EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE ATHLETIC AND SOCIAL BODY: AN EXPLORATION OF DUAL IDENTITIES IN COLLEGIATE FEMALE BASKETBALL PLAYERS

by

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Abstract

Female athletes who participate in sports that require body size, strength, and physicality may experience body dissatisfaction due to discrepancies between their bodies and idealized bodies of non-athlete women (Krane et al., 2004). The purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine the body-related experiences of collegiate female basketball players, as well as explore the extent to which their body perceptions were related to their student-athlete identities. Six participants from a women’s university basketball team were interviewed near the end of the 2013-2014 season. Data was analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Results demonstrated the efficacy of studying female-athlete identity and body image together. Participants who had strong and exclusive athletic identities experienced more extensive body dissatisfaction than participants with more diverse identities. This may have been related to increased pressure for the body to serve as a physical representation of their athleticism. Findings also demonstrated the utility of the bicultural identity integration framework (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002) for studying identity integration among female athletes. Some participants perceived their participation in basketball as contradictory to femininity and discussed their athletic and feminine identities as separate parts of their overall self. In contrast, other participants discussed their identification with an athletic femininity that was more compatible with their participation in sport. Differences in participants understanding of their athletic and feminine identities were reflected in their efforts to ‘do femininity’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987) in sport and non-sport settings. Regardless of the status of their athletic and feminine identities, participants demonstrated conformity to hegemonic notions of femininity; they expressed a certain amount of body satisfaction associated with the instrumental capabilities of their bodies, but for all participants that satisfaction was coupled with the desire for body
change that would increase compliance with a lean and toned female body ideal. Findings contribute to existing research exploring female athlete identity and body image, and highlight the need for future research examining the effect of identity integration on the body-related experiences of female athletes.
Preface

This project was conceptualized, researched, and designed by MA candidate Louisa Scarlett with the support of her supervisor Dr. Peter Crocker. All interviews were carried out, transcribed, and analyzed independently by Louisa Scarlett.

Ethics approval for this research was obtained from The University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board; certificate number H14-00029. Original approval was obtained on January 28, 2014. Two amendments were made to the ethics application. The first of these amendments involved changes to the interview schedule, and was approved on February 12, 2014 (H14-00029-A001). The second amendment was to allow a twenty dollar honorarium to be provided to participants, and was approved on April 3, 2014 (H114-0029-A002).
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, an increase in opportunity for girls and women in sport has prompted questions regarding the impact of sport and physical activity on girls and women at both the individual and societal level (Ross & Shinew, 2008). An important part of this inquiry has been to understand the influence of sport participation on the body image of female athletes (Hausenblas & Symons Downs, 2001). Body image is “a multidimensional self-attitude toward one’s body, particularly its size, shape, and aesthetics…[encompassing] a persons’ evaluations and affective experiences regarding their physical attributes, as well as their investments in appearance as a domain for self-evaluation” (Cash, Ancis, & Strachan, 1997, p. 433). A considerable amount of research has been conducted in this area from both psychological and sociological perspectives (George, 2005; Greenleaf, Boyer, & Petrie, 2009; Hasse & Prapavessis, 2001; Smolak, Murnen, & Ruble, 2000), and has suggested a complex relationship between sport participation and body image for female athletes. While participation in sport has been associated with more positive body image in a variety of women’s sport settings (Hausenblas & Symons Downs, 2001; Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011; Smolak et al., 2000), qualitative research has consistently suggested that many female athletes feel dissatisfied with their bodies outside of sport due to discrepancies between ideal sport and social bodies (George, 2005; Krane, Waldron, Michalenok & Stiles-Shipley, 2001; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004; Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). Krane and colleagues (2004) suggested that female athletes might manage this social-body dissatisfaction by repressing their athletic identities in social settings. Despite this suggestion, limited amounts of research have been conducted in this area.

Identity can be conceptualized as how an individual would respond to the question, “who are you?” (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). An individual can have any number of
identities; which one comes to the forefront depends on a number of personal and situational factors. This project is an exploration of body image and identity in university women’s basketball players, making athletic, student, and feminine identities of primary interest to this research project. Athletic identity (AI) refers to the extent to which one identifies as an athlete (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Similarly, student identity reflects the extent to which one identifies with the student role (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). Finally, feminine identity reflects one’s gender identity, and the extent to which they identify with and present themselves as female (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Inherent conflict between participation in competitive sport and hegemonic notions of femininity add interest to exploration of participants’ feminine and athlete identities. Separately, athletic, student, feminine, and other types of identities have been researched fairly extensively, but the way these different types of identities are integrated within the individual is not well understood.

An existing framework for exploring identity integration is the bicultural identity integration framework (BII; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). Though it was originally developed for use on people with multiple cultural identities, it has been suggested that the BII framework may be useful for understanding integration of other types of identities (Huynh, Nguyen, & Benet-Martínez, 2011). The BII framework explains the integration of multiple identities as being dependent on the extent to which they are perceived as being similar or different and compatible or incompatible; thus, successful identity integration is achieved when multiple identities are seen as blended and harmonious (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002). Successful identity integration is associated with more adaptive outcomes for bicultural individuals (Benet-Martínez & Heritatos, 2005). It follows that successful integration of other types of multiple identities may
be associated with adaptive outcomes as well. Exploration of the extent to which this is true for female athletes is a primary goal of this project.

In sum, this research is an exploration of body image and identity among university-level female basketball players. Sociocultural and psychological theories of body image serve as a basis for the exploration of participants’ body-related experiences. The BII framework is used as a guideline for the exploration of participants’ athletic, student, and feminine identities. A small amount of existing research exploring female athlete body image and identity together has provided valuable insight into the body-related experiences of female athletes (Ezzell, 2009; Langon & Petracca, 2010). This research is an expansion of these findings, and will provide a unique and valuable contribution to existing research.

1.1 Justification and Relevance

As members of an increasingly ‘connected’ culture, girls and women are heavily exposed to information about idealized female bodies. Media sources present an almost singular expression of the idealized female body that is both extremely lean and appropriately toned. Perhaps as a result of this media pressure, body dissatisfaction is alarmingly present among girls and women today (Tiggemann, 2011). While it may seem logical that female athletes are protected from this dissatisfaction to a certain extent, findings of previous studies highlight a number of factors that actually put female athletes at increased risk of experiencing body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Smolak et al., 2000). A small amount of research has explored this phenomenon in the context of female athletes who participate in contact and power based sports. Findings suggest complex body-related experiences for female athletes in these sports because of contradictions between body-requirements of their sport and hegemonic ideals for the female body (Krane et al., 2001; Krane et al., 2004). This project represents an important
extension of the limited existing research in this area. As opportunities continue to grow for girls and women to participate in contact and power-based sports, so too does the importance of understanding the body-related experiences of female athletes who are involved in them.

A small number of studies have explored the relationship between female athletes body-related experiences and identity (Ezzell, 2009; Langdon & Petracca, 2010). Findings of these studies suggest that identity is an integral part of the body-related experiences of female athletes who participate in contact and power-based sports (Ezzell, 2009; Langdon & Petracca, 2010). Despite the valuable contribution of these findings to existing understanding of body image among female athletes participating in contact and power based sports, much remains to be discovered about this relationship. Thus, by examining identity and body-related experiences together, this research may provide new insight into the body-related experiences of female athletes. Findings of this project could be used to inform future research on identity and body image among female athletes.

This research also represents a new application of the bicultural identity framework (BII; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002). Although a small amount of research has utilized the BII framework to examine integration of non-cultural identities, much remains to be discovered surrounding the utility of this framework for exploring integration of other types of identities. As a qualitative project, this research will shed light on female athletes experiences with athletic, student, and feminine identities, as well as the extent to which these experiences are compatible with identity integration strategies outlined in the BII framework. Further, this research will explore whether or not different understanding of these multiple identities is associated with participants’ sport and body-related experiences.
1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

Previous research has suggested female athletes feel satisfied with functional aspects of their bodies, but experience dissatisfaction with body appearance in social settings (George, 2005; Krane et al., 2001; Krane et al., 2004; Ross & Shinew, 2008). Sociocultural and cognitive-behavioural theories of body image suggest that this could be due to perceived discrepancies between their bodies and culturally idealized female bodies (Cash, 2011; McKinley & Hyde, 1996; McKinley, 2011; Tiggemann, 2011). The experience of body dissatisfaction may also relate to female athlete’s understanding of their athletic and feminine selves. The body is the physical representation of the self, making it an integral part of identity construction (Ezzell, 2009; Fox & Corbin, 1989). Findings of the limited research in this area support a connection between female athlete identity and body-related experiences (Ezzell, 2009; Langdon & Petracca, 2010).

The purpose of this research is to further understanding of the relationship between female-athlete identity and body image. Specifically, this research examines whether the way participants experience their multiple identities has an impact on their understanding of their bodies in different sport and non-sport contexts. Sociocultural and cognitive-behavioural theories of body image serve as guides for the exploration of participant’ body image. The bicultural identity integration framework (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002) is used to guide and structure the exploration of female athlete identity. To address these issues, this study will explore the following research questions:

1) How do university-level female basketball players experience their identities in sport and social settings?
2) How do university-level female basketball players perceive and experience their bodies in sport and social settings?
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Body Image

Body image has been studied extensively from sociocultural and psychological perspectives. While there is agreement across these perspectives that body image is a multifaceted and multidimensional construct, there are some key conceptual differences in these perspectives that are worthy of consideration. The sociocultural model of body image emphasizes the prevalence of societal ideals for the body, which are transmitted to the individual by influential sources such as peers, parents, and the media (Tiggemann, 2011). In the sociocultural framework of body image, the individual internalizes this norm-referenced information about the body, and body satisfaction or dissatisfaction is determined by the extent to which the individual sees their own body aligning with societal ideals (Tiggemann, 2011). Body image is seen as situational in this model; although one may experience body dissatisfaction in a setting where the appearance of their body is quite salient, at the gym for example, they may not experience the same degree of dissatisfaction in other realms where their body is not at the forefront (Tiggemann, 1999).

Another prominent framework used in the study of body image is feminist-based objectification theory (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). This theory has been applied to explain the widespread body dissatisfaction experienced by women as the result of gendered power structures, where idealized men and women’s bodies are the standard against which women are judged (McKinley, 2011). The result is a social context where women’s bodies are constantly being evaluated and watched, and women learn that they are evaluated based on how they appear to others, ultimately leading to objectified body consciousness (OBC; McKinley & Hyde, 1996; McKinley, 2011). OBC has three components: 1) body surveillance, which refers to viewing and
evaluating the body from an outsider’s perspective; 2) internalization of cultural standards, which involves cultural standards for the body being accepted and used for body self evaluations; and 3) appearance control beliefs, which reflect the sense of agency one feels over their body and its appearance. Each of these components is associated with different body-related emotions and behaviours (McKinley & Hyde, 1996; McKinley, 2011). Body surveillance, for example, is associated with body-related shame and anxiety (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Internalization of cultural standards for the body is also related to body shame (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Shame is a self-conscious emotion associated with avoidance coping, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Sabiston et al., 2010). In contrast, appearance control beliefs may not be as maladaptive as the other components of OBC, as they seem to offer the individual a sense of control and agency over their body (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997).

Arguably the most common approach in body image research stems from the cognitive behavioural framework (Cash, 2011), which suggests that attitudes about the body form the basis of body image. Body image attitudes involve two components; evaluation and investment. Body image evaluation refers to the ways one evaluates their body against what they consider to be the ideal body. Body image investment refers to the extent to which one feels the appearance of their body is important. These body-related attitudes (evaluations and investment) are influenced by several historical and proximal factors. Historical influences on body image attitudes include cultural socialization, interpersonal experiences, physical characteristics, and personality. Cultural socialization and interpersonal experiences correspond with the three sources of norm-referenced body-related information included in the sociocultural model (parents, peers, and media). Physical attractiveness and dispositional characteristics, such as self-esteem and gender-role endorsement, are the two other historical factors that influence body image attitudes.
In this cognitive-behavioural framework of body image, activating situations or events trigger proximal factors that also impact attitudes about the body; examples of these proximal factors are: coping, self-regulatory behaviours related to the body, and body-related emotions. Each of these proximal factors has important implications for body image and well-being (Cash, 2011). For example, coping with body dissatisfaction using avoidance or appearance fixing strategies has been shown to be associated with negative body evaluation and high levels of investment in appearance, unrealistic body evaluations, and poor psychosocial functioning (Cash, Santos, & Williams, 2005). Furthermore, social physique anxiety (Hart, Leary, & Rejeski, 1989), a body-related anxiety experienced when one fears their body being evaluated negatively in a social setting, has been shown to be associated with use of a number of maladaptive coping strategies, including substance use, dieting, excessive exercise, and seeking sexual attention (Sabiston, Sedgwick, Crocker, Kowalski, & Mack, 2007). In summary, the cognitive behavioural approach positions body image attitudes, which include evaluation of and investment in appearance, as central to body image; body image attitudes are influenced by several historical and proximal factors, which together determine the thoughts one has about their body as well as the behaviours they engage in to manage body appearance and body-related emotions.

A key commonality between the sociocultural and psychological approaches to body image is the recognition that both the broad cultural context and more immediate social environment have an impact on body image evaluation and attitude. Research from each of these perspectives shows that women experience more body dissatisfaction than men (Cash, 2011; McKinley & Hyde, 2011; Tiggemann, 2011), a finding that is unsurprising given the one-dimensional nature of cultural expectations for female beauty and the body, and the prevalence of body-related media in the Western world. Body dissatisfaction is so common among women it
has been aptly referred to as ‘normative discontent’ (Lafrance, Zivian, & Meyers, 2000; Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984). Given the importance of the social environment on body image, a major area of interest among body image researchers is to understand the impact of the sport environment and participation in sport and physical activity on body image, some findings in that area will be discussed below.

2.1.1 Athlete Body Image

In virtually all sports, the body and what it is able to do is directly related to athletic success (Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). Although there is considerable variation across different sports in terms of ideal body types and the way bodies are evaluated, the importance of the body in sport has an effect on athletes’ body image (Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). Meta-analytic research has suggested that athletes in a variety of sports, particularly those who compete at elite-levels, experience less body dissatisfaction than their non-athlete peers (Hausenblas & Symons Downs, 2001; Smolak et al., 2000). Although it seems logical that participation in sport, particularly competitive sport, results in increased physical fitness and ultimately body satisfaction, this is not necessarily the case (Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). While athletes report experiencing less overall body dissatisfaction than non-athletes, they also report greater instances of thoughts and behaviours related to disordered eating (Smolak et al., 2000). Though not a direct indicator of body dissatisfaction, disordered eating is a type of self-regulatory behaviour for dealing with negative body image attitudes outlined in the cognitive behavioural model of body image (Cash, 2011). Clearly, the relationship between sport participation and body image is complex, and several factors need to be considered in order to understand these somewhat counterintuitive findings (Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011); one of these factors is sport type.
For example, aesthetic sports, where athletes are directly evaluated based on appearance, such as figure skating, dance, and gymnastics, seem to put athletes at greater risk for experiencing body-related emotions, disordered eating, and other indicators of body dissatisfaction (Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). Being watched and judged based on appearance in sport stands to increase body objectification, one of the mechanisms of body dissatisfaction outlined in objectification theory (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). In accordance with this, previous research demonstrated that female athletes involved in sports that focus on appearance reported greater body-related shame than those involved in sports where appearance is not directly related to performance success (Parsons & Betz, 2001). Similarly, elite female athletes involved in aerobics and diving reported more disordered eating than female soccer players of a comparable level of competition (Haase & Prapevessis, 2001). Not only does there appear to be a link between participation in aesthetic sports and disordered eating, but frequency and severity of thoughts and behaviours related to disordered eating have been shown to increase with time spent participating in aesthetic sports for both male and female adolescent athletes (Slater & Tiggemann, 2011), suggesting increased risk with prolonged exposure to appearance-oriented sport environments. Much of the research in this area is cross-sectional, so it remains unclear whether participation in aesthetic sports leads to disordered eating, or whether athletes with disordered eating patterns seek out aesthetic sports (Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). However, given that participation in sports like gymnastics and dance starts at such a young age, the later seems unlikely. The relationship between participation in aesthetic sports and body image has been studied extensively, particularly in terms of the prevalence of eating disorders among female athletes in these sports. However, perhaps because of the seemingly lower risk for disordered eating in sports such as basketball, rugby, and hockey, that don’t directly emphasize appearance,
less research has been conducted examining the body-related experiences of female athletes in these sports. Thus, the proposed research will explore body image among female basketball players, a population that is underrepresented in the existing research on body image among female athletes.

2.1.2 Male Versus Female Athlete Body Image

Due to the much higher rates of eating disorders among girls and women than boys and men, the vast majority of research on the implications of sport participation on body image and eating behaviours has been conducted on women (Cash & Smolak, 2011). This is true of research on body image in general, as the field of study was essentially born out of the eruption in instances of women reporting eating disorders in the 1980’s and 1990’s (Cash & Smolak, 2011). This is not to say that men do not experience body dissatisfaction, or that male athletes are immune to the added pressure that sport participation puts on the body; on the contrary, recent research in this area shows that men are experiencing increasing amounts of body dissatisfaction (McCreary, 2011). Much of this dissatisfaction stems from perceived failure to match up to the hyper-muscular male body ideals emphasized in media and popular culture (McCreary, 2011).

Importantly, most sports emphasize and lead to the development of body types that are consistent with cultural norms for the male body, making sport participation a way for boys and men to develop lean, toned, and muscular bodies (Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). Further, sports encourage competitiveness and dominance, characteristics that are consistent with cultural behavioural norms for boys and men (Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). The same cannot be said for female athletes participating in sports that require considerable size, strength, and assertive
behaviour, and lead to development of features and characteristics that contradict hegemonic ideals for the female body (George, 2005; Krane et al., 2004; Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011).

2.1.3 The Female Athlete Paradox

Body requirements for female athletes in ‘contact’ based sports include, height, strength, and power (George, 2005; Krane et al., 2004; Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). Behavioural norms for females in contact sport include being competitive, fearless, and aggressive (George, 2005; Krane et al., 2004; Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). These body and behavioural requirements stand in contrast to cultural norms for the female body and feminine behaviour (Tiggemann, 2011). Consistent with this notion is the finding that female-college athletes participating in sports traditionally dominated by men, such as soccer, basketball, and rugby, reported greater endorsement of winning and risk taking, characteristics traditionally considered part of the male gender role (Steinfeldt, Zajrajsek, Carter, & Steinfeldt, 2011). Though no significant differences in body satisfaction were noted between female athletes and non-athletes in this research, this may be due to the researcher’s use of a total score for body esteem based on a measure which combined ratings of body functionality and attractiveness (Steinfeldt et al., 2011b). The distinction between functional and aesthetic aspects of body image for female athletes is supported by findings in which female athletes reported greater functional body satisfaction, and comparable levels of aesthetic body satisfaction to their non-athlete peers (Abbott & Barber, 2011). This data suggests that separate consideration of functional and aesthetic aspects of female athlete body image may be warranted because measures of overall body satisfaction don’t seem to capture the complexity of body image among female athletes. Consistent with this, university-level female athletes competing in a variety of sports reported a desire to be muscular for functional and health reasons, but not aesthetic ones (Steinfeldt, Carter,
Benton, & Steinfeldt, 2011). Similarly, adolescent and adult female track and field athletes reported desire to develop and maintain muscular development for performance reasons, but struggled with feeling as though their bodies were different from non-athlete women (Mosewich, Vangool, Kowlski, & McHugh, 2009). Collectively, the findings from these studies suggest that female athletes evaluate their bodies differently in terms of function and appearance.

In addition to a distinction between functional and aesthetic aspects of female athlete body image, some research suggests a need to consider contextual factors that may impact female athlete body evaluations. For example, Krane and colleagues (2001) found that female athletes in a variety of sports evaluated their bodies differently depending on whether they were in a sport or social context. This finding is supported by other studies (e.g. George, 2005; Krane et al., 2004), which suggest that female athletes feel satisfied with their bodies in sport settings and when surrounded by fellow female athletes, but dissatisfied with their bodies in social settings due to comparison to the bodies of non-athlete peers. The simultaneous experience of functional body satisfaction and aesthetic, social dissatisfaction with the body has been referred to as ‘the female athlete paradox’ (Krane et al., 2004).

Researchers have attempted to understand how female athletes negotiate this paradox, and what the implications of this may be for female athlete behaviour and performance. Findings suggest one of the strategies used by female athletes to deal with being dissatisfied with their bodies in social settings is by engaging in behaviours to emphasize their femininity (George, 2005; Krane et al., 2004; Ross & Shinew, 2008; Russel, 2004). In the sport context, this includes altering uniforms or appearance in ways that emphasize their femininity, such as wearing makeup or ribbons in their hair during games. In the social context, this includes putting extra effort into feminine appearance and dress. These gendered behaviours are consistent with West
and Zimmerman’s (1987) notion of ‘doing gender’, a theoretical framework suggesting that
gender is a status that is embodied, routinely performed, and carried out in and through daily
social interactions. In this framework, gender is created and maintained through social
interaction, where the display of gendered behaviour and appearance signifies membership in a
given sex category. Thus, ‘doing femininity’ refers to behaviours performed by women, who are
aware of social norms for femininity, in the pursuit of presenting socially as female.

Despite their use of these gendered behaviours, the women-athletes in the above-
mentioned studies also report ongoing conflicts with body image and appearance, such as not
having enough time to put effort into appearance on a daily basis, struggles with having large
bodies or body parts, difficulties finding clothing to fit their athletic bodies, undesirably large
appetites, and the need to eat what they felt was more than a socially acceptable amount of food
in order to fuel their athletic performances (George, 2005; Krane et al., 2004; Ross & Shinew,
2008; Russel, 2004). These studies provide insight into behavioural aspects of managing the
paradox of the female athlete body, but tell us little about the cognitive processes and emotional
outcomes that might be involved.

It has been suggested that one of the ways female athletes may deal with the apparent
contrast between their sporting bodies and cultural ideals for the female body is by constructing
separate sport and social identities (Krane et al., 2004). Research involving university level
women rugby players provides support for the notion of identity as a mechanism for dealing with
having an athletic female body. This research has shown that female athletes may deal with
conflicts between sport and feminine identities by engaging in ‘defensive othering’ (Schwalbe et
al., 2000, p. 425). In the context of Schwalbe and colleague’s (2000) research, defensive othering
involved labeling other female rugby players undesirable for being too muscular or too large and
putting down other women for not displaying aggression, hard work, and other desirable ‘masculine’ behaviours believed to be of value in rugby (Ezzel, 2009). The use of defensive othering perpetuates inequalities within sport (Schwalbe et al., 2000), which points to the importance of understanding how female athletes deal with conflicts between their athletic and feminine identities. Langdon and Petracca (2010) also suggested a link between identity and body image, hypothesizing that the strength of athlete identity in a given sport may be associated with the degree of internalization of body-related norms and behaviours associated with that group. This suggestion was supported by findings that revealed dancer identity to be negatively correlated with body appreciation (Langdon & Petracca, 2010). The findings discussed above suggest a link between identity and body image among female athletes, and that identity may be a mechanism for understanding how female athletes might navigate the female athlete paradox (Krane et al., 2004). A review of the construct of identity is provided below.

2.2 Identity

According to Vignoles and colleagues (2011), “identity involves people’s explicit or implicit responses to the question: who are you?” (p. 2). The construct of identity has been researched extensively from a variety of perspectives, which typically define identity on one or more of the following three levels: 1) individual or personal identity, 2) relational identity, and 3) social identity (Vignoles et al., 2011). Individual identities are based on individual-level aspects of self-definition and focus on the individual as an active part of identity formation, for example, basketball player or student (Vignoles et al., 2011). Relational identities relate to the role or roles an individual may assume in social interactions, for example, daughter, sister, or teammate (Vignoles et al., 2011). Finally, social identity refers to the individuals’ identification with groups they are a part of, such as teams, classes, ethnicity, or gender (Spears, 2011; Tajfel,
1981). Each of these levels of identity are active in the individual at any given time, as such, Vignoles and colleagues (2011) suggest that identity consists of “the confluence of [one’s] self-chosen or ascribed commitments, personal characteristics, and beliefs about [the self]; roles and positions in relation to significant others; and [their] membership in social groups and categories” (p. 4). Importantly, these different levels of identity do not exist independently; they interact within the individual in different ways in different social contexts (Vignoles et al., 2011). As this research explores identity among female athletes, athletic identity will be discussed in more detail below.

2.2.1 Athletic Identity

Athletic identity (AI; Brewer et al., 1993) is a type of identity that reflects “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (p. 237). The strength of one’s identity as an athlete is thought to depend on the extent to which influential others, including parents, friends, teammates, coaches, and the media, support the individual in their athletic endeavors (Brewer et al., 1993). In this sense, two athletes competing at the same level may have different levels of AI depending on the extent to which their athletic participation is supported by people with whom they interact. Brewer and colleagues (1993) suggest that AI may be stronger when surrounded by other athletes or when in sport environments, which is of particular interest to this research project as it may be key to understanding body dissatisfaction experienced by some female athletes in social settings.

As is the case with other identities, the extent to which success or failure in sport impacts the individual depends on the value an individual places on their AI (Brewer et al., 1993). Research in this area provides evidence that athletes who identify strongly with the athlete role may experience a variety of negative psychosocial outcomes if faced with career-threatening
injuries, poor performances, or transitions out of sport (Brewer et al., 1993). Maladaptive outcomes that have been associated with strong AI in previous research include: disordered eating (Busanich, McGannon, & Schinke, 2013); burnout (Martin & Horn, 2012); and other emotional difficulties (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).

Much of the research on AI has focused on understanding the maladaptive nature of AI, whereas little work has been done to develop understanding of how athletes integrate their AI with other aspects of identity and overall self-concept (Brewer et al., 1993).

### 2.2.2 Bicultural Identity Integration

The bicultural identity integration framework (BII; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002) explains how bicultural people, those who have internalized more than one culture, integrate multiple cultural identities. In the BII framework, individuals evaluate multiple identities based on their perceived blendedness and harmony. Blendedness refers to the extent to which identities are perceived as being integrated versus separated. Harmony refers to the extent to which one perceives their identities as being compatible versus in conflict. If the individual perceives their identities to be blended and harmonious, the BII framework considers their identities to be integrated. In contrast, if the individual perceives their identities as separate and not compatible, the BII framework considers the individual to be in a state of identity conflict. Individuals may try to reduce identity conflict by keeping their identities compartmentalized and separate, or by attempting to blur the lines between their multiple identities in order to create one that is compatible with both cultures. These strategies may or may not be effective in resolving identity conflict. Successful identity integration is related to improved task performance in domains involving both identities (Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, & Lee, 2008). Conversely, unsuccessful attempts to manage identity conflicts are related to interpersonal...
challenges, increased anxiety, depression, and lower psychological well-being (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Bond, 2008).

The extent to which identities are seen as compatible, and the likelihood that an individual will achieve identity integration status, is said to depend on a number of historical and immediate environmental factors (Huynh et al., 2011). One of these factors is the historical and current status of one’s cultural group; tensions between host and heritage cultures make identity integration less likely, and may lead to use of compartmentalization or alternating strategies for managing identity conflict (Huynh et al., 2011). Thus, in the context of this research, integration of social and athletic identities may be affected by participant’s perceptions of past and current tensions over rights and opportunities for women in basketball. Identity integration is also affected by experiences of discrimination and interpersonal problems, which both present challenges for successful integration of multiple cultural identities (Huynh et al., 2011).

Though the BII framework was developed to examine dual-identities among bicultural individuals, it has been suggested that it is an appropriate framework to study individuals with other types of multiple identities (Huynh et al., 2011). Support for this is shown in the successful application of the dual-identity framework to understand the ways in which lesbians identify with both the lesbian and heterosexual community (Fingerhut, Peplau, & Ghavami, 2005), and in a study of female engineers, which demonstrated that more integrated gender and professional identities were associated with better performance on an engineering task (Cheng et al., 2008). This research applied to BII framework to explore elite-level female basketball players experiences with their athletic, feminine, and other identities. More specifically, the extent to which these athletes perceived their multiple identities as blended or separate, harmonious or in
conflict was explored, as well as whether individual differences in identity integration were related to participants’ body-related experiences.
Chapter 3: Method

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) approach was employed throughout this research process. IPA is concerned with exploring how individuals make sense of meaningful life events (Smith & Osborne, 2003; 2008; Smith et al., 2009), which made it appropriate for understanding female athletes’ identity and body related experiences.

The theoretical foundation of IPA includes three main components: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith & Osborne, 2008). The first of these, phenomenology, refers to the study of experience (Smith et al., 2009). The phenomenological nature of IPA is evident in the focus on the unique experiences of each participant. IPA emphasizes understanding lived experiences, and the meaning ascribed to those experiences by participants (Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Given its focus on individual experience, IPA is concerned with focusing on participants’ perceptions rather than attempting to produce a singular, objective account (Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). For the researcher, understanding participants’ detailed descriptions of lived experience involves interpretation (Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith et al., 2009), which relates to the second theoretical underpinning of IPA, hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics, or theories of interpretation, are a central component in IPA because the researcher must rely on interpretation in order to make sense of participants’ accounts of their lived experiences (Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). In this way, IPA is referred to as a ‘double hermeneutic’, where the researcher makes sense of the participant making sense of their experience (Smith & Osborne, 2008, p. 53). In order to facilitate interpretation of participants’ experiences, IPA researchers are encouraged to engage in both empathic and
questioning hermeneutics; which means simultaneously attempting to understand what the experience is like from the participant’s perspective, while also asking critical questions to reveal deeper meaning in individual participants’ responses (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). An assumption inherent to the hermeneutic foundations of IPA is that there is a chain of connection between one’s verbal expression and their thoughts and emotions (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Under this assumption IPA researchers are able to interpret underlying cognitions from a participant’s account of a given experience. IPA shares this emphasis on cognitions with the social-cognitive and cognitive psychological frameworks (Smith & Osborn, 2008), making it an appropriate framework to study psychological constructs such as body image and identity.

The third major theoretical component of IPA, idiography, describes the frameworks’ focus on the individual and on detailed examination of individual cases (Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). This idiographic approach stands in contrast to the nomothetic, group focus common in psychological research (Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). The idiographic nature of IPA research is evidenced by researcher’s use of small sample sizes, and the tendency for IPA researchers to focus on theoretical rather than empirical generalizability (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Together, these theoretical underpinnings served as a guide throughout the research project. The procedures described in ensuing sections were selected on the basis of their compatibility with the principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography.

3.1 Participants

Female basketball players were chosen because elite-level performance in basketball requires athletes to have bigger and stronger than what is considered ‘ideal’ by today’s rigid standards for female beauty (Tiggemann, 2011). Further, it has been suggested that basketball is
perceived as a ‘masculine’ sport (Parsons & Betz, 2001), which may increase the complexity of female basketball player’s identity-related experiences. Because of this tension, female basketball players are in a position to provide unique insight into the experiences of women athletes with historically incompatible identities.

There is considerable variation in the body sizes of players in different positions in basketball. Guards are typically smaller and are required to be faster, forwards are typically taller and need to be stronger to play under the basket. Despite this variation in body size, no restrictions were placed on the sample with respect to position or body size. While homogeneity is desired for samples in IPA studies, comparing differences between individual cases is of great interest (Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith et al., 2009); it was anticipated that the variation in experience of players who play different positions would add depth to findings.

There are no strict guidelines for sample size in IPA research, but it is recommended that researchers sacrifice breadth of sample for depth of analysis (Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Further, it has been suggested that a small sample size is ideal for students, to ensure individual details are not lost in wake of overwhelming amounts of data (Smith & Osborn, 2008). For these reasons, purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012) was used to generate a sample of six varsity female basketball players recruited from a major western Canadian university.

3.2 Procedures

Prior to participant recruitment, ethical approval was obtained from the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Ethics Board. After contacting the team’s coach to set a date, a brief recruitment presentation was made to participants in early March 2014, at the end of the regular season and just before the start of playoffs. This presentation lasted about five minutes and involved a short introduction to the purpose and structure of the study, and also a description
of what participation in the study would entail. Potential participants were given an information letter (see Appendix A) containing contact information as well as detailed information about the project. In addition, participant recruitment posters (see Appendix B) were put up in the women’s locker room and the varsity gym on campus at the University of British Columbia.

While two interviews were scheduled and completed within two weeks of this initial presentation, recruitment efforts were hindered as a result of the team’s busy playoff preparation schedule. Due to low participant involvement after the first presentation, an application was made to the ethics board for permission to give a second presentation to the team. After approval was obtained, another presentation about the research project (following the same format as the first presentation) was made to potential participants, this time offering a $20 honorarium in return for participation (honorariums were also given to the two participants who had already completed interviews). This second presentation took place approximately three weeks after the initial one, and one week after the team’s season officially ended. Four more interested participants contacted the researcher following this presentation. Interviews were scheduled in the coming weeks, and were complete by the end of April 2014.

Prior to the start of interviews, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. After a review of the study’s purpose and expectations for what the interview would entail, participants were asked to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix C). Following the obtainment of informed consent, participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D).

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data for this project because they provided enough structure to ensure research questions were adequately addressed, and also adequate flexibility to explore unique details of participants’ body and identity-related
experiences. Participants were given a choice of a number of interview locations on campus. Five interviews were conducted in a coffee shop on the university campus, and one interview was conducted in an empty classroom space on campus.

Interviews lasted an average of 58 minutes, and were guided by the semi-structured interview schedule. The interview schedule (see appendix E) included open-ended questions to encourage participants to reflect on the personal meaning of their experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Major themes addressed in the interview schedule were: youth sport involvement, experiences in competitive basketball, team culture, body-related ideals, body image, and femininity. While some of the questions in the interview schedule were grounded in body image and identity theory (e.g. Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Cash, 2011; Spears, 2011), they served as a starting point for interview discussions, and participants were encouraged to elaborate further on areas that had personal significance for them (Bryman, 2012). Consistent with IPA guidelines, the interview schedule was used as a guide that only loosely structured the interviews, and care was taken to ensure the interview schedule did not restrict the natural flow of conversation and the participants’ stories (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim in preparation for data analysis, and participants were given pseudonyms as a part of maintaining anonymity.

3.3 Demographics

Participants ranged in age from 19 to 22 with the average age of participants being 19.7. Participants ranged in height from five-foot-six to six-foot-one, with an average height of five-foot-ten. Participants’ self-reported average weight was 169 pounds, and ranged from 132 to 220 pounds.
On average, participants had started playing basketball at the age of eight. All participants mentioned having played numerous other sports growing up, but had started to focus solely on basketball at an average age of 14. Three of the six participants identified themselves and guards, and three as center or forward players. Interviews were conducted in late spring of 2014 directly following the end of the 2013-2014 season. One participant had completed her first year of eligibility, two had completed their second, and one had completed her fourth. The sixth participant had just red-shirted her first season due to injury. In university sport players can ‘red shirt’ a season to avoid losing a year of eligible play. As red shirts, athletes are permitted to practice but not play with the team, and usually do not travel with the team to away games.

3.4 Data Analysis

In the most basic sense, data analysis moved from descriptive to interpretative (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Coding followed the guidelines provided by Smith and colleagues (2009). Data analysis began with an initial reading of a single transcript, which allowed the researcher to become familiar with the participant’s responses and story. Analysis continued with three more readings of the same initial transcript, each time adding more in-depth notes on the left hand margin. These notes included: short summaries of participants’ excerpts, key words or points, connections to different parts of the participant’s story, interesting language, and any other points of interest. Some interpretation was used in this phase of analysis, for example: one participant was unable to describe what ‘feminine behaviour’ was, but discussed in other responses engaging in displays of feminine behaviour. This was interpreted as the participant having an implicit understanding of femininity and cultural norms for feminine behaviour.

When this process was complete, another pass of the transcript was completed, this time using the right-hand margin to document emerging themes. These themes came from notes taken
previously, and were supported by the participant’s actual responses. These themes represent another level of interpretation, and involved contrasting and condensing notes, as well as connecting them to psychological constructs. Coding was done on hard copies of transcripts. This was done out of comfort, and in accordance with the suggestion of Saldaña (2012), who suggested that researchers becoming familiar with qualitative data analysis might benefit from the familiarity of working with paper and pencil over on-screen style analysis.

When this process was complete, the themes generated were listed in a word document in chronological order as they appeared in the transcript. Each theme was listed with a page number and line number that linked it to the participant’s account from which it originated, for example: 4.15 for page 4 line 15. Next, themes were grouped into categories based on similarity and cohesiveness of content. A small amount of themes were removed that did not fit into any of the categories and were less central to the participant’s story than other themes generated through analysis. When all themes were clustered together, higher-order themes were created to represent all sub-themes in that category. This list of themes and supporting excerpts was the end of the initial phase of analysis for this transcript.

The same process was repeated for the five remaining transcripts. Care was taken to code each transcript individually, ensuring that the voice of each participant was considered individually. Despite this effort, it is hardly conceivable that previous transcripts and interviews did not influence the coding of subsequent transcripts in any way. To remedy this, and ensure all transcripts were given similar treatment, newly emerging themes were explored in any transcripts that had been coded prior to their discovery.

The next step in analysis was to compare and contrast themes across transcripts in order to begin to explore commonalities or discrepancies of interest across participants’ experiences.
To do this analysis of themes across cases, Nvivo for Mac (version 10.0.4) was used. Passages representing participants’ experiences of various themes were coded using the coding software. Not all themes included passages from every participant. In cases where the theme was of particular interest, or where it seemed highly important to the participant’s experience of their body or identity, a theme would be included with as little as one passage representing it. This is consistent with Smith and colleagues (2009) recommendations for data analysis in IPA.

This process was not completely seamless. Because each transcript was coded independently, the higher-order themes were sometimes different across transcripts. Further, some lower-order themes represented under a higher order theme in one transcript, were classified under a different higher-order theme in a subsequent one. For example, the lower-order theme “naturally bigger” was classified under the higher-order theme “my body versus my teammate’s bodies” for one participant, whereas the same lower-order theme was classified under the higher-order theme “my natural body” for another participant. This particular participant made numerous references to the natural abilities and limitations of their body, and thus a higher-order theme around this topic was warranted. When this occurred care was taken to respect the individual’s unique voice, while also combining lower-order themes in a way that made sense and allowed the data to be organized and interpreted across participants. To do this, consideration was given to the passage attached to each lower-order theme, and was ultimately placed under the higher-order theme that seemed to represent it best. In the example above, the participants experience related to the lower-order theme “naturally bigger” was coded under the higher-order theme “my natural body”. This ultimately allowed for a more complete discussion and reflection on the theme of the natural body.
This process of combining themes across participants in order to come up with a cohesive, complete set of themes to represent their experiences was challenging and not unidirectional. The original list of higher and lower-order themes to be included in the final write-up changed considerably as the writing process commenced. Often writing about a given theme resulted in reorganizing lower order themes, which lead to further exploration of the data, and ultimately to reworking of the higher-order themes. This reworking continued throughout the writing of the results and discussion sections, until finally a set of cohesive and representative themes was generated.

The final list of higher-order themes includes: athletic identity and the self, negotiating femininity in a non-feminine sport, what my body should (and shouldn’t) be, and living with a female athlete body. The theme ‘athletic identity and the self’ explores the extent to which being an athlete is central to participants’ overall sense of self, and includes several lower-order themes, including: youth sport involvement, family support, social athletic identity, importance of school, and long-term basketball goals. The theme ‘negotiating femininity in a non-feminine sport’ explores participants understanding of femininity given their participation in a competitive sport, and includes lower order themes: hegemonic femininity, basketball and femininity don’t mix, redefining femininity, doing femininity, and how ‘he’ makes me feel. The theme ‘what my body should (and shouldn’t) be’ reflects the multiple sources of pressure on participants’ bodies, and includes the lower-order themes: the media as a source of body-ideals, muscularity, and performance pressures on the body. Finally, the theme ‘living with a female athlete body’ explores participants’ day-to-day experiences with their athlete bodies. This theme is supported by the lower-order themes: the female athlete paradox, reverse female athlete paradox, and satisfaction paired with a desire for change, and diet. These themes were generated through a
process that required researcher interpretation of participants’ experiences. To provide context and clarity to this interpretative process, potential ways the researcher may have influenced the process and product of this research will be considered in the next section.

3.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves maintaining awareness of the implications of personal values, biases, and decisions on the process and product of research (Bryman, 2012). Reflexivity is critical in IPA research because of the central role of researcher interpretation in data collection and analysis. Thus, it is recommended that IPA researchers “present appropriate reflections on their role in the dynamic process of analysis where this might be argued to have a significant impact on the final narrative account” (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 92). In accordance with this, rather than trying to set aside personal preconceptions that may impact the research process, the researcher should attempt to reflect on their thoughts, values, and beliefs about the subject matter throughout the entire research process (Smith et al., 2009).

As a starting point for this reflexive process, I acknowledge that my position as a graduate student in sport and exercise psychology led me toward this topic. The combination of course work and research experience I have had throughout the duration of my program has provided me with knowledge on the subject of body image and female athletes. This knowledge has influenced my selection of this topic, the theoretical underpinnings of this research, the research questions, and the methods to be used for this project.

On a more personal level, I grew up playing basketball and my involvement in the sport from a young age definitely played a part in my decision to conduct this research with female basketball players. Also central to my biases on this topic is my sexuality. Although I didn’t ‘come out’ as a lesbian until after I stopped playing competitive basketball, I remember feeling
tensions between the presentation of my body in basketball and social settings. Basketball was a comfortable world for me as a teenager, a place where it was ‘normal’ to wear clothes that were less feminine and to be competitive. Basketball was a place where interaction with and approval from male peers was less central to my sense of self. While the world of basketball was a comfortable one for me, it was not the only one I existed in. I remember as a teenager feeling social pressure to present myself in a more feminine way, and feeling personally conflicted about this presentation. As I got older and more comfortable with my identity as a lesbian woman, this conflict became less prominent. Throughout my early twenties I began to feel more comfortable with my social presentation as a queer woman regardless of the setting. Despite feeling comfortable with myself now, these experiences mean the topic of this research is one of personal significance for me.

An important part of the reflexive process is consideration of how personal biases and beliefs may have had an impact on the chosen approach to data collection and analysis, as well as the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of that approach (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). Because of my sexuality and concerns over fitting in, I grew up feeling ‘different’ from other girls; experiences of feeling different left me critical of positivist research paradigms that inherently lump people together rather than emphasize the value of individuality. This skepticism played a part in my decision to pursue a research project with more interpretative epistemological underpinnings.

To ensure ongoing consideration of my personal biases and any thoughts and feelings that emerged as part of the research process, I kept a reflexivity journal and made regular entries at different times throughout the research process. I often made entries after interviews with participants to reflect on how it went and what interaction was like with that participant. I also
made entries throughout data analysis as I considered my interpretation of participants’ accounts and any personal feelings about their responses. The following is an example of a journal entry made just after an interview:

In the interview today she mentioned that she grew up in the town where my wife played five years of University basketball. I had been struggling with the decision of whether or not to reveal the fact that I was a lesbian to participants, for fear it might make them less comfortable in the interviews. I had decided that I wouldn’t bring it up unless I was asked. But, when she brought up that she was a fan of Women’s Basketball at the university that my wife attended, it seemed like a great opportunity to develop rapport a bit at the start of the interview. I said my wife had played there and mentioned her name, it turns out that the participant was a fan of my wife growing up and had always cheered for her. Ultimately this situation resulted in no awkwardness, and I felt as though the participant opened up more after she knew that I was somewhat of an “insider” in the basketball community.

Journal entries like this one were helpful, as they allowed me to processes thoughts and feelings about the research throughout the project. It was also beneficial to have written record of these accounts, so that I could refer to them throughout the analysis and writing phases of the research. As I wrote the results section and selected themes to include in the final write up, I looked back on the reflexivity journal to determine whether the themes I chose to include had personal significance. In cases where I had reflected on a theme or topic in my reflexivity
journal, I considered carefully whether I had chosen to include it in the final write up because it was meaningful to me, or whether it was actually central to the participant’s narrative. In many cases themes were significant for participants and for me; parts of interviews that resonated meaning for me also had personal meaning for participants. The mutual relevance of these themes is interesting given the difference in age and experience between participants and myself.

For example, I made a journal entry when watching women’s tennis just prior to starting interviews for this project. I found myself reflecting on Serena Williams’ muscularity. While I remembered evaluating her body negatively when she became famous over ten years ago, I found myself viewing her muscularity in a positive way. Because this was relevant to my research topic I decided to make an entry in my reflexivity journal about how my feelings about her muscularity had changed. I considered whether this change was a personal one for me, or was actually indicative in a change in cultural ideals about female athlete muscularity. Weeks later a participant made reference to Serena Williams as an example of a female athlete with excessive muscularity. When this interview was complete I was able to return to my journal entry and consider this further. This participant’s identification of Serena Williams as excessively muscular reinforces my original evaluation of my change in opinion as indicative of personal rather than cultural-level change.

Ultimately, the combination of my experiences and personal thoughts and feelings about femininity, the body, and female participation in sport did have an impact on this research project. My experiences have also left me critical of sport, media, and other powerful institutions that perpetuate hegemonic femininity and masculinity. This critical standpoint explains why I was initially drawn to this area of research, with hopes of understanding further how female athletes’ experiences with their athleticism and femininity may have an impact on their body
image and experiences in sport. The culmination of my personal experiences also left me with a tendency to feel empathetic to participants who discussed conflicts between their athletic and feminine selves, and critical of those who expressed valuing idealized forms of femininity. The reflexivity journal I kept allowed me to understand the influence of my personal position on the structure, analysis, and write-up of this project.

3.6 Credibility

Rather than attempting to establish objective accounts of events, IPA is concerned with flexible and detailed exploration of subjective experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). As such, tests of validity aimed at establishing a singular truth are inappropriate in the context of this research (Smith et al., 2009). A more relevant way to evaluate the quality of IPA research is to undergo credibility checks, such as the four broad strategies outlined by Yardley (2000): sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance.

Sensitivity to context involves the researcher maintaining constant awareness of situational factors impacting the entire research process. Given the nature of the research topic, sensitivity to context was of particular importance here. Despite progress and expanding opportunities for women in sport, hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity continue to prevail in sport culture (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995; Hall, 1996; Messner, 1995). Sensitivity to participants’ experiences with these hegemonic norms, and the way they may have impacted the construction of their identities and body image, was critical for this project. Participants didn’t express conscious awareness of the ways in which their ideals about femininity and women in sport have been socially determined by hegemonic norms, however, maintaining awareness of
pervasive hegemonic norms for femininity and the female body was critical to the interpretative process of this research.

The second broad strategy for ensuring credibility in IPA research, commitment and rigour, involves being attentive in order to make the most of interviews and interpretation of data, and being thorough every step of the research process. Tracy (2010) outlines rich rigour, as an important criterion for establishing excellence in qualitative research. Studies with rich rigour are those that are grounded in sufficient and appropriate theoretical frameworks, include sufficient data from an appropriate sample, and adhere to appropriate data analysis processes. Rigour was demonstrated in the initial phases of this research process through careful selection of an appropriate sample to address research questions grounded in well-supported theoretical frameworks. Rigour was demonstrated throughout the remainder of the research process through careful adherence to recommended steps for IPA data collection, analysis and writing up of results.

Transparency and coherence refers to the importance of clearly describing each stage of the research process so that the reader can understand how the final write up, which should flow logically and be supported by participants’ accounts of their experiences, came together. To ensure transparency, detailed notes were kept throughout data analysis. These notes involved step-by-step notation of the process of analysis and dated documentation of decisions made throughout. These notes allowed for a thorough write-up of the analysis phase of the project, which should allow the reader to follow steps taken in a clear and comprehensive way.

The final strategy for establishing credibility in IPA research, impact and importance, states that no matter how well research is conducted, the true test of its validity lies in whether it tells the reader something new and important. This research is novel; this is the first application
of the BII framework (Benet-Martínez & Heritatos, 2005) to identity integration among athletes. Further, this research extends this inquiry to include an exploration of the impact of identity integration on social body dissatisfaction among female athletes. The findings discussed in the following section demonstrate that this research represents an important addition to existing literature on body image and identity among elite-level female athletes.
Chapter 4: Findings

In this section, I describe the four underlying themes encompassing participants’ experiences with their athletic bodies, and the extent to which these experiences relate to their understanding of their athletic, student, and feminine identities. First, I explore participants’ athletic identities and the centrality their participation in sport to their overall sense of self. Second, I examine participants’ understanding of femininity and what it means to them to be both athletic and feminine. Third, I discuss the influence of the media and the team’s coach on participants understanding of body ideals. Finally, I examine participants’ lived experiences with their athletic bodies, and the extent to which these experiences are dependent on social context.

4.1 Athletic Identity and the Self

The centrality of basketball to the participant’s overall sense of self was a recurring theme emerging from the women’s stories. Participants’ athletic identities (Brewer et al., 1993) were revealed through discussions of youth sport involvement, family support, dealing with injuries, social-athletic identity, the importance of school, and long-term basketball goals. To articulate the narrative nature of the women’s experiences, a theme-within-case approach (Smith et al., 2009) will be utilized in this section. This approach involves attending to each participant’s story individually. This will allow the reader to connect with each unique story and will provide the reader with an introduction to each participant, adding richness and understanding to the discussion of the remaining themes.

4.1.1 Breanne

Breanne’s athletic identity (AI; Brewer et al., 1993) began developing when she started playing basketball at the age of eleven. While attending a kid’s basketball camp, she was
approached by a coach who told her she showed potential to play at an elite-level. She had been playing competitive basketball ever since.

Breanne was dealing with an injury that had sidelined her for the entire season. She discussed how taking time away from basketball made her aware of how important it was to her:

I love it. I missed it because of my injury and stuff, I really like, now I notice how much I loved it, and how much it’s a part of me now that I’m like, I haven’t played for a very long time. Like I feel like something’s missing.

Breanne’s conscious awareness of basketball as an important part of her overall sense of self suggests that she has a strong AI; being an athlete is a major part of who she is. By identifying that without basketball something was missing, Breanne suggested that not being able to actively live out her AI left her with a void in her overall sense of self. This suggests that in addition to being strong, Breanne’s AI is fairly exclusive. When asked whether she had pursued other activities to fill the void left by not being able to play basketball, Breanne replied, “I started just kind of sitting around. I noticed that my whole like… I was still thinking about basketball, and just wishing I was playing.” The fact that Breanne did not pursue other avenues of self-fulfillment is consistent with previous research that has suggested athletes with strong and exclusive athletic identities may lack other avenues of self-fulfillment due to singular focus on self-definition as athletes (Brewer et al., 1993).

Previous research has shown that transition out of sport due to injury can be problematic for people with strong and exclusive AI’s (Brewer et al., 1993). Athletes with this type of AI are susceptible to experiences of disordered eating and burnout (Busanich et al., 2013; Martin &
Horn, 2012), as well as anxiety, depression, and other intrapersonal difficulties (Brewer et al., 1993). Although Breanne did not discuss experiences of clinical levels of disordered eating, she indicated that struggle with diet was a large part of her experience being away from sport over the past season: “The way my head processed it was like, I can’t play basketball so I just started eating more.” Breanne did not demonstrate any of the other maladaptive outcomes associated with being forced to take time away from sport due to her injury. A potential explanation for why Breanne appeared to be handling her time away from sport fairly well is that she still had quite a few years of eligibility left to play university basketball. Knowing that she had a long university basketball career ahead of her means that the injury she was dealing with was not a long-term threat to her AI. Breanne’s vision of her future in basketball was demonstrated through her discussion of her desire to pursue a competitive future in basketball:

I was hoping that if all goes well I would play professional for a couple of years, and kind of get that experience. Maybe go to Europe. Um, and hopefully like, the big dream I guess would be to represent [Country] or Canada in the Olympics kind of thing, or like play for the National team somewhere. So um, that’s a big thing for me that I really want to accomplish.

Breanne envisioned herself competing in basketball beyond her university career. Her vision of a future in basketball meant that her time away from basketball due to injury was temporary and does not present a long-term threat to her AI.

Breanne also discussed the social aspect of her AI:
I get a sense of pride when I’m representing the women’s team and stuff like that. Even walking around campus and I have like my fleece on with the logo and stuff like that, or like my backpack and stuff like that, like I’m proud to be part of the team. I’m proud to be something like greater than just like a varsity team. It’s kind of like I’m representing my family in a sense. So I think it’s like really cool being a part of something really big, and it’s kind of like though, people will walk around and they’ll look and be like, “wow you’re part of the basketball team?” Kind of stuff, and then start asking questions and stuff. It’s really cool.

Breanne’s suggestion that being recognized as an athlete was the best part of being a varsity basketball player demonstrates the strong social component of her AI. A major component of her identification as an athlete revolved around presenting and being recognized as an athlete when interacting with others. Breanne’s strong social AI reflects the strength of her AI overall; an individual with a strong AI would likely also express stronger individual and social-level components to their AI. Concerns over social athletic representations may have interesting implications for Breanne’s body-related experiences, a theme which will be further explored in ensuing sections.

**4.1.2 Jenn**

Jenn started playing basketball at age nine. She was involved in a number of sports growing up, but began to focus exclusively on basketball at fourteen years of age. Having played the sport competitively for a number of years, Jenn described basketball as an important part of who she is:
I think it’s a big part of who I am, but I also think it’s like contributed to my personality, because I’ve learned so much from playing basketball. But not just basketball, like I’ve learned things from sports. Like I’ve learned how to work with other people, and how to work out conflicts.

The strength of Jenn’s AI is reflected by her conscious awareness of basketball as a big part of who she is. Like Breanne, being an athlete was a central component of Jenn’s perception of her overall self. Her description of basketball as a contributor to her personality suggests that she perceived her AI, or personality characteristics attributable to her AI, as congruent with her overall sense of self. This identity congruence increases the likelihood that Jenn would perceive her AI as salient in both sport and non-sport situations. The more salient an identity is, the more likely it is to be at the forefront in a given situation (Oakes, 1987); for Jenn this means that her athletic self is likely present in many of her daily experiences.

Jenn revealed other interesting features of her AI when she was asked what it meant to her to be a varsity athlete:

I’m proud of it, because it means that I was good enough to get recruited by a school that is one of the best programs in the country, school-wise and athletic-wise. Um, so that’s quite an honour and I’m very proud of that, like every day. And, almost everybody who knows me knows that that’s part of who I am.

Jenn’s experience of pride associated with being a part of a prestigious academic and athletic program is of interest here. Pride is a self-conscious emotion experienced when an individual
engages in or demonstrates valued behaviours and characteristics (Tangney, 1999; Tangney et al., 2007). Jenn’s reference to being proud of being good enough to be a varsity athlete suggests that her participation in basketball is a source of authentic pride, a positive self-conscious emotion experienced when one feels a genuine sense of accomplishment (Tangney, 1999; Tangney et al., 2007).

Jenn’s discussion of the sense of pride she feels associated with being a varsity basketball player led her to discuss the social aspect of her AI. This suggests that not only does she feel a personal sense of accomplishment associated with being a varsity athlete, but that she values others’ recognition of this prestigious status:

I mean like I said, everybody I know knows me as a basketball player. Um, so sometimes I actually kind of wonder like what people would think of me if I didn’t play basketball. Because I see, I feel like people see me like, “oh there’s that girl on the basketball team,” and that’s like the only thing they think about me.

Interestingly, Jenn described her social AI as the only thing others know about her. This suggests not only does Jenn have a strong social component to her AI, but also that her social identity revolves exclusively around being an athlete. While previous research has demonstrated that exclusive AI is associated with maladaptive outcomes, the extent to which exclusive social AI is adaptive or maladaptive has not been explored. Jenn did not discuss any negative experiences associated with her exclusive social AI.
The satisfaction Jenn obtained from being recognized as a varsity athlete, and the congruency between her AI and her overall sense of self, left her with no doubt about her desire to continue playing basketball in the future:

I would like to play professionally, um, if that’s possible. I don’t, I don’t know. Um, and I, I mean my biggest goal is to play for Canada one day, but, you’ve gotta be pretty good to get there, so.

With three years of eligibility remaining, and plans to pursue a career in professional basketball, Jenn had a number of years before she will need to actively pursue other sources of self-fulfillment. Other implications of Jenn’s strong and exclusive identity, such as the relationship between her AI and her body-related experiences, will be discussed in later sections.

4.1.3 Sarah

Sarah’s involvement in basketball began at age five. Because of this early involvement, Sarah emphasized the support of her parents and family as an important part of her experiences in basketball:

Ya, like my whole family, like we’re a basketball family. Like my brother plays serious, my younger brother plays serious, both my parents played in high school. My dad was gonna go to college to play. So they’ve always been really supportive.

Brewer and colleagues (1993) recognize that the strength of one’s AI may be influenced by social factors such as family support and involvement. For Sarah, support from her parents and
siblings, as well as their involvement in basketball set the foundation for the development of her AI.

When asked how important basketball is to her, Sarah replied:

I think it’s pretty important, because like… we’ll be asked questions sometimes for our athlete profile, and they’ll be like, is there anything other… like something that, a skill that you have that no one knows? And you’re thinking, (laughs) I don’t know because all I’ve ever done is basketball. Like that’s all you’ve done all your life. So like, what other like, what other little things or characteristic do I have? That is, cause that’s your, that’s all you know, right?

Sarah’s suggestion that basketball is important to who she is demonstrates that it is a major component of how she defined her overall self. Her difficulty identifying other important parts of herself, or other things that she is good at, demonstrated that she has an exclusive AI. That is, she defined herself as an athlete and had few or no other self-defining features (Brewer et al., 1993).

Like other participants with strong and exclusive AI’s, Sarah described positive feelings associated with the social component of her AI:

I like representing the school, and kind of being like, put to a different level. Like when I, it’s cool when I go to my classes, like especially cause I’m not with a lot of the varsity athletes for class, it’s more sciences and there’s just… not as common in my classes. So, when people ask me about it and they’re super intrigued, like I find that really exciting. I get to update everyone.
Sarah’s reference to being put on a different level than non-athlete classmates demonstrates enjoyment she got from the status of being a varsity basketball player. Of interest in later sections will be whether this emphasis on status and social recognition associated with social AI is associated with increased pressure on the body as a physical indicator of athleticism.

4.1.4 Kate

Kate started playing basketball at the age of eight, and was involved in a number of other competitive sports growing up. Kate’s experiences in these sports mean she likely had a fairly diverse AI growing up; however, since choosing to pursue basketball over other sports at the age of sixteen, her AI has become increasingly centered on basketball. When describing how she came to the decision to pursue basketball over other sports, Kate said, “I was thinking, which sport could I live without? So I was like… I couldn’t live without basketball”. The idea that she could not live without basketball demonstrates how central it is to her overall sense of self. This is indicative of a strong AI. When asked why she thought she could not live without basketball, Kate replied:

I guess it was just one of those things that I’ve played it for so long that it’s like, I love the sport so much that I… it’s just like, going like a week or two without playing, like I get antsy and I want to go out and touch a ball again.

Her experience of ‘getting antsy’ when away from basketball is again consistent with Brewer and colleagues (1993) notion that inability to exercise AI may cause emotional stress for individuals with strong AI. While this is particularly problematic for athletes forced away from sport for
extended periods of time due to injury, Kate’s experience of feeling ‘antsy’ reflects a less severe response to her short time away from sport.

Despite Kate’s apparently strong AI, when asked about her intentions to play basketball in the future, Kate responded:

I probably won’t play anymore. I feel… at my skill level, like university is kind of like my peak I guess. But I still, have, I have coached basketball already and so I like probably will continue to coach kids camps, and probably end up coaching some kind of team. Whether it be my kids in the future, or going to coach a school team.

Kate’s reference to the upper limit of her abilities as basketball player is of interest here. Low perceptions of ability are associated with low evaluations of self-worth for athletes with strong AI (Brewer et al., 1993). Thus, Kate’s perception of her abilities as somewhat limited, coupled with a strong identity as a basketball player, may be related to negative self-evaluations. Kate did not directly mention negative self-evaluations related to her abilities as a basketball player, however, she later described her body as a major component of her limited ability. Potential connections between her low perception of ability and her body-related experiences will be further explored later sections.

Also of interest are Kate’s plans to continue her involvement in basketball through coaching. Although Kate did not plan to pursue basketball after finishing her remaining three years of eligibility, her plans to stay involved in basketball as a coach may eliminate the need for her to fully consider other avenues of self-definition upon completion of university. Coaching
would allow Kate to continue to live out a part of her AI, which may explain the fact that she did not express any stress related to her lack of plans to play competitive basketball in the future.

4.1.5 Emily

Emily started playing basketball at the age of eight, and was also involved in a number of other competitive sports growing up. She began to focus on basketball over other sports at the age of fourteen. Emily emphasized how her family and social surroundings influenced her involvement in basketball as a child:

I mean also like my family… obviously was pretty into it. My, both my parents played, and my sisters play. So… that and then just being in where I lived, there was definitely a lot of basketball.

This excerpt demonstrates the role of Emily’s social surroundings on the development of her AI. As a member of a family and a community where basketball was an important part of life, Emily was likely exposed to a lot of situations where her AI would have been salient. More salient AI means that her AI was likely central to her experiences growing up, which supports Brewer and colleagues (1993) notion that social support can increase the strength of AI development.

Despite her family and community as a potential source of strong AI development, when asked about how important basketball was to her sense of self, Emily responded:

I think I’ve grown away from it a bit, because I’ve gotten into my schoolwork a lot, and… being in a sort of a city area has helped, and meeting new people has helped. Whereas I think before… basketball sort of defined me quite a bit.
Emily’s discussion of her AI becoming less salient to her overall sense of self is of interest here. Findings of previous research have suggested that elite-level student athletes are likely to prioritize their athletic identity over their student identity (Sturm, Feltz, & Gibson, 2011). While this used to be the case for Emily, her AI was losing importance in favour of an increasingly prominent student identity. Interestingly, she discussed these changes using the words “helped”, as though she appraised them as a positive thing. Despite her positive appraisal of this change, Emily described it as stressful:

I mean… it’s hard because it’s just defined me for so long, so… it’s tough to sort of make that transition. Even though I, I don’t know… I think I’m really, but it’s still tough, so… I’m just trying to figure out… if I’m not a basketball player, who I am, what do I want to do?

Emily’s difficulty identifying who she is without basketball suggests that even though her student identity was becoming more central to her sense of self, her athlete identity was still a major part of who she is. Several participants, including Emily, discussed time constraints as barriers to their involvement in school. It is possible that even though Emily identified strongly with the student role, time constraints were preventing her from fully actualizing her student self, leaving her with a void in terms of defining her overall self.

Despite her AI becoming less central to her overall sense of self, Emily was still considering a career in basketball in the future. When asked whether she was planning to pursue basketball beyond university, she said, “I might. Um, I’m… I think my sister’s going to, so that might open some things up for me”. Emily’s lack of clarity about her future in basketball might
be indicative of ongoing uncertainty with respect to defining who she is. As Emily was currently still committed to playing competitive basketball, she was not yet able to pursue other options. Potential implications of Emily’s uncertainty with her sense of self for her body-related experiences will be explored in later sections.

4.1.6 Kim

Kim started playing basketball at the age of eight. She was involved in other competitive sports growing up, but started to focus solely on basketball at age sixteen. She identified a number of reasons why she chose to pursue basketball over other sports, “My sister is a huge basketball player, so I think like part of me just wanted to play basketball because she played basketball.” Kim’s recognition of her sister’s involvement in basketball as a part of her decision to pursue the sport supports the notion that family involvement can impact the development of AI (Brewer et al., 1993).

Despite recognizing many positive aspects of basketball, Kim expressed some discontent with respect to conflicts between basketball and other important parts of her life:

I like it when I have like a lot of aspects to my life. Like basketball is one thing, school is another thing, and like my family and friends are another thing. And then when one thing starts to take over more than my other things start getting pushed to the side, and then… not that I, I mean I still love it, but that’s normally when it starts to become a problem.

Kim discussed a number of identities that were important to her overall sense of self. Her reference to it being problematic when one of her identities starts to take over the others suggests feelings of conflict between her athletic, student, and family identities. Kim later revealed these
conflicts between basketball and other sources of self-identification as primarily involving time constraints. She made no references to the presence of any inherent conflicts between her involvement in sport, school, and her family and social life. For this reason, these conflicts are viewed as pragmatic rather than actual identity-level conflicts or differences.

Kim reinforced the importance of her student identity to her sense of self when discussing whether she thought she would continue to play basketball in the future:

I probably won’t. I mean like my sister is playing in Europe now, and she loves it. And like, I think that would be so sweet, being able to travel and see the world with basketball. Um, but I want to get my masters, so, it would again be like school… which I’m already pretty old for *(laughs)*… or basketball.

With her decision to pursue school over basketball, Kim demonstrated the importance of her student identity to her overall sense of self. With only one year of eligibility remaining, Kim’s transition out of competitive basketball will occur in the not-too-distant future. Despite the proximity of this impending transition, Kim did not show or discuss any signs of experiencing stress associated with her upcoming transition out of sport. This demonstrates she was comfortable with the idea of her student identity as the central part of her self-definition. Implications of the diversity of Kim’s identity compared to that of other participants on her body-related experiences will be explored in later sections.
4.1.7 Summary

Breanne, Jenn, and Sarah discussed experiences that demonstrate the strength and exclusivity of their AI’s. These participants also revealed the strong social component of their AI’s. Both Breanne and Jenn discussed aspirations of continuing to play competitive basketball after university, while Sarah was unclear about whether or not she would continue to pursue a future in basketball. Previous research suggests strong and exclusive athletic identities are associated with intra and interpersonal difficulties, especially when an athlete is faced with unexpected retirement or injury (Brewer et al., 1993). Breanne was struggling with an ongoing injury that had kept her off the court for an extended period of time, but did not directly discuss experiences of any of the maladaptive outcomes associated with athletes dealing with injury. A potential explanation for this is her appraisal of her injury as a temporary setback rather than a long-term threat to her AI.

Kate also demonstrated a strong and exclusive athletic identity, but discussed having limited ability and therefore no intention of pursuing a future in basketball. Kate’s combination of a strong AI and low perceptions of ability has been associated with low evaluations of self-worth in previous research (Brewer et al., 1993). Kate did not express low evaluations of her self-worth, however, perceptions of limited ability were central to the body-related experiences she discussed later. This connection between these experiences will be explored in more detail in later sections.

Emily described her athletic identity as becoming less important, and her student identity as becoming a more important part of her overall sense of self. Although she appraised this as a positive change, she described the transition from student-athlete to athlete-student as a source of
stress. Emily was unsure about whether or not she would pursue a future in basketball, which may reflect her ongoing struggle to prioritize her student and athlete identities.

Like Emily, Kim emphasized the importance of school to her overall sense of self. Kim discussed her decision not to pursue basketball in order to focus on getting a masters degree. Kim discussed time constraints as a stressor because of her desire to put more time into school, but did not express any actual conflict between their student and athlete identities.

### 4.2 Negotiating Femininity in a non-Feminine Sport

This theme reflects how participant’s perceptions, experiences, and identities were shaped and constrained by pervasive cultural norms surrounding femininity. The ensuing sections will highlight the meanings the women associated with femininity, participants’ awareness of the contradictions between certain aspects of playing basketball and socially sanctioned feminine ideals, the separation of feminine and athletic identities, identification with a new kind of femininity compatible with the participant’s athleticism, and the interactive nature of the “doing of gender” in sport and social contexts (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

#### 4.2.1 Awareness of Hegemonic Femininity

All six participants demonstrated their conformity to social pressures and cultural norms surrounding hegemonic femininity. For example, Emily described femininity as:

Um… I mean I think it’s pretty… coincides probably with the general opinion of what being feminine is. Like, I don’t know like girly, girlier things. Um… soft, delicate (laughs). Things like that. I think of the general… I don’t know the population’s view on what femininity is.
Emily was able to identify characteristics consistent with hegemonic notions of femininity, and acknowledged the pervasive nature of this type of femininity by identifying this as ‘general opinion’. Despite the fact that she was able to provide a description of femininity, the difficulty Emily had articulating her response further illustrates the pervasive nature of hegemonic femininity, which is indicative of internalization of norms for hegemonic femininity.

Kate expressed a similar idea of femininity when she said, “I think of the kind of typical like femininity, like being the, like the weak, the nice, kind of delicate kind of person.” Like Emily, Kate demonstrated the pervasiveness of the feminine ideal when she referred to ‘typical’ femininity. Kate’s reference to weak as a component of femininity is interesting in that it suggests comparison to a stronger, presumably male, ‘other’. This may reflect the construction of women’s sporting bodies as ‘different’ from male bodies; this apparently natural difference is perpetuated in media representations of athletic bodies as a means of ensuring ongoing segregation of men’s and women’s sport (Dworkin & Messner, 2002).

Breanne also demonstrated knowledge of hegemonic femininity:

I guess the, the society the way they see it is like feminine being like dress up and like do your hair a lot and take care of yourself in a sense of like nails and everything… kind of being that, um, I don’t know why but I’m thinking of like flowers for some reason (laughs). Um, I don’t know why, but that was kind of the thing that came to me. Daisies and roses… um, floral dresses, that’s going in my head right now. Um, but ya I guess kind of just um, kind of like not wearing the sweatpants and the hoodies. Uh, kind of avoiding like that kind of clothing, I guess. Going more towards like skirts, dresses, um jeans with like a really dressy top.
Breanne’s recognition of the links between femininity and appearance demonstrates the importance of the body as a physical representation of femininity. Highlighted by the excerpts above, participants showed awareness of hegemonic ideals for feminine behaviour and appearance. The extent to which participants identified with these ideals, as well as how they navigate being both athletic and feminine, will be explored in the next section.

4.2.2 Basketball and Femininity as Separate Parts of the Self

Three participants discussed their participation in basketball as contradictory hegemonic notions of femininity. For example, when asked how femininity worked with being a basketball player, Breanne replied:

Um… well thinking about it now, it doesn’t work very much *(laughs)*. Cause I don’t think any of us wear much floral *(laughs)*. But I think I’m, I can be feminine or like go with my florals *(laughs)*. Um, I definitely wear my dresses and stuff like that. I’m kind of like, I have the, I have my athletic side and I guess I have my feminine side where I’ll kind of do my hair and do my makeup, um and kind of dress up in a sense. I guess.

In her reference to floral clothing, dresses, hair and makeup, Breanne once again demonstrated that her definition of femininity is centered on body and appearance characteristics. Breanne’s reference to her athletic and feminine ‘sides’ demonstrates a certain amount of separation of her athletic and feminine identities.

Kim also discussed basketball as a non-feminine sport and commented on the conflicts between characteristics required in basketball and hegemonic notions of femininity:
Um, so I think basketball is an aggressive sport, not feminine. Um, but I think lots of feminine people can play basketball. Like, I think it’s just, I don’t think basketball and the sport defines your attitude toward things. Like, people play basketball and you look gross and sweaty and man-like, but like then you put on your clothes and you’re a woman.

In this excerpt Kim reiterated the association between body presentation and femininity by suggesting that her femininity is preserved when she leaves the court and puts on her non-basketball clothes. This excerpt also suggests that, like Breanne, Kim experiences a degree of separation between her athletic and feminine identities. She is able to be athletic when she is on the court, and feminine when she is away from the basketball setting.

Jenn also discussed her thoughts about basketball as a non-feminine sport:

It’s just, it’s a physical game and, I think like some people probably see it as like less feminine as other sports, if you can classify sports as feminine and masculine. But like people would think of like dancing, or synchronized swimming, or gymnastics as like more feminine sports.

Interestingly, all three sports Jenn listed as ‘feminine’ were aesthetic-oriented sports, where participants are judged primarily based on body appearance (Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). Her identification of these sports, which are very different from basketball, as feminine illustrates her view that basketball is contradictory to hegemonic notions of femininity. Her emphasis on these appearance-oriented sports as feminine also reiterates the association between femininity and body appearance.
Given Jenn’s view of basketball as a non-feminine sport, she commented further on what it meant for her to be a woman participating in a sport that others perceive as masculine:

I see myself as an athlete and a lot of people don’t really see that as fitting in with being ‘girly’. But at the same time, like, I like to be like, I’m just as girly as the next girl, like I’ll wear dresses, I’ll do my makeup. Like, you know, just cause I’m athletic doesn’t mean that I’m not feminine… It’s just, I think it’s, it’s removed. And I think that’s how most of us see it is, it’s like two different things, and two different worlds, and they don’t really overlap, but they don’t need to.

Jenn demonstrates her experience of her athletic and feminine identities as two separate parts of her overall self. Interestingly, this was expressed by all participants who perceived participation in basketball as contradictory to their feminine identities. In the bicultural identity integration framework (BII; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002), this pattern of identity conflict and separation is indicative of identity conflict.

4.2.3 Defining Athletic Femininity

While the three participants mentioned above discussed separation of their athletic and feminine identities, other participants experienced their multiple identities in a different way. Specifically, these two participants discussed identifying with an athletic femininity that was more consistent with their participation in basketball. For example, when asked how femininity works with basketball, Emily said:

Um… I don’t think that I really care for [hegemonic feminine ideals] too much. Um, I don’t think I’ve ever like wish I was more feminine. I think that like, I think the world’s
changing a bit, so I think that basketball and like being a female athlete, I think that’s an upside. It was always something that I was really proud of in high school, and now still. So, I really embrace that, and think about femininity in that way.

The athletic femininity discussed by Emily is consistent with the idea of the fit, lean, physically active woman that has become increasingly idealized over the last two decades (Meân & Kassing, 2008). This emergence of this athletic femininity coincides with an increase in women’s participation in sport and exercise, and the corresponding increase in media portrayal of athletic female bodies.

Kate also discussed identifying with a type of femininity that was compatible with characteristics of her athletic identity:

I think the kind of typical like femininity, like being the weak, the nice, delicate kind of person… I am completely opposite of that. I feel like basketball has helped me become kind of like the confident, positive person that I am. I don’t think that I’d be as … go for it, hard-working, out-there kind of person if I hadn’t played basketball. I guess those things aren’t femininity specifically, but I think I identify with it being above some like shy, delicate, nice girl that might just like look all pretty like going for some job. I may not look like that day-to-day, but I can get the job done. It’s different… different ideas of what is important in femininity.

Kate identified characteristics associated with her participation in basketball, including being hard working, positive, and confident, that she has integrated into her feminine identity. Interestingly, in defining her idea of femininity, Kate trivializes women who express
characteristics of hegemonic femininity. This phenomena has been termed ‘defensive othering’ (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 425) in previous research, and is one of the ways female athletes navigate tensions between their athletic and feminine identities.

Both Emily and Kate appeared to have combined aspects of their feminine and athletic identities by creating a new definition of femininity, which they perceived to be compatible with their athletic selves. This amalgamation of their feminine and athletic identities is consistent with identity integration as outlined in the BII framework (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002). In this framework, individuals’ identities are considered integrated when they perceive low conflict and low distance between their two identities. The participants appear to have achieved identity integration through their emphasis on an athletic femininity. The extent to which this identity integration is associated with participant’s body image or experiences as student athletes will be explored in the general discussion section.

### 4.2.4 Doing Femininity

Regardless of the integration or separation of their feminine and athletic identities, participants made numerous references to ‘doing femininity’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987); they described engaging in behaviours that reinforced their femininity through social interactions with others. All six participants made reference to making conscious efforts to appear feminine in social situations. Some participants also discussed experiences with ‘doing femininity’ during basketball games.

Kim discussed the performance of femininity in social contexts. She commented:

I mean, ya like I like to dress up when I go out and look nice, and maybe for him, maybe not for him. Like I don’t think it’s specifically for the guy that I like, um because it makes
me feel good too. Um, again I think it just goes back to confidence, like if I feel good then that’s how I’m gonna dress.

As one of the participants who discussed separation of her athletic and feminine identities, Kim’s emphasis on dressing up to boost confidence in the above excerpt suggests that ‘doing femininity’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987) is one way that she reinforced the separation between her athleticism and femininity. This excerpt also demonstrates that wearing feminine clothes is an important part of femininity for Kim. Although she discussed personal satisfaction related to wearing these feminine clothes, her reference to the ‘guy’ demonstrates the importance of social interaction with men to Kim’s construction of her femininity.

Breanne also discussed the separation of her athletic and feminine identities. She described making a conscious effort to ‘dress up’ on some occasions:

Um, sometimes even getting ready for school in the morning it will kind of be like, oh do I want to wear like my hoody and basketball stuff, or do I want to dress up a little bit? And kind of, um, not necessarily feel more girly, but just put more effort into getting ready in the morning.

Although Breanne comments that her efforts to dress up are ‘not necessarily to feel more girly’ it is evident that they are a part of how she separates her athleticism and her femininity. Also of interest in this excerpt is Breanne’s identification of school as a place where she feels compelled to put effort towards presenting in a more feminine way. This suggests that school is one place where Breanne’s femininity is created through social interaction.
Kate, one of the participants who appeared to have integrated her athletic and feminine identities, also made reference to making efforts to appear feminine in social situations:

I don’t really care about maybe like wearing clothes that make me look really feminine, but there are little parts of me that I’m kinda like ya, I’m not doing this for someone else, but I just like doing something to like make me feel good. Like getting a pedicure, or doing my nails… like, I’m playing sports so often that once in a while I like to do that kind of thing.

As one of the participants who discussed identifying with an athletic femininity, Kate’s decision to ‘do femininity’ by getting her nails done is interesting. Painted nails, unlike feminine clothes, would still be visible when wearing basketball attire. This choice of feminine expression may reflect her blended feminine and athletic identities. This excerpt also demonstrates Kate’s awareness of ‘someone else’ as a potential beneficiary of her gendered behaviour. The role of social interaction is clear in Kate’s experience above, as it is difficult to imagine the act of painting one’s nails as a source of good feelings in the absence of social praise or recognition through interaction with others.

As mentioned, some participants also discussed experiences with ‘doing femininity’ in sport situations. This theme was not reflected in the responses of all participants because it was not initially included in the interview schedule. Rather, it came up in conversation in the second to last interview that was completed for this project, and was subsequently included in the topics to be explored in the final participant interview. The participant who originally shared her experiences with ‘doing femininity’ in the context of sport was Sarah. Sarah had also made references to ‘doing femininity’ in non-sport social contexts, and like Kim and Breanne,
emphasized clothes as an important part of this feminine construction. After identifying that it was important for her to appear feminine, Sarah was asked whether she made any efforts to look more feminine when playing basketball, she replied, “A lot of us do our hair and makeup. Not full makeup, but minimal like what I do every day.” When asked why she felt compelled to wear makeup and do her hair for games, Sarah replied:

Well because, because you’re like, the basketball court is like a stage. And, this is for games, like not for practice or anything. Cause it’s like a stage, lot of people are coming to watch. So you do want to do what you like, but like to try to look good. Like it’s hard to look good, because you’re sweating and making the grossest faces (laughs) when you get in there and drive or whatever, but…”

Here, Sarah’s reference to the court as a stage directly demonstrates the performative nature of femininity. She discusses the physicality of basketball as a limitation to her ability to appear feminine during games, and applying makeup and doing her hair as a way to compensate for that and preserve her feminine appearance. This is consistent with other studies exploring the experiences of female athletes who participate in contact or power-based sports (Krane et al., 2001; Krane et al., 2004).

Emily was also asked about whether she made any efforts to appear feminine during games. She replied:

There’s a lot of girls that definitely do their hair. I mean I think maybe it’s just more comfortable, but I think they also want to like… especially home games, they’re not trying
to look too bad. And then some girls will put on makeup before the game. Like if I had makeup on that day or something, I wouldn’t take it off.

Emily was one of the participants who discussed identifying with an athletic femininity. The fact that she does not feel compelled to add to or remove makeup worn during the day when playing basketball may reflect this integration; as integrated parts of her overall self, there is no need for Emily to emphasize either her athleticism or femininity by applying or removing makeup across sport and social contexts. Also of interest in this excerpt is the notion that teammates feel especially compelled to monitor appearance for home games. This suggests that the social construction of gender may be more important in the context of familiar others.

Although this topic was not adequately explored among all participants, Emily’s suggestion that a lot of teammates engage in these gendered behaviours during games demonstrates it is something that other participants would have had personal experiences with. Together, participants experiences of ‘doing gender’ demonstrate that they ‘do femininity’ in social interactions regardless of the status of their athletic and feminine identities. Despite the fact that participants engaged in these gendered behaviours regardless of the integration or separation of their athleticism and femininity, there were some differences in the ways they enacted these gendered performances that may reflect differences in their understanding of their feminine and athletic identities.

4.2.5 How ‘He’ Makes me Feel

Three participants revealed the size of their boyfriends or men they were romantically interested in as an important part of their ability to ‘do femininity’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987). These participants emphasized the importance of their partners’ body size in their ability to feel
feminine. The idea of dating someone smaller or weaker seemed a more serious issue than dating someone who was simply shorter. The three tallest participants in the project expressed this desire for a smaller partner. The other three participants demonstrated awareness of their ‘taller teammates’ struggle to find taller romantic partners, and emphasized this issue as less important for them.

Kate discussed her feelings about dating someone taller:

Like a guy that doesn’t play sports might get kind of intimidated by a girl that’s got bigger legs than him. Or like could push him around. That might be a little intimidating. Whereas I know, like from the female perspective, like I don’t really want to date someone that’s smaller than me in all those aspects. Like I’ve dated, the guy that I dated was my height, so I don’t really care that much about the height version. But if I’m like dating someone that’s more petite than me, like skinnier legs, like skinnier everything. Or like, smaller than me, like lighter. That might, that would probably make me uncomfortable, and I’d feel like I need to be smaller.

This excerpt demonstrates the centrality of the body in Kate’s understanding of femininity. Earlier, Kate demonstrated integration of her athletic and feminine identities into a kind of athletic femininity that is compatible with her participation in sport. Despite the integration of these identities, this excerpt demonstrates that Kate still feels pressure for her body to conform to hegemonic ideals for the female body. This reflects the pervasive nature of social norms for femininity and the female body that emphasize women’s bodies as smaller than men’s bodies; even though Kate consciously rejects some aspects of hegemonic femininity, she still feels pressure to adhere to these idealized notions about the feminine body.

Kim also discussed her feelings about dating someone larger than she is:
I like to feel small… incorporated with him, like… like when I’m hanging out with him I
don’t want to feel huge, buff… and I mean I’m not huge and buff, but like… Ya, I like it
when my boyfriend is taller than me. Um, ya… I have dated somebody that’s smaller than
me… it’s more just like being stronger, they need to be stronger than me because I want to
feel small *(laughs)*.

Kim’s reference to wanting to ‘feel small’ echoes Kate’s discussion of wanting to feel as though
she was smaller than her partner. Kim elaborates by saying that she is actually more concerned
with her partner being stronger than she is. This suggests that idealized female bodies are not
only smaller, but also weaker than men’s bodies.

Breanne also discussed the desire for a boyfriend who is larger than she is:

Ya, definitely tall. Definitely taller than me. Um, I’m not asking for much *(laughs)*, but um
a little bit taller would be nice. And I’m, I feel like I’m more attracted in a sense to
someone that is like bigger. Um, and like not, still like really muscular where you have to
have like the biceps bulging out of a t-shirt kind of thing. But just kind of like active and
like built.

Interestingly, Breanne did not directly discuss a need to have a larger, stronger partner in order to
feel feminine; however, her discussion of being more attracted to men with larger bodies
suggests that she is affected by cultural norms about the female body as smaller and weaker than
men’s bodies.

As mentioned, other participants did not share this concern over the size of their partners.
However, they showed awareness of teammates experiences with this. For example, Sarah
commented:
Like, just listening to like my taller friends (laughs), they’re like, some of them have a thing where they get, they feel uncomfortable wearing heels cause they make them look taller than guys. And I think they’re always trying to like look for taller guys, because they’re tall so they think that they should look for taller guys. Like I don’t have that problem because I’m short, so, I can wear the heels, but… you know, what’s what I feel at least.

Like Sarah, Jenn also showed awareness of her teammates struggle with this, she said, “it’s actually funny, like some of my teammates talk about like being taller than a lot of guys, and like that’s something I never really have to think about. “ The desire to find a taller, larger partner was only expressed by taller participants, but the centrality of this theme to participants’ experience is highlighted by their teammates awareness of the issue. This is indicative of the importance of body size in participants’ ability to ‘do femininity’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987) in social interactions with male partners.

4.2.6 Summary

Collectively, these themes discussed above encapsulate participants’ experiences with hegemonic femininity, playing basketball, and defining their feminine selves. Participants discussed norms for feminine behaviour and appearance, and described participation in basketball as something that stood in opposition to those norms. Some participants seemed to negotiate this by keeping their athletic and feminine selves separate. Others discussed identifying with a ‘new’ femininity that blended some aspects of their athletic selves with valued aspects of femininity. Identification with this new, athletic femininity meant these participants perceived their athletic and feminine selves as fairly integrated. Regardless of whether they saw their athletic and feminine selves as integrated or separate, participants made numerous references to
‘doing femininity’. Participants discussed the need to be smaller and weaker than their boyfriends, as being larger would challenge their ability to perform femininity in interactions with their partner. Gendered performances took place in sport and non-sport settings, and were an integral part of participants’ experiences with their athletic and feminine identities.

### 4.3 What my Body Should (and Shouldn’t) Be

This theme reflects participants’ understanding of female body ideals, and the impact of these ideals on their beliefs about their own female-athlete bodies. This theme will be explored in ensuing sections on the media as a primary source of normative body information, participants’ beliefs about female-athlete muscularity, and the impact of performance-related body feedback on participants’ understanding of their bodies.

#### 4.3.1 The Media as a Source of Body-Ideals

A major determinant of body satisfaction in both the sociocultural and cognitive-behavioural models of body image is the extent to which an individual evaluates their own body in comparison to prevailing societal body ideals (Cash, 2011; Tiggemann, 2011). Accordingly, participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of the ideal female body. The women explained that various media outlets such as magazines, social media, and television influenced their perceptions of cultural norms surrounding body ideals. For example, Sarah commented on where she got her idea about what she would like her body to look like:

> Online, pictures that girls post online. Like I follow a lot of, I on my Instagram I follow a lot of like fitness blogs with like mainly food pictures, like healthy clean eating, that’s what I like. But I see like a lot of them posting pictures with like flat stomachs and abs. So like that’s where I see it.
Similarly, Kim said:

Like, ideal female body… like, I think there’s so many different things. Like I look at Cameron Diaz and I think like you look good. I, sometimes, like and then I look at somebody who’s larger and I’m like you look good. Like Beyonce, wow! She’s incredible.

Both of the celebrity examples of the ideal female body Kim gives here are prominent in popular culture media today. Kim’s identification of Beyonce as a ‘larger’ woman demonstrates the narrow range of what she considers to be an ideal body size for women. The emphasis on thinness in these examples of ideal female bodies is also reflected in Sarah’s idealization of ‘flat’ stomachs. The pictures Sarah referred to are extremely popular on social media, and usually depict lean and toned women’s bodies framed with motivational quotes about the benefit of diet and exercise.

In contrast to the emphasis on leanness in Sarah and Kim’s discussion of female-body ideals, three other women emphasized an athletic female body ideal. For example, Breanne said:

I forgot her name. But I had, there was this one picture that I came across, I think she was like a boxer or someone like that. In a sense where she had like, she was not, she was not like even close to being thin… like Victoria Secret like kind of being like… um, but she like, the thing that um, I saw about her is she had her curves and stuff like that, but like, she had muscle and stuff like that. Um, so I think that was kind of like the ideal um, ideal body I guess. It was more, muscle related and like having those curves but being muscular and lean than being just super skinny.
Similarly, Kate said:

For me personally, ya. Like someone who’s like toned, but still like has like your muscular kind of, like muscular legs, like shoulders aren’t like bony. I guess I don’t like the bony look, it just looks kind of creepy to me.

Jenn also referenced an athletic body ideal:

I can’t think of specific names, but some of the Olympic swimmers you see, and like, they’re strong and they have power, but they’re like, they’re not big. Um, so I, I think that’s the best representation of what people should be.

Jenn’s use of the word ‘should’ is of interest here. The implication that women’s bodies should be something in particular demonstrates her internalization of social norms for the female body. Not only does Jenn have knowledge of normative information about the female body, she uses that normative information to make judgments regarding women’s bodies. This internalization reflects the pervasiveness of hegemonic norms for the female body; Jenn uses these hegemonic norms to make judgments about her own body as well as the bodies of others, with little conscious awareness of the fact that these norms are derived from external sources such as the media.

The lean and toned female body ideal discussed by participants has become increasingly prominent in recent years, and has largely replaced the thin and soft ideal that dominated media in the past (Dworkin & Heywood, 2003; Gruber, 2007). More women are getting involved in
sport and exercise, and in turn, media outlets are more frequently featuring images of women with athletic bodies (Gruber, 2007). Despite perhaps being more consistent with participants’ views of their own body, the emphasis on leanness in this new body ideal is not necessarily less problematic for women’s body image than more traditional female body ideals (Gruber, 2007). An emphasis on leanness as well as a certain amount of muscle definition means that in order to adhere to this athletic ideal, women must not only monitor body weight, but also spend countless hours in the gym developing muscle tone. Engaging in sufficient amounts of cardiovascular exercise and weight training to achieve this ideal requires extensive amounts of time and effort that many women do not have, increasing the likelihood that they resort to dieting and other maladaptive behaviours to achieve this athletic female body ideal. Often framed as empowering or as a form of resistance against the ultra-skinny female body ideal, in actuality this athletic female body ideal represents a new form of control over the female body.

4.3.2 Muscularity

Stories surrounding muscularity were another central component of the women’s discussions of female athlete body ideals. Participants expressed thoughts about what they considered to be an acceptable or ‘natural’ amount of muscularity for women. Women’s bodies that exceeded this natural upper limit were subject to criticism and deemed unattractive. In addition, some participants discussed personal experiences with excessive muscularity, while others emphasized their muscularity as a source of body pride (Sabiston et al., 2010; Castonguay, Brunet, Ferguson, & Sabiston, 2012; McHugh, Coppola, & Sabiston, 2014).

When discussing body ideals for female athletes, Jenn brought up professional tennis player Serena Williams. This led to the following discussion about female athlete muscularity:
I couldn’t really tell you where the line is, I just think like sometimes you see women and it looks like unnatural how strong they are. And maybe it is natural for them, but like, it, it looks like it’s… you’re too jacked and too big. It’s just, not how you’re meant to be. Like we’re not, women aren’t necessarily built like that. Like ya, they’re gonna be strong but like, your muscles aren’t gonna look like men’s muscles.

Sarah also emphasized that too much muscle on a woman made her look unnatural:

Like I, when I see like pictures of girls with a tiny waist and like huge upper and lower body it’s just so unproportional, it doesn’t look real. And then that to me almost is unattractive, when it gets too extreme like that.

Jenn and Sarah’s emphasis on a natural limit to women’s muscularity is indicative of the framing of women and women’s bodies as ‘other’ in sport; female-athlete bodies are expected to remain distinguishable from male-athlete bodies in order to preserve gender segregation and male dominance in sport (Dworkin & Messner, 2002). One way this is reflected is through the different uniforms worn by male and female athletes in sports like tennis, volleyball, and track. Despite the fact that men and women in these sports play the same game by the same rules, female athletes are required to wear more revealing uniforms than male athletes; these uniforms serve little purpose but to emphasize the heterosexual attractiveness of female athletes and to differentiate them from male athletes.

At the same time, two participants discussed thoughts and feelings related to their own levels of muscularity. In reference to how her body had changed as she transitioned to playing at
the university level, Jenn said, “I think in first year I was too big. Like, not like big like chubby or anything, but I think I just had too much muscle on me for what I would like for myself.” Similarly, Kate said:

I already know that I have like pretty big shoulders, so I am very kind of conscious of that like when I’m doing bench press or some kind of shoulder stability or something. I’m often cognizant of like, it’s just making this bigger. It’s more the like from here (motions to shoulders) up that I get very worried about getting too big.

Both Jenn and Kate earlier discussed valuing an athletic ideal for the female body. Despite idealizing a certain amount of muscularity, these excerpts demonstrate their personal struggle with evaluations of their own muscularity as in excess of this ideal. Kate’s concern over the size of her shoulders and neck suggests that muscularity in these areas may present more of a threat to feminine appearance than muscularity in other parts of the body.

In contrast to Jenn and Kate’s concerns over their muscularity, two of the women discussed their muscles as a source of body pride (Castonguay et al., 2012; McHugh et al., 2014). For example, Sarah said, “I like it [her muscularity] because I think I, being strong is like such a… it’s like something to be proud of as well because you’ve worked hard to get to where you are.” Similarly, Emily said, “I think when I go in the weight room I look pretty strong, so that’s good. I think they people are a bit envious of that, so that always feels good.” Interestingly, Sarah experienced her muscularity as a source of authentic body pride, that is, she demonstrated a genuine sense of achievement from the effort expended to develop her muscularity (McHugh et
al., 2014). In contrast, Emily discussed her muscularity as a source of hubristic pride that was centered on others being envious of her muscularity (McHugh et al., 2014).

Sarah and Emily both play the guard position and are considerably smaller than participants who discussed having personal concerns over their muscularity. This suggests that smaller female athletes may be able to push the limits of muscularity further without threatening size restrictions on what is considered a ‘natural’ female body size, whereas taller female athletes who also develop muscles present as threat to the ‘natural’ division between male and female athlete bodies (Dworkin & Messner, 2002).

4.3.3 Pressure on the Performance Body

In addition to the media, participants perceived performance-based body feedback from their coaches as a major source of body-related stress. All participants discussed a personal experience of being asked by their coaches to change something about their body. Although it was always delivered as something that needed to be done to enhance performance, some players struggled with the implications this performance-based feedback had on their appearance. Through discussion of both personal and teammate experiences, participants revealed that their coaches shaped and constrained their body related perceptions and experiences.

When asked if her coaches ever commented on her body, Kim replied, “‘I mean, they’re not awful, but ya sometimes they’ll mention something… like I’m pretty weak, and they’ll be like, ‘You need to get stronger.’ But it’s not a big deal.” Kim’s qualification of being asked by her coaches to get stronger by saying, ‘they’re not awful, but…’ demonstrates a certain amount of tension over receiving this suggestion. However, it did not seem to be a source of significant stress for her, she later reflected that it was ‘not a big deal’ and seemed to accept this feedback as necessary for performance.
Sarah also discussed being told by her coach to get stronger, she said:

Well they mentioned my strength. And like, they always, like, they don’t say directly. And I’ve heard from other teammates like what the coaches have been telling them as well. I think it’s more performance based how they comment on it. Like I know two of my teammates they weren’t as fast or as in shape, so they kind of in an indirect way told them to lose weight, in a way, to help them with that, but it’s clearly for their quickness and stuff. Like for me a lot of it is strength, because I’m naturally thin. Like it always comes up, and like it’s not a problem.

Sarah’s experience, like Kim’s, suggests that she accepted her coach telling her to get stronger. It also demonstrated her awareness of teammates receiving body-related feedback from the team’s coach. Interestingly, although Sarah accepted her coach telling her to get stronger, she expected that her teammates experience with being asked to lose weight would be different:

It’s, like if I were to hear that it would be hard because it’s probably something you already know. Just thinking about like how your performance is and even looking at your body… and then hearing it again, it probably hurts them.

The implicit suggestion is that it is worse to have too much body fat than to be too weak, which reflects the importance of leanness to Sarah’s concept of an ideal female body. Sarah’s beliefs about the importance of leanness may explain why she didn’t seem to struggle with being asked by her coach to get stronger.
Breanne discussed a personal experience with being asked to lose weight by her coach. She commented, “It definitely has been brought up with my coaches. Like they’re kind of like told me, you need to um, lean up in a sense, and stuff like that.” When asked how this made her feel, Breanne said:

Um, I kinda like laugh about it, cause I’m like… I know the way I look and I know the way I need to be. But, I kinda just haven’t gotten to that point where it’s like, again, actions put into words. Where like, I know it’s like, it’s obvious, and obvious I guess would be the word, but like I don’t like using obvious.

Breanne’s response here is consistent with Sarah’s expectations discussed above. Her reference to it being ‘obvious’ suggests she has an awareness of how others see her body, and that what they see does not match up to social ideals for the female body. This pattern is consistent with the notion of body surveillance (McKinley & Hyde, 1996; McKinley, 2011).

Similarly, Emily discussed being asked by their coach to lean out in order to become a quicker, faster player at the guard position. She described her experience with this as unique from her teammates when she said:

Ya… I think that… it’s sort of different for me because like… my coaches were sort of telling me to not do that much high-weight stuff because I sort of lift a lot. So they sort of want me to be a bit like leaner and quicker, and like fast, because I sort of already have the strength piece of it. So… before I think that like, I don’t think I was ever really reluctant to go in the weight room at all… like, I don’t know… maybe it’s because of my dad, I don’t
know, he used to be like a power-lifter, so like I’ve lifted most of my life and like, that’s sort of how I got pretty strong. And then… so now it’s sort of the other way around. It’s sort of weird.

Emily’s reference to her dad being a power-lifter and that she had been lifting weights most of her life suggests that weight lifting was an important component of how she understood her athletic body. Being told not to lift weights appeared to be a source of stress because it challenged that understanding. When asked how she felt about receiving this feedback, Emily said:

I mean… it sort of feels like, it feels a bit tough because I don’t really need to hear that, but more like, I don’t really know how to go about doing that, because this has always sort of been my body, you know? I don’t feel like I’m like doing anything that’s like… I don’t think I eat like bad or anything like that. So I think that, it’s like I don’t really know how to do that besides like… I don’t really know (laughs). They told me to do it, I gotta figure it out I guess!

This excerpt demonstrates that Emily believes she has the ability to change her body in order to comply with her coach’s demands. This is indicative of one of the components of objectified body consciousness (OBC; McKinley & Hyde, 1996), which specifies that women experiencing OBC believe they are in control of their body shape, size, and appearance.

The experience of receiving body-related feedback from their coach was common across all participants. This commonality highlights the centrality of this body-related feedback on
participants understanding of their bodies and what their bodies should be. Although the feedback was framed as performance-oriented, some participants were unable to separate performance from appearance, and struggled with the aesthetic implications of weight-related feedback.

4.3.4 Summary

Participants discussed multiple sources of pressure on their bodies, including the media as a source of body ideals, ‘natural’ limitations on muscularity, and receiving body-related feedback from their coach. Participants with larger bodies discussed personal struggles with muscularity not matched by smaller participants. This may be because the combination of body size and muscularity challenges the ‘natural’ separation of male and female athlete bodies, which is enforced to preserve the dominance of hegemonic masculinity in sport (Dworkin & Messner, 2002). Despite being performance-oriented, body-related feedback from their coach was problematic for participants who were unable to ignore the appearance implications of the feedback. This was particularly true of participants who were asked to lose weight. Perhaps due to a combination of the pressures listed above, participants expressed thoughts and feelings consistent with objectified body consciousness (OBC; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). That is, they showed internalization of cultural ideals for the female body, discussed evaluating their bodies and the bodies of others against these ideals, and expressed the belief that they were in control of their body and its appearance (McKinley & Hyde, 1996).

4.4 Living in a Female Athlete Body

This theme explores how participants experienced their female-athlete bodies. This theme will be explored in sections on the effect of different sport and non-sport contexts on
participants’ body evaluations, participation in as a source of body satisfaction, participants’
desire for their bodies to conform to female body ideals, and diet as a tool for body change.

4.4.1 Social-Body Dissatisfaction

All six participants discussed experiencing their bodies differently in sport and non-sport settings. For example, Breanne commented:

I think in like the basketball setting, I feel great. Like even on the court and stuff, ya it feels
great and everything. And then like in a social setting, or even if I go shopping with friends
or something like that, it’s sometimes harder, like I worry about my body. They’ll be trying
on clothes or something and I’ll be like… trying to find something that I want to like wear
that will fit me, but I won’t necessarily.

The stark contrast between Breanne’s experience of her body in sport and social settings is
consistent with what Krane and colleagues (2004) referred to as the female athlete paradox;
female athletes participating in sports that emphasize physicality and strength often feel satisfied
with their bodies in sport, but experience concerns over the size and physicality of their bodies in
non-sport settings due to comparison to the smaller, less muscular bodies of non-athlete women.

Emily also reflected on feeling conscious of her body in non-sport settings:

I think if I’m in a social setting around like, people that are not necessarily athletes, I think
that makes me feel different. Ya, I think it varies. Like sometimes I’ll feel good, I’ll be
like, I look a lot stronger than them, and things like that. Then sometimes I’ll be like, ya
I’m a lot bigger than them (laughs).
Emily’s experience of being concerned over body size in non-sport settings is again consistent with previous research on the female athlete paradox (Krane et al., 2004). Emily was one of the smaller participants in this project. As one of the smaller participants in this project, Emily’s perception of her body as ‘a lot bigger’ than non-athlete peers demonstrates that female athletes of a variety of body sizes are susceptible to the social-body dissatisfaction associated with experiences of the female athlete paradox (Krane et al., 2004).

Jenn also shared her experience of feeling conscious of her body in non-sport settings:

I mean if I ever go out with my friends who don’t play sports, like, my two best friends are 5’4 and 5’5 (laughs). So like, they’re short. Um, and it’s stupid things but like we take pictures together and I’m like, having to crouch down you know just to be like at their level. That makes me feel bigger.

Jenn’s reference to the photograph as the source of her awareness of her body is of interest here. Photos also allow us to view ourselves from the perspective of others, which is a major component of objectified body consciousness (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Thus, it makes sense that the photograph added to Jenn’s awareness of her body as different from her non-athlete friends.

Kim also identified photographs as a source of increased body awareness, she commented:

Sometimes I look around at people and I’m like, wow, I am the tallest person here (laughs)! Or like in photos, it’s mostly photos to be honest (laughs). Like when you’re standing next to your friend, and like they’re just like tiny and small and like, like I’m not a
fat person, but like next to other people you’re just bigger because you’re taller, like you have different body proportions.

This excerpt demonstrates the combined effect of height and body size on female athletes’ experiences with their body in social settings. Although Kim was visually very lean she still perceived her body as ‘bigger’ than non-athletes. This is consistent with previous research showing the combination of body size and height is most associated with body dissatisfaction in non-sport settings (Krane et al., 2001; Krane et al., 2004).

The experiences these five participants discussed closely resemble the experiences of participants in other research examining the female athlete paradox (Krane et al., 2004; Steinfeldt et al., 2011a). Despite feeling satisfied with their body in sport settings, participants discussed experiencing their bodies as different from non-athlete women. This was particularly evident in situations that triggered heightened body awareness, such as shopping or when looking at photographs taken with non-athlete friends.

Unlike other participants, who discussed experiences of feeling dissatisfied with their bodies in social settings, Kate expressed that she felt more critical of her body in the company of other athletes:

I feel more pressure from the athletes in terms of having that ideal body, than with the non-athlete. With the non-athlete groups I usually feel more comfortable, or like better about my body image around the non-athlete people. I feel the most pressure from people that are like fit, healthy, athletic kind of body types.
The pressure Kate referenced in this excerpt may be due to her strong identification with an athletic female body ideal. However, other participants who also discussed an athletic female body ideal, demonstrated consistency in their experiences of feeling more dissatisfied with their bodies in non-sport settings. Evidently, something about Kate’s experience was considerably different from that of her teammates.

A major factor that distinguished Kate from other participants was her perception of her performance body:

In terms of basketball, as like someone who’s trying to be a competitive and skilled basketball player, I feel undersized and slow. ‘Cause the people that are my height are bigger, or the people that are taller than me are like my size. So either they can reach over me or they can push me. So I often feel small in that regard, or… just like a little more slow-footed. So often I get annoyed with my body in that sense.

Kate perceived her body to be a serious limitation to her ability to perform effectively in basketball. This dissatisfaction with her body performance was unparalleled by other participants. Earlier, Kate revealed that she does not plan to pursue a future in basketball because she feels that she is not skilled enough for higher-level competition. This excerpt suggests that Kate perceived her body to be a component of that limited ability. As someone with a strong and athletic identity who valued her participation in basketball as an important part of who she is, Kate’s dissatisfaction with the performance aspect of her body stands to have a negative effect on her overall body image. This was reflected in her discussion of how she felt about her body overall:
I just feel big. Cause I’m… I’m a big person. I understand that, and so there are times that I’m … uhhh just uncomfortable and want to cover up certain spots. I can’t say that I don’t worry about those things. Like I can quite honestly say that I do.

Kate’s admission that she worries about her body and her appearance suggests that concerns over body appearance are central to her body-related experiences. In the cognitive-behavioural model of body image (Cash, 2011), individuals who are invested in their appearance, as Kate demonstrated in this excerpt, are more likely to experience negative body-related emotions (Cash, 2011). This finding, paired with the discrepancy Kate perceives between her own body and the athletic female body ideal, are indicative of fairly extensive body dissatisfaction that was unmatched by other participants.

4.4.3 Satisfaction Paired with a Desire for Change

When asked how they felt about their bodies, five out of six participants identified some level of satisfaction coupled with the desire for change. The changes participants desired to make were ones that would move them toward the lean and toned female body ideal discussed previously. For example, Emily said:

I think I feel pretty good about it. In general I’m a pretty confident person, so I think that helps my confidence in my body. I mean I definitely have things that I, you know… that I don’t like. Well not that I don’t like, I just… they could be different. I would choose for them to be different (laughs).
When asked how she would like to change her body, Emily said, “I’d say my arms are pretty big, and I think if I was skinnier it would be good.” Even though Emily previously discussed her muscularity as a source of body pride, she expressed a desire for her arms to be smaller; this contradiction demonstrates the pervasive nature of social norms for acceptable female-athlete muscularity.

Kim expressed a similar feeling about her body:

I mean in general I’m happy with my body. I wouldn’t like… this question… if you could change anything… Ya I would change something, I mean you look at yourself and you’re like wow, I have a lot of zits on my face. Like, there’s gonna be some things that I would change.

When asked how she would change her body given the chance, Kim said, “It’s just my legs, that would be the one thing I would change, would be my legs. They’re just strong. I have strong legs. The thigh gap… not happening!” Like Emily, Kim seemed satisfied with her body overall, but desired to change it in ways that would increase conformity to idealized female bodies. Kim’s reference to the ‘thigh gap’ suggests a desire to conform to the extremely lean body ideal often featured on the cover of fitness and health magazines.

Although slightly less positive, Breanne also expressed an overall body satisfaction paired with the desire to change:
Um, there are definitely things that I’d love to change. I accept it and it’s ok, but there’s definitely things that I would want to change. But an overall consensus, like I’m ok with the way I look and stuff like that.

When asked how she would change her body, Breanne replied:

Just the stomach area a little bit *(laughs)*. Um, just to be a little bit lean and thinner and stuff like that. Um, that would be kind of the most like general kind of thing that I would want to change. Overall nothing more than just being a little bit leaner and more toned.

Breanne’s emphasis on the desire to be leaner is consistent with that of other participants. The prevalence of this finding is indicative of the emphasis on leanness in the athletic female body ideal.

The unanimous desire for body change expressed by participants reflects the prevalent body dissatisfaction experienced by women today, a phenomena that has been referred to as ‘normative discontent’ (Lafrance et al., 2000; Rodin et al., 1984). Changes participants desired to make to their bodies involved losing body fat or size, which would reduce perceived discrepancies between their bodies and the body ideals previously discussed.

**4.4.4 Diet**

Through discussion of their desire to change their bodies, two participants revealed food and diet to be a major part of their lived experiences with their bodies. Both of these participants wanted their bodies to be leaner, and had been asked by their coach to lose weight to help with their quickness on the court.
When Jenn was asked whether she did anything to lose weight as her coach had requested, she replied:

I started like watching what I was eating more. Because I think a lot of it was just coming from like, I wasn’t eating the greatest. You know, I’d go to a movie and I’d be getting popcorn and candy and then I’d come home and have some chips. And like, it’s nothing huge but like, I definitely notice it. I think about what I eat every day. And I almost wish I didn’t, cause sometimes I find myself like, oh I’m not really hungry I’m just not gonna eat.

Jenn’s concerns over food intake, as well as her reference to skipping meals to compensate for previous food intake, are indicative of potentially maladaptive eating behaviour (Garner & Garfinkel, 1979). Despite the maladaptive nature of these thoughts and behaviours, Jenn did not disclose having struggled personally with an eating disorder. Jenn’s concerns over diet are interesting as she previously discussed being satisfied with her body overall. Findings of previous research support the simultaneous experience of body satisfaction and disordered eating behaviour among female athletes (Smolak et al., 2000).

Food was also central to Breanne’s body-related experiences; she discussed dieting as though it was something she had been dealing with her entire life:

I’m kind of a roller coaster myself, where like there will be moments where I’m like really motivated and I’ll really watch what I’m eating, and then I’ll see progress, and I get like, oh there’s progress so I can go back to what I was doing before.
Breanne also discussed diet as central to her experience of trying to manage her body and body weight while out with injury over the last year:

My body was kind of taking over control where my mind was like oh now I can like eat and stuff because I’m not playing.

The suggestion that her body was taking control of her eating demonstrates a lack of agency over her food intake may indicate uncontrolled eating habits associated with maladaptive dieting and eating behaviours. Together, Jenn and Breanne’s experiences with food and diet revealed a complex relationship with food.

4.4.5 Summary

The themes discussed above reflect participants’ experiences with their athletic bodies. Most participants described experiences consistent with Krane and colleagues (2004) notion of the female athlete paradox; they reported feeling more aware and more critical of their body appearance in non-sport settings because of perceived differences between their bodies and the bodies of non-athlete women. That said, for one participant, this was not the case. Kate discussed feeling more pressure on her body when surrounded by athlete peers whom she perceived as having ideal bodies. A potential explanation for this ‘reverse female athlete paradox’ is Kate’s low perception of her ability as a basketball player. While Kate expressed feeling dissatisfied with her body, the remaining five participants generally expressed some amount of satisfaction with their bodies overall. This satisfaction was paired with a desire to change some aspects of body appearance for all participants, demonstrating that participants’ elite-level athletic involvement does not completely protect them from the widespread body dissatisfaction.
experienced by women today. For Breanne and Jen, diet was a central part of enacting desired body changes.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this research was to further understanding of the relationship between female athlete body image and identity. This purpose was explored through discussions related to participants’ understanding of their athletic identities and overall selves, the negotiation of femininity in a non-feminine sport, norms surrounding female bodies and appearance, and experiences of living in a female athlete body. Key findings related to these topics include: participants’ strong and exclusive athletic identities, their understanding of what it meant to be both feminine and athletic, and the team’s coaches as a source of body-related stress. Implications of these findings will be discussed in more detail below.

The centrality of the participants’ athletics identities (AI; Brewer et al., 1993) and its relationship to their overall selves emerged from the women’s stories. While the majority of participants identified very strongly with the athlete role, and struggled to describe themselves as anything other than basketball players, other had more diverse identities, and discussed the importance of their student identity to their overall sense of self. These findings are consistent with previous research, which has demonstrated that university athletes are likely to have stronger athlete than student identities (Sturm et al., 2011). Four out of six participants described their athletic identities (AI; Brewer et al., 1993) as strong and exclusive. That is, they defined themselves as almost solely as athletes and had trouble defining other relevant roles. Strong and exclusive AI’s have been associated with maladaptive outcomes for athletes facing forced retirement or career-threatening injuries (Brewer et al., 1993). One explanation that has been offered for this is that strong and exclusive athletic identities mean the athlete lacks other meaningful sources of self-fulfillment (Brewer et al., 1993). Despite not dealing with career-
ending injuries or forced retirement, implications of the strong and exclusive AI’s of these four participants may be reflected in their body-related experiences.

Kate, one of the participants with a strong and exclusive AI, discussed her abilities as a basketball player as limited. Unlike other participants, who were confident in their ability to perform at the university or professional level, Kate felt as though she had realized her full potential and was not good enough to play at a professional level. Given her strong identification with the athlete role, Kate’s low perceptions of her ability are likely to evoke negative self-evaluations (Brewer et al., 1993). These negative-self evaluations were reflected in Kate’s discussion of her body as a limitation to her ability to perform effectively in sport. She made numerous references to being frustrated over being too slow, too tall, or too heavy to perform at the elite-level. Kate’s negative evaluation of her performance body was a major component of her body dissatisfaction. These experiences highlight the potentially maladaptive nature of strong and exclusive AI for female athletes; this type of AI increases the likelihood that female athletes make self-evaluations based on sport performance (Brewer et al., 1993). In times of poor performance, this may result in negative evaluations of the performance body that extend to dissatisfaction with the body overall.

The experiences of the other three participants with strong and exclusive AI also suggest a connection between strong and exclusive AI and the body-related experiences of female athletes. Two of these participants revealed dieting to be a central part of their body-related experience, and one made numerous references to monitoring and regulating her body appearance. Interestingly, these three participants also had strong social components to their AI’s; they discussed being recognized by others as athletes as one of the best parts about being varsity basketball players. With the body as the physical representation of participants’ athletic selves, it
follows that strong social AI means added concern over body appearance. Consistent with this, the body-related concerns of these participants were centered on social presentation of the body. Using clothes to manage appearance and dieting behaviour are two of the most common coping mechanisms used when women are experiencing social physique anxiety (Hart et al., 1989; Sabiston et al., 2007), a negative body-related emotion experienced when one fears negative evaluations of their body in a social setting.

Participants with strong and exclusive AI expressed more body-related concerns than participants with more diverse identities. Together these findings suggest that participants’ strong and exclusive athletic identities may be associated with experiences of heightened body awareness or body dissatisfaction. This is consistent with findings of previous research, which demonstrated that strength of dancer identity was negatively related to body satisfaction among female dancers (Lagndon & Petracca, 2010). Future research is needed to further explore the relationship between strength and exclusivity of AI and body satisfaction among university-level female athletes. There are established programs to aid athletes with strong AI facing injury or retirement with the transition out of sport. If there is a relationship between strong and exclusive athletic identities and body dissatisfaction among female athletes, similar programs aimed at diversifying identities may benefit female athlete body image in the future.

Another key finding was participants’ understanding of femininity, and the meanings they ascribed to being both feminine and athletic. The women demonstrated their conformity to hegemonic notions surrounding femininity. For example, some seemed to construct their athletic and feminine selves as separate entities, whereas others emphasized an athletic femininity that allowed for and even encouraged characteristics associated with their AI’s. Regardless of the status of their athletic and feminine identities, participants demonstrated the social construction
of gender through their discussion of ‘doing femininity’ in both sport and non-sport settings (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Participants emphasized the importance of their bodies and body size in their ability to ‘do femininity’ effectively in social interactions with male peers.

Participants who described their participation in basketball as contradictory to femininity seemed to also frame their athletic and feminine identities as separate entities that did not need to overlap. This type of identity construction is consistent with identity conflict in the bicultural identity integration framework (BII; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002), which means that identities are perceived as separate and incompatible parts of the overall self. In contrast, two participants appeared to have integrated their athletic and feminine identities into an athletic femininity more compatible with their participation in sport. This is consistent with identity integration in the BII framework (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002); which refers to multiple identities that are perceived as compatible and relatively unified parts of the overall self.

Previous research exploring identity integration within the BII framework has suggested that identity integration and identity conflict are associated with a number of adaptive and maladaptive outcomes, respectively. For example, identity conflict has been shown to be associated with depression, anxiety, and interpersonal difficulties among bicultural people (Chen et al., 2008). On the contrary, successful identity integration has been associated with increased life satisfaction and improved task performance (Cheng, et al., 2008). Despite the presence of these two levels of identity integration in participants’ experiences, the extent to which they are associated with various outcomes remains unclear. Participants with separate identities did not express experiences of anxiety, depression, or interpersonal difficulties. In addition, participants
who discussed their athletic and feminine identities as integrated did not appear to be any more satisfied with life than other participants.

However, the status of participants’ athletic and feminine identities may have been reflected in their efforts to ‘do femininity’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Previous research exploring the female athlete paradox (Krane et al., 2004; Steinfeldt et al., 2011a) has demonstrated that female contact-sport athletes make efforts to present as feminine to compensate for perceived discrepancies between their athleticism and hegemonic norms for femininity and the female body. All six participants made reference to engaging in this type of gendered performance, but the way and place in which they did it may reflect the status of their athletic identities. For example, participants who discussed the separation of their athletic and feminine identities made reference to ‘dressing up’ as a way to distinguish their social appearance from their on-court appearance; while one participant who discussed her athletic and feminine identities as integrated chose to ‘do femininity’ by painting her nails, a representation of femininity that would still be visible while playing basketball.

Together these findings suggest that the BII framework may be useful for developing understanding of elite-level female athletes experiences of their athletic and feminine identities. Further, these findings suggest a possible connection between the status of participants’ athletic and feminine identities, and their experiences of the female athlete paradox. Further exploration of this relationship is warranted, to determine different outcomes that may be associated with identity integration among elite-level female athletes

Also of interest in the findings were the multiple sources of pressure participants felt on their bodies, and the impact of these pressures on their body related experiences. Participants identified various media outlets as the source of normative body-related information. Indicative
of the rise in prominence of an athletic female body ideal (Dworkin & Heywood, 2003; Gruber, 2007), most participants discussed identifying more with a lean and toned body ideal than a strictly skinny one. Despite their positive view of muscle tone and definition, participants expressed negative feelings about women who exceeded a ‘natural’ level of muscularity. These feelings were personal for some participants, who described negative evaluations of their own muscularity.

In addition to media sources, all participants acknowledged receiving performance-related body feedback from their coaches as central to their body-related experiences. The coaches’ requests for body change were problematic for participants who were asked to lose weight. While this feedback was always framed as necessary for performance, participants who were asked to lose weight struggled with the implications for their body appearance. Findings of existing research have suggested that female athletes who participate in sports that emphasize thinness are at increased risk for disordered eating (Smolak et al., 2000). Basketball is not usually conceptualized as a sport where thinness is a primary concern, however, the prevalence of coaches feedback for players to get leaner and lose weight suggests that weight-concerns were central to their body-related experiences. This finding is consistent with the suggestion of Smolak and colleagues (2000) that researchers need to consider more than simply sport type when attempting to determine the relationship between sport participation and the body-related experiences of female athletes.

Given the complexity of participants’ body-related experiences, it is worth considering how coaches could best frame performance-related body feedback to limit added pressure on female-athlete bodies. For example, rather than requesting that athletes lose weight to become faster and more agile players, the coaching staff could focus on implementing a power and
agility training program. To complement this training program, the coaching staff could provide the entire team, as to not single out particular athletes, with nutritional guidance and support to ensure all participants were eating in a way that supports maintenance of a healthy body weight. Further, coaches should consider the implications of their position of power on players’ perceptions of body-related feedback. In instances where it is necessary to discuss body size, weight, and muscularity with players, it may be beneficial to have someone who is not in a position of power to deliver body-related feedback to players.

Finally, participants discussed their perceptions of and experiences in an athletic body. The majority discussed experiences of social-body consciousness due to feeling as though their bodies were larger than non-athlete women. However, one participant expressed the opposite experience, feeling more critical of her body in the company of other athletes. This may have been due in part to her perception of her body as limiting her ability to perform effectively in basketball. In addition, with the exception of one participant, who expressed fairly extensive body dissatisfaction, participants discussed fairly positive evaluations of their bodies overall. Despite fairly positive body evaluations, participants expressed their desire to change their bodies to increase conformity to idealized female bodies.

Previous research suggests that elite-level female athletes, whom we may assume are satisfied with their athletic bodies, actually experience body consciousness and dissatisfaction in social settings because of perceived discrepancies between their bodies and idealized bodies of non-athlete women (Krane et al., 2004). Participants of a variety of body sizes discussed experiences consistent with the female athlete paradox. Further, participants discussed fairly equal amounts of social-body dissatisfaction regardless of whether they identified with an athletic or a more traditional ideal for the female body. Together, these findings indicate a social-
body dissatisfaction that is immune to differences in body size and shape, and that is not dependent on what the individual considers to be an ideal female body type. This normative social-body dissatisfaction among female athletes is consistent with normative body discontentment experienced by non-athlete women (Lafrance et al., 2000; Rodin et al., 1984).

In my initial research on this topic, I interpreted the female athlete paradox in a negative way. I found it unfair that even these exceptionally skilled women are not immune to feeling badly about their bodies. I felt compelled to develop understanding of this phenomenon, and to explore ways to reduce social-body dissatisfaction experienced by female athletes. Despite this initial understanding, findings of this research project have led me to a more positive interpretation of the female athlete paradox. Participants’ experiences of instrumental body satisfaction due to participation in sport seemed to provide them with a certain amount of global body satisfaction and self-confidence that they may have otherwise not experienced. Although this was not true for one participant, whose lack of instrumental body satisfaction may have actually exacerbated her body dissatisfaction, most participants genuinely seemed satisfied with their bodies because of what they allowed them to accomplish in sport. I now feel compelled to celebrate sport as a source of body satisfaction for female athletes, the other edge of the female athlete paradox sword. Yes, female athletes and non-athletes would benefit from diversifying media portrayals of idealized female bodies, as they are rigid, exclusive, and problematic for a number of reasons. However, findings of this research highlight the importance of also considering ways that we can maximize sport as a source of body-satisfaction for female athletes, rather than simply reflecting on social situations that compromise that satisfaction. Findings from this research suggest that diversifying female athlete identity and ensuring that
coaches deliver body-related feedback in an appropriate manner may be two ways in which this could be accomplished.

5.1 Strengths and Limitations

A major strength of this research is its exploration of the relationship between female athlete body image and identity. A large body of research has aimed to better understand body image among female athletes (e.g. Hausenblas & Symons Downs, 2001; Krane et al., 2001; Krane et al., 2004; Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011; Steinfeldt et al., 2011a), but only a small portion of this research has explored the inherent connections between body image and identity (Ezzell, 2009; Langdon & Petracca, 2010). The body is a physical representation of the self, making it an integral part of identity construction (Cash, 2011). This research project addresses this gap in the existing literature in an exploratory manner. Findings from this project could serve as a basis for further research on identity and body-related experiences among female university athletes.

Another strength of this research is its sample diversity. Although homogeneity of sample is desired in interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith et al., 2009) to ensure that research questions are meaningful for all participants, it is also recognized that there is value in being able to compare individual differences in participants’ experiences. Commonalities among participants’ were reflected in their ability to reflect on and share experiences with all research questions. However, diversity among participants in a number of demographic variables also allowed for reflection on the effect of these factors on participants experiences of their bodies and identity. Participants were diverse in terms of age, year of eligibility, ethnicity, place of birth, body size, and position. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 23, and ranged in year of eligibility from first to fourth. In terms of ethnicity, two participants self-identified as Canadian, one identified as Polish, one as American, one as
Jamaican-Canadian, and one as Chinese. Three participants were guards and three played the center or power-forward position. In accordance with this diversity among positions played, there was considerable variation in participants’ body size (they ranged in body size from five-foot-six and 132 pounds to six-foot-one and 220 pounds). Although this was a small, purposively selected sample that is not generalizable, diversity across these sample characteristics adds to the utility of study findings. Similarity in experiences across participants of different age, nationality, and body size reflects the pervasiveness of social pressures on the female athlete body.

Additionally, my knowledge of basketball gathered through years of playing and watching basketball allowed me to comfortably discuss the ins-and-outs of participants’ different positions, training protocols, and team dynamics. This understanding allowed me to establish common ground with participants, which was critical in the process of developing rapport. This rapport was an important part of getting participants to reflect on their experiences with sensitive topics of interest such as dieting, negative body evaluations, and questions regarding their desire to continue playing varsity basketball.

Despite these strengths, a limitation that needs to be addressed is the fact that participants were only interviewed at one time point. This was done for practical purposes, but under less time constraint a second interview with participants would have added depth to the data. A second time point would have allowed more time to establish rapport with participants and would have also allowed for clarification or elaboration on points of interest noted after reflection on the first interview. Further, body image and identity are dynamic constructs, a second interview would have allowed for analysis of changes in these variables across different points in participants’ season, as well as any changes attributable to injury or change in playing
status. Existing literature on body image among female athletes would benefit from further exploration of this topic over multiple time points.

Another potential limitation of this project is the use of the IPA approach (Smith & Osborne, 2003; 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Numerous critiques of this approach to qualitative research have been put forth, including: overreliance on the use of semi-structured interviews, lack of clarity on the distinctions between IPA and other approaches to qualitative research, and a lack of actual thematic interpretation in some of the research using this approach (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Chamberlain, 2011; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Steps were taken to avoid these potential limitations. For example, the guidelines for IPA data analysis outlined by Smith and Osborne (2008) were followed carefully to ensure that data analysis was consistent with the tenants of IPA rather than reflective of thematic or content analysis approaches. Further, findings were written up in close connection with a more experienced IPA researcher who encouraged interpretation of themes that were too descriptive in initial drafts of the write up.

5.2 Future Directions

Results from this study suggest that strong and exclusive athletic identities may be associated with experiences of body awareness and dissatisfaction among university female athletes. Previous studies have demonstrated strong and exclusive athletic identities are associated with a number of maladaptive outcomes for athletes facing forced retirement (Brewer et al., 1993), but there is a dearth of research examining the impact of strong and exclusive athletic identity on body image. Future research should explore the connection between body image and identity among female athletes. One topic of interest would be exploring whether athletes with strong and exclusive athletic identities experience added pressure on their bodies as physical representations of their athletic selves.
This research also suggests that the bicultural identity integration framework (BII; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002) may be appropriate for examining identity among female athletes. This is consistent with findings of previous research, which have demonstrated the utility of the BII framework for understanding integration of professional and feminine identities among female engineers (Cheng et al., 2008). Despite the potential utility of this framework for exploring feminine and athlete identities among female athletes, future research is needed to determine how different levels of identity integration impact female athletes; for example, whether different types of identity integration are more or less adaptive for female athletes.

Finally, future research should explore the impact of performance based body related feedback on female athletes overall body-related experiences. The importance of this research is reflected in the impact of body-related feedback on the women in this project. This was especially true for participants who were asked by their coaching staff to lose weight, who struggled with the implications of this feedback for body size and appearance. Future research could explore how delivery of performance-related body feedback could be framed to limit body-related stress for female athletes.

5.3 Conclusion

This research has shed light on the complex relationship between female athlete identity and body image. Findings suggest that strength of athletic identity may be associated with the body-related experiences of collegiate female basketball players. Further, novel findings of this project point to a potential connection between participants’ understanding of the relative integration or separation of their athletic and feminine identities and their efforts to ‘do femininity’ in non-sport contexts. Although previous research has demonstrated that female
athletes may make efforts to emphasize their femininity as a way of dealing with the female athlete paradox (Krane et al., 2001; Krane et al., 2004), findings of this project highlight that the nature of these efforts may be related to the integration or separation of their feminine and athletic identities. Specifically, those who perceived their athleticism and femininity as separate parts of their overall selves seemed to ‘do femininity’ in ways that emphasized the separation of these identities, whereas those who identified with an athletic femininity that incorporated characteristics associated with their athleticism and hegemonic femininity appeared to ‘do femininity’ in ways that demonstrated the blending of these aspects of their overall selves. The lack of existing research in this area illustrates the need for future research exploring implications of female athletes experiences with their athletic and feminine identities on body evaluations and body-related experiences. Instrumental body satisfaction gained through participation in sport has the potential to have a positive effect on the global body image of female athletes, However, the potential of sport as a positive influence on female-athlete body image depends on understanding potential sources of body-related stress in sport, including: the impact of strong and exclusive athletic identity, performance-related body feedback, and other body-related sources of stress.
References


Experiences and Perceptions of the Athletic and Social Body: An Exploration of Dual Identities in Collegiate Female Basketball Players

Initial Contact Letter

Peter Crocker, PhD (Principal Investigator)
School of Human Kinetics
University of British Columbia

Louisa Scarlett, B.HK.
School of Human Kinetics
University of British Columbia

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?
The principal investigator for this study is Dr. Peter Crocker, Professor in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of British Columbia. This study is part of the master’s thesis of Louisa Scarlett, a graduate student at UBC.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?
We are interviewing university level female basketball players in Vancouver and the surrounding area. We are interested in hearing about their thoughts and experiences related to having an athletic body and being athletes in both sport and non-sport settings.

WHAT WILL PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY INVOLVE?
Participation in this study will involve taking part in one interview that will last approximately 60 to 120 minutes (conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you). The discussions that take place will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. If there are any issues you are not comfortable discussing, you do not have to. You may withdrawal from this study at any time, without providing a reason for doing so, and without any penalty. There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

WHAT WILL BE DONE WITH THE INFORMATION I PROVIDE?
Any information provided within these discussions will be made anonymous, whereby no personal information that can identify you will be made available within any reports that may result from the research. Furthermore, it will be ensured that audio-recordings are not overheard and transcripts not read by anyone other than the researchers involved with this study.
All interview transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in the office of the principal investigator and no-one other than the researchers involved in the study will have access to this information.

**HOW WILL THE RESEARCH BE USEFUL?**
The information you provide in this interview will provide us with a valuable understanding of (a) how collegiate female basketball players experience their bodies in both sport and social settings and (b) what is it like to be an elite-level female basketball player in different contexts.

**WHAT IF I WERE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?**
Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reason for doing so and without experiencing any negative consequences.

**WILL I GET PAID FOR TAKING PART?**
You will receive $20 cash as a thank you for your participation.

Thank you!
Appendix B

Recruitment Poster

DO YOU PLAY ON THE WOMEN’S BASKETBALL TEAM AT YOUR UNIVERSITY? IF SO, WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

What is this study about?

The purpose of this study is to gain understanding about how elite-level female athletes experience and perceive their bodies in both sport and non-sport settings.

You can participate if you…

Are a woman who is currently playing basketball for your university team.

What is involved?

In taking part you will need to participate in one one-on-one guided interview that will take 1-2 hours to complete. You will receive $20 as a thank you for your participation.

Who to contact for more information?

To take part in this study, or for more information, please contact Louisa Scarlett.
Experiences and Perceptions of the Athletic and Social Body: An Exploration of Dual Identities in Collegiate Female Basketball Players

Consent Form

Peter Crocker, PhD (Principal Investigator) Louisa Scarlett, B.HK.
School of Human Kinetics School of Human Kinetics
University of British Columbia University of British Columbia

Purpose of the Project: We are interested in interviewing university-level female basketball players in Vancouver and surrounding areas to learn about their body-related thoughts and experiences in both sport and social settings. We are also interested in experiences related to being an athlete in non-sport contexts. The information gained from this study will hopefully help us to develop understanding of body image experiences of elite-level female basketball players.

Participation: If you agree to participate in this project you will be asked to participate in one interview. This interview will take place in a location of your choice, and will take approximately 60 to 120 minutes to complete. If anything comes up in the interviews that you do not wish to discuss, you are not obligated to in any way. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time, without providing a reason, and with no penalty. The interview will be tape recorded and transcribed word for word in order to analyze the information you provide.

Confidentiality: Participants in this study will remain anonymous. No personal information that can identify you will be made available within any reports that may result from this research. We will make sure that audio-recordings are not overheard and that transcripts, or parts of the transcripts are not read by anyone other than the researchers involved with this study. All interview transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in the office of the principal investigator and no one other than the researchers associated with this study will have access to this information.

Remuneration: You will receive $20 cash to thank you for your participation in this project.
Your Rights: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason for doing so and without experiencing any negative consequences. If you have any questions or want further information about the study please contact Dr. Peter Crocker. Alternatively, if you have any concerns about your rights or treatment as a research subject please contact the ‘Research Subject Information Line’ in the UBC Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598 or if long distance email to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Potential Risk: This study will not subject you to any physical risk. Although we do not expect any psychological risk, if you feel participation is placing you under undue stress you may discontinue your involvement in the study, again resulting in no penalty. Any data collected prior to this point will be omitted from the study and destroyed. In the event that you would like to further discuss your feelings regarding the topics discussed in the interviews, UBC Counselling Services (604-822-3811) or Student Health (604-822-7889) can be of assistance.

Consent: I consent to take part in this study of ‘Experiences and Perceptions of the Athletic and Social Body’. The study has been explained to me and I understand what is involved.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study without having to give any reason for doing so and without experiencing any negative consequences. I understand that if I do not wish to answer any question or discuss any topic that is raised, I may refuse to answer and the interviewer will go onto the next question. If I withdraw from the study, the information I have supplied (audio files, notes) will be destroyed.

I am willing to take part in the interview and understand that this will last approximately 1 hour, and I am happy for the conversations to be tape-recorded.

I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records. I also understand that any identifying characteristics will be removed from the information I supply so that my anonymity is protected.

By signing this form you have consented to participate in this study.

SIGNED…………………………………………………………………………………………

NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS…………………………………………………………………

DATE……………………………………………………………………………………………
Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire

The following questionnaire will ask for some background information. This information will be used for research purposes only. Accurate information is greatly appreciated, but you may leave questions unanswered if you are not comfortable providing the information.

Pseudonym (You can chose a pseudonym for yourself that will be used in place of your name. If you prefer to leave this blank, a pseudonym will be chosen for you): __________________________

Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY): __________________________

Place of Birth: ______________________________________

Height (feet and inches): ______________________________

Weight (lbs): __________________________

Year of Eligibility: ________________________________

Position: _________________________________________

How would you describe your cultural origin? (Canadian, French Canadian, English, Chinese, First Nations, etc.) __________________________________________________________

What is your first language? __________________________________________________________

How old were you when you started playing basketball? _________________________________

At what age did you start to focus on playing basketball over other sports?

______________________________________________________________________________

If you would like to provide any additional information about yourself, please do so here:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
Appendix E

Interview Schedule

The following questions represent an agenda for interviews with participants. The questions will be introduced in a flexible manner, and may be changed or altered over time to represent newly emerging themes and patterns.

Research Question 1: How do university-level female basketball players experience their identities in sport and social settings?

1. Is there anything you would like to ask me about before we get started?

2. Can you tell me about your previous experiences in sport?
   Probes:
   a. How long have you played basketball?
   b. Did you play any other sports growing up? If so, which ones?
   c. What do you like about basketball? Why?
   d. What do you not like about basketball? Why?
   e. What are your plans for playing basketball in the future?

3. Tell me about your team.
   Probes:
   a. Can you tell me a bit about your season?
   b. What is it like to be a part of your team?
   c. How would you describe your role on the team?
   d. How much time do you spend with your teammates outside of training?
   e. What kinds of things do you do with your teammates outside of training?
   f. How do you feel about spending time with your teammates?
   g. What are the best parts about being a varsity basketball player?
   h. What are the challenges?
   i. How do you find balance between school, basketball, and other things?
4. How does being a basketball player influence who you are as a person?

Probes:
   a. How important is basketball to who you are as a person? Why?
   b. Besides being a basketball player, what other roles or identities do you have in life? (i.e. employment, volunteer, family, romantic relationship, religion, cultural)
      a. Of all your various roles and identities, which ones are most important to who you are? Why?
      b. Which are least important to you? Why?
      c. How do you see these roles fitting together?
      d. Do any of these roles conflict? How so?

Research Question 2: How do university-level female basketball players perceive and experience their bodies in sport and social settings?

1. So let’s talk about your body…
   a. How do you feel about your body?
   b. What do you like about your body?
   c. What do you dislike about your body, if anything?
   d. How has playing basketball influenced the way you feel about your body?
   e. How does the way you feel about your body influence you as a basketball player?
   f. Is there any aspect of your body that you feel really helps your performance in basketball? If so, what?
   g. Is there anything about your body that hinders your performance in basketball? If so, what? Why?
   h. What, if anything, would you change about your body if you could?

2. How does the way you feel about your body change, or stay the same, in various settings?
   a. How do you feel about your body when you are competing in games?
   b. What do you think about your uniform and the way it makes you look?
   c. How do you feel about your body during practice/workouts?
   d. How do you feel about your body in the dressing/locker room?
3. How do people around you influence the way you feel about your body?
   a. Have your coach/teammates/parents or family members/friends/significant others/or someone that you’re interested in/somebody that you dated ever made comments about your body?
      i. If so, what kind of comments?
      ii. Why do you think they made these comments?
      iii. How do you feel about your body when you’re around…?
      iv. Who has the most influence on how you feel about your body? Why?

4. How would you describe an ideal female body?
   a. Can you give me an example of a famous woman that you think has an attractive body? Why?
   b. How would you compare a female basketball player’s body to this ideal?
   c. How would you compare your own body to this ideal?
   d. How important is it to you to conform to this ideal? Why?
   e. To what extent is the athletic female ideal similar/different to the non-athlete female ideal? (i.e. musculaity, height, weight)
   f. What kinds of things have you done to make your body fit with these ideals, if anything? (i.e. dieting, clothing, exercising, surgery, makeup)
   g. What, if anything, have you ever done that was unhealthy/harmful to make your body fit with these ideals?
   h. What kinds of things have you avoided doing to make your body fit with these ideals, if anything?

5. What does femininity mean to you?
a. What does a feminine body look like to you?
b. How important is it to you to appear feminine?
c. What kinds of things make you feel feminine?
d. What kinds of things make you feel less feminine?
e. What is the relationship between muscularity/weight/height/physicality and femininity for you?
f. How does being a basketball player enable you to, or challenge your ability to, be feminine? (i.e. in what ways are basketball players more or less feminine)