolation, and loss of control were at the forefront of these difficult experiences. I felt moments of emptiness in these women as they talked about their experiences. It was as though being injured took away part of who they were as athletes. I expected to hear that their injuries made them sad and frustrated, but they took me beyond those emotions going deeper into what was causing their difficult emotions. Opening up about the weaknesses and loneliness of their injuries helped them explain their emotional experiences. They are all powerful young women athletes, and in their experiences the women had to struggle for strength; strength to overcome their injuries both physically and mentally. The only way they would overcome their injury was to become stronger than the brokenness.

Chapter 2: Why couldn't it have been someone else?

Throughout each woman's struggle, thoughts of 'why me' would continually come in and out of their experiences, each time creating strong feelings of disconnection from other people. Failure was seen as something that was abnormal, something that was not supposed to be happening, especially to them. During these times of disconnection, the women felt all alone with their personal suffering and completely isolated. These were among the many dark times that occurred for each of the women while trying to overcome their difficult experiences. This darkness was a time of sadness for the women. For some, these times were brief. For others, like Molly, these times were frequent and devastating. Molly still cannot find a reason as to why she got injured when she did. In her eyes, everything doesn't happen for a reason. Feeling bad for herself was not uncommon and quite debilitating. She still has no closure from her injury; a continuous nightmare that she cannot wake up from.

Sadness was often talked about when the women discussed the moments in their days when they were alone. Whether they were sitting on the sideline, watching a practice, or trying to fall asleep at night, these were the times when they would find themselves the most upset. Janelle talked about crying herself to sleep every night. She constantly questioned why this was happening to her right when she was improving so much. Rachael and Lexi, while having lots of support from family and friends, talked about not wanting to express their personal suffering to others. They didn't think others would understand, or they simply didn't want to be a 'bummer' to be around. For both of them, their suffering went un-detected by the outside world. But on the inside, they were battling sadness. It wasn't until a couple years later that Lexi opened up to those close to her about what she was feeling. She admits now that if she were to experience similar situations she wouldn't hide away from her feelings. It was a vicious cycle for some of

the women. They wanted to be alone with their failures; but when they were alone they felt the most sad and upset.

The dark moments always made Janelle feel mentally weak. Having those questioning thoughts of why this is happening to her, or why it couldn't be someone else that is injured, made her feel awful and more alone than normal with her failures. All of the women struggled to accept what had happened to them. After working so hard, and loving something so much, they didn't understand why this awful thing was happening to them. Ultimately, these thoughts and feelings were the core of their sadness. Lauren always wonders why she reacted the way she did after losing a wrestling match. She wishes she could go back and change her emotions. She questions why it happened to her. She hasn't had much failure in her career. For many of the woman, experiences with personal failure and painful emotions were rare. This may be why they found failure difficult to accept.

With all of their feelings of sadness, many of the women struggled to accept what had happened to them. They were blinded by their emotions and negative thoughts. They could not move forward. Why were they the ones suffering? How come it had to happen to them? What did they do to deserve this? Each of the women had to look deep within to answer these questions. Their searching became an important part of their individual journeys...and my journey as a researcher.

The Research Journey

As each woman told me her unique story I could remember a time when I had experienced similar emotions, or had someone close to me go through something similar to what the women were telling me. Failure is part of sport; and all athletes have thoughts on what failure in sport is. Prior to discussing each one of the women's personal story of failure, I asked them

what they believed failure in sport was. I got a variety of answers. Some were specific to a particular sport, while others could be applied to any sport. What I found was that all of the women described failure as not reaching a personal goal. It didn't matter how important or specific that goal was; they simply responded that failure happens any time athletes work hard to achieve something and then does not get the intended result. They considered falling short on their goals to be the biggest failure athletes could experience in sport. I then wanted to know why feelings or thoughts of failure are so individualized and isolated. Many individuals have different thoughts and ideas on what could be considered a failure. Why is this? The response I received was that it depends on the goals that one sets and the expectations one has. The more you invest in something, the more important it becomes. Each athlete is different, and each one has personal goals and expectations. Therefore, failure is different for everyone.

My conversations with the women built on each other. Each time I sat down with one of them I was embarking on a new journey; a journey with no expectations. I simply wanted to hear their stories and connect with them and their experiences. As I did this, and I learned more about each one of them, I could see the stories overlapping and intertwining with each other. Emotions seemed to be alike, and similar feelings were expressed. Although they felt alone in their experiences, their suffering was a shared experience among them all. They all had personal goals, and moments those goals were not reached. They all had moments where they failed.

Often after meeting with one of the women, I would write in my research journal. These notes would mostly include my thoughts about how the interview went; occasionally I would write about things that were said during a conversation that were interesting to me, or questions that came to my mind after thinking about our discussions. Below are three excerpts from my research journal.

March 24, 2011

Met with my first participant today. I felt nervous going into the interview, probably more nervous than Molly did. The interview lasted a little over an hour and I am exhausted. I feel very sad for Molly. The interview was very emotional for her and I remember what it was like to be injured at an early age in my career...I was a mess. I could tell Molly was still suffering from her experience even though it was a year ago. I wonder if self compassion will play a role for her since she hasn't really accepted what had happened to her. There is still so much anger and sadness in her. I had only hoped that I would feel such emotions after finishing an interview. With Molly I definitely felt her pain. There were moments of happiness when she talked about her family...she loves her family...she talked about them throughout our entire conversation. It was refreshing to hear.

April 19, 2011

Difficult experiences in sport elicit strong feelings of emotional pain. This I know. This emotional pain, while very difficult for the women, was able to elicit a heightened awareness of previously taken for granted aspects of sport. Janelle and Rachael both told me that having those feelings of awareness is what led them to become better athletes. They described their difficult time as a period in their lives that made them love their sport and that their suffering was necessary for them to go through in order to make them stronger. I can relate to that. I remember feeling that way when I was forced to the sidelines for two basketball seasons because of injuries. The only thing that kept me going back to watch practices and doing my physiotherapy exercises was the feeling of how much I loved to play basketball and wanted to get back. I bet that is what they felt as well...thankful for the opportunities they are given.

May 2, 2011

All the women talked about how their sport was who they were. And after talking with them I could tell that they strongly identified themselves with the athlete role. Is this why failure is so hard to accept? If they suffer an injury that physically takes them away from 'who they are' or the athlete role they associate themselves with, is that what makes the failure so difficult? What if someone experienced the same injury, but didn't associate as strongly with the athlete role, would they still have as difficult of a time? Molly told me that she was lost without figure skating and all she wanted when she was injured was to get back to what she knew. Figure skating must give her a heightened source of self worth and it seems that her injury has taken that source away and threatened her role as an athlete. Did I ever feel threatened? Probably.

My research journals helped me to stay focused on my research questions. They also allowed me to highlight and piece together key thoughts or moments in their stories. My day-to-day writing became a vital process for understanding the young women's experiences. Each one shared stories that involved many different experiences. My research journals helped me make sense of all those experiences; enabling me to create the narratives for this study.

In addition to my journals, conducting interviews, transcribing, and reading transcripts allowed me to take a good look at each woman individually. As I did this, I realized that even though we were talking about very painful emotions and personal suffering, in the end, what I got were stories of success. When asked about their emotions they would talk about how it was the worst time in their lives. But then they would tell me why experiencing these painful emotions was positive for them and their athletic career. The women were also coming to this realization as they walked me through the journey of their experiences.

The Journey of the Women

Athletes are surrounded by sporting stories. By asking the women to share with me their personal accounts of key moments or times in their athletic career, I am essentially inviting story-telling. Stories of winning, losing, devastation, and joy are among many of the themes that arise through sport story-telling. The purpose of this study was for me to explore young women athletes' stories of emotional pain and self compassion after experiencing a perceived failure. While I was exploring and trying to make meaning of their experiences, the women involved were also re-visiting and trying to gain a better understanding of what they had been through. Alongside the research journey, the six young women went on their own journey; looking for the same answers that I was. Many of the women had 'moved on' from their difficult experiences by the time they were recruited for the study, which allowed for them to be somewhat removed

from their experiences. Looking back gave them a chance to reflect on what had happened in a new and perhaps deeper, or at least a different, way than before. Lexi told me that she didn't think going in the study would have such a positive effect on her as it did. While re-counting her experience to me she found herself getting very emotional, which created an awareness of the experience that she didn't have before.

Combining the in depth one-on-one interviews with the photograph taking, this study gave the woman an opportunity to personally reflect. All of the women talked about the comfortable open nature of our conversations and the addition of the photographs to their stories. I was particularly interested in the journey that the study took the women on. Below is one of the conversations I had with Lexi about her thoughts on taking part in my study.

Lindsay: How do you feel like you have been affected by all of this?

Lexi: Like from when we started all of this?

Lindsay: Yes. So when we talked in our first interview and then taking the pictures of your difficult experience, thinking about the pictures, and looking at them and remembering all the painful emotions you went through.

Lexi: I think that through all of this, like talking about everything and taking the pictures, I've become a lot more aware of it [her difficult experiences]. Aware of what I felt, what I didn't like about those feelings, and what I didn't like about those experiences. I know I never want my rugby experiences to go like this again. I know how valuable whatever I do is and the experiences I get now will be. I know how I should handle them and not take them for granted.

Lindsay: Would you contribute that to having a failure or having to go through something difficult in your sport?

Lexi: I think that having a failure and then being able to understand it is important. I don't think just having a failure and then forgetting about it is necessarily a good thing always. I think if you learn from your failures they can be really beneficial for you and you can take a lot of life experiences out of them. I do think that now I'm more mature and I understand the way that rugby politics, camps, recruiting, and things work a little bit better; so I think that also helps.

Lindsay: So would you say from your difficult failures that you have learned a lot?

Lexi: Yeah, I think I learned a lot, and I think I learned a lot about myself. I was able to look back at something that I don't think I would have looked back at if I hadn't done this study. I realized a lot of things that are different than they used to be like now; and I like that.

Lindsay: What kind of things?

Lexi: Like now I appreciate when I get chances and I'm working really hard. I understand that if I go to a camp that I'm the only one there and if I work hard and I try hard and I'm myself I know I'm going to get along with the girls. I don't have to be scared that I'm not going to make friends. If I show well, then opportunities will arise. I don't need to be scared. I think I would still be nervous, but I think nerves are a good thing. I don't think that I need to be scared of my teammates. I think that I should look at these opportunities as opportunities and not try to close them down or give myself reasons or take away opportunities for myself according to what others say. I've learned to keep people in my life that support me; and not those that don't support me. Life is too short to do what other people want you to do [laugh].

It appears that my study, among other things, gave Lexi a chance to look back and reflect on what she experienced. She was able to explore deeper into the meanings of her emotions. She has gained a better understanding of the role her emotions played in her experiences, as well as how she wants to move forward in the future. Lexi, along with the other women participating in my study, were given the opportunity to understand, reflect, learn, and grow from their difficult experiences. But at the very least they were able to share their story with me.

I found it very interesting. It's just different. I've never done it before and it got me to think about actual factors in my life that have affected pole vault. I thought it was beneficial just looking back and trying to bring up those moments again and that was really cool. So I really enjoyed it.

– RACHAEL, POLE VAULT

It was hard to find things that described what I wanted them to say, but in the end they turned out to be what I expected and wanted them to be.

– MOLLY, FIGURE SKATING

After the first interview and taking the photos it has taught me in a way how to react to anything in life really. To not freak out when something happens or when something goes wrong. There are always better things to come.

–LAUREN, WRESTLING

I think going through the process was a really good journey back. To go through everything that I was feeling and what it meant to me. I never really had time to stop and debrief each section through it. So I found it really interesting to look back at every step of the way through. It brought back memories and obviously some were good and some were bad, but it was good to look back and to just remember not to take for granted the things that we love.

– JANELLE, BASKETBALL

The whole thing of having to talk about it, then take pictures of it, and think about it again a couple years later has made me understand it. By looking back at it a lot you learn from it I think. Before doing this I don't think I would of ever thought about it this much. As soon as I started thinking about it and talking about it I realized that it made me a lot more emotional. It affected me more than I thought it would.

– LEXI, RUGBY

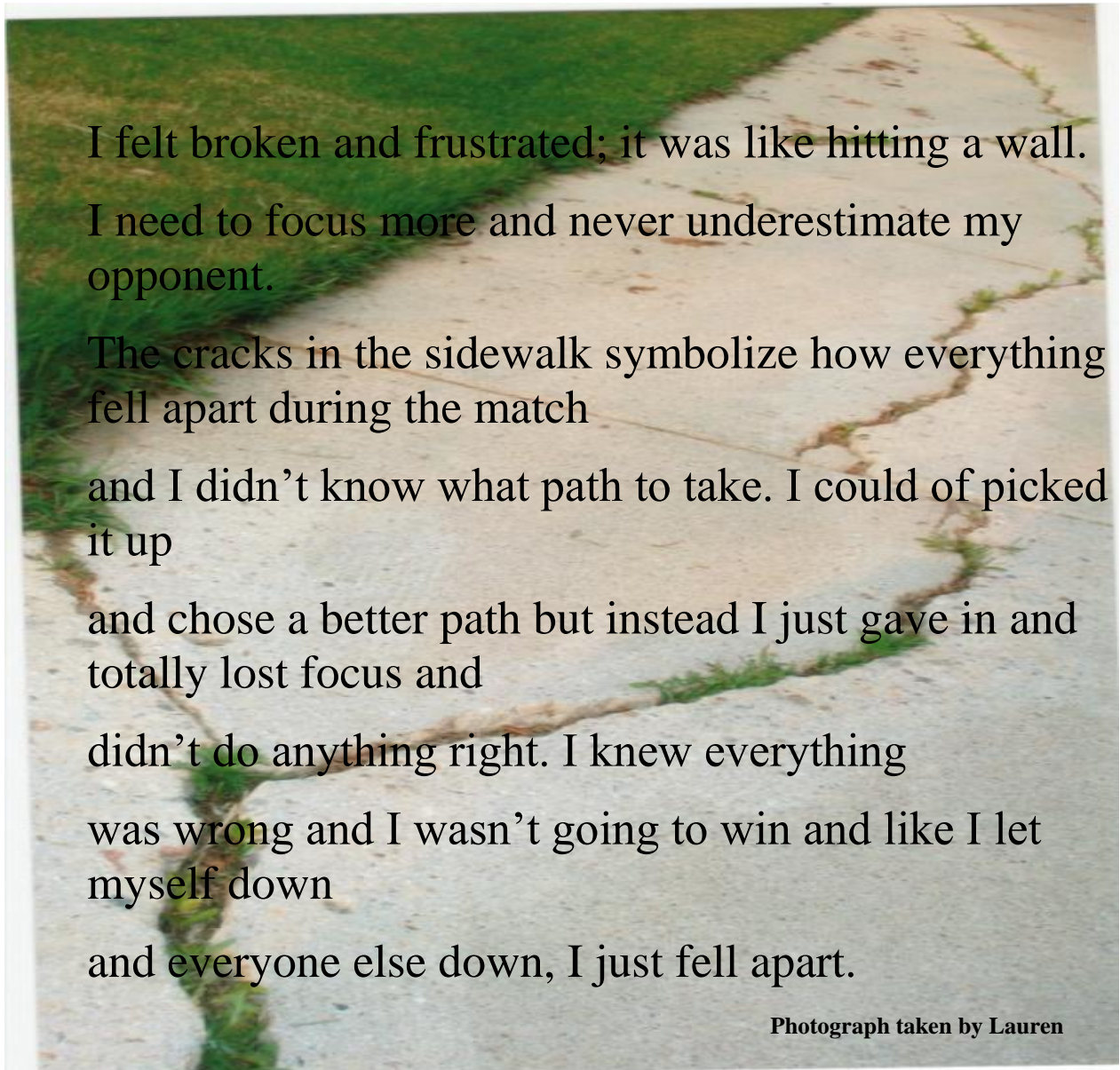
Looking back, I now don't take for granted that I am able to run every day. I have realized how special it actually is. And I know what it is like to be frustrated. And I just feel lucky.

– MARTHA, RUNNING

Reflecting on our journeys help us to make meaning of our experiences, and talking about struggles faced on our journeys helps bring awareness and understanding to our experiences. When starting my research journey I was excited to see where I was going to end up. I knew where I wanted to go, but wasn't sure how I was going to get there. The same was true for the young women in this study. Each one of them embarked on a journey, unsure of where it was going to take them. They all knew where they wanted to end up, but didn't know

how they were going to get there. Reflecting back their journeys gave them an opportunity to try to make sense of where they started and where they ended up; along with everything experienced in between. Slowly, their lonely thoughts of 'why me' began to fade. Perhaps the searching for answers to their difficult questions led them to a place where they no longer felt isolated because of their failures. Or maybe as their emotions dulled with time they were able view their suffering with clarity and move forward.

Chapter 3: I should have...I could have...I would have...



I felt broken and frustrated; it was like hitting a wall. I need to focus more and never underestimate my opponent.

The cracks in the sidewalk symbolize how everything fell apart during the match

and I didn't know what path to take. I could of picked it up

and chose a better path but instead I just gave in and totally lost focus and

didn't do anything right. I knew everything

was wrong and I wasn't going to win and like I let myself down

and everyone else down, I just fell apart.

Photograph taken by Lauren

I was done. I was beat. I know I was. It just sucks especially when you know you can beat someone, and you are not the one getting your arm raised...I just lost focus and underestimated her (Lauren).

Lauren steps onto the wrestling match at city finals as a favourite to win. The fans know it. Her coaches know it. She knows it. Prior to this, she could have been found in the hallway talking with friends; completely unfocused on the task to come. Her pre-competition routine

consists of her taking 30 minutes by herself listening to music and getting into her zone. Today that is not the case. The gym is packed. All eyes are on her. Overconfident, she starts the match and finds herself in the third round down one point with two seconds left. She loses the match, and her eyes begin to fill up with tears. In this moment, all she feels is sadness. Before stepping off the wrestling mat she frantically tries to search for any excuse for her loss. She begins questioning the referee's decisions, in hopes that he might give her extra points. This is not the case. Her sadness quickly changes to anger as she storms off the wrestling mat; refusing to shake hands with anyone in her path, including the referee and the opponent coaches. She simply grabs her bag and runs out of the gym.

I didn't listen to anything they [coaches] had to say, and like it was horrible. I stormed off crying, and didn't want to talk to anyone. I don't know...I think I was just so mad at myself; it was horrible. My mom came to talk to me after and I freaked on her. I just didn't want to be seen. I was so embarrassed and upset with myself. They made me go back and apologize to the referee and all the coaches. That part sucked, but was worth it. I needed to do that, and I knew I did. It was just really hard. I just couldn't believe that I had lost (Lauren).

Her emotions slowly start to spiral out of control. Lauren feels embarrassment in her actions. She does not recognize this person, but doesn't know how to stop. She knows she wasn't prepared for the match, and feels instant regret for skipping her pre-competition routine. Never feeling like this before, she is confused and lost. Losing this match was the furthest from her mind. But now it is consuming her; leaving her with unfamiliar emotions. Perhaps it is so painful because her goal was to win cities four years in a row. The loss means that goal will never be met. Possibly it is because she portrayed bad sportsmanship; letting her frustration show to everyone around her. Or maybe she feels these unfamiliar painful emotions because deep down she knows she could have won the match. She let herself down. Lauren is not proud of the way she reacted when she lost the match. From the start her coaches have taught her that it is not

about winning or losing, it is about what you do with your ability and how you feel. She knows she has failed. Like cracks in a sidewalk, Lauren's choice that day made her feel broken.

Although she has lost matches before, this loss sticks out for Lauren. She knows what she could have done and should have done. When the time came she simply didn't do it. She has high expectations for herself, and believes that she needs to be hard on herself in order to get better. But she can't stop blaming her loss on everyone and everything else. She is so angry.



She finds a new spark in pole vault, and is getting really good really fast. Rachael is achieving personal bests at every meet in her rookie season, but not really knowing her full

potential in the sport. This is a good thing, in her eyes, because at this point her mind isn't in the sport yet. She places 3rd in the country in both her first and second seasons. She is happy with that result; she had gotten 3rd and didn't really have to work at it. She underestimates her own abilities, and the expectations for herself are low. She thinks that placing higher than 3rd is unrealistic; those spots are reserved for the upper year athletes.

Her third year comes around, and it begins to click that she has what it takes to be top in the country. She knows she has to put everything into it. She can no longer base her success on potential or natural ability. At this moment in her career, she makes a decision; she puts it all on the line. She starts lifting weights and doing things subsequent to her training. She still places 3rd in the country. This time she doesn't feel happiness, but feelings of disappointment. She knows she should have and can do better. She continues to work hard in her training, often at the expense of other things in her life. In her fourth season she gets a bittersweet 2nd place. Bittersweet because she has broken the 3rd place finish curse, but she still did not end up at the top. She expects to win and is ready to win. She can't understand why it isn't happening; she is frustrated.

It is her final season, and she is a veteran in the field. Her time has finally come. She has no other choice but to again put everything on the line. She never misses a practice and is really focused on her goals. From the start of the competition she is tense. It is her chance to live up to her expectations and show what she has been working on. She is looking forward to and prepared for this opportunity since her last season's 2nd place finish. It all was happening so fast, and then she was done. She misses her 3rd attempt at the bar, and has to watch her opponent get the gold medal. She gets 2nd in her last and final championship. All she is thinking is 'ok it's over, I can breathe now'.

She doesn't feel sadness that her career is over just yet. She only feels relief. She no longer has to compare herself to others, and has relief from the pressure and stress of constantly performing at the top. Rachael feels numb as she begins to cry. Her tears are not from sadness that it is all over, but sadness for all her hard work and effort. All of her dedication and commitment did not pay off. The moment came when she had her big shot. She thought that moment would last forever, and then it was over and she got second place. She never measured up to what she wanted to in her last and final season.

I wish I had a better mindset during this time in my career, and not been so caught up in the competitive nature. I should have thought about how I am as an athlete and trust my ability. I would have, and I could have done something different (Rachael).

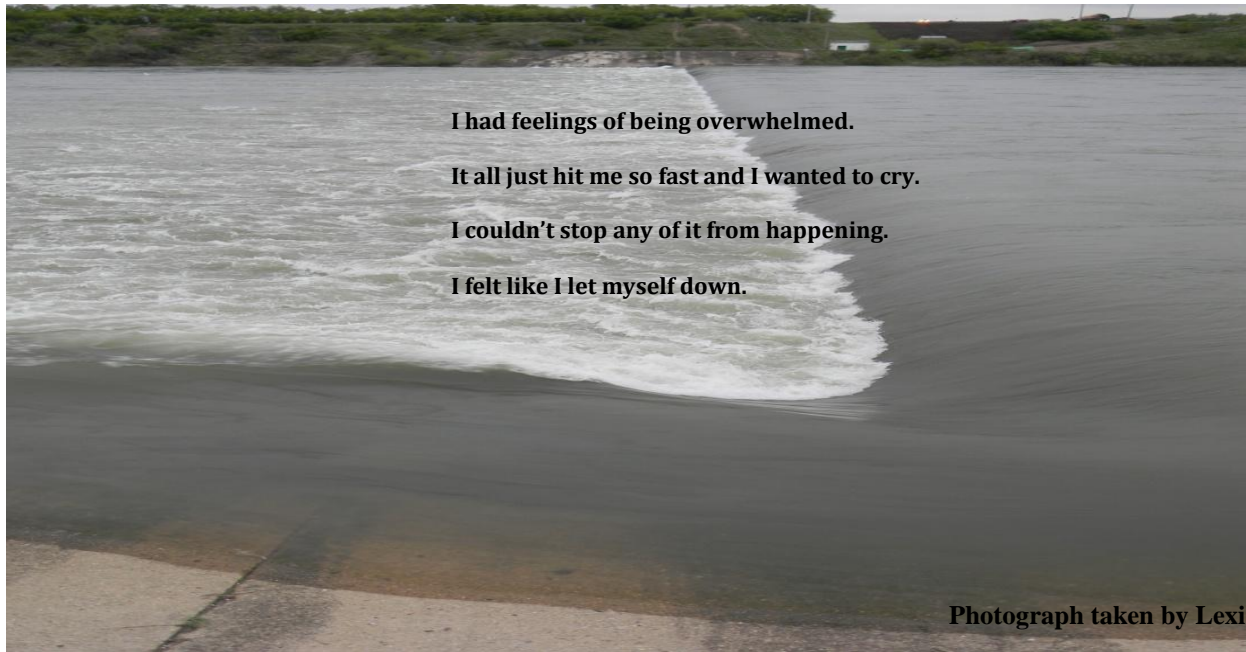
It is hard for her to think that she has never won a championship, but the failure isn't in finishing second. Second in the country is still an accomplishment for Rachael. Her failure is in how she handled the entire process. In her moments of reflection she wishes she would have started her career with higher expectations. If only she put everything into it from the beginning, and not just counted on natural ability, things might have turned out differently. If only she focused on herself and stopped comparing herself to others, she may have been able to achieve her goal. If only.

At first I had a moment of reflection of you know 'I jumped the best I could jump and she is better than me'. But as I think about it now, it is hard to bite the bullet that I've never won a championship. I know that it was in me. If I were to jump now I would go about it with a totally different mindset. I was so focused on the outcome of winning that I didn't think about what I actually had to do mentally to compete. I was thinking about her [the girl that beat her]. What she was doing, and how she was excelling and jumping better than me was on my mind. So for me in that moment it was failure because I wasn't on my game ready to compete for myself when I had worked so hard (Rachael).



Rachael and Molly both keep reminders of their accomplishments in their room. For Rachael it is a shoe box of medals. In fact she has three of them. On good days, the box reminds her of all of her accomplishments. But it is just a box, and she can easily close it and move on. If she digs around enough she can see all the triumphs, but most of the time she sees un-reached goals. This is why the box remains shut and on a shelf in her closet. Molly keeps an old worn down pair of skates out on display in her bedroom. Those skates have seen everything; blood, sweat, tears, triumphs, and disappointments. Even though her mom wants her to throw them out, they are a reminder of all of her hard work she had committed to herself in order to reach her goals. To get injured right before the competition she had been anticipating for a year was devastating for her. She had finally found a category in skating that she really loved, and thinking about competing in it for the first time was exhilarating for her. That moment never came. She felt worn down inside like the skates that are in her room. Working so hard and not getting the chance to compete left her with lonely feelings of disappointment in herself.

I didn't measure up to mine and others' expectations. I felt that I didn't measure up to everything I had been working so hard for. I let myself down because I put myself into a situation that wouldn't allow me to reach my goal of skating my best, ideally top 2 in the triathlon event. I let others down because of my injury. And I knew it. I had feelings of having let myself down and others down and not measuring up to my own and others' expectations (Molly).



Falling short of reaching a personal goal can bring on overwhelming emotions. Each one of the women has experienced what it feels like to fail. Injury for Lexi showed her signs of weakness, which she explained lead to her feelings of failure. She expected herself to perform when asked or when the sport demanded her too. By physically showing that she couldn't do it, she no longer had the ability to do what she wanted to. This left her with overwhelming painful emotions. Martha pushed the boundaries of her physical capabilities to the point where she was forced to remain out of most of her track and field season. Constantly trying to return to running when her body wasn't ready gives her intense frustration. Unprepared for a match Lauren expects to win, she watched her goal slip away as the referee raised her opponent's arm and not

hers. A rush of sadness and anger take over her mind and body. Rachael committed everything she had to pole vault, and put it all on the line only to receive another 2nd place finish. Janelle and Molly are devastated when their injuries take them away from the sport they love. Molly spends a year training for her triathlon and is unable to compete and show off what she has learned. Janelle, just when she is making vast improvements to her game, tears her ACL ligament and can no longer physically contribute to her team.



I expect to be at the top. I get there and then get pushed back down.



I felt the daunting task of what it is like trying to reach those goals.



I feel like its always uphill. You are always working to get



I felt like all the hard work that I did was kind of useless.



Photograph taken by Lexi

All of these athletes have felt like they have personally let themselves down. Although some of the outcomes were out of their control, they thought they should have, or could have done something differently. They should have been able to prevent these unwanted painful thoughts. Many of the thoughts came from feelings of shame and personal blame they put on themselves. They expect to be the best. They expect to be perfect. When they are not, the brunt of the emotions can become very personal. Sadness, frustration, disappointment, guilt, relief, regret, embarrassment, and anger are among many of the painful emotions expressed by the athletes after they have failed. It was these emotional experiences stemming from failure that left the women confused and overwhelmed.

Chapter 4: You are going to make me ugly over this

I am making myself ugly over this, I let him down

My coach is mad, I am upset

Maybe he is right, I let him in my head

Someone else's opinion, I didn't even give myself a chance

I am alone with his expectations, guilt

I am making myself ugly over this, I had let others down

The burdens I've put on them, I feel numb

They don't know what it is like to be there, I'm not expecting them to know

Comparing myself to others, I just let it go by

I am alone with others expectations, disappointment

I am making myself ugly over this, I let my team down

I have never won for my team, I am having troubles

This is hard, I am expected to get the points

People are counting on me, I am battling

I am alone with the team's expectations, stress

You are going to make me ugly over this, I don't deserve this

You thought I was wasting my time, I am not a burden

I'm not like other athletes, I can't compare

I have a chance, you tried to take something away

I only need my expectations, relief

Pause for a moment. Remember an experience where you have let yourself down. Now think about the role of other people in that experience. What happens when you weigh the expectations, demands, and pressures from other people into that experience? What does that do to you as an individual? How does it make you feel? We all have our own expectations and are our own inner critics. But when other people become involved in our experiences, it can change the emotions we feel. I think we can all agree that not living up to others' expectations can be a hard thing to swallow. Each and every one of us has gone through it. Maybe we have even been the ones with the expectations of others. Many of the women in the study talked about the effect other people had on their difficult experiences. Often the very people that are closest to them were unknowingly the ones who were causing much of their distress. Whether it was coaches, family, friends, opponents, or fans; other people influenced how they felt about themselves and their personal failure.

*...I knew what I wanted to do and what I could do. I just didn't even give myself a chance to try because of **someone else**. So I was failing but not even...I guess it is like all those quotes you hear like 'you miss 100% of the shots you don't take' and stuff like that. It was like that for me. I didn't even give myself a chance to succeed at something just because I just took it away before I even tried. I was **letting someone else dictate** what I was going to do. For me to even think about not pursuing rugby kind of made me think that I was just shutting down a part of me. Rugby is a part of me and **it made me really sad** to think that **I would let somebody try to take that away from me**. I let my opinions and thoughts be warped by what he said. I always thought 'oh how can girls be pulled into that? How can you let someone treat you like that?' Looking back now I was that girl who got pulled in. **I was that girl who let someone treat me like that** (Lexi).*

Prior to trying out for the Senior National team and getting injured, Lexi turned down her original invitation to the Junior National team tryouts. She didn't turn it down because she wanted to. Someone else told her that she shouldn't go. When she got asked to the tryout, she knew it was what she wanted and what she had been working toward. She also knew that a friend didn't like rugby and wouldn't approve of her going. Her friend didn't know why she would

waste all her time and money on it. He had never played a competitive sport, and it was a battle every time she would explain to her friend that rugby was something she wanted to spend her time and money on. He hated the fact that she played rugby. In his opinion it was a ‘manly’ or ‘boyish’ sport, and it was taking time away from him. She would often come home from a game or practice with scrapes and bruises and all he would care about was how she looked. She would always succumb to his demands; constantly she felt the stress of her sport on their friendship. Before long, she was putting his opinion before her own and was slowly becoming very unhappy. Lexi ended up letting her friend influence her decision to try out for the Junior National team. Once again he managed to control her decisions. She sadly declined the invitation to tryout; an opportunity she had been waiting for. Luckily she was approached by a women’s rugby coach at a training weekend and was given a second chance. But what if she wasn’t? Would her friend have been the one thing that prevented Lexi from reaching her personal goal of making the National team? She couldn’t help but wonder.

Letting someone get inside her head and take something really important away from her was difficult for Lexi to accept. Looking back on her experiences, she realized how much of a negative impact another person had on her decisions. Being worried about pleasing him blinded her from her own needs and opportunities to succeed. She let someone hinder her from reaching a goal she had set for herself and had worked so hard for. He made her feel emotionally weak. Back then she wasn’t a strong enough person to stand up for what she wanted. He exploited that.

*...I think it was when my coach opened the team room door and saw me. She was just like ‘what happened!’ That’s when **I feel like I just let her down**, and I failed. **I failed to impress her.** She knew that I could have done really well that summer. She knew that I was exceeding really well and improving a lot. I felt like **I failed her** just because **she had put so much time into me** and the team and everything. Then I had to stop and I couldn’t do anything. **I couldn’t contribute to the team** physically anymore, and that for me was a big issue. **I’m depended on by my team** to do well. I’m looked up to. I score points and get rebounds. For me not to be able to do that I knew **I let them down;** and **it was hard.** I feel that **I failed my parents** too because I wasn’t going to be able*

to play for a while. I especially felt it in my grade 10 season when I was able to start playing again. I wasn't playing like I could of been playing, or like how was playing before I tore my knee. So I felt like I was failing my parents, coach, and team. I wasn't doing as well as I could of. It was a tough time, as you know (Janelle).

Janelle walked in to the team room for the first time since injuring her knee. She saw her coach, who at that point didn't know that her star player would be out for the season. She knew her coach would be sad for her. But, at the same time, there were expectations the coach had of her. The team was counting on her this upcoming season. They expected her to perform. The feelings of disappointment, and letting them all down were confirmed the moment she saw her coach. Tears instantly streamed down her face. In that moment she knew she had failed them. She soon forgot about how much pain she was in and how disappointed she was with her injury. Instead, the weight of the team's expectations took over.

She knew how much the team would be affected by her injury. Janelle was expected to get the points. As a big contributor to the team they depended on her. Every day, sitting out and watching, she felt upset for letting them down. At the end of the day, she couldn't do what her team needed her to do. She kept quiet about her emotions, but the crushing feeling of failure continued to linger for a long time.

...I was feeling a sense of 'I've never won for my team' and that was hard. Of course I've never won for myself either, but I am representing my team and my school. When I'm just individually competing it's just me. I'm the only one that has to go home and think about it. The nerves and everything that go into a competition are a lot to handle. You are expected to get the points and you are expected to win. You put all of this external pressure on yourself to get those points and wins for your team. When there are external stresses and pressures polluting my mind I'm not on my game ready to compete for myself (Rachael).

Although Rachael competed as an individual athlete, she was still part of a team. Like Janelle, she knows what it feels like to have other people counting on her. She knows what it feels like to disappoint them. Her time came to shine and she was expected to win. She needed to meet the team standards and the high level of expectations from her coaches and teammates. It

was all about performance. Rachael felt like she had to put on a show for other people; it was like she was always being monitored by everyone. She wasn't given the element of choice to stretch the limits of her ability or risk anything. Just get the win, get the points, and get the medal. She was always being compared to other women, and was expected to be a winner. Eventually she too began comparing herself to other women, causing her a tremendous amount of excess stress and pressure. What she really needed was to focus on her own development and growth by making choices for herself; without all the background noise of others' comparisons.

She loved being part of a team and having those people around her who support and know her struggles. At the same time, those people were a constant 'buzzing in her ear'. She had to do well for her team or else she is going to feel bad. The sad part is that it was never about personal achievement for Rachael. It was always about the team and getting the medals for the team. If she didn't get the expected medal, she felt like she had let the team down. Feeling relief after receiving a medal was common for Rachael. There was relief of the external pressures, and a relief for living up to the team's expectations. After earning a medal all she seemed to think about is the feat of living up to the expectations of others.

*...I had to tell my mom that I broke my collar bone. She was always worried that I would break something and that wrestling was a bad idea because I was also skating at the same time. I guess I was just asking for it to be wrestling leading up to a big skating competition. After I broke my collar bone I was devastated. **I had let myself and others down.** Each one of my skating programs had **cost a lot of money** to choreograph as well as the dresses that had been made for each. **I felt sad that no one** would even get to see the programs that I had worked so hard on, polished, and sweated over. **I felt guilty for wasting time, money, and the coach's time** only for me to break my collar bone in a sport that I shouldn't have risked so close to an important competition (Molly).*

Molly felt guilt for everything that came along with her injury. This was not personal guilt; it was guilt she felt from other people. She sat against the cold concrete wall of the gym in physical pain. It clicked that she would not be able to enter the skating competition. All of the

choreography, dresses, and music were for nothing. All of their time was wasted, and her feelings were hard to cope with. She knew she had let those closest to her down. Her family had put many hours and dollars into her figure skating endeavours; never denying her the opportunity to skate. She blames herself for risking an injury so close to the skating competition. Others were counting on her to compete. Her family and coaches all had high hopes and expectations for her figure skating program, and knowing that they believed so much in her made Molly feel worse. She was unable to live up to those expectations. In the end she felt like a burden. She knew her coaches and family support her and just want her to be happy, but she couldn't help but feel the guilt of not being able to compete for them. Guilt weighed heavily on her emotions and it was always in the back of her mind keeping her in a dark place of sadness and sorrow.

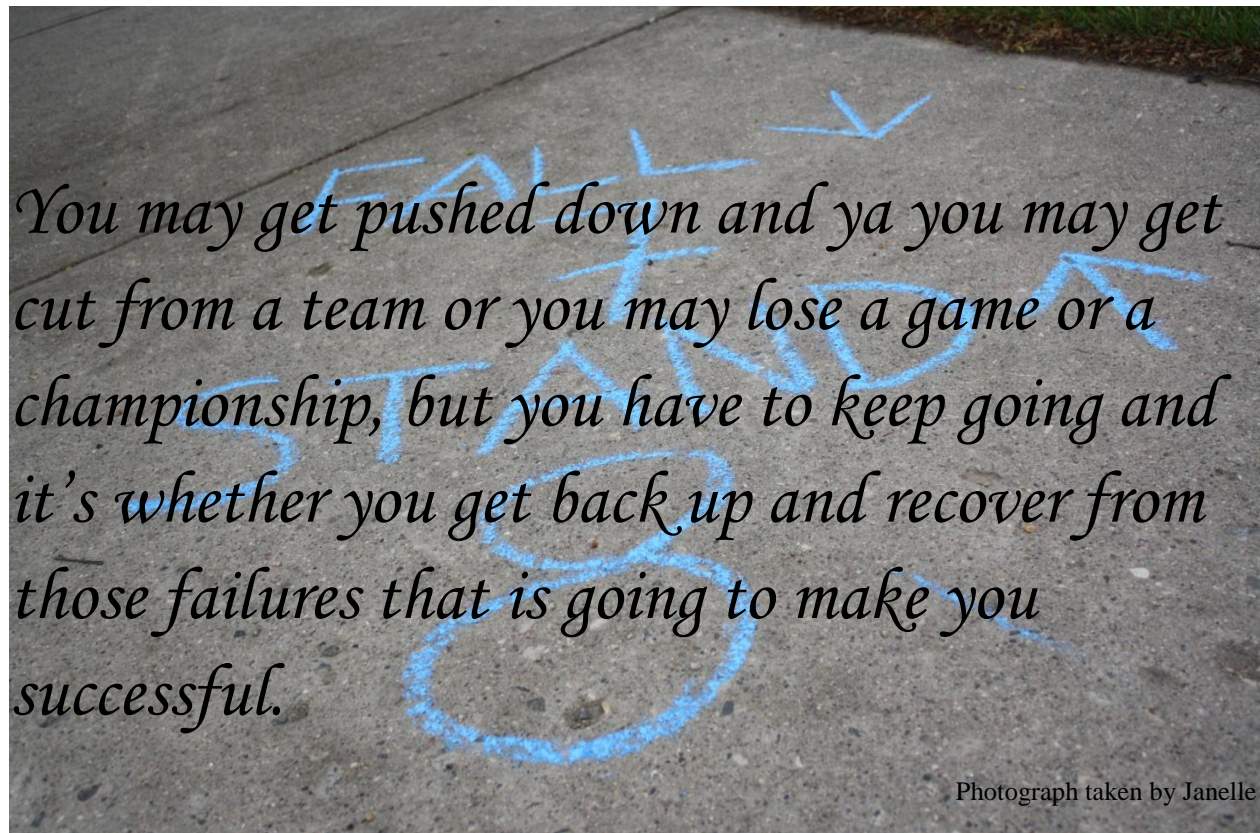
*...**They made me feel like I should just quit.** I'm usually good at keeping myself motivated, but once things happen and they begin to build up I get super stressed. I can't deal with it sometimes...like what people say. **Even my coach** that day told me I was embarrassing and that I sucked. **They are mean about it.** They would tell me that I wrestled like crap. The day of the match he said "I don't even know what you are thinking...why would you do that?" **Then he walked away and left me there.** After I kept hearing that over and over again **I started to think that I was an embarrassment and I did suck.** I wanted to quit (Lauren).*

Lauren liked hearing her coaches yell at her. Yelling confirmed that all of their focus was on her, and it would push her to work harder. Whenever she struggled she just expects to get yelled at. This is what she preferred. That is until all of the pressure and expectations started to build up; like they did the day of her wrestling match. She knew losing that match would have negative consequences, one of those being harsh criticism for her coaches, but she didn't expect to feel so emotional as a result. Her coaches are not the only people who were having a negative role in her difficult experiences, her parents were as well. Both groups expect her as an athlete to do whatever it takes to be at the top. They are constantly comparing her to the last talented

wrestler to go through the program. It was not uncommon for her to hear “I want you to do what she did” or “She made it far, so you need to look up to her and do what you need to do to be like that”. Lauren felt like they just expected her to make it all the way to the top. Those expectations challenged her emotions and the way she felt about performances.

It was clear that others were having a direct impact on some of the women’s experiences. Often it lead them to feel worse about what had happened. For some, it was the expectations others had of them. But for others, it was the opinions and thoughts of others that affected their emotions. Their stories seemed as though the significant others presented were unaware of causing those emotions of failure and disappointment. The women expressed having strong support systems and had many people who believed in them. These people may have unknowingly had a negative impact on the athlete’s experiences. The women’s personal emotions of failure were often overshadowed by emotions created by others; others who have invested in them. It is one thing to let yourself down, but it is worsened when the heightened expectations of others start to play a role in difficult experiences.

Chapter 5: Fall down seven, stand up eight



When I asked the six women in the study for stories of failure, they ultimately gave me stories of success. As their stories of personal struggle developed, the necessity of those struggles also came to light. They each found a way to overcome and turn their difficult experiences around and use them as opportunities to learn and grow as athletes. Even Molly, who still doesn't think there was a good reason for why she got injured, felt like her emotional experiences made her a stronger person and was glad she had to go through it.

Janelle writes the Japanese proverb 'fall down seven and stand up eight' everywhere. It is a constant reminder that everything is going to be ok. She continually tells herself she needs to keep going and persevere, because the end result is going to be worth it. Janelle struggled through her serious knee injury, and she explained the emotions she felt the first time she had to

watch her team compete with her sitting on the bench. She was disappointed and sad, but knew being upset was not going to get her anywhere.

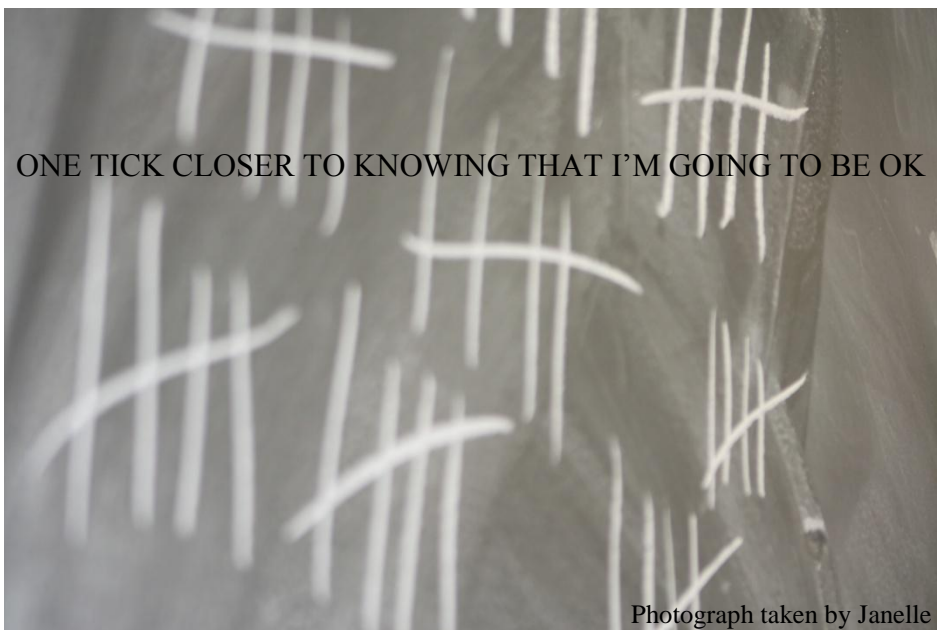
I could have been negative towards my teammates and I could have been upset about the whole situation, but I knew I just had to make the best of it. I just realized that I can't do anything about it and it must have happened for a reason so why not make the best of it. I had the ability to turn a bad experience into a positive learning experience (Janelle).

While this was a very difficult time in Janelle's basketball career, she grew a stronger love for the game and learned the game from a different view. Being forced to watch the game increased her "basketball knowledge".

I think I am stronger mentally from my injury than I would have been if I didn't go through it. I grew a stronger love for the game, and I grew as a person. I learned a lot of different things that I wouldn't have learned if I wasn't sitting on the bench for a season (Janelle).

Janelle believes that without the suffering she experienced she would not be in the positive, stronger state of mind she is in today. A greater appreciation for basketball was born, which is now the motivation behind her dream of playing basketball at the University level.

I worked harder during my rehab than I had ever worked at anything before tearing my knee. I knew I wanted to get back and I had to do all of these things to get back. After it really made me realize not to take these things [pause] don't take basketball for granted. So now I work super hard and I feel like I work hard. I feel like I have to give back to my sport, just because why not? You can't take that for granted because who knows next practice I could tear my knee again. So why not give it all you can up until then (Janelle).



Some of the women realized that they needed to ‘move on’ from the difficulties they were experiencing. They battled through the tough emotions, personal weaknesses, and expectations of others, and have become stronger women because of it. Changing the way they looked at their experiences gave them a new sense hope for what was ahead of them. Lauren sat down in the change room angry, embarrassed, and disappointed. She knew it would pass and people would forget, but right then in that moment it was all she could think about. Her mom and coaches tried to calm her down. She liked hearing them tell her that she needed to forget about it and move on. There was a lot to learn from the match. Right then she needed to settle herself down. It was just one match and there is much more to happen and many more opportunities in her future. It took her a while, but she began to look at her experiences in a different way.

I was so caught up in one little thing that happened. My mom was just telling me about how this happens and its part of life and I have to think differently about it. I had to stop acting the way I was and look at it differently. The match is in the past and I shouldn't be freaking out like I was because it was one match and it is going to happen and I have to deal with it (Lauren).



Many of the women used their dreams for motivation to continue on and to never give up. They have endured the long journey of obstacles that failure presented to them. They were able to stay authentic to their dreams and believe in their ability. Like Martha, they didn't see much point in wallowing in their sorrows. Martha realized that staying mad at herself was not going to get her anywhere fast. She used her frustrations as a motivating tool for working harder. This approach made her feel like she was acting positively on her situation and that might help her get better faster. After her injury, Martha too decided not to take the fact that she can run every day for granted. There are a lot of athletes who get injured, and now she knows the amount of painful, frustrating emotions that come with having an injury. When she was away from running, she missed it. Once she was able to run again she knew not to take it for granted. She has learned a lot about herself during the injury process, and is now more aware of what her

body needs so she can perform at her best. Martha used her difficult experience as motivation and this helped her get through the painful emotions.

My injury made me work harder to get through it because I wanted to be back. I just wanted to get away from it and get back to normal so I just worked harder. It made me push up the intensity of training and I used my rehabilitation training as my main way to cope because I felt like I was doing something about it to make myself get better (Martha).

She had a long journey with her injury. She never dreamt that her injury would take as long as it did, but she could always see a glimmer of hope at the end. That was what kept her going.

Rachael described a similar story to Martha. Coming to the realization that what she experienced was hard, and accepting that she had these failures was humbling. Failures are part of the pole vault journey she is on. Being able to deal with them gives her hope for the future.

I was mad that I couldn't just say 'whatever it's over'. I wish I could of changed my mentally right away and move on, but I know now that it's just going to take time and that you are never really going to get over it. I think you just accept it. I don't think I will ever get over the failures I've had in my pole vault career, but I'll always remember the good times too. So, just the balance of knowing that and accepting that it is part of the process; that failure had to happen to me (Rachael).

Rachael put a smile on her face, trying to mask the moment of sadness from everyone else. She knew she would reflect and critique her performance when she goes home, but for the time being she has learned that it is best to just smile and be happy for receiving second place. Again. Rachael thought about that competition for the next couple months. Trying to re-live the moment, and looking for things she should have changed in her performance. She needed to move past this because her outdoor season was coming up. She can't have previous failure baggage following her. She turned her challenge into an opportunity.

I needed to start fresh again, and I needed to push it out of my mind. In order to do this I needed to be in a good head space, thinking that I have another shot and another opportunity. I have an opportunity to turn this challenge around and set new goals and really focus on the process. I feel like bringing the old junk in is just weighing me down; and the past season is a burden to me now; so I need to just move on (Rachael).

Once Rachael realized that her past season was becoming a burden on all of her upcoming opportunities, she decided to use her failure experiences as her drive to do better. Her difficult experience allowed her to see how important the processes she went through day in and day out were to her performances. Rachael's silver medal disappointment changed her behaviour for the better; it made her more motivated. She had to let this experience go, and learn from the journey she has been on because there are many more journeys to come.

I know what it feels like to be disappointed now, and so when I go to a meet knowing that I have had that feeling I know I'm ready to deal with it. I'm ready for the obstacles and I'm shooting for the stars. I'm setting my goals way higher now and before I was setting my goals to win and yes I would have been happy winning a gold at Nationals I guess, but I wouldn't have been totally satisfied. It is the height of the jump that matters to me now not the gold medal (Rachael).



“I knew there was an end, and I knew I was going to get back. Even though it was a long road to get back, I knew I would get there. There was no way I was just going to give up now” (Janelle). People had doubted Janelle and her ability to come back and play basketball. The above picture of her shoe, filled with inspiration quotes, is a helpful and tangible reminder for her. The circled quote reads “when the world says give up, hope whispers try again”. Positive

words are what kept Janelle going. She wanted to prove everyone wrong. To make a statement that she was going to come back stronger; no matter what.

Failure is one of the most difficult challenges athletes will have to face in sport. Rachael, Molly, Martha, Lexi, Lauren, and Janelle are all a testament of the strength and the character needed to overcome a failure. Each one of them knows what it feels like to fail. They know the painful emotions that come along with failure, and yet they found hope and growth in their failures. Rachael said it best when she told me “that’s the crazy thing about sports; you never know what you can achieve”.

Self-compassion

As stated in my research purpose statement, the concept of self-compassion, and the question about its potential role in sport was always planted in the back of my mind. Hence, it was a crucial part of the research process throughout. While listening to the women's stories, I began to notice aspects of self-compassion woven throughout the telling of their experiences.

Common humanity involves recognizing that all humans are imperfect, fail, and make mistakes. Through listening and seeing the personal struggles of other young women athletes, I was able to connect my personal weaknesses as an athlete with their own suffering and perceived inadequacies. The journey of personal struggle is a shared human condition, and for me the journey involved learning about and reconnecting with the struggles experienced in sport. For the women, the essence of their journey was the struggle itself.

All of the women shared one thing in common. They all felt failure; physical failure, psychological failure, and emotional failure. How failure came to be was unique to each one of them, but it was obvious that all of the women had suffered. The young women who connected their failures with injury; Janelle, Molly, Martha, and Lexi; experienced somewhat shameful thoughts of "why me?" and "why not someone else?" during their process of recovering from emotional pain associated with failure. While Molly may still be struggling with those questions, the other young women stopped searching for answers and tried to move forward in a positive way. For example, once Janelle, Lexi, and Martha realized that their injuries were out of their control, they stopped taken their injuries so personally.

I remember being so frustrated that I didn't have control of what had happened. I have always been in control of my body and what I wanted to do. I was never told I couldn't do something. But, I got hit from behind and there was nothing I could have done about it (Lexi).

While common humanity, one component of self-compassion, is often viewed as the recognition that personal suffering and inadequacy is part of the shared human experience, it also involves recognizing that external factors may play a role in these experiences. These factors (e.g., environment, culture, behavior, and expectations of others) still need to be acknowledged in a non-judgmental manner, but they do not need to be taken as personal failings.

Some of the women expressed moments where they realized they might be acting too harshly towards themselves. Lauren, for example, is a successful confident young athlete, but she described feeling all too human in her experiences of defeat and devastation. Although she vividly shared with me what happened the day she lost all control of her emotions, she also recognized that being hard on herself didn't help anything. "I know I can't do that ever again because that was embarrassing on so many levels. I just need to take it for what it is because it's hard to know how to handle everything when it happens" (Lauren).

The third component of self-compassion, mindfulness, is recognized as the ability to take a balanced approach to negative emotions. Lauren, once settled down from her experiences, took a step back from her emotions. Once she disconnected herself from her emotional pain, she was able to see that it was only one wrestling match; she would have many more opportunities. I was able to see mindfulness in Lauren's story most evidently during our phase two interview when she presented me with a photograph. At first glance, the stop sign appeared to be the important feature in the photograph. But, it wasn't the stop sign she wanted to talk about. It was the other content (what was not obvious) that was presented in the photograph that was significant to her. Behind the stop sign was clear open blue sky. Lauren explained at first her experiences of emotional pain associated with failure appeared to be a barrier for continuation in her sport, or a "stop in her career". In the photograph, this was represented by the large stop sign. She then

pointed out what was presented behind the stop sign. This was the most important part of the photograph as it represented everything that she had to look forward to, and reminded her that anything was possible. It was the larger picture of her experiences that was important to Lauren. Mindfulness involves putting ones situation into a larger perspective, which is what Lauren had displayed through her photograph. She was willing to observe her negative thoughts and emotions with openness and clarity using a photograph. (Photograph presented earlier in results).

It wasn't until a couple years after her experiences with emotional pain associated with failure that Lexi opened up to those close to her about what she was feeling. She admitted hiding her experiences from those around her. It was common for her to deny her feelings and bury them deep within where no one could find them. A regretful Lexi expressed that if she was to experience similar situations now she wouldn't hide away from her feelings. Somewhere between her injury and where she was that day I interviewed her, Lexi's thoughts and emotions were held in mindful awareness as she put her experiences into a larger perspective. She began to feel connected to others around her. She felt a sense of common humanity. Relating her personal experiences to others who were suffering, Lexi was able to see her experiences as part of a larger human experience rather than isolating herself. She made stronger bonds with teammates and friends, and became a much happier individual.

Thoughts of comparison were often talked about by the women. Some were comparing themselves to others, such as Martha, and others, like Janelle, spoke about comparisons between herself prior to her injury and now. Comparing only made them feel worse about themselves. Martha for example, while forced to do her workouts on a bike overlooking the track that her team was practicing on, constantly felt like she was being passed by her teammates. This went on for the first couple weeks that she was rehabilitating from her injury. During this time she was

very self-critical, always viewing herself in relation to those around her. “I was always feeling like my teammates were getting so much better than me. They got to run and I didn’t, I was on a bike and getting out of shape” (Martha). Once her anger subsided, Martha was more understanding of her situation. Her anger slowly turned from a debilitating to an enabling emotion. “It [frustration] made me work harder to get through it. I just wanted to get away from that and get back to normal. So I just worked harder. It made me push up the intensity of my training I guess” (Martha). She became motivated and began to treat herself with self-kindness, the first component of self-compassion, rather than self-criticism. Part of being self-compassionate involves not basing self-worth on performance evaluations of the self in comparison with others. Instead it is based on recognizing the flawed nature of the human condition. Eventually, Martha was able to see herself clearly and extended kindness without the need to put others down or put the self up.

For some of the women, it was harder to detect traces of self-compassion. For example, it was hard for me to identify aspects of self-compassion in Molly's story because of the anger she was still feeling. This is not to say that self-compassion was not playing a role in Molly's experiences, or that she is not a self-compassionate person. Whether it was noticeable or not, in the end all of the women in the study acknowledged failure as being a necessary process. It was often the birth place of their drive and motivation to continue on with revised goals and a new appreciation for their sport. In those moments of acknowledgment, the women accepted that failure is part of the shared human experience and confronted their realities in a new light; a kind and understanding light.

The women's reflection on self-compassion

According to Neff (2003a),

Self-compassion, involves being touched by and open to one's own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one's suffering and to heal oneself with kindness. Self-compassion also involves offering nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain, inadequacies and failures, so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience. (p. 87).

Near the end of my research journey I was curious as to how much the women knew of self-compassion, so I asked them. Molly said it "is the ability to recognize the good and bad parts of yourself, but still believe in who you are". Martha reported "it involves giving yourself a chance and not giving up on you". Rachael said "compassion is knowing and actually feeling the emotions that other people are experiencing. Basically self-compassion takes those same ideas only it is applied inwards". Janelle stated "it means being supportive of yourself and being there for you". Lexi and Lauren were both unfamiliar with the term self-compassion. Lexi guessed that it "was being able to understand and see why you care about something and then actually letting yourself care about it". Lauren was unable to give an idea of what it might mean.

With the help of a video by Neff (Self-compassion, 2009) the idea of self-compassion was explained to the young women in order to help clarify what is meant by the concept of self-compassion. The women had the opportunity to ask me further questions about self-compassion if the video was unclear. It appeared as though all the women had a better understanding of self-compassion and what it meant after watching the video. Once I got a sense that they understood the concept, I began to ask them questions about the potential role of self-compassion in sport. I then moved more specifically into the role it may have played in their emotional experiences associated with failure. I noticed that the more we discussed self-compassion, the more comfortable some of the women became with the concept. Lexi, for example, previously not

knowing anything about self-compassion, was expressing ways in which it would benefit or hinder athletes before I had even asked her specific questions. She was able to think about her experiences and apply them to the self-compassion construct. This was true for Rachael and Janelle as well; but for Molly, Martha, and Lauren it seemed as though they only looked at self-compassion at the surface level until I probed further into their answers. What follows is a reflection of the women's thoughts about self-compassion. More specifically, the women reflected on the potential benefits of self-compassion for athletes, why it may be a barrier for athletes, the role it had within their difficult experiences with failure, and if they viewed themselves as self-compassionate athletes.

All of the women, except for Molly, agreed that self-compassion is an important quality for athletes to have. Although they agreed on the importance, the reasons for why it may be beneficial varied between the women. For Rachael it is essentially, "having the ability to look at the situation and evaluate your emotions is very important because you have to know that it is going to be okay and that you are going to be okay". Whereas Martha expressed that "self-compassion is important for helping athletes gain self-confidence in order to motivate and allow them to be better athletes". She expressed that athletes who have self-compassion can stop dwelling on the bad things and move on. Furthermore, Martha said "without self-compassion athletes would probably just give up and think they aren't worth it". Janelle took a different approach to the benefits of self-compassion.

As athletes if you don't care about yourself you are not going to be able to care for other people on your team. If during a situation you are always negative towards yourself obviously that is not going to get you anywhere. For you to be loving and caring towards yourself is a big thing for a female athlete. Obviously we are really caring towards other people and loving towards other people, but I think that in order to do those things you need to love and care for yourself first (Janelle).

Lauren thought self-compassion “can make any situation better for athletes, and it can help with how they react to things”.

Molly was the only woman to disagree with the importance of self-compassion for athletes. It was unclear to her how self-compassion would help athletes, other than make them aware of what they are experiencing.

I question whether it would help or whether it would just bring athletes to a point where they understand self-compassion. I don't see how it would benefit them; I just see that they would mentally be aware that they are judging themselves too harshly. Let's say that I've done two good programs in a row, I'm bound to have a bad one. I'm not sure how it would actually help them [athletes] other than thinking that it's okay to have a bad program because I'll have a good one soon (Molly).

Molly did however express that it was easier for her to connect the importance of self-compassion when dealing with painful emotions. “If athletes had a better understanding of self-compassion, they wouldn't beat themselves up so hard for doing something wrong.”

While discussing the potential benefits of self-compassion for athletes, the conversations typically turned towards the role of self-compassion in difficult sporting situations. There was a mix of responses from the women as to how self-compassion might play a role in difficult experiences. Janelle reported that self-compassion is something athletes need in order to get through a rough period of time in their career. Further, understanding of themselves and being open and accepting of emotions experienced may help athletes approach difficult events, such as failure, in a healthy and balanced manner.

I think in order to get through sports you need to be caring towards yourself and be accepting of the things you are going through. If you feel like you are failing at that moment you need to realize you are having a bad day; but also know that there is light at the end of the tunnel and it is okay to have bad day (Janelle).

Similarly, Rachael stated that athletes would be better equipped to get through the day to day things in sport if they had self-compassion; it would get them through the journey of sport. For Rachael, everyday life in sport requires a great deal of mental preparation. Therefore, self-

compassion would help contribute to athletes' mental preparation. It would allow athletes to embrace that they are human and not perfect. Rachael also reported that self-compassion may be used for motivation. It could motivate athletes to keep working hard in their everyday life, continually learning from their setbacks. Molly also highlighted the benefit of self-compassion in athletes' mental games. She expressed that self-compassion could be another tool used in mental preparation; similar to how positive thinking might be used. "It may not be used all the time, but is something that athletes could use in certain situations like having a failure" (Molly).

Most of the time when something negative happened to Lauren, she would rely on other people. She needed them to tell her that everything was going to be okay. Therefore, she thought self-compassion would be "a positive thing if athletes were able to rely on themselves; to believe within that everything would be okay". While she liked the support, in the end she was alone with her emotional pain. Lexi and Molly both felt that self-compassion may be effective if athletes learned how to apply it properly. Lexi expressed that it would be really hard for athletes to realize that they should be kind to themselves and support themselves in difficult moments; especially if they are they are not used to failure.

I think you would need to learn how to properly be self-compassionate. I mean it's probably really hard for some athletes to realize that something is hard for them or if they are upset at themselves. I think that that they don't know that in these moments they should give themselves support and kindness. I think a lot of athletes are used to, and just keep beating themselves up. It would be really hard to turn that around (Lexi).

Lexi also suggested that self-compassion might not be for everyone. Her concern was that while for some athletes it could a beneficial tool, for others it may act as a barrier to performance.

Every athlete deals with failure differently and has diverse coping responses. Therefore, according to Lexi, some personalities would benefit from developing self-compassion, whereas others would not. Similarly, Molly suggested that before self-compassion could help with painful emotions, athletes must first understand what is meant by self-compassion.

The women talked about the importance of self-compassion for athletes, and the potential role it may play in difficult experiences; such as failure in sport. Although most of the women agreed that self-compassion has the potential to be beneficial for athletes when going through a time of suffering, there was still a bit of uncertainty in some of their voices. For example, Martha expressed that too much self-compassion may cause athletes to be too ‘into themselves’, thereby creating a lack of awareness of the others around them. She stated that if athletes were only focused on themselves they wouldn’t notice the suffering of others around them. Lexi and Janelle, while both agreeing that it would be beneficial, also thought that athletes can’t let themselves get too comfortable. Lexi responded with “you can’t always say it is okay that something bad happens, or it is okay that you didn’t get this or you didn’t do an exercise correct. You have to be hard on yourself in order to get better.” As a result, Lexi thought that if athletes become too self-compassionate then no one would ever get better.

I think if we get too self-compassionate we will never get any better. No one would ever get any better because you would never challenge yourself. We learn in school that we need goals that are challenging, and sometimes you fail and sometimes you succeed. If you always are accepting your failures you are never going to get better (Lexi).

Lexi also mentioned that self-compassion would be easier in a non-sport environment, where an individual isn’t required to be critical of oneself. She gave me the example that she is not as self-critical of herself when she does poorly on a school exam, but when she messes up in rugby she is very judgemental of herself. For Janelle, as well as Lexi, the self-critical work ethic is what makes an elite athlete. Janelle said “it [self-criticism] makes an athlete good at what they do.” There was also concern for self-compassion potentially leading to mediocrity. Janelle is not content with just being ‘good enough’ in her sport. She linked the possibility of having too much self-compassion with accepting being average in sport.

If you are too self-compassionate you are always going to be fine with good enough. You are never going to strive to be better, and for an elite athlete that shouldn't be okay. I need to be hard on myself, because if I'm not then I am just going to settle for mediocrity; which I personally don't want. Other people may feel like good enough is good with them, but I want to be above the average person. Obviously if I am too self-compassionate, I'm not going to ever achieve that above exceptional kind of thing (Janelle).

While each woman, throughout our discussions, talked about becoming aware and understanding of their struggles, none of them referred to themselves as self-compassionate people when asked. In fact, most of them laughed when this came up in the conversation. Even though they acknowledged the importance of self-compassion, many of the women admitted that it was something they needed 'a lot of work on'. Rachael said now that she is older and has matured, she is really working on trying to recognize that self-compassion is something she needs in order to be successful.

Through a lot of my experiences with failure I don't think I was compassionate enough with myself. I think I let it go to an extent, but I really didn't follow through with telling myself it was going to be okay. So for now I would say I'm not self-compassionate, but I am recognizing and becoming aware that I need to be (Rachael).

Janelle and Lauren said that they are self-compassionate at times, but they recognize that they could be more compassionate towards themselves in the future. They are both extremely hard on themselves, even at the age of 16 and 17 years. Their age is what they contributed their lack of self-compassion towards. Janelle also stated that "toughness on oneself is how it should be for athletes; unless you are willing to settle for mediocrity". Lexi reported that she can be a very self-compassionate person, but that she is more forgiving and understanding of herself outside of her sport. She attributed this to the fact that in her sport she expects herself to be the best. Molly doesn't take too much time thinking about having self-compassion and said "I only use it when I see it or when something bad happens". She admitted to that not being very often.

Looking back at the role of self-compassion in her difficult experiences, Martha felt like she was self-compassionate to an extent. Immediately after she experienced failure self-compassion didn't play a role, but upon reflection on her experiences she said it might have been present. Many of the women expressed the role of self-compassion in the reflection process of their experiences. While experiencing suffering, the women stated that self-compassion was absent; as they could only feel their emotional pain and negative thoughts associated with failure. Eventually the women began to understand and reflect upon their suffering, and during the reflection process is when they reported that self-compassion might have played a role. Lauren found herself being self-compassionate after she had time to think about what had happened. "There was so much else on my mind after the moment I failed that I didn't think about self-compassion at all". For Janelle there was a moment when she realized she couldn't do anything about her injury; so there was no point continuing on in pain and suffering. This is the moment she felt compassion for herself and truly believed it would be okay.

Summary

Failure can often be very difficult for one to understand and deal with. It can be hard for athletes to realize that they have failed and to act in a healthy manner to overcome their emotions. Self-compassion for most of the women in the study was viewed as something that could potentially be beneficial for athletes. They acknowledged that it may help athletes deal with difficult experiences and painful emotions. A few of these women stated that it would help, but only if developed and learned properly. Some even saw self-compassion as another tool athletes could use to help improve their mental game; something that wasn't needed all the time, but could be very useful during certain situations. Concerns over the risks of athletes being too self-compassionate were also expressed. Some of the women suggested that self-compassion

could create a lack of motivation, and could be a potential facilitator of mediocrity and a barrier to athletes achieving their fullest potential.

CHAPTER 4

4.1 Discussion

Self-compassion is an adaptive way of relating to the self kindly when experiencing personal failure and difficult life experiences (Neff, 2003a). Recent investigation suggests that self-compassion might act as a potential buffer to painful emotions for athletes (Mosewich et al., 2011); however, there is little research in the area of self-compassion and sport. When individuals are faced with painful emotions or negative life experiences they become immersed in their own problems, often leading them to forget that others have similar experiences. They can become self critical and judgmental, which can bring on extended feelings of isolation and stress. Having the ability to treat oneself with compassion and understanding when dealing with experiences of emotional pain and failure may help increase health and psychological well-being (Neff et al., 2007).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and present narratives of six young women athletes (16-23 years of age), from a variety of sports, about their experiences of emotional pain and self-compassion. Each woman took part in two individual interviews, one of which involved reflexive photography. They were asked to reflect on the emotional pain associated with failure in sport. This was followed by discussions around the potential role of self-compassion in their experiences. The interviews, combined with reflexive photography, helped build rich narratives organized around the following themes: (1) Broken bodies, wilted spirits; (2) Why couldn't it have been someone else?; (3) I should have, I could have, I would have; (4) You are going to make me ugly over this and; (5) Fall down seven, stand up eight. The narratives also suggested that while self-compassion can potentially be beneficial for athletes if

developed and learned properly, concerns were expressed that being too self-compassionate may lead to mediocrity.

In contrast to the potential health benefits often reported to be associated with sport (Jaffe et al. 1992; Penedo & Dahn, 2005; Van de Loo et al. 1995), my study suggests that participation in sport can also be difficult for young women, especially when experiencing emotional pain stemming from personal mistakes, failures, or inadequacies. Bolger (1999) defined emotional pain as the awareness of a feeling of brokenness. The brokenness occurs as a result of a traumatic event that functions to suddenly shatter the external covers that represent identity and facilitate connection with others (Bolger, 1999). Additionally, when experiencing emotional pain, individuals are aware of their own brokenness, the associated feelings, and a loss of control. Throughout their narratives, the women described feelings, thoughts, and behaviours associated with failure in sport, and the implications of emotional pain on their overall well-being. The findings of my study contribute to previous research on the potential negative implications of participation in sport (Coakley, 1992; Gerber, Holsboer-Trachsler, Puhse, & Brand, 2011; Szabo, 2000), and provide support for further exploration of emotional pain associated with failure.

My study specifically examined the emotional side of experiencing failure in sport. One of the most difficult challenges athletes will inevitably face is failure, as it may be more often the rule than the exception in the process of obtaining challenging sporting goals (Smith, Kass, Rotunda, & Scheider, 2006). Ball (1976) defined failure in sport as (1) the inability, for whatever reason, to satisfy standards of goal-related performance, leading to (2) the separation or estrangement of the failed from the goal-specified position from which the goal has been unsuccessfully pursued. Given that in sport it is rare for athletes to have a flawless performance, athletes are often placed in situations where they are not satisfied with their performances and as

a result will view their experiences as failure. Among the emergent themes in the present study were feelings of failure as a result of physical injury. The pain that athletes suffer after experiencing an injury is not only physical, but emotional as well. Due to the nature of sport participation athletes are always faced with the risk of being injured. As a result, researchers have investigated the complex nature of athletic injury experiences. In the current literature there is a strong focus on the physical side of the injury, often leaving the psychological experiences including thoughts, feelings, and behaviours associated with being injured unaddressed (Tracey, 2010). Findings from the present study illustrate the benefits of exploring the emotional side of being injured in order to provide a more holistic approach to dealing with injury recover in sport.

The women presented strong athletic identities that placed much of their self-worth on participating in their sport. Wiechman and Williams (1997) defined athletic identity as the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role. An individual who identifies strongly with the athlete role may have difficulties transitioning to other roles outside of sport. In addition, identities are claimed and constructed through social relationships (Thoits, 1983). Sparkes (1998) suggested that when individuals descend from the heights of extraordinary into the mundane world of ordinariness; they experience a loss of certain selves. Individuals who identifies with the athlete role may feel this way as they receive much of their self-worth from participating in sport (Thing, 2005).

A sense of isolation and loneliness was expressed by the women when they were removed from the athlete role, and when they linked their self-worth to goal achievement in their chosen respective sport. Their isolation and disconnection from other people provides further evidence for the importance of the development of a resource, such as self-compassion, for athletes suffering from emotional experiences. Individuals who lack self-compassion are likely to

have lowered feelings of self-worth because they are self-critical and hard on themselves, while those with high levels of self-compassion are likely to have heightened feelings of self-worth because they are kinder and more accepting of themselves (Neff, 2011).

Common humanity, the second component of self-compassion, recognizes that all people fail, make mistakes, or feel inadequate in some way. It involves framing one's experiences as part of the shared human experience, so that one feels connected to rather than disconnected from others when experiencing suffering (Neff, 2003a). Neff (2011) highlighted that "people feel isolated from others when considering personal flaws or hard times, that it is somehow abnormal to fail, have weaknesses, or undergo hardship. This is not a rational thought process, but an irrational sense of "why me?" that causes strong feelings of disconnection" (p.9). As a result, developing common humanity might allow athletes to be connected rather than disconnected to others when experiencing suffering.

Findings from my study provide evidence that athletes may be experiencing irrational thoughts of 'why me?' after suffering from personal failings. In addition, Atkin (2010) linked self-compassion and loneliness. The components of self-compassion, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, were negatively related to loneliness. In contrast, self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification factors of self-compassion were found positively correlated to loneliness. Therefore, developing the components of self-compassion may provide a buffer to irrational thoughts and experiences of loneliness.

After failing to reach a personal goal or not living up to personal expectations the women not only experienced loneliness, but other emotional pain as well. This was illustrated in the chapter titled I should have...I could have...I would have. The women described emotional experiences of regret, blame, relief, guilt, frustration, anger, and shame failing in sport; all of

which contributed to their emotional pain. All of the women experienced at least one of the negative emotions described by Lazarus (2000), but shame in particular was experienced by several of the women. Shame is associated with feeling that the entire self is a failure; making individuals seek an escape from the shame-eliciting situation (Lewis, 1992). Shame-prone athletes who fail in competition may think that this failure reveals a character flaw. Additionally, athletes experiencing shame feel like they have let others as well as themselves down, and they often want to hide from everything (Lazarus, 2000). Sagar and Stoeber (2009) suggested that shame and embarrassment occur through the cognitive processes of self-evaluation. In addition, Lazarus (1991) proposed shame and embarrassment to result from a failure to live up to an image of personal excellence that an individual strives for. Therefore, shame is associated with perceptions of personal failure and self-deficiency.

In a recent study by Mosewich et al. (2011) the relations among proneness to self-conscious emotions, such as shame and self-compassion, as well as the potential of unhealthy self-evaluative thoughts and behaviours of young women athletes was explored. The results suggest that self-compassion may help in managing emotional pain, and may be beneficial in cultivating positive sport experiences. Furthermore, Jones (2003) highlighted that providing athletes with a range of strategies they can draw on may enhance emotional control in difficult experiences and increase emotional well-being in times of failure. Coping responses accompany emotional responses and has demonstrated a strong relationship to performance issues (e.g., success, failure, injury, and career termination) in sport (Giacobbi & Weinberg, 2000; Lazarus, 1991). Therefore, one strategy for controlling emotions might also involve controlling coping behaviours when faced with a difficult time.

Coping with emotional pain associated with failure was a very difficult process for the women in the present study. Sagar et al. (2007) reported that young athletes experience a diminished sense of self and achievement, guilt, emotional costs, negative self and social evaluation, and a loss of motivation after experiencing failure in sport. Based on previous research, how athletes deal with difficult emotions may depend on coping responses. Giacobbi and Weinberg (2000) looked at the individual differences of trait anxiety, and found that high trait anxious athletes responded to stressful situations using different coping behaviours (e.g., denial, wishful thinking, and self-blame) significantly more than the low trait anxious athletes. Therefore, emotions brought on by failure may be a result of maladaptive coping response.

Developing a healthy self-perspective that is not based on self-evaluations may be a valuable coping resource when people experience negative life events. Allen and Leary (2010) found that self-compassionate people tend to rely heavily on positive cognitive restructuring and less on avoidance and escape, but do not appear to differ from less self-compassionate people in the degree to which they cope through problem-solving or distraction. In addition, Neff (2009) reported that higher levels of self-compassion are linked to increased feelings of happiness, optimism, curiosity, and connectedness, as well as decreased anxiety, depression, rumination, and fear of failure. Self-compassionate individuals seem less prone to evaluate themselves when they fail. Instead, those with high self-compassion are more able to admit mistakes, modify unproductive behaviours, and take on new challenges. Further, self-compassionate people do not rely on the evaluations of others, nor do they have to be successful or feel superior to others in order to experience positive feelings about themselves (Neff, 2011).

The women reported feelings of guilt, loss of control, inadequacy, and self-judgment as a result of high expectations and criticism behaviours from other people (e.g., coaches, parents,

friends, and spectators). The ‘others’ played an important role in shaping the women’s stories of emotional pain associated with failure. Smith and Sparkes (2009) stated that narrative looks at both the personal and social sides of storytelling. Narratives take into account not only individual experiences, but also how these stories are derived from the fabric of society and culture.

Although their narratives were about personal failures, each of the women’s difficult experiences involved other people. Looking at both sides of the story explores how other people might be shaping or constraining individuals’ experiences with sport. Along with previous research on the role of “others” in sport, the findings from my study provide evidence that negative behaviours (e.g., expectations, evaluations, and criticism) from others may cause athletes to experience painful emotions such as fear, guilt, and shame. Further, they can make athletes feel inadequate in their performances, develop a fear of failure, or become self-critical and judgemental (Ommundsen et al., 2006; Lewis, 1992).

Although the importance of ‘others’ is widely acknowledged in the sport literature, it has just recently been studied in the self-compassion literature; this despite claims that self-compassion offers stronger protection against social comparison, public self-consciousness, self-rumination, anger, and close-mindedness (Neff et al., 2009). The importance of others was reported in Berry et al. (2010) as a facilitating structure in women’s experiences of body self-compassion. The ‘others’ in the study by Berry et al. (2010) helped the participants develop a sense of body self-compassion; whereas, the ‘others’ in the present study played a negative role in their emotional experiences. Sager and Busch (2010) stated that sporting performances typically take place in the public arena; thus, mistakes and failures expose the athletes both to self and others’ negative evaluation. Athletes are constantly being evaluated; thus, it might explain why the ‘others’ played a significant negative role in the women’s experiences with

failure. Therefore self-compassion may protect athletes from the negative effects of other people in order to assist in developing a healthy well-being.

Self-compassion may have been a potential buffer against the negative comparison to others' thoughts experienced by some of the women in the present study. Neff et al. (2007) suggested that unlike self-esteem, self-compassion is not based on performance evaluations of the self in comparison with others; rather, it is a kind, connected, and clear-sighted way of relating to oneself even when experiencing failure. Further, self-compassion provides greater emotional resilience and stability than self-esteem, but involves less self-evaluation, ego-defensiveness, and self-enhancement than self-esteem (Neff, 2011). Some of the women in my study reported an increase in self-criticism and self-judgement when comparing themselves to others after experiencing a personal failing. It has been suggested that individuals can positively relate to themselves without self-evaluation or social comparisons by developing inward compassion (Neff, 2009). Therefore, by developing self-compassion athletes don't have to feel better than others to feel good about themselves.

Further, increasing self-compassion during times of failure may reduce thoughts of social comparison. Neff (2003a) explained that individuals experiencing self-compassion will not harshly criticize themselves for failing to meet ideal standards. A study by Neely, Schallert, Mohammed, Roberts, and Chen (2009) suggested that the way students managed their negative emotions in the face of disappointment was a significant contributor to their well-being. Findings indicated that students with higher levels of self-compassion were better able to manage their negative emotions during times of disappointment in a healthy manner. Therefore, it may be that athletes with higher levels of self-compassion may be better equipped to manage their emotions in times of disappointment.

Allowing emotional pain appeared to facilitate positive change and the development of a healthy well-being. The women gained a new sense of hope after surviving their experiences, and a greater appreciation for their sport and themselves as athletes. Failure created positive learning experiences for the women, especially after suffering from an injury. In chapter five, Fall down seven, stand up eight, the women reported the importance of taking responsibility for their injuries recovery. They were able to refocus their negative energy on the rehabilitation process. Previous researchers have reported that athletes have described injury recovery as an opportunity to learn important lessons about themselves (Ievleva & Orlick, 1991). Tracey (2010) reported that injured athletes were experiencing negative thoughts and emotions briefly at onset of injury, and then quickly summoned their resolve and optimism to work diligently during the rehabilitation phase. The women also reported gaining an increased knowledge for the game while sitting out during the recovery process. Ievleva and Orlick (1991) found that athletes who recovered quickly reported more positive comments and that the learning during the process enhanced insight into sport. Thus, cultivating a positive outlook during emotional experiences may enable a faster recovery as well as foster personal growth and opportunities for learning.

Self-compassion as a potential tool or strategy for facilitating emotional experiences in sport was mentioned several times throughout this discussion. The concept of self-compassion is a relatively recent topic of study, and currently there is only a small amount of knowledge and understanding around self-compassion and how it can be applied to sport and exercise. Both Berry et al. (2010) and Mosewich et al. (2011) took important first steps toward advancing our knowledge of self-compassion as well as establishing the relevance of self-compassion for young women in sport and exercise. Berry et al. (2010) explored body self-compassion, specifically how young physically active women experienced self-compassion in relation to their bodies.

Recent investigation by Mosewich et al. (2011) has shown that self-compassion might act as a potential buffer to painful emotions for young women athletes. Results suggest the importance of athletes developing self-compassion in order to cultivate positive sport experiences. Further Mosewich et al. (2011) highlighted key steps for future research which included the examination of the role of self-compassion in sport specific situations (e.g., failure events).

While the women's narratives support the potential of self-compassion as a buffer to painful emotions as described by Mosewich et al. (2011); the question of whether self-compassion leads to passivity still remains. The women reported that self-compassion might be a barrier to performance success, as it may lead to mediocrity. While much of what we know about self-compassion is positive, it would be beneficial to consider whether self-compassion is ever maladaptive. There may be times when self-compassion is used as a cover for less adaptive emotions, especially when clear self-awareness is lacking. For example, Neff et al. (2007) highlights how self-pity can easily masquerade as self-compassion if an individual does not sufficiently recognize the shared nature of human experience. In addition, self-compassion may be confused with self-indulgence or laziness, if the steps needed to ensure one's health and wellbeing are not adequately acknowledged.

The fear of settling for mediocrity, and experiencing a lack of motivation were concerns raised by the women about self-compassion. Similar concerns were highlighted in a study by Williams, Stark, and Foster (2008) who found that students with higher levels of self-compassion reported dramatically less motivation and anxiety, and procrastination tendencies than those with low or moderate self-compassion. It was also suggested that because having a sense of identity and worth are not contingent upon performance, individuals may be more focused on learning from challenging course assignments. In contrast, preliminary research on the consequence of

being too self-compassionate suggested that while some people may express the worry of being too self-compassionate, undermining their motivation, and becoming self-indulgent, this does not appear to be the case (Neff, 2009). Rather, self-compassion motivates individuals to push through difficult challenges, learn from their mistakes and try hard, because they want to be happy and free from suffering (Neff, 2011). Likewise, Neff et al. (2007) indicated that self-compassion is associated with greater personal initiative to make needed changes in one's life. Therefore, it is still unclear whether self-compassion is ever maladaptive for individuals.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Research Implications

Narratives provide insights that can have practical implications for sport and exercise communities. Smith and Sparkes (2009) suggested that adopting a narrative perspective has the potential to make a positive contribution to psychological research in sport and exercise. One specific concern in the sport and exercise literature is that athletes do not have a large pool of information or narratives to draw on in order to give meaning to their experiences. The opportunity to share stories that are met with understanding, support, and empathy, is an important aspect of mental health and personal development (McLeod, 1997). The narratives in my study drew attention to the many difficult experiences young women athletes face in sport, specifically situations in which the women felt like they have personally failed. Using personal narratives, the women gave insight into the emotional pain as well as the coping strategies they employed after experiencing failure in sport. By expanding the narrative literature, athletes will have the opportunity to fit their lived experiences with the stories and experiences of others; thereby, preparing and opening up new possibilities for care and understanding.

In the context of my study, exploring emotional pain associated with failure provided a better understanding of self-compassion in difficult sporting experiences. Because sport is very much an achievement atmosphere, centered on success and failure, it was an appropriate environment to study experiences of emotional pain associated with failure and the role of self-compassion. Previous research suggested that self-compassionate individuals do not criticize themselves when they fail, they are more able to admit mistakes, modify unproductive behaviours, and take on new challenges (Neff, 2009), but little is known about how much individuals understand what self-compassion is. My study highlights the needs for further

exploration of self-compassion and the potential of self-compassion to be both a facilitator and barrier to emotional health and performance success in sport. Specifically, little is known on whether or not self-compassion can ever be maladaptive. Currently, there has been little research on the consequences of being too self-compassionate, and studies like this one provide support for a deeper exploration of self-compassion as a barrier to emotional health and well-being. Perhaps we should not be putting self-compassion on a pedestal just yet.

5.2 Limitations

A challenge in writing about my narratives was the lack of comparable data in previous research to guide my interpretive framework. Self-compassion is a relatively new and emerging construct, at least in Western research, and there is currently very little available data to draw upon. Further, there are only a handful of studies which have looked at self-compassion in sport and exercise. To date, there have been no other qualitative studies, that I am aware of, that have looked at specific experiences of emotional pain and the role of self-compassion. As a researcher in this area, it would have been helpful and beneficial if more data were available. Specifically, more data would have provided some guidance for discussing the significance of my findings more directly within the self-compassion literature. For example, there is very little research on the potential consequences for having self-compassion. Thus, when concerns were raised in my study about self-compassion leading to mediocrity and a lack of motivation, the current body of literature was limiting.

Another challenge was presented while having discussions around self-compassion with the women in my study. It seemed that prior to my study, the participants had very little knowledge, if any, about self-compassion. As a result, it might have been possible that the athletes were confusing self-compassion for other well known self constructs given that they

were not familiar with self-compassion. For example, when a few of the women were initially talking about self-compassion they might have been mistaking self-compassion for self-confidence. In order to help clarify the meaning of self-compassion a video was shown to each of the women. The video by Neff (Self-compassion, 2009) discussed the components of self-compassion and how it differs from similar self constructs. Also, before continuing with the interview, I answered several self-compassion questions the women had after watching the video. As our conversations around self-compassion advanced throughout the interview, it appeared that the women gained a greater understanding of self-compassion. As a researcher, I can only hope that the video and in-depth conversations around self-compassion aided in their understanding, but it cannot be said for sure.

This concern was also brought forth by Neff et al. (2007) who reported the misconceptions for self-compassion to be one reason why any approach attempting to enhance self-compassion should include all of its major elements; so understanding of interconnectedness and mindful awareness is developed alongside increased self-kindness. A first step in examining self-compassion and how it may relate to sport and exercise would be to educate athletes on self-compassion. One possible way researchers could educate athletes would involve developing interventions or strategies that would teach athletes about self-compassion, how it is unique from other self constructs, how it relates to their difficult experiences, and how it could potentially be used for coping with future failure experiences. By introducing athletes to the potential benefits for developing self-compassion, researchers may be able to avoid the possible misconceptions that might have been unavoidable in the present study.

A third possible limitation to the present study was the decision to only have two points of data collection. Although having two interviews was a conscious decision, it might have been

helpful to have a more data collection time points. By having more time points while collecting data, it would have allowed for a greater focus on specific details in the participant's experiences. Further, it would have been beneficial to combine other forms of data collection, such as observation; which could lead to deeper understandings than interviews alone.

Observation may provide knowledge of the context in which events occur, and may enable the researcher to see things that participants themselves are not aware of, or that they are unwilling to discuss (Patton, 1990). Also, adding a focus group component to the study would enable an interactive atmosphere, which might have helped enhance a more thorough understanding of self-compassion and the emotional processes that were being experienced by all of the women.

Finally, there are limitations that are inherent when conducting qualitative research. Performing qualitative research can make drawing broad generalizations about the findings very difficult for researchers. The main goal of qualitative research is to explore and develop a thorough understanding of experiences of a small group of participants (Lincoln et al., 1985). The decision for a small and specific sample was made in order to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. This became the priority of the study over generalizability. Strauss et al. (1990) claimed that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively. As a result, findings from this study are transferable, but ultimately the decision of how well the findings can be transferred to another context is up to the individual reader. As the researcher I was able to give suggestions about the relatedness of the findings as well as aid the reader by presenting my study clearly giving distinct descriptions of the participant selection procedure, data collection, and the process of analysis. The findings are

provided in rich detail highlighting the uniqueness and commonalities found between participants as well as addressing the focus of my research questions.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

While my study focused on stories shared by athletes at one particular time period, it would be beneficial to gain a better understanding of how telling a story about experiences changes with the same athlete over time. For example, Sparkes and Partington (2003) suggested focusing on athletes as they gradually move from novice to expert status or if they engage in different sports over time. Therefore, providing athletes with the opportunity to share their stories may allow for a better understanding of their changing sporting experience over time. Specifically, it would be interesting to explore how athletes' emotions change throughout experiences and over time. Narrative practice may also be useful for studying the construct of self-compassion. Currently, it is unknown whether an individual's self-compassion levels change within experiences over time. Perhaps narratives could help explore whether athletes' self-compassion levels change throughout difficult experiences in sport. Further, the opportunity to share stories of experiences that are met with understanding and support is an important part of personal development (McLeod, 1997) and might assist in the development of self-compassion over time. Thus, individuals should be encouraged to share and value their stories that might be difficult to tell.

In addition to sharing personal stories, it might be beneficial to involve the participants in the creative processes at various stages of research. As a qualitative researcher, I decided to present the narratives in very intentional and creative ways. However, the participants did not take part in, nor did they provide a voice for, how they would like their stories and photographs

to be presented in my thesis. For example, the participants were not involved in the process of composing the poetic transcriptions or the visual presentation of the captions presented in the photographs. The co-construction of the results might enhance the trustworthiness of my research by adding an additional means of member checking. Therefore, by having the participants actively partake in the creative processes the credibility of this study would increase, and perhaps a deeper understanding of their thoughts and feelings would be gained.

Although my study explored emotional pain and self-compassion as it relates to failure experiences, it would be valuable to look at other difficult events athletes may experience, and if self-compassion is still relevant. In the present study, the women expressed that self-compassion may be useful for a variety of difficult experiences in sport, not just failure events. Some examples of other difficult experiences suggested by the women were the retirement from sport and career termination. As mentioned earlier in the discussion, individuals may take on strong identity roles. When individuals are required to transition out of their dominant role as athletes into other roles they may experience identity difficulties and a loss of selves (Brewer, Selby, Linder, & Petitpas, 1999; Sparkes, 1998). Lally (2007) stated that it would be beneficial to explore when identity transformation is successful and when it is not after athletes retire. Perhaps the construct of self-compassion is relevant during the transition and transformation process of retired athletes, and may be one tool that can help negotiate a new sense of self.

My study provided an exploration of the potential role of self-compassion for a group of young women athletes and their experiences of emotional pain associated with failure, but there is much more to investigate. Exploring self-compassion in similar and other populations involved in sport has the potential to contribute to the self-compassion literature by advancing the clarity and meaning of self-compassion in individuals' experiences. While the research on

self-compassion and age is mixed, Neff (2003a) suggests that adolescents may have lower self-compassion because of the various social pressures that are often present at this time. Another study by Neff and McGee (2010) found that the self-compassion levels of college students were no higher than those of high-school students. Further Neff (2007) suggested that it may be possible that individuals become more self-compassionate later in life because they potentially have a greater acceptance of self. As a result, studying older populations of women may be helpful for understanding the role of self-compassion in difficult experiences at later stages in life.

While my study looked at self-compassion in a variety of young women's experiences of emotional pain associated with failure, an important next step might be to explore the application of self-compassion to more specific domains related to emotional pain in sport (e.g., the physical self). Berry et al. (2010) studied self-compassion for one's body, and their findings suggest that self-compassion is useful when conceptualized in more specific domains. Therefore, a next step might involve specifically looking at particular domains in sport. Exploring specific domains in sport would be beneficial for clarifying whether self-compassion is most useful in some areas compared to others. For example, in Sparkes (1998) an injured college athlete shaped her experiences around the body's performance in sport. It was evident in my research that an injured body not only hindered physical participation in sport, but also created emotional pain for the women. Therefore, exploring specific areas, such as injury, might allow researchers to provide further uses for the application of self-compassion in sport, and will also help gain insight on the role self-compassion may play in some domains compared to others.

Mosewich et al. (2011) has suggested that self-compassion may be an important and useful resource for young women athletes, but this study supports the need for further

exploration on the benefits of self-compassion for athletes since concerns were expressed that self-compassion may be maladaptive. Perhaps self-compassion is only beneficial at certain times or situations in sport, in which case a future step would be creating tools and strategies to help athletes develop the necessary self-compassion skills that may lead to a healthier well-being. Previous studies have linked high levels of self-compassion to healthy psychological functioning. For example, Neff, Hsieh, and Dejitterat (2005) reported high levels of self-compassion are related to feelings of autonomy, competence, optimism, wisdom, curiosity, personal initiative, and positive affect. Also, individuals with high self-compassion scores showed higher levels of motivation to learn and grow for intrinsic reasons rather than for the approval of others or to avoid failure. Therefore, exploring athlete's difficult experiences in sport highlights the need for intervention strategies aimed at helping athletes to learn and develop self-compassion. Mosewich et al. (2011) suggested that because of the prevalence of evaluation and comparison in sport there is a need for effective and appropriate resources to help young women athletes to manage evaluative processes. Neff et al. (2007) reported that the construct of self-compassion is most useful when viewed as a skill that people can develop to facilitate mental health, rather than as a static personality trait. As a result, the experiences shared in this study may help researchers gain a better understanding in order to develop the tools needed, and perhaps create strategies for developing self-compassion skills that could lead to a healthier well-being, but further exploration of self-compassion is needed before these steps should be taken.

Previously there has been research done on possible strategies for developing self-compassionate skills. Proctor and Gilbert (2006) designed a group based therapy intervention called Compassionate Mind Training (CMT). Although mindfulness training research is relatively new, in a pilot study of CMT involving hospital day patients with intense shame and

self-criticism, significant decreases in depression, self-attacking, shame, and feelings of inferiority were reported after participation in the CMT program (Gilbert & Procter, 2006). CMT provides preliminary evidence that mindfulness training may enhance self-compassion, and that these types of interventions may have a life-changing impact for individuals who develop self-compassion skills. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to explore intervention strategies, such as CMT, for populations within a sporting context in order to help individuals involved in sport develop the skills and resources needed to overcome their difficult experiences. Additionally, therapeutic approaches have been developed that rely on mindfulness, such as Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program (Kabat-Zinn, 1991). Mindfulness teaches people to notice the difficult thoughts and emotions that arise in present-moment awareness, so that they can be experienced with kindness, acceptance, and non-judgment. Previous research has demonstrated that MBSR significantly increases self-compassion (Shapiro, et al., 2005; Shapiro et al., 2007). Therefore, MBSR might also be an effective way for individuals to develop self-compassion.

Epilogue

As I stare at all the pictures in front of me and the many pages of transcripts produced from the connections I've made, I can't help but think of all the thoughts and feelings that I felt on this journey. Writing the stories of Rachael, Lexi, Martha, Janelle, Lauren, and Molly, I was able to find comfort in my own failure experiences. I feel very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to provide the voice for these young women athletes. It is the goal that through narratives other young women are able to find comfort in their own personal failures in sport. It is necessary to share our stories in order to open up new possibilities for self-care and understanding. It is also hoped that those supporting the young women, such as coaches, parents and friends, recognize the difficult experiences that athletes face and the painful emotions they are experiencing.

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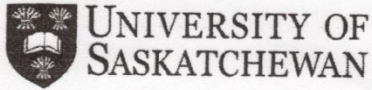
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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A

Human Ethics Approval



Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Certificate of Approval Study Amendment

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Kent C. Kowalski

DEPARTMENT
Kinesiology

Beh #
10-248

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT
University of Saskatchewan

TITLE

Narratives of Young Women Athletes' Experiences of Emotional Pain and Self Compassion

APPROVAL OF
Addition of Snowball Sampling

APPROVED ON
10-Feb-2011

CURRENT EXPIRY DATE
28-Oct-2011

Full Board Meeting

Date of Full Board Meeting:

Delegated Review

Expedited Review

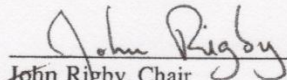
CERTIFICATION

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 of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics_review/


John Rigby, Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:

Research Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Box 5000 RPO University, 1602-110 Gymnasium Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 4J8

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Advertisement



**College of Kinesiology
University of Saskatchewan**

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR
RESEARCH IN KINESIOLOGY**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of entitled: *Narratives of Young Women Athletes' Experiences of Emotional Pain and Self-compassion.*

Would this study be a good fit for me?

This study might be a good fit for you if:

- You are a young women between the age of 15-24
- You participated in a competitive sport in the last year
- You have had a difficult experiences with failure in your sport but feel like you have dealt with it fairly well.

What would happen if I decided to take part in the study?

If you decide to take part in this study you would be asked to:

- Take part in a one-on-one interview with lead female researcher Lindsay DeGroot. You will be asked to discuss your difficult experiences with failure in your sport (e.g. not reaching a personal goal).
- Take photographs that represent that experiences to you. After each photograph you will be asked to record the date/time and a caption of why you chose to take the photograph and how it represents your difficult experiences with failure in your sport. An example will be shown to you of what we are looking for in this part of the study
- Partake in a second one-on-one interview discussing your photographs and captions.

**In appreciation for your time, you will receive
a \$50.00 gift certificate to lululemon**

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

Lindsay DeGroot

M.Sc. Student, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan

at

(306) 966-1087 or

Email: lindsay.degroot@usask.ca

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

APPENDIX C

Consent Forms

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Narratives of Young Women Athletes' Experiences of Emotional Pain and Self-compassion*. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Researchers:

Lindsay DeGroot, M.Sc. Student, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan

(306) 966-1087, lmd072@mail.usask.ca

Dr. Kent Kowalski, Supervisor, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan

(306) 966-1079, kent.kowalski@usask.ca

Purpose and Objectives: The purpose of the proposed study is to explore and present narratives of young women athletes' experiences of emotional pain and self-compassion. Emotional pain, for this study, is being defined as the difficult emotions that may arise from challenging sporting situations in which you feel like you have failed or did not reach your expectations.

Potential Benefits: As a participant in this study you will receive a \$50 gift certificate to lululemon as an incentive to participate in the study. Other benefits of participation in the study cannot be guaranteed, but there is the potential for participation to provide the opportunity for an increased understanding about self-compassion and how it can play a role in emotionally difficult experiences in sport. Little research in this area has been conducted with a female population, so the results generated from this study may be beneficial to you and other female athletes, as well as parents and coaches.

Procedure Your participation will be required in two phases. Each phase will be conducted at a time and location of your convenience and will be led by female M.Sc. student researcher Lindsay DeGroot. The length of the interviews will not be pre-determined in order to allow you to provide an elaborate account of your experiences.

Phase one involves a one-on-one interview. Initially, the interview will help to gain a rapport (relationship) with you and then once comfortable we will identify and discuss a difficult experiences you have had within your competitive sport. Specifically we are interested in a challenge or an event that you have experienced in which you feel like you have failed (e.g. you didn't reach a personal goal) and the emotions you felt during this time. Once the interview is complete instructions regarding phase two of the study will be explained.

Phase two involves two stages, first in which you will be asked to take photographs of what your experiences might look like through the lens of a camera. After each picture you will be asked to record the date, time and write notes about why and how the photograph 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 be asked to choose 5 photographs to talk about in phase two. If you do not have a camera we will provide one for you to use. You will have 3 weeks to complete this part of the study. The second stage of phase two involves a one-on-one reflexive photography interview. For this interview you will present your chosen photographs with corresponding notes, and the interview will flow from there discussing each photograph in detail.

Both phases 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: 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 lead researchers at any time during the study with the information listed above.

Mental Health and Addiction Services- *services available to public, no fee*
Phone # - **655-7950**

- Youth Community Counseling
-*Services for adolescents 12-19*
- Adult Community Mental Health and Addictions
- *Services for adults 19 years and up*

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 the student researcher has completed the first draft of her thesis paper. 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. If you withdraw from the study at any time before the first draft of the thesis is complete any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. 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 session, you will be asked if you still wish to participate.

Confidentiality: The data from the study will be used to complete the student researcher's M.Sc. thesis and may appear 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. Only the research team will review the original audiotapes and transcripts. Names or other identifying information will not be discussed or made public outside of the research team. Audiotapes will be identified by code number and stored in a secure, locked office. The audiotapes, transcripts, and photographs will be stored separately from the master sheet identifying names, pseudonyms, and code numbers.

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.).

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

Questions: If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the researchers at any time during the study using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and has received ethical approval through the Research Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084).

If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office.

Thank you for your assistance in this study. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

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 the photographs to be used under the following conditions only:

- As raw data, not to be viewed outside the research team,
- Only those projects that do not reveal my identity may be used for educational purposes (professional and research presentations) and research publications,
- All projects can be used for educational purposes (professional and research presentations) and research publications.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Your daughter is invited to participate in a study entitled *Narratives of Young Women Athletes' Experiences of Emotional Pain and Self-compassion*. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Researchers:

Lindsay DeGroot, M.Sc. Student, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan

(306) 966-1087, lmd072@mail.usask.ca

Dr. Kent Kowalski, Supervisor, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan

(306) 966-1079, kent.kowalski@usask.ca

Purpose and Objectives: The purpose of the proposed study is to explore and present narratives of young women athletes' experiences of emotional pain and self-compassion. Emotional pain, for this study, is being defined as the difficult emotions that may arise from challenging sporting situations in which your daughter feels like she has failed or did not reach her expectations.

Potential Benefits: As a participant in this study your daughter will receive a \$50 gift certificate to lululemon as an incentive to participate in the study. Other benefits of participation in the study cannot be guaranteed, but there is the potential for participation to provide the opportunity for an increased understanding about self-compassion and how it can play a role in emotionally difficult experiences in sport. Little research in this area has been conducted with a female population, so the results generated from this study may be beneficial to your daughter and other female athletes, as well as parents and coaches.

Procedure Your daughter's participation will be required in two phases. Each phase will be conducted at a time and location of her convenience and will be led by female M.Sc. student researcher Lindsay DeGroot. The length of the interviews will not be pre-determined in order to allow your daughter to provide an elaborate account of her experiences.

Phase one involves a one-on-one interview. Initially, the interview will help to gain a rapport (relationship) with your daughter and then once comfortable we will identify and discuss a difficult experiences she has had within her competitive sport. Specifically we are interested in a challenge or an event that your daughter has experienced in which she felt like she had failed (e.g. you didn't reach a personal goal) and the emotions she felt during this time. Once the interview is complete instructions regarding phase two of the study will be explained.

Phase two involves two stages, first in which your daughter will be asked to take photographs of what her experiences might look like through the lens of a camera. After each picture she will be

asked to record the date, time and write notes about why and how the photograph represents her experiences discussed in the first interview. An example will be shown to your daughter in order to give her a better idea of what we are looking for. Your daughter will be asked to choose 5 photographs to talk about in phase two. If she does not have a camera we will provide one for her to use. Your daughter will have 3 weeks to complete this part of the study. The second stage of phase two involves a one-on-one reflexive photography interview. For this interview your daughter will present her chosen photographs with corresponding notes, and the interview will flow from there discussing each photograph in detail.

Both phases 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 and Addiction Services- *services available to public, no fee*
Phone # - 655-7950

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

Right to Withdraw: Your daughter's participation is voluntary, and she 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 the student researcher has completed the first draft of her thesis paper. After this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your daughter's data. If your daughter withdraws from the study at any time before the first draft of the thesis is complete any data that she has contributed will be destroyed at her request. As a participant, 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.

Confidentiality: The data from the study will be used to complete the student researcher's M.Sc. thesis and may appear 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, your daughter 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. Only the research team will review the original audiotapes and transcripts. Names or other identifying information will not be discussed or made public outside of the research team. Audiotapes will be identified by code number and stored in a secure, locked office. The audiotapes, transcripts, and photographs will be stored separately from the master sheet identifying names, pseudonyms, and code numbers.

After your daughter's interviews, and prior to the data being included in the final report, she will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of her interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as she sees 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.).

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

Questions: If you or your daughter have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the researchers at any time during the study using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and has received ethical approval through the Research Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084).

If you or your daughter has any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office.

Thank you for your daughter's for your assistance in this study. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

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 the photographs to be used under the following conditions only:

- _____ As raw data, not to be viewed outside the research team,
- _____ Only those projects that do not reveal my identity may be used for educational purposes (professional and research presentations) and research publications,
- _____ All projects can be used for educational purposes (professional and research presentations) and research publications.

(Name of Parent/Guardian)

(Date)

(Signature of Parent/Guardian)

(Signature of Researcher)

PARTICIPANT ASSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Narratives of Young Women Athletes' Experiences of Emotional Pain and Self-compassion*. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Researchers:

Lindsay DeGroot, M.Sc. Student, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan

(306) 966-1087, lmd072@mail.usask.ca

Dr. Kent Kowalski, Supervisor, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan

(306) 966-1079, kent.kowalski@usask.ca

What is this study about? This study explores the experiences of emotional pain and self-compassion young women athletes have while participating in competitive sport. For this study emotional pain means the difficult emotions that may arise from challenging sporting situations in which you feel like you have failed or did not reach your personal expectations.

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 required to participate in two one on one interviews and take photographs of your experiences. Each interview will be with the lead by female researcher, Lindsay DeGroot, and will be done at a time and place that is comfortable for you.

Phase one involves a one-on-one interview. Initially, the interview will help to gain a rapport (relationship) with you and then once comfortable we will identify and discuss a difficult experiences you have had within your competitive sport. Specifically we are interested in a challenge or an event that you have experienced in which you feel like you have failed (e.g. you didn't reach a personal goal) and the emotions you felt during this time. Once the interview is complete instructions regarding phase two of the study will be explained.

Phase two involves two stages, first in which you will be asked to take photographs of what your experiences might look like through the lens of a camera. After each picture you will be asked to record the date, time and write notes about why and how the photograph 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 be asked to choose 5 photographs to talk about in phase two. If you do not have a camera we will provide one for you to use. You will have 3 weeks to complete this part of the study. The second stage of phase two involves a one-on-one reflexive photography interview. For this interview you will present your chosen

photographs with corresponding notes, and the interview will flow from there discussing each photograph in detail.

Both phases will be audio taped. The audiotapes will be written out word for word in order for us to review what was said. You will be asked to look over the transcripts (typed out copies of what was said) to make sure that is what was really said.

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 lead researchers at any time during the study with the information listed above.

Mental Health and Addiction Services- *services available to public, no fee*
Phone # - 655-7950

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

Are there any benefits to doing this study? As a participant in this study you will receive a \$50 gift certificate to lululemon as a thank you for participating in the study. Other benefits of participation in the study cannot be guaranteed, but there is the potential for participation to provide the opportunity for an increased understanding about self-compassion and how it can play a role in emotionally difficult experiences in sport. The findings may also be helpful to your parents and coaches as well.

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. 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 the student researcher has completed the first draft of her thesis paper. After this point it may no longer be possible to withdraw your data. If you withdraw from the study at any time before the first draft of the thesis is complete any data that you have contributed will be destroyed if you want. 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 study, please feel free to ask at any point. You are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on ____ (insert date) _____. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

You may contact the research team to find out the results of the study or to provide more input. A copy of the published paper can also be requested.

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

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

_____ For the interview discussion only, not to be viewed outside the research team,

_____ Only those photos that do not reveal my identity may be used for educational purposes (professional and research presentations) and research publications,

_____ All photos can be used for educational purposes (professional and research presentations) and research publications.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

APPENDIX D

Phase One Interview Guide

PHASE ONE: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Remind athlete of right to withdraw at any time without penalty and review the issues of confidentiality- GO OVER CONSENT

Gaining rapport:

- Please tell me about a little bit about your sporting background
 - When did your interest in sports first begin?
 - How many years did you play?
 - What level did you play?
- How did you end up where you are today in your sport?
 - How did you get involved?

Specific experiences discussion:

I am sure that being a competitive athlete in competitive sporting environments that you have had many emotional experiences, both good and bad. For the purpose of my study, today I would like to discuss with you a specific challenge or an event that you have experienced in which you feel like you have failed (e.g. you didn't reach a personal goal) and the emotions you felt during this time.

- What kinds of challenges or events arise in your sport that you would describe as a failure?
- Are there any specific situations you can talk about that could possibly occur in your sport that may result in an athlete feeling like they have failed?
- Now that we have talked a little bit about what could potentially happen in your sport is there one specific experience or situation you can tell me about where you have gone through a difficult time in your competitive sport where you felt you have failed? By this I mean a situation where you feel like you have let yourself down or maybe you didn't meet a personal goal or expectation.
- Can you tell me about why you think your experience is one of failure? What about this specific experience makes you feel like you have failed or let yourself down?
- Why was this experience different from all the other challenges and events you have experienced in your competitive sport?

-Why is it important to you?

- Was there a certain moment in your experiences in which you knew you have let yourself down? If so, can you walk me through that moment?
- There are often many emotions present when someone is faced with difficult experiences. What type of emotions were you feeling during your difficult experiences?
- Did you have similar emotions hours, days, weeks, or months after your experiences? Can you tell me in what ways they have changed? For example were they becoming more positive or more negative? Or did they not change at all?
- In what way did these emotions affect you in your sport?
 - Was your training affected?
 - Your approach to your sport (training, coaches, teammates)?
 - Your competition performance?
 - Your attitude?
 - Did they carry over to other aspects of your life?
- During this difficult time did you notice things that you did not like about yourself?
- Did you do anything to cope with your emotions?
 - Is there anything specific that you feel has helped you deal with your experiences?

 - Was there someone that was able to help you? For example, a coach, teammate, family, or friend?
- When reflecting back on your experiences can you talk about how your emotions and behavior has or has not changed and why you think this might be the case?

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

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

1. Explain photography release – i.e. they have to give me their consent before the photos will be shown to anyone.
2. Explain that consent must be obtained from the third party if he/she appears in the photograph and distribute photo release forms. If the participant in the photograph is under the age of 18, the photo will not be used for presentation or publication purposes.
3. Explain that the participants will not be judged on their photographs. The photographs are simply a means of generating discussion and promote understanding.
4. Ask participants if they have any questions.

APPENDIX F

Phase Two Interview Guide

PHASE TWO: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for completing the photograph phase of the study. To start off I just want to get your thoughts on how you felt the photograph process was.

- How did you find the photograph taking process? Did you find it beneficial, frustrating, helpful, difficult, or emotional?
- Were you able to express your emotions and thoughts fully through the photographs and your captions?
- Did any new emotions arise from taking then pictures or when you got them developed? If so, can you tell me about how these emotions are different than the ones previously discussed in our first meeting?
- Did you have a plan in mind when taking the pictures or did you just see something that sparked emotions and then took that picture? Why did you choose to do it this way?

Thank you for bringing you photographs with you today, for this part of the interview we will now go through your photos and you can walk me through what they represent and how they reflect your difficult experiences.

- Can you walk me through your photographs? And talk about in what ways these pictures capture your experiences in which you felt you have let yourself down?

Things to bring up with photos

- What does it symbolize?
- Please tell me a about the emotions that arose when you took the photograph, when you wrote about the photograph, and now seeing the picture.
- What emotions are present in this photograph for you?
- What emotions were you trying to portray?
- Can you talk about the emotional story behind this picture? Is it a positive or negative? Personal? Individual or team driven?
- Can you talk about how you feel about the photos? Are they positive, negative or neutral feelings?
- How has your behavior been effected by these photographs?
- In what ways has your behavior changed?
- Would you say you have a better understanding of yourself and your experiences after this photograph taking process?

In conclusion

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

Now that we have discussed your experiences of emotional pain I would turn our discussion towards the ideas around compassion.

- Can you tell me what you believe compassion to be?
- Have you heard of the idea or concept of compassion towards yourself?
- Can you tell me a bit about what you think being compassionate towards the self means and involves?

Show Lead researcher Kristin Neff's video on Self-Compassion

(Having self-compassion means extending compassion to the self for ones failures, inadequacies and experiences of suffering. Leading researcher Kristen Neff says it involves 3 components: 1) Self kindness which means treating oneself with understanding rather than harsh self-judgement. 2) Common Humanity which involves one to realize that suffering and personal inadequacies are part of the shared human experience, and 3) Mindfulness which requires one to take a balanced approach to our negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated.)

- Now that you are a little more familiar with the term self-compassion can you tell me why this might or might not be an important quality for an athlete to have?
- Do you think that self-compassion is something that will help athletes? Specifically do you think that self-compassion can help with the painful emotions that athletes face after experiencing an event in which they felt they have not lived up to a personal expectation or a time when they felt they have let themselves down?
- How do you think self-compassion might help with these negative experiences?
- Do you typically think that you act self-compassionately when faced with negative experiences? Can you explain why you do or don't usually act with self-compassion?
- In terms of your personal experiences we've been talking about, do you think that you acted self-compassionately?
- In what specific ways do you believe that you were acting self-compassionately?
-If you feel like you did not act self-compassionately can you tell me in what ways you might have been able to use self-compassion when dealing with your difficult experiences?
- Can you talk about how self-compassion may have played an important role in coping with your difficult time in a healthy way?
- Was there a certain moment after your experiences where you started to accept what happened and began to look at the situation in a different perhaps more positive way?
- Can you walk me through that moment and what you feeling?
- Do you think any of these photos represent self-compassion? And in what ways?
- Did you try to capture aspects of self-compassion in this photograph?
- Overall can you give me a summary of your thoughts
- Is there anything else that you would like to include in discussion today?

APPENDIX F

Photo Release Form

PHOTO RELEASE FORM

Title of the Study: *Narratives of Young Women Athletes' Experiences of Emotional Pain and Self-compassion*

Researchers: Dr. Kent Kowalski, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan

(306) 966-1079, kent.kowalski@usask.ca

Lindsay DeGroot, M.Sc., College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan

(306) 966-1087, lmd072@mail.usask.ca

I, _____, (age ____*) allow the photograph taken of me for the purpose of the above study to be used:

___ for *discussion* purposes ONLY, during a confidential one-on-one interview with the person who took the photo.

___ for *discussion AND publication or presentational* purposes (e.g., in a scholarly journal or at an academic conference).

I hereby authorize the release of this photo(s) to researchers Dr. Kent Kowalski and Lindsay DeGroot to be used for the above study. I have received a copy of this Photo Release Form for my own records.

(Participant Signature)

(Date)

(Signature of Researcher)

* If the person in the photograph is below the age of 18, the photo will not be used for publication or presentation purposes.

APPENDIX G

Transcript Release Form

TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal information that was given during the interview sessions 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 the interview with Lindsay DeGroot. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript (to researchers Lindsay DeGroot and Dr. Kent Kowalski) to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Transcript Release Form for my own records.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

(Signature of Parent/Guardian if under 18)