Adolescents' Experiences of Self-Compassion when Navigating Difficult Friendship

Dissolutions

by

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Abstract

Among adolescents, the ending of a close friendship may be a source of significant psychological distress. Considering the potentially adverse sequalae of friendship dissolutions, it is crucial to gain an understanding of strategies and practices that adolescents can employ to cope with such adversity. One such strategy that merits attention is self-compassion, as it has been linked to several outcomes that may be relevant among adolescents experiencing the difficult termination of a close friendship. However, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding self-compassion in the context of friendship loss. To help address this gap, the purpose of the present qualitative study was to understand the meaning and experiences of self-compassion among adolescents who had experienced difficult friendship dissolutions. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to explore the role self-compassion played in adolescents' experiences of recovering from one of their close friendships ending. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five adolescents across Canada and data analysis revealed six key themes: (a) focusing on the positive, (b) developing and strengthening one's sense of self, (c) soothing the body and mind, (d) connecting with and expressing emotions, (e) reaching out and connecting with others, and (f) reflecting on friendship. Implications for counselling, study limitations, and suggested directions for future research are included.

Keywords: self-compassion, adolescents, friendship dissolution, youth mental health

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Lindsey Erin Feltis. The research project, of which this thesis is apart, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Self-Compassion and Friendship Dissolution," No. 00118833, 2022.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to the incredible young people who shared their experiences of friendship dissolutions and self-compassion with me. It is hard to lose a friend and it may be even harder to talk to a stranger about how you responded to that challenge with self-compassion. However, you kindly and courageously shared your experiences with me, and for that, I am forever grateful.

I would also like to dedicate this work to any adolescent (or any person) who has ever experienced a difficult friendship dissolution. It is my hope that this research will help remind you that you are not alone and that self-compassion may help you cope with this upsetting loss.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank my incredible supervisor Dr. K. Jessica Van Vliet. Thank you for embracing my enthusiasm with an open heart from the moment that you met me and inspiring me to be a better researcher, writer, practitioner, and person. I consider myself immensely lucky to be working under your supervision and support. I feel equally as grateful as I am excited that this project was only the beginning of our work together. I'd also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Christina Rinaldi and Dr. Karen Cook, for their time, efforts, and attention. I know that your time is precious and I am so grateful that you shared yours with me.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

Interpersonal relationships play a critical role in what it means to be human. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that developing and maintaining close relationships contributes significantly to individuals' health and well-being (Demir & Özdemir, 2012; Demir & Weitekamp, 2007; Dunbar, 2018; Gilbert, 2009a). Among these relationships are the close friendships that people develop throughout their lives. Within the literature, friendship has often been defined as a voluntary relationship characterized by an emotional bond and mutual care (Pezirkianidis et al., 2023). In a recent review, Dunbar (2018) suggested that friendship may be the "single most important factor" influencing health and well-being (p. 32). Furthermore, the benefits of friendship appear across several cultures (Demir, et al., 2015; Demir, Cuisinier et al., 2015; Demir, Jaafar et al., 2012; Demir, Özen et al., 2012) and throughout the lifespan (Alsarrani et al., 2022; Goswami, 2012; Pezirkianidis et al., 2023).

While friendships may impact well-being throughout the lifespan, they play a particularly significant role in the lives of adolescents. Adolescence is a period characterized by physiological, social, and environmental transitions, with these transitions often posing unique challenges for adolescents (Eccles, 1999; Steinberg, 2005; Steinberg et al., 2018). As they mature, adolescents commonly wrestle with developing a stable sense of identity and self-concept (Erikson, 1968; Klingle & Van Vliet, 2019; Neff & McGehee, 2010). Interpersonal relationships may help to bolster the development of teenagers' understanding of who they are and who they want to be (Mattingly et al., 2020). Across several cultures, adolescents' interpersonal relationships change significantly as young people balance their desire for autonomy with their desire for intimacy (Kagitcibasi, 2013). As adolescents mature, they

typically begin to gain more autonomy from their parents and prioritize friendships with their peers (Eccles, 1999). Thus, across cultures, adolescents' friendships are important sources of social and emotional support (Benner & Yang, 2016; Delgato et al., 2016; Flannery & Smith, 2021; Poulin & Chan, 2010; Yoon et al., 2017).

Despite their importance for psychosocial development, friendships differ from other close relationships (e.g., family relationships, work relationships) in that the former are more voluntary in nature, making them more fragile (Dunbar, 2018; Flannery & Smith, 2021; Khullar et al., 2021; Morry et al., 2014). This fragility often translates into friendships being more susceptible to ruptures and endings than are other interpersonal relationships (Flannery & Smith, 2021; Khullar et al., 2021). Researchers have identified that friendship dissolutions are particularly common among adolescents between the ages of 12 and 16 (Azmitia et al., 1999; Bowker, 2011; Flannery & Smith, 2021; Poulin & Chan, 2010). Given the prevalence of friendship dissolutions in adolescence, researchers have also begun exploring the negative emotions associated with the endings of close friendships.

In adolescence, friendship dissolutions have been associated with a myriad of negative emotions including feelings of anger, guilt, sadness, loneliness, and stress (Bowker, 2011; Bowker et al., 2023; Flannery & Smith, 2021), as well as increased symptoms of depression (Chan & Poulin, 2009). Although emotional reactions are nuanced and differ depending on who initiates the dissolutions (i.e., initiated by one member of the dyad, or based on a mutual decision), adolescents are vulnerable to experiencing negative emotions regardless of how their friendships end. Despite the negative implications of friendship dissolutions among adolescents, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding potential interventions and strategies that may promote recovery for these individuals.

Focus of the Present Study

One possible strategy that may help adolescents who experience a difficult friendship ending is self-compassion. The current psychological literature on self-compassion relies heavily on the conceptualizations of Neff (2003a) and Gilbert (2009a). Self-compassion is essentially compassion turned inwards and is thus derived from the more general concept of compassion (Gilbert, 2009a; Neff, 2003a; Neff & McGehee, 2010). Gilbert (2009a) defined compassion as an awareness and understanding of others' suffering, coupled with the desire and effort taken to alleviate it. Self-compassion, more specifically, may be understood as the process of directing these aspects of compassion towards the self and building a relationship with oneself that is characterized by warmth, kindness, and caring (Gilbert & Proctor, 2006). Self-compassion encourages individuals to treat themselves with the same compassion and kindness they would extend to a good friend (Neff, 2003a; Neff & McGehee, 2010).

Self-compassion has been linked to several outcomes that may be especially relevant for individuals experiencing distress from a difficult friendship dissolution. However, self-compassion has not yet been explored in direct relation to adolescents coping with friendship loss. As noted, friendship dissolutions are often associated with a variety of negative emotions (Bowker, 2011; Flannery & Smith, 2021). Given that self-compassion has been found to promote healthy emotion regulation (Neff, 2003a; Leary et al., 2007; Muris et al., 2019; Scoglio et al., 2018), it is plausible that self-compassion may help buffer the negative emotions experienced by those who experience the loss of a close friend. Similarly, adolescents who experience friendship dissolutions sometimes experience increased symptoms of depression and stress (Chan & Poulin, 2009; Flannery & Smith, 2021), and in adolescents, self-compassion has been associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and perceived stress (Bluth & Blanton, 2014, 2015; Neff &

McGehee, 2010). Self-compassion has also been associated with higher levels of resiliency in adolescents (Bluth et al., 2018). Resiliency may buffer the impact of stressors (such as friendship dissolutions) and promote the development of positive coping strategies. Finally, as self-compassion has also been shown to be related with a positive self-concept (Neff, 2003a; Bluth & Neff, 2018), it is plausible that self-compassion may buffer the negative impacts of friendship dissolution on adolescents' self-concepts.

Although self-compassion and its impact on romantic relationships has been explored (Budzan & Van Vliet, 2021; Lathren et al., 2021, Neff & Beretvas, 2013), to date there are only a handful of studies examining self-compassion and friendships. Three of these studies explored self-compassion and friendships among college students (Crocker & Canvello, 2008; Raque-Bogan et al., 2016; Yarnell & Neff, 2013). A few other studies have examined self-compassion and adolescent friendships (see Dong et al., 2022; Kong et al., 2022; Xavier et al., 2016). For example, Dong et al. (2022) examined self-compassion and friendship quality as buffers against adolescent depression. However, research on self-compassion in the specific context of adolescents' experiences of friendship dissolutions is lacking in the literature.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the role of self-compassion in the face of friendship dissolutions among adolescents, from the perspective of adolescents who have experienced the difficult ending of a close friendship. My main research question was: What are the experiences and meaning of self-compassion in the face of difficult friendship dissolutions among adolescents? Additional research questions included: (a) from the perspective of adolescents, what impact does self-compassion have on their mental health and well-being when navigating friendship dissolutions?, (b) what perceived impact does self-compassion have

on adolescents' sense of self when navigating friendship dissolutions?, and (c) what obstacles to self-compassion do adolescents experience when navigating friendship dissolutions? In this thesis, I have used the terms *friendship dissolution*, *friendship ending*, and *friendship breakup* synonymously to indicate the ending of a friendship initiated by one or both members of the dyad.

Given the potential benefits of self-compassion among adolescents navigating friendship dissolutions, it is imperative that researchers understand the meaning and experiences of self-compassion among adolescents from their perspective. The knowledge that arises from this study may not only increase understanding of this phenomenon, but also contributes to the knowledge that bridges the literature on self-compassion, friendship loss, and adolescent development. Additionally, a better understanding is needed of strategies that adolescents can use in their everyday lives to cope with the inevitable losses they may experience as a normal part of growing up. The findings gleaned from this study may also help inform counselling approaches and interventions aimed at supporting adolescents in the aftermath of a difficult friendship dissolution. In order to make sense of adolescents' experiences of self-compassion and friendship dissolutions, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009) as the research methodology, as it is particularly useful for conducting in-depth explorations of how individuals make sense of meaningful experiences in their lives. In this case, IPA allowed for an in-depth exploration and analysis of how adolescents made sense of their experiences with self-compassion in the face of difficult friendship dissolutions, while also acknowledging the researchers' role in making sense of participants' experiences.

The Researcher

As the researcher conducting this study, I bring with me my own set of experiences, assumptions, and perspectives to the process. In undertaking qualitative research, special attention must be given to the researcher and their background (Berger, 2015). In my instance, I am a White plus-size woman who grew up middle-class in Southwestern Ontario and for as long as I can remember, I have been passionate about working with children and adolescents. At sixteen years old, I began working as a summer camp counsellor where I witnessed the profound impact that unconditional acceptance and empathic concern can wield in shaping young lives. What began as a passion for summer camp has since evolved into a lifelong aspiration to provide not only young people, but also adults, with that same acceptance and empathy. Nevertheless, until recently, most of my clinical and counselling experiences have revolved around children and adolescents (e.g., ten years working at summer camps and three years working as a child and youth counsellor). As a result, I am keenly interested in understanding the issues and challenges that young people experience as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Additionally, as an undergraduate student, I was exposed to research that focused on mindfulness and self-compassion as programs that promote positive youth development. Therefore, my curiosity began to revolve around investigating and understanding programs and strategies that may help children and adolescents navigate the inevitable challenges that accompany growing up.

This curiosity led me to pursue graduate studies in developmental psychology. Considering my affinity for summer camp, when given the opportunity to conduct independent research as a graduate student, I wanted to explore the summer camp setting as a possible delivery method for such interventions. Fortunately, I had the privilege to develop "Be Kind to Your Mind," a five-day mindfulness and self-compassion intervention for children and adolescents, as a part of my master's thesis. We then piloted this program at an overnight

summer camp in Southwestern Ontario and found that children and adolescent participants experienced several mental health benefits. Conducting this research instilled in me a sense of optimism in regard to self-compassion and its benefits among child and adolescent populations.

After the successful completion of my master's thesis in developmental psychology, I was accepted into the counselling psychology program at the University of Alberta. Here, I remained interested in the beneficial nature of self-compassion; however, I wanted to explore self-compassion within the context of interpersonal relationships. I recognized that I, as an individual, placed great emphasis on building and maintaining meaningful friendships. Throughout my adolescence, I found great joy in friendships and also deep sadness in close friendships ending. Therefore, my own experiences with friendship dynamics propelled me explore the role of self-compassion in the face of difficult friendship dissolutions among adolescents.

Overview of Thesis

This thesis is comprised of five chapters, each serving a distinct purpose. Chapter two presents a literature review, offering context and justification for the present study. In the subsequent chapter (chapter three), I review the methodology used and discuss relevant ethical considerations. The fourth chapter involves an analysis of the study's findings. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I provide a discussion of the findings in relation to existing research. Alongside this discussion, I review implications for counselling, study limitations and suggested directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

To help set the stage for my study, this chapter begins with brief coverage of theory and empirical research on adolescent development and mental health. I then review some of the current literature on friendship, before focusing on the beneficial nature of friendships among adolescents. Thereafter, I discuss the relevance of friendship dissolutions in adolescence, as well as the negative implications of these dissolutions. Finally, I introduce self-compassion as a possible strategy that may be beneficial to adolescents who have experienced the difficult ending of a close friendship. In that section, I review conceptualizations of self-compassion as well as its mental health benefits among adolescents. I then conclude with a review of theoretical and empirical evidence that supports the notion of self-compassion being of potential benefit to adolescents experiencing difficult friendship breakups.

Adolescent Development and Mental Health

Among scholars, there are differing opinions on the age range of adolescence. Some characterize adolescence as the period spanning from 10 to 25 years of age (González-Cabrera et al., 2022; Steinberg, 2014). Others characterize it as the period between 10 and 18 years of age (Liu et al., 2022; Zhou & Wu, 2020), with the years 18-29 being its own developmental period, called emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2015). Furthermore, many researchers and practitioners differentiate between specific stages of adolescence. The period spanning 10-12, roughly corresponding with the middle school or junior high school years, is often considered *early adolescence* (Liu et al., 2022; Zhou & Wu, 2020). The period spanning 13-15, which roughly aligns with high school years, is often referred to as *middle adolescence*; and finally, the period spanning 16-18, corresponding with the end of high school and the beginning of college years is often considered *late adolescence* (Liu et al., 2022; Zhou & Wu, 2020). The developmental

periods wherein adolescents appear to be particularly vulnerable to experiencing difficult

friendship dissolutions are the ending of early adolescence, the entirety of middle, and the

beginning of late adolescence (Azmitia & Lippman, 1999; Bowker, 2011; Flannery & Smith,

2021; Poulin & Chan, 2010).

Developmental Transitions and Changes

As young people progress through puberty, they experience significant changes and

transitions. These transitions often occur within three key areas, including cognition, identity

development, and social-emotional development. As adolescents mature, they experience rapid

changes in brain structure that result in significant cognitive advances (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2018;

Steinberg, 2005, 2009). During this time, young people acquire new skills such as thinking about

abstract concepts (e.g., values and moral reasoning), and thinking about one's own thinking,

referred to as metacognition (Sanders, 2013; Weil et al., 2013). Identity development is another

pivotal hallmark of adolescence, as adolescents try to ascertain and define their sense of self

(Erikson, 1968; Meeus et al., 2010). According to Erikson's (1968) psychosocial stages of

development, identity formation is contingent on the accomplishment of building trust,

developing autonomy, taking initiative, and demonstrating competence (also referred to as

industry). Finally, adolescence is also a period characterized by significant social-emotional

growth and development. Adolescents' social relationships shift during this time period, as

adolescents begin to gain more autonomy from their parents (Eccles, 1999; Kagitcibasi, 2013;

Lekes et al., 2010). In summary, the transitional journey through adolescence is one marked by

profound changes and advances in cognitive, identity, and social-emotional development.

Mental Health Concerns

In addition to adolescence being a phase of intense development, this period is also characterized by an increased risk of developing emotional, behavioural, and mental health concerns (Steinberg, 2005). For example, although adolescents' increased cognitive capacities (e.g., self-reflection, self-awareness, and metacognition) are indeed normal and crucial aspects of development (Bialecka-Pikul et al., 2020), they may also lead to increases in negative social comparison and self-criticism (Gilbert & Irons, 2009; Neff, 2003a). Among adolescents from various cultural backgrounds, higher levels of self-criticism have been associated with several psychological concerns, such as anxiety (Aruta et al., 2021; Barcaccia et al., 2022) and depression (Aruta et al., 2021; Auerbach et al., 2014; Barcaccia et al., 2022). In Western samples, higher levels of self-criticism have also been associated with increased likelihood of non-suicidal self-injury (Xavier et al., 2017; Zelkowitz & Cole, 2020) and eating disorders (Fennig et al., 2008; Zelkowitz & Cole, 2020).

Furthermore, some adolescents may experience distress as they work towards developing a coherent sense of identity (Becht et al., 2016; Erikson, 1968). In one longitudinal study, Becht and colleagues (2016) explored identity formation and psychosocial adjustment among a large sample of Dutch adolescents in the early and middle stages of adolescence (ages 11 to 14). Participants were followed for a five-year period and once every three months completed questionnaires that measured identity formation and various indices of psychosocial adjustment. The researchers found that participants who experienced more identity fluctuations were more likely to report more psychosocial adjustment problems, such as anxiety and aggression. These findings highlight how challenges with identity may be associated with mental health concerns among adolescents.

Additionally, Wiens and colleagues (2020) recently used data from the *Canada Community Health Survey* (CCHS; Statistics Canada, 2017) to analyze trends in mental health concerns among Canadian youth ages 12 to 24. Findings indicated that between 2011 and 2018, adolescents reported significant increases in mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours. As a part of their study, Wiens and colleagues also analyzed trends in binge drinking, cannabis use and other illicit drug use. While the prevalence of binge drinking decreased from 2011 to 2018, cannabis use and other illicit drug use remained relatively stable; however, the prevalence of cocaine use and hallucinogen use increased over time. In addition, Toulany et al. (2022) reported that eating disorder-related hospital visits have increased significantly among Canadian children and adolescents in recent years. Taken together, these trends are reflective of the severity of mental health concerns among adolescents in Canada and illustrate the importance of the identification of resilience resources and positive coping strategies for adolescents. Close friendships may act as important buffers and sources of social support amidst the challenges of adolescence; thus, for adolescents, the dissolution of close friendships may represent a loss of that buffer and source of social support.

Friendship

Definition and Conceptualizations

In the friendship literature, many scholars rely on Hays' (1988) definition of friendship: a "voluntary interdependence between two persons over time, that is intended to facilitate socio-emotional goals of the participants and may involve varying types and degrees of companionship, intimacy, affection, and mutual assistance" (p. 395). Characteristics of this definition appear across many other conceptualizations. Firstly, many scholars have emphasized that friendships are voluntary relationships, in contrast to familial relationships (e.g., parents,

siblings, aunts, and uncles) or work relationships (e.g., employees, colleagues) that are more

involuntary in nature (Hays, 1988; Pezirkianidis et al., 2023). In other words, friendships are

"never a necessary consequence of role positions" (Hays, 1988, p. 392). Although one may

consider their family members and/or colleagues to also be friends, the dynamic and nature of

close friendships between family members and/or colleagues often go beyond the typical scope

of familial and collegial relationships.

Most scholars have also agreed that friendships are characterized by companionship and

some level of intimacy that is developed over time (Dunbar, 2018; Hays, 1998). While some

friendships are fairly casual in nature (e.g., members of the dyad converse with each other

occasionally), others are marked by greater intimacy wherein the members of the dyad (i.e., close

friends) spend significant amounts of time together and develop close emotional bonds.

Friendships are also typically characterized by an element of mutual care (Blieszner, 2014;

Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Friends may demonstrate this care in a number of ways. One way

includes providing emotional support to each another (Demir et al., 2011; Demir et al., 2013). In

a large sample of European adults in which respondents were asked "What is a good friend?,"

the most common qualities included unconditional presence, unconditional support, and trust

(Policarpo, 2015). In other words, friends spend time with each other, support each other, and

trust each other (Dunbar, 2018; Policarpo, 2015).

Theoretical Perspectives

In addition to defining friendship and identifying its key characteristics, psychologists

have offered several explanations as to why friendships play such a pivotal role in individuals'

lives. From an attachment perspective, developing close friendships may be an extension of

individuals' desires to form strong attachments with their parental figures in infancy (Gilbert,

2009a). According to attachment theory, children use the quality of their early interactions with their caregivers to build cognitive schemas about being worthy (or unworthy) of love and care (Bowlby, 1969; Sümer, 2015). Research has suggested that children, adolescents, and adults may use their interactions with their friends to build additional schemas about their worthiness (Sümer, 2015). Thus, friendships may offer individuals additional opportunities to seek warmth, security, and reassurance. An additional theory that may explain the importance of developing and maintaining friendships is the *belongingness hypothesis* (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Demir & Özdemir, 2010). According to this theory, all human beings have a fundamental need to belong. More specifically, humans have a need for frequent and pleasant interactions with others within the context of relationships that endure across time (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Thus, individuals seek out interpersonal relationships (i.e., close friendships) with others as a means to fill those needs. Taken together, these theories illuminate why friendships may play such a crucial role in individuals' lives, encompassing the fulfillment of attachment-driven desires and the satisfaction of the fundamental human need for belongingness.

From an evolutionary perspective, friendships are associated with increased chances of survival and human reproduction (Lewis et al., 2015). The increased likelihood of survival can be explained by the theory of reciprocal altruism (Gilbert, 2005a; Lewis et al., 2015). Based on this theory, individuals who form and maintain friendships with non-kin greatly benefit from the altruistic tendencies of their companions. For example, among early societies, interpersonal relationships with non-kin may have been advantageous when individuals relied on the hunting and gathering of food for survival (Lewis et al., 2015). In more contemporary times, friendships continue to offer benefits as they provide practical and economic aid in times of necessity

(Dunbar, 2018). Additionally, individuals who form multiple close friendships increase their

mating opportunities, thereby increasing their chances of reproducing (Lewis et al., 2015).

Another theory that relates to the above perspectives on friendship is Gilbert's (1989,

2005b) theory of social mentalities. Gilbert described social mentality theory as a

biopsychosocial and evolutionary approach to understanding interpersonal relationships.

According to this theory, humans have evolved to be social creatures who think and behave in

ways that allow us to build meaningful interpersonal relationships. Gilbert (2005b) also

maintained that there are several archetypal social mentalities at the root of human motivation

and behaviour. Many archetypal social mentalities can be seen in individuals' approaches to

close friendships. For example, the care-seeking social mentality relates to friendship such that in

friendships, friends may seek comfort and emotional support from each other. Similarly, people

may approach their friendships with a care-giving mentality. When motivated by care giving,

individuals act in certain ways that enable their friends to flourish and grow. For example,

individuals may be more motivated to offer comfort and emotional support to their friends in

times of pain and distress. On the topic of social mentalities and friendships, Gilbert (2009a)

asserted that "if you want to have a close friendship, you must find somebody who will share and

interact with you in such a way that together you form and experience the pleasures of

friendship" (p. 150). In other words, according to social mentality theory, humans are wired to

think and behave in ways that allow them to benefit greatly from developing and maintaining

close friendships.

Friendship in Adolescence

Although friendships impact individuals' mental health and well-being throughout the

lifespan (Demir & Weitekamp, 2007), friendships play a critical role in the lives of adolescents

(Bagwell et al., 2015; Demir & Urberg, 2004). In the paragraphs that follow I highlight the beneficial nature of friendships among adolescents, especially in relation to optimal development, mental health, and well-being.

Friendships and Development

Developing and maintaining close friendships has important implications for adolescents' healthy development. For example, research has suggested that close friendships may help adolescents refine their cognitive abilities and strengthen their skills in perspective taking and problem solving (Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Miklikowska et al., 2022; Steinberg, 2005). Additionally, as adolescents enhance their cognitive abilities, their capacity for intimacy increases; this enables adolescents to reflect more meaningfully on their experiences of friendship and engage more deeply in these relationships (Azmitia et al., 1999; Erikson, 1968; Neff, 2003a). With deeper and more meaningful engagement may come greater opportunities for adolescents' relationships to positively impact the transition from adolescence to adulthood. More specifically, close friendships may offer adolescents opportunities to understand moral responsibility and obligations within the context of interpersonal relationships (Keller & Edelstein, 1991). This may allow adolescents to develop and strengthen their own value systems and sense of morality.

Identity development is also often closely tied to interpersonal relationships (Mattingly et al., 2020; Sullivan, 1953; Thomas & Daubman, 2001). As adolescents mature, they begin to ask themselves, "Who am I?" and often rely on interpersonal relationships to help answer this question. Adolescents rely on close relationships with their friends to help build their sense of self (Sullivan, 1953). Sullivan's (1953) theory on friendships in adolescence suggested that close friendships create feelings of intimacy and validation which in turn influence the development of

a stable identity, as adolescents recognize their self-worth in the contexts of these close

friendships. Additionally, as mentioned, Erikson (1968) identified four key tasks that relate to

identity formation in adolescence: building trust, developing autonomy, taking initiative, and

demonstrating competence (also referred to as industry). When Jones and colleagues (2014)

studied friendship characteristics and adolescent identity formation, they found that support from

friends was positively associated with higher levels of initiative and competence. Conversely, the

researchers found that conflict within friendships was associated with lower levels of trust,

autonomy, and competence. Considering this study, in tandem with theoretical frameworks

developed by Sullivan (1953) and Erikson (1968), it is evident that friendships contribute

significantly to positive identity development among adolescents.

Finally, close friendships contribute to adolescents' social-emotional growth and

development as adolescent friendships provide a context for young people to learn and practice

various social and emotional skills. Building and strengthening these skills may prove beneficial

to adolescents as they transition into adulthood and expand their social networks (Bagwell &

Schmidt, 2011; Hartup & Stevens, 1997). For example, adolescent friendships may help

adolescents develop greater empathy for their peers and others. In one recent longitudinal study,

Miklikowska and colleagues (2022) explored the role of peer relations in the development of

empathy among Swedish adolescents aged 15 to 19. Participants were asked to provide the name

of up to eight friends; the researchers then used those nominations to find reciprocal friendship

dyads (i.e., friendship pairs wherein both members of the dyad nominated the other as one of

their close friends). Participants' empathic concern was then measured at two time points, and

the authors looked at empathic concern across participants over time. The findings indicated that

when one adolescent was friends with another adolescent higher in empathic concern than them,

participants' own empathy increased significantly over time. Participation in close friendships

may also help adolescents develop more sophisticated emotion regulation skills (Dollar &

Calkins, 2019; Zeman et al., 2019). As adolescents develop their friendships, they learn to

recognize their friends' emotions, such as anger (Dollar & Calkins, 2019) and sadness (Zeman et

al., 2019), and may also learn new strategies to regulate these difficult emotions. For example,

Lindsey (2022) recently examined American adolescents' (ages 13 and 14) use of emotion

regulation strategies in interpersonal relationships (with parents and best friends) in relation to

internalizing and externalizing behaviour. Expression of emotion between best friends was

significantly negatively associated with internalizing behaviours, whereas suppression of

emotion between best friends was significantly positively associated with internalizing

behaviours. This suggests that emotion regulation strategies learned and utilized in interpersonal

contexts can also be turned inward and can help adolescents deal with internalizing behaviours,

such as anxiety and depression. In summary, developing and maintaining close friendships has

significant benefits for adolescents as they navigate various aspects of their development.

Benefits to Mental Health and Well-Being

Among adolescents, high quality friendships have been continually associated with high

levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and other indices of well-being (Bagwell et al., 2015; Jose,

2015; Lambert et al., 2014; Oberle et al., 2010; Raboteg & Sakik, 2014; Schacter & Margolin,

2019). When Raboteg-Saric and Sakic (2014) examined friendship quality and happiness, life

satisfaction, and self-esteem among Croatian high school students aged 15 to 20, they found that

friendship quality significantly predicted all three. Schacter and Margolin (2019)'s study yielded

similar results when they investigated the impact of friendship connections on adolescents'

happiness in their daily lives. Adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 were recruited from a

large American city and asked to complete single-item questionnaires measuring perceived

social support and happiness daily. Results revealed that on days when adolescents felt more

connected to their friends, they also reported feeling happier. When exploring the relationship

between the number of close friends one has and life satisfaction across the lifespan, Kang

(2023) found that the association between the number of close friends and life satisfaction was

the strongest among adolescents and young adults, when compared to middle-age and older

adults. Taken together, these studies demonstrate the beneficial nature of close friendships during

adolescence.

Moreover, research has repeatedly demonstrated that social support, such as the support

provided by close friends, may be an important buffer against the stressors and mental health

concerns that emerge during adolescence (Finan et al., 2018; Hall & Melia, 2023; La Greca &

Moore Harrison, 2005). For example, Finan and colleagues (2018) found that support from a

close friend predicted lower levels of depressive symptoms among a large sample of adolescent

boys and girls recruited from the Mid-Atlantic United States. Afiti (2006), in exploring the risk

and protective factors of depressive symptoms among adolescents aged 14 to 20 in Oman, found

that friendship quality was associated with decreased risk of showing depressive symptoms. In

another study, La Greca and Moore Harrison (2005) found that positive friendship qualities, such

as intimacy and support, were associated with decreased symptoms of social anxiety. Taken

together, these studies provide evidence that participants' close friends may help protect against

depressive symptoms and social anxiety. Furthermore, in a recent review and thematic analysis,

Hall and Melia (2023) explored the relationships between friendships and self-harming

behaviour among adolescent participants from various countries and cultures, all ranging in ages

from 11 to 19. Results revealed that close friends acted as the main source of support for

adolescents who self-harmed. In Hall and Melia's study, participants also played a vital role in encouraging their friends to change their self-harming behaviours and disclose the behaviour to a trusted adult.

In addition, research has demonstrated that as adolescents in Western cultures mature, they begin to rely on their friends, more than their family members, as sources of emotional support (Flannery & Smith, 2021; Poulin & Chan, 2010). Therefore, close friendships may act as a resilience resource and promote positive coping skills and flourishing among young people. In one study, Graber and colleagues (2016) looked at the benefits of how a single close friendship may facilitate psychological resilience among British youth (ages 11 to 19) from low socio-economic backgrounds. The authors found that higher friendship quality was significantly correlated with higher psychological resilience. Similarly, when van Harmelen and colleagues (2017) looked at social support as a predictor of resiliency, they asked a large sample of American adolescents aged 14 to 24 to complete questionnaires focusing on the support they received from their friends and family members; questionnaires also included various measures of psychosocial resilience. The results revealed that support from both family and friends predicted immediate resiliency. However only support from friends predicted resiliency in later adolescence and early adulthood. Each of these studies highlight the various ways that social support received from friendships may buffer against the stress and mental health concerns that often arise in adolescence.

Friendship Dissolutions in Adolescence

Despite their developmental significance, adolescents' friendships are also more fragile than their other interpersonal relationships (Dunbar, 2018; Flannery & Smith, 2021). Therefore, friendship dissolutions are extremely common among adolescents; and when adolescents'

friendships end, teenagers may lose the buffering effect their friendships once provided (Bowker et al., 2023; Meter & Card, 2016). Bowker (2011) distinguishes between two types of friendship dissolutions: complete dissolutions that result in the termination of a friendship, and downgrade dissolutions that result in decreased quality and/or closeness of a friendship. Both types of dissolutions occur frequently in adolescence and have their own emotional consequences (Bowker, 2011; Bowker et al., 2023).

Based on existing literature, Flannery and Smith (2021) have estimated that over 50% of adolescents will experience at least one friendship dissolution as they mature from childhood to adulthood. There are several reasons why this may be the case. Firstly, adolescence often includes the environmental transition from elementary school to high school. This means that young people's friendships are vulnerable to dissolutions that occur naturally due to this transition (i.e., changing schools). In one study exploring adolescents' transition from elementary school to high school in the South East of England, only 27% of adolescents reported having the same best friend in high school that they did in elementary school (Ng-Knight et al., 2019). Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that many adolescents experience some type of friendship dissolution as they transition from elementary school to high school. Additionally, as adolescence is a period characterized by rapid social and emotional changes (Jansen & Kiefer, 2020), interpersonal relationships may suffer as a result. This may be because adolescents are still developing their ability to understand others' perspectives and resolve conflict; therefore, when problems inevitably arise, adolescents may not possess the social-emotional skills to resolve the conflict (Flannery & Smith, 2021). In addition, although adolescents experience significant cognitive advances as they mature, areas of the brain associated with emotion regulation may be especially sensitive at the beginning of puberty (Jansen & Kiefer, 2020). This

means that at a time characterized by significant changes in their social relationships, adolescents may be especially vulnerable to emotional reactions in interpersonal conflicts that may lead to friends parting paths. Considering the beneficial nature of friendships in adolescence, coupled with the frequency of dissolutions during this developmental period, researchers have begun exploring the negative implications of these friendship endings (Azmitia & Lippman, 1999; Bowker, 2011; Bowker et al., 2023; Flannery & Smith, 2021).

Although the research on friendship dissolutions in adolescence has only recently emerged, research thus far has demonstrated that adolescents experience a myriad of negative emotions related to the ending of their close friendships (Bowker, 2011; Bowker et al., 2023; Flannery & Smith, 2021). Research has also demonstrated that friendship dissolutions are nuanced; in other words, not all friendship breakups look alike. When Flannery and Smith (2021) looked at friendship dissolutions among early adolescents, there was significant variance in reasons for the dissolution, ways in which the friendship ended, and in participants' emotional reactions to the dissolutions. Participants' emotional reactions differed significantly based on the reasons why the friendship ended and how the ending occurred. For example, those adolescents who initiated friendship dissolutions experienced significant anger when they felt betrayed by their former friends, when they felt their friendships were not reciprocal, or when situational factors contributed to the friendship dissolution. Participants also experienced stress and guilt when they felt a lack of companionship in their friendships and subsequently terminated their friendships. This suggests that friendship breakups can be distressing even when the loss is voluntary (Chan & Poulin, 2009).

Flannery and Smith (2021) also looked at the emotional responses of adolescents who were not the initiators of friendship dissolutions. Results indicated that adolescents who did not

initiate the friendship dissolutions experienced more sadness when their friendships ended, when compared to adolescents who did initiate the dissolution. Adolescents who self-reported committing acts of transgression that resulted in the loss of a close friendship also experienced significant stress and guilt when their friendships ended. When Bowker and colleagues (2023) examined friendship dissolutions among early adolescents, the researchers also found that adolescents who did not initiate friendship dissolutions experienced more sadness, as well as feelings of embarrassment, than adolescents who had been initiators. Adolescents who do not initiate friendship dissolutions may experience these friendship breakups as interpersonal rejections (Bowker, 2011). Considering the significance of close friendships in adolescence, these rejections can be extremely hurtful and lead to intense emotional pain for individuals (Leary, 2015). Similarly, considering that having close friendships significantly impacts adolescents' development of identity and self-worth (Erikson, 1968; Sullivan, 1953), when close friendships end, adolescents' self-concept may also be negatively impacted.

Although reactions to friendship dissolutions are nuanced, and the literature is still in its nascent stages, one thing is clear: friendship dissolutions can be painful for adolescents. When their close friendships end, not only do adolescents experience negative emotions related to the dissolution, but they may also lose the buffering that stable friendships offer against the stressors and challenges in adolescence. Given the potential negative consequences of experiencing ruptures in adolescents' close friendships, Flannery and Smith (2021) have recommended that researchers focus on strategies and interventions that may help individuals navigate difficult friendship dissolutions. One such strategy may be self-compassion.

Self-Compassion

Currently, the psychological literature on self-compassion has been heavily influenced by the work of Neff (2003a) and Gilbert (2009a). In the following section, I review both researchers' conceptualizations of self-compassion and expand upon the reasons why self-compassion may be a promising strategy for adolescents navigating difficult friendship dissolutions.

Neff's Conceptualization

Self-compassion, as described by Neff (2003a) has its roots in Buddhist philosophy, and can be understood as compassion turned inwards. According to Neff, self-compassion is comprised of three unique, yet closely related, components: (a) self-kindness, (b) common humanity, and (c) mindfulness. Self-kindness refers to treating oneself with kindness and understanding, rather than with harsh judgment and self-criticism. Common humanity refers to the acknowledgement that imperfections and insecurities are a common element of the human experience. When recognizing the common humanity component of self-compassion, individuals are discouraged from isolating themselves from others when experiencing pain and sorrow. Finally, mindfulness refers to experiencing one's thoughts and emotions in a balanced manner. When embracing the mindful component of self-compassion, individuals are encouraged to acknowledge their emotions and experiences without avoiding them or being overwhelmed by them. According to Neff (2003a), self-compassion differs from self-esteem in significant ways. Self-esteem often relies on judgments from oneself and others whereas self-compassion does not, making it significantly less evaluative (Neff & Vonk, 2009). Additionally, self-esteem may also be contingent upon external indicators of achievement, whereas self-compassion can be cultivated internally.

Gilbert's Conceptualization

In Gilbert's interpretation of self-compassion, compassion is defined as an awareness of the pain and suffering of others coupled with the desire and action taken to alleviate that suffering (Gilbert, 2009a). Self-compassion refers to the process by which individuals become aware of their own pain and suffering and subsequently relate to that pain and suffering with a desire to alleviate it. Gilbert's approach to self-compassion has its roots in his tri-partite theory of emotion regulation and the aforementioned theory of social mentalities.

According to Gilbert's (2005b, 2009a, 2020) tri-partite theory of emotion regulation, humans rely on three main systems to help with emotion regulation: threat and self-protection, incentive and resource-seeking, and soothing and contentment. Each of these three systems has their own unique role to play in regulating individuals' affect and behaviour. According to Gilbert (2009a), the *threat and self-protection* system has evolved to identify threats and respond quickly; therefore, when this system identifies danger, individuals may react quickly with intense feelings of anger, anxiety, and/or disgust in order to protect themselves from the perceived threat. The *incentive and resource-seeking* system, in contrast, has evolved to motivate and direct individuals towards the attainment of helpful resources and the achievement of important life goals. This system is often associated with feelings of excitement and vitality and acts as a source of "anticipation and pleasure" (Gilbert, 2009a, pg. 201). The third and final system, the *soothing and contentment* system, is the system responsible for regulating the other two systems and for producing feelings of comfort, warmth, and social affiliation and affection. According to Gilbert's (2005b, 2009a) theory, responding to one's experiences and emotions with self-compassion activates the soothing and contentment system and allows a person to access the positive emotions associated with the activation of this system.

From a social mentality perspective, individuals often relate to themselves through the same systems that they employ when relating to others (Gilbert, 2005b). More specifically, tapping into individuals' care-seeking and care-giving social mentalities allows individuals to relate to themselves with that same compassion and reassurance (Gilbert, 2005b; Hermanto & Zuroff, 2016). For example, when coming from a care-seeking mentality, individuals seek out feelings of warmth, reassurance, safety, and security when experiencing distress (Gilbert, 2005b, 2009, 2014). When motivated by care giving, individuals are sensitive to the distress of others and respond by expressing love and caring (Gilbert, 2014). Self-compassion, therefore, involves using these skills and competencies to relate to the self with a caring mentality.

Self-Compassion Among Adolescents

As key forerunners in self-compassion research, both Neff and Gilbert have sparked a groundswell of research on the benefits of self-compassion among adolescents. On the need to develop self-compassion in adolescence, Neff (2003a) asserted: "adolescent egocentrism no doubt contributes to increased self-criticism, feelings of isolation, and over-identification with emotions, meaning that self-compassion is likely to be especially needed but especially lacking during this stage of life" (p 95). Similarly, Gilbert and Irons (2009) suggested that self-compassion may be a helpful antidote to the intense shame and self-criticism experienced in adolescence. Among adolescents, self-compassion has been positively associated with several indices of mental health and well-being including: life satisfaction (Bluth & Blanton, 2014, 2015; Bluth, Gaylord et al., 2016), positive affect (Bluth, Gaylord et al., 2016), and resilience (Bluth et al., 2018; Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017). Conversely, self-compassion has also been associated with decreased symptoms of self-reported stress (Bluth & Blanton, 2014, 2015; Bluth, Roberson et al., 2016), depression (Neff & McGehee, 2010), anxiety (Bluth, Gaylord et al.,

2016; Neff & McGehee, 2010), and negative affect (Bluth & Blanton, 2014, 2015). Although these and other quantitative studies play an important role in understanding the benefits of self-compassion among adolescents, qualitative research helps by bringing attention to the contextualized meaning and experiences of self-compassion from the perspective of adolescents (Klingle & Van Vliet, 2019). Different research methods produce different types of insights (Willig, 2019). Qualitative inquiry elevates the voices of participants by focusing on gaining in-depth understandings of participants' lived experiences. This allows researchers to capture the more unique and nuanced perspectives that may be missing from large-scale quantitative studies.

When Klingle and Van Vliet (2019) explored self-compassion from the adolescent perspective, they found that self-compassion centered around eight key themes. For adolescents, treating themselves compassionately meant: putting oneself at the center, maintaining a positive outlook, engaging in pleasurable activities, connecting positively with others, working on self-improvement, making oneself attractive to others, accepting oneself, and experiencing emotional balance. Although researchers have examined self-compassion from the adolescent perspective, a gap in the literature remains in regard to how self-compassion may support adolescents navigating difficult friendship dissolutions. In the following section, I will discuss the beneficial nature of self-compassion in relation to the need to promote recovery among adolescents experiencing the ending of a close friendship.

Self-Compassion and Friendship Dissolutions

Across many studies, self-compassion has been associated with several outcomes that may prove especially beneficial to adolescents navigating difficult friendship dissolutions. In the following sections, I discuss the potential benefits of self-compassion among adolescents experiencing difficult friendship breakups.

Self-Compassion, Mental Health, and Well-Being

Among adolescents, the ending of a close friendship may negatively impact mental health and well-being (Bowker et al., 2023; Flannery & Smith, 2021). Many adolescents who experience the ending of a close friendship experience symptoms of stress and depression (Bowker et al., 2023; Chan & Poulin, 2009; Flannery & Smith, 2021). Across several studies, self-compassion has been associated with lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Barry et al., 2015; Bluth & Blanton, 2014, 2015; Bluth, Gaylord et al., 2016; Bluth, Roberson et al., 2016; Egan et al., 2022; Marsh et al., 2018). For example, when Bluth and Blanton (2015) investigated the relationship between self-compassion and well-being among American adolescents ages 11 to 18, the authors found self-compassion was significantly negatively correlated with perceived stress. Similarly, Barry and colleagues (2015) found that higher levels of self-compassion were significantly negatively correlated with symptoms of anxiety and depression among adolescent males aged 16 to 18. Taken together, these studies highlight the potential benefits of self-compassion among adolescents who may be experiencing mental health challenges related to the ending of a close friendship.

In addition to heightened negative emotions and stress, adolescents who experience difficult friendship dissolutions may also lose the social support once afforded to them by their close friend(s). Thus, adolescents who experience friendship loss may also lose the potential buffering effect of close friendship against adolescent stressors. Self-compassion has been considered social support turned inwards (Bluth, Gaylord et al., 2016); thus, self-compassion may promote recovery from difficult friendship dissolutions by allowing adolescents to replace the support they once received from their friend(s) with their own self-support and self-compassion. Despite self-compassion's relevance to these indices of mental health and well-

being, its potential as a coping mechanism for adolescents experiencing friendship loss has not

yet been investigated, and therefore a significant gap in the literature remains.

Self-Compassion and Positive Coping

Self-compassion has also been theoretically and empirically linked to positive coping

across several studies (Bluth et al., 2018; Leary et al., 2007; Muris et al., 2019; Neff, 2003a;

Scoglio et al., 2018). For example, among adolescent populations, self-compassion has been

associated with higher levels of resiliency (Bluth et al., 2018) and healthy emotion regulation

(Muris et al., 2019). Neff (2003a) suggested that self-compassion may promote healthy emotion

regulation by encouraging individuals to approach their emotions with mindful awareness and

curiosity, and therefore may lead to more positive coping and problem solving. Among

adolescents, self-compassion has been associated with increased positive coping and decreased

negative coping strategies (Muris et al., 2019). As a part of their study on self-compassion and

coping, Muris and colleagues (2019) had participants (ages 14 to 19) complete the Self-

Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003b) and the Adolescents' Reactions to Adversity Questionnaire

*(*ARAQ*; Byme & Mazanov, 2002; Wright et al., 2010), among other measures. The ARAQ

measures responses to ten hypothetical scenarios describing typical problems that occur

frequently in adolescence, with friendship breakup being among them. When the authors looked

at the correlations between self-compassion and coping reactions, self-compassion was

significantly positively correlated with positive coping reactions, such as optimism and

perspective taking. Furthermore, self-compassion was significantly negatively correlated with

negative coping reactions, such as putting oneself down and feelings of shame. Based on these

findings, self-compassion may buffer against experiencing negative emotions related to daily life

problems among adolescents, such as friendship dissolutions. Although friendship breakups were

mentioned on the ARAQ, the inclusion of friendship dissolution in Muris et al.'s study was

minimal. A more nuanced and individualized understanding of adolescents' experiences of self-

compassion is needed, in the context of difficult friendship dissolutions.

Given that friendship dissolutions have been associated with a myriad of negative

emotions (Bowker et al., 2023; Flannery & Smith, 2021), it is plausible that self-compassion may

promote healthy emotion regulation among adolescents navigating a difficult friendship breakup.

In terms of friendship dissolutions, self-compassion encourages individuals to be open to *all* of

their emotions (Neff, 2003a), regardless of how painful they may be. By practicing self-

compassion, and demonstrating an openness to their unpleasant emotions, adolescents may learn

to regulate these emotions more effectively. Additionally, Flannery and Smith (2021) have

posited that the impact of friendship dissolutions may be cumulative. The authors suggested that

the more dissolutions adolescents experience, the more likely adolescents may be to experience

negative emotions. After experiencing an emotionally painful dissolution, individuals may feel

defeated and unmotivated to learn new skills to be more successful in future relationships

(Flannery & Smith, 2021). Self-compassion has been associated with increased self-

improvement motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012; Klingle & Van Vliet, 2019), and therefore one

might speculate that self-compassion may promote recovery among adolescents by promoting

self-improvement motivation, acting as an antidote to feelings of defeat and a lack of motivation.

Self-Compassion and Self-Concept

Self-compassion has also been theoretically and empirically related to a positive self-

concept. Considering the saliency of identity formation, along with the negative implications that

interpersonal rejections may have on adolescents' sense of self-worth and self-concept, it is

imperative to understand strategies and practices that may promote the rebuilding of a positive

self-concept. Adolescents often rely on their close friendships for information regarding their

identity (Jones et al., 2014). Therefore, when those friendships end, it can lead to intense feelings

of shame and self-criticism. Adolescents who experience difficult friendship dissolutions may

perceive them as interpersonal rejections (Leary, 2015). As self-compassion is ultimately

characterized by relating to oneself in a positive manner, it is theoretically likely that self-

compassion would bolster an individual's sense of self-concept and self-worth, in the face of a

difficult friendship dissolution. Additionally, self-compassion differs from self-esteem

significantly in that in encourages individuals to relate to themselves with warmth, kindness, and

care regardless of their self-evaluations. Therefore, self-compassion may buffer against the

negative impacts of friendship dissolutions on adolescents' self-concepts.

Self-Compassion Interventions and Programs

Considering the mental health benefits of practicing self-compassion, researchers have

developed several interventions and programs aimed at increasing individuals' levels of self-

compassion. Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC; Neff & Germer, 2013) and Compassion Focused

Therapy (CFT; Gilbert, 2009a, 2009b, 2014) are among the most common compassion-based

interventions and programs appearing in the literature. Both approaches were initially developed

for adult populations. MSC was developed by Neff and Germer (2013) and it combines the

complimentary benefits of mindfulness and self-compassion. The program consists of eight

weekly meetings in which participants are introduced to a variety of formal (e.g., formal

meditations) and informal (e.g., repeating self-affirming phrases in times of distress) practices

that help participants to cultivate mindfulness and self-compassion. It is considered to be a

"resource-building course" rather than a group intervention (Neff & Germer, 2013, p. 31). When

Neff and Germer (2013) piloted the Mindful Self-Compassion program with adults in the greater

Boston area, participants reported significant increases in mindfulness, self-compassion, life satisfaction, and happiness. Participants also reported significant decreases in depression, anxiety, and stress.

CFT (Gilbert 2009a, 2009b, 2014) is another well-established approach to increasing individuals' ability to relate to themselves with compassion. This approach is deeply rooted in Gilbert's theories of emotion regulation and social mentalities. Central to CFT is a focus on helping clients understand that their feelings of shame and self-criticism are "not their fault" but have evolved as safety strategies (Gilbert, 2009b, p. 201). Another central component of CFT is compassionate mind training, which refers to a series of specific activities designed to help individuals move away from their self-blaming and self-shaming tendencies and move towards a more compassionate way to relate to themselves. When Gilbert and Procter (2006) conducted a pilot study on the effectiveness of compassionate mind training among adults with high shame and self-criticism, they found that compassionate mind training had significant mental health benefits. Participants in the pilot study reported significant reductions in depression, anxiety, shame, and self-criticism, illustrating the potentially beneficial nature of compassionate mind training among adults.

Given the possible benefits of these programs among adults, researchers have also examined the effectiveness of these programs among younger populations. For example, Bluth, Gaylord and colleagues (2016) piloted Mindful Self-Compassion for Teens (MSC-T; formerly called Making Friends with Yourself), a six-week mindful self-compassion program for adolescents. The program was adapted from MSC to be emotionally and developmentally appropriate for adolescents. When Bluth, Gaylord et al. piloted the program, they found that adolescent participants (ages 14 to 17, nonclinical sample) who completed the program reported

significantly lower depression, anxiety and stress scores, when compared to their waitlist counterparts. Other more recent intervention studies have yielded similar results. For example, Bluth and colleagues (2023) recently piloted an online North American version of MSC-T with transgender and gender-diverse adolescents in early and middle adolescence (ages 13 to 17). From pre- to post-intervention, participants experienced significant decreases in depression and anxiety, and significant increases in resilience.

Among adolescent populations, CFT approaches have also yielded positive results (Bratt et al., 2020; Carona et al., 2017; O'Driscoll & McAleese, 2021). For example, in a recent study, O'Driscoll and McAleese (2021) investigated the feasibility and effectiveness of compassionate mind training as a test anxiety intervention among adolescents aged 16 and 17. Participants were quasi-randomly assigned to one of two conditions (compassionate mind training or control) based on their class schedules. Participants in the experimental condition showed significant increases in self-compassion and significant reductions in test anxiety and general anxiety, when compared to their control condition counterparts. Similarly, when Bratt and colleagues (2020) adapted Gilbert's (2009b) CFT approach for use with adolescent females aged 15 to 17, they found that it offered significant mental health benefits. More specifically, they found that adolescents' experiences of participating in a CFT group centered around three key themes: a sense of clarity and relief, feeling connected, and asserting oneself. These studies (Bluth, Gaylord et al., 2016; Bluth et al., 2023; Bratt et al., 2020; O'Driscoll & McAleese, 2021) have important implications for the present study, as they demonstrate that self-compassion is a teachable and malleable skill with significant potential benefits to adolescents' mental health and well-being.

Summary

In summary, self-compassion may be an especially promising strategy for adolescents struggling with friendship loss. Although researchers have begun to explore friendship dissolutions in adolescence, significant gaps in the literature remain. Research has not yet explored potential recovery strategies for adolescents navigating friendship dissolutions; the current study aimed to help address that gap by exploring the potential role of self-compassion in promoting recovery among these adolescents. Additionally, the present study sought to understand the meaning and experiences of self-compassion among adolescents who had navigated difficult friendship dissolutions, and elevate the voices and perspectives of these adolescents. The knowledge that arose from this study was not only intended to address current gaps in the literature, but also help inform future counselling interventions that may support adolescents in the aftermath of difficult friendship dissolutions.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In order to explore the meaning and experiences of self-compassion among adolescents who had experienced difficult friendship dissolutions, I relied on qualitative methodology, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009), as it allowed for an in-depth and contextualized exploration of adolescents' experiences of self-compassion when navigating difficult friendship dissolutions. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of IPA methodology and explain why it was chosen for the present study. I also discuss three key philosophical ideas that helped to inform the methodology's development. I then outline the details of the present study including participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis before concluding with a brief discussion on methodological integrity and relevant ethical considerations.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA, founded in the late 1990s (Smith, 1996), encourages researchers to examine how individuals make sense of major and meaningful life experiences (Smith et al., 2009). It entails participants sharing their own unique stories in their own unique voices (Noon, 2018) and allows researchers to gain an "insider's perspective" on the chosen phenomenon of study (Smith, 1996, p. 264). When conducting IPA research, it is important to understand the ontological and epistemological assumptions that have helped to inform its development. Ontology refers to the nature of reality and epistemology refers to the understanding of how reality is known (Creswell & Poth, 2018). IPA researchers maintain that when it comes to human experiences, there is no one objective reality (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020; van Manen, 2016). Rather, human experiences are subjective and are highly dependent on the context in which they occur and the perspectives of those with the lived experiences (Park, 2010; Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, in IPA research,

the goal is not to illuminate participants' objective reality, but rather their subjective experiences

of a phenomenon. Furthermore, IPA research embraces a social constructivist framework

wherein meaning is co-created by the participants and the researcher.

I chose IPA as the methodology for the present study as IPA allows researchers to gain

comprehensive, nuanced, and contextualized understandings of human phenomena, while also

providing clear, yet flexible, guidelines to follow when collecting and analyzing data. IPA's

emphasis on meaning and the subjectivity of human experiences makes it a strong choice for

exploring adolescents' experiences and interpretations of self-compassion after facing a difficult

friendship dissolution. Additionally, IPA research is well-suited for studies relating to mental

health and psychotherapy, as it provides "crucial insights into personal experiences and

psychosocial processes" (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p. 114). Finally, IPA is an approach that

explicitly acknowledges the role of the researcher as an interpreter of participants' own

interpretations of experience.

In order to more fully understand and appreciate IPA, it is also helpful to understand

three key philosophical ideas that have influenced its development: phenomenology,

hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). These concepts are discussed in further detail

below.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is concerned with identifying the essential components of phenomena

and understanding how these components make certain human experiences unique (Pietkiewicz

& Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). The concept of phenomenology has been significantly

influenced by the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (Cresswell & Poth,

2018; Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology first emerged as a result of Husserl advocating for the

inclusion of individuals' personal experiences in scientific inquiry as he considered close examinations and rich descriptions of phenomena and experiences (or first-order personal experiences) to be foundational in building theories that would eventually become second-order sources of knowledge (Spiegelberg, 1971). For Husserl, embracing a phenomenological attitude involved "stepping outside of [the] everyday experience" so that it could be examined (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12). Therefore, Husserl encouraged researchers to bracket their preconceived notions about human phenomena and focus on the essence of individuals' consciousness and lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009).

Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre all then expanded upon Husserl's seminal work in their own unique ways. Heidegger was also interested in the essence of human experiences but argued that it was impossible for individuals to completely separate themselves from their everyday experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, he argued that it was impossible for individuals to separate themselves from the culture, objects, people, and relationships that make their everyday experiences meaningful (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger (1962) maintained that phenomena were "structurally interconnected" to the contexts in which they occurred (p. 53). Therefore, according to Heidegger, phenomenological inquiry must consider human beings and their experiences in relation to their worlds and contexts. Sharing ideas with both Husserl and Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty presented the idea of an embodied relationship between the self and its contexts (Smith et al., 2009). According to Merleau-Ponty (1956), human beings and their bodies exist not independently of their contexts *or* in relation to their contexts but exist as a "means of communication" with them (Smith et al., 2009, p. 18). In IPA research, this translates to understanding and appreciating the embodied experiences of participants, past and present:

The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the meaning which appears at the

intersection of my experiences and at the intersection of my experiences with those of

others by the enmeshing of one with the other. Thus it is inseparable from the subjectivity

and from the intersubjectivity which form their unity by taking up my past experiences in

my present experiences and the experiences of others in my own. (Merleau-Ponty, 1956,

p. 69)

Finally, for Sartre, human nature was far less about *being* than it was about *becoming* (Smith et

al., 2009). He also argued that the process of becoming is one that has to be understood within

the context and social climate of an individual's life. In IPA, this translates to understanding how

participants' experiences are situated within individuals' personal and social contexts.

Hermeneutics

Another key concept that has helped to inform IPA is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is also

known as the theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). In IPA, researchers are tasked with

interpreting participants' thoughts and feelings to the best of their ability in order to capture the

essence of their experiences. Therefore, it is at its core an interpretive process, heavily influenced

by hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is concerned with a series of dynamic relationships. One of these

dynamic relationships is the relationship between the part and the whole (Smith et al., 2009). In

IPA research, researchers are encouraged to continuously move between the parts and the whole.

This may mean moving between individual words within a sentence or focusing on individual

sentences within a paragraph. As researchers move through the parts and the whole, they are

continually evaluating the meaning and relevance of both and recognizing that one does not exist

independently from the other.

Another dynamic relationship related to hermeneutics is the relationship between the

interpreter and what is being interpreted. IPA research includes a double hermeneutic or a dual

interpretation process (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2004). In IPA research, the participant

is trying to make sense of their experiences while the researcher is simultaneously trying to make

sense of the participant trying to make sense of their experience. When participants' experiences

and perspectives are understood in relation to the knowledge, experiences, and perspectives held

by the researcher, the two horizons (i.e., the worldviews of the participant and of the researcher)

fuse together. Gadamer (1989) referred to this process as the "fusion of horizons" (p. 350). In

using IPA methodology, understanding the concept of fusion of horizons allowed me to

recognize the role that my own experiences, biases, and preconceptions may play in my

interpretation of participants' experiences.

Idiography

One final key component that has helped to inform IPA is idiography. Most research in

psychology is often monothetic, meaning it is largely group-based (Piccirillo & Rodebaugh,

2019; Smith et al., 2009). IPA research, however, takes a more idiographic approach, by

focusing on the particular. By embracing an idiographic approach, IPA researchers are able to

expand the depth of their data collection and analysis, as they focus on their participants' unique

and nuanced experiences of the phenomenon being studied. The emphasis is on the *particular*

experiences of *particular* participants in *particular* contexts. It is only once researchers have

conducted a detailed and nuanced analysis of each individual case that they are encouraged to

then begin cross-case analysis (Smith, 2004).

The Present Study

Participant Recruitment

Prior to participant recruitment, I received ethics approval from the University of Alberta.

Participants were recruited from local youth organizations in Alberta and Ontario. Recruitment

for participants took place virtually and in-person. First, local youth organizations received

copies of the recruitment poster (see Appendix A). Some local youth organizations shared digital

versions of the recruitment poster with youth electronically; other youth organizations with

physical locations asked for hard copy versions of the recruitment poster so that they could be

posted in relevant spaces that youth frequently occupied. Next, interested participants were asked

to contact me directly via email. Once participants contacted me, I then sent them additional

information about the study, as well as the parent consent (Appendix B) and participant assent

(Appendix C) forms. Once all consent and assent forms were signed, I scheduled a time to

interview them. Four participants were recruited from local youth organizations in Ontario, and

one was recruited from a local youth organization in Alberta.

Participants

A total of five participants took part in this study. They ranged in age from 13 to 16 years

old (*M*= 14.6). Participants' self-reported gender identity was as follows: girl (60%), boy (20%),

and non-binary (20%). All participants identified their ethnicity as White. The inclusion criteria

for participants were as follows: (a) between the ages of 12 and 16, (b) fluent in English, (c)

reported having had a difficult experience with a close friendship ending, and (d) reported

treating themselves with compassion during/following that dissolution. The age range of 12 to 16

was chosen for theoretical and practical reasons. Firstly, researchers have reported that friendship

dissolutions are common among adolescents between the ages of 12 and 16 (Azmitia &

Lippman, 1999; Bowker, 2011; Flannery & Smith, 2021; Poulin & Chan, 2009). Additionally, in

Alberta and Ontario, adolescents between the ages of 12 and 16 are often transitioning from

elementary school to junior high schools and high schools. Therefore, we were able to capture

participants who experienced friendship dissolutions due to changing schools, as well as due to conflict and/or other reasons.

Data Collection

All participants took part in semi-structured individual interviews; these interviews took place virtually via Zoom video conferencing software. Semi-structured individual interviews are the preferred method of data collection in IPA because they encourage a balance between carefully considered questions and naturally occurring conversation between the participant and the researcher (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, although I prepared interview questions in advance (see Appendix D), I did not rely exclusively on these questions. For example, at the onset of each interview, I spent two to five minutes establishing rapport with the participants. When establishing rapport with participants, I did not rely on pre-written questions as I wanted these interactions to be comfortable and authentic for both myself and the participant. I would often start by asking the participant how their day was going, how they were feeling about participating in the research interview, or how they found out about the research study. This approach aligned with best practices in IPA research as IPA suggests that in order to obtain good data from participants, participants must feel comfortable with the interviewer (Smith et al., 2009).

After establishing rapport, each interview began with an introduction of the research purpose, review of assent form, and review of the limits of confidentiality. I then asked participants a short series of demographics questions and recorded their answers on the participant demographic form (see Appendix E). Following this, I began asking participants questions from the interview protocol. The interview included a total of five questions that were designed to capture the meaning and experiences of self-compassion among adolescents

navigating difficult friendship dissolutions. In IPA research it is recommended that the first question allows the participant to recall and share a specific episode or experience (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore the first question in this study was: "Can you tell me a little bit about your close friendship that ended?" The questions that followed encouraged participants to speak about how they experienced self-compassion after their friendship ended. Although the questions from the interview protocol provided structure and focus to the interview, I also allowed the interviews to take on a more conversational tone. This allowed me to ask relevant follow-up questions, in the moment, and proceed in different directions that emerged throughout the interviews. Each initial interview lasted between 25 to 45 minutes and were audio and video-recorded via Zoom video conferencing software. Participants received a $25 gift card to a local movie theatre after participating in the first interview, as a token of appreciation for their participation. I transcribed each initial interview verbatim and then began coding the data. I then began analyzing the data using ATLAS.ti (Scientific Software, Mac version 23.2.1), a qualitative analysis software. I completed the coding and initial data analysis of the first interview before conducting the follow-up interview with the participant. This allowed me to develop relevant follow-up questions and also ensure accuracy of my initial interpretations with participants.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with participants three to six months after the initial interviews. These follow-up interviews lasted between 10 to 25 minutes. Three of the participants agreed to follow-up interviews. Although I attempted to schedule follow-up interviews with the remaining two participants, they were unavailable to participate in follow-up interviews (e.g., one of the participants did not respond to my emails, and the second participant was unavailable due to other commitments). During the follow-up interviews I conducted with available participants, I asked them several relevant follow-up questions to ensure that I was

accurately capturing the thoughts and feelings shared with me in the first interview. I then

transcribed follow-up interviews and completed coding and data analysis, also using ATLAS.ti

(Scientific Software, Mac version 23.2.1).

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data for the present study, I was heavily influenced by the rigorous, yet

flexible, step-by-step guidelines provided by Smith and colleagues' (2009). Smith et al. (2009)

recommended that researchers begin by reading, re-reading, and immersing oneself in the

original data. My immersion with the data began early, as I conducted all interviews with the

participants and transcribed the interviews myself. All interviews were also video-recorded. This

meant that as interviews were transcribed, I could pause and listen to the transcript to ensure

clarity and accuracy. I also relied heavily on the use of memos throughout the interview process

and subsequent data analysis and interpretation process. Smith and colleagues (2009) have

suggested that writing memos throughout the data collection and analysis process allows

researchers' focus to remain with the data. Writing memos allowed me to record and organize

my initial thoughts and ideas, while keeping my focus on the original data. This process also

provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my own biases, assumptions, and experiences and

how they might be influencing my interpretations.

Next, I began coding a transcript; according to Smith et al. (2009), this step is referred to

as initial noting. While completing initial noting, I would use codes as "labels" to identify

relevant pieces of information within the transcripts. Throughout this stage, I kept IPA's

idiographic focus in mind, by trying to understand my participants' experiences from their

unique perspectives. I continued to rely on memos during this stage as it allowed me to make

note of any connections that I saw emerging within the data. While coding, I would often ask

myself, "Does this accurately capture what my participant is saying?" and in order to develop

richness, I would often ask myself, "What *else* could be going on here?" Throughout this

process, I would meet frequently with my supervisor to ensure the clarity and accuracy of the

codes.

The next steps included developing emerging themes and identifying connections among

them. At this stage in IPA research, the researcher's goal is to develop concise phrases that

represent various elements of the participants' experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). During

this process, codes with conceptual similarities were clustered together in order to form themes.

Once initial themes were developed, these themes were then clustered together in order to form

superordinate themes; these themes were then given a descriptive label. Once themes were

developed for one participant, I would move onto developing themes for the next participant and

would follow the same steps, as outlined above. Once themes were identified within each case, I

began looking at themes and connections *across* cases to develop common themes. According to

Smith and colleagues (2009), there is no predefined proportion of participants that must mention

a theme in order for it to be considered a common theme. For the present study, I considered

themes that appeared in at least half of the cases (i.e., appeared for three or more participants) to

be common themes.

Methodological Integrity

Establishing quality and trustworthiness is an imperative component of the qualitative

research process. Therefore, I employed a variety of strategies to establish credibility,

confirmability, and transferability in this study. Credibility reflects the accuracy of which

participants' experiences were captured by the researcher (Stahl & King, 2020). In order to

establish credibility, I used member checks (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985;

Stahl & King, 2020) which allowed participants to individually review transcripts of their

interviews and ensure accuracy of the transcription. I also used follow-up interviews with my

participants; these follow-up interviews allowed me to clarify my own understanding of their

thoughts and feelings, and seek additional clarification when necessary. In order to establish

confirmability, which refers to the consistency between my interpretations and the data collected

(Stahl & King, 2020), I had frequent peer review sessions with my research supervisor. IPA

research is dedicated to in-depth and contextualized explorations of participants' experiences;

thus, IPA researchers often avoid general claims and do not aim for replicability (Noon, 2018;

Stahl & King, 2020). However, IPA researchers do hope that their findings may be applicable, or

transferable, to others. Therefore, several steps can be taken to ensure that the findings are

transferable. In order to ensure that my findings were transferable, I used thick descriptions of

the data to provide a rich enough portrayal of my participants' experiences so that others may

benefit from the knowledge gained from this study. Finally, I relied on the use of thorough

documentation (e.g., memos, audit trails, self-reflective journaling) throughout the entire process

to maximize the methodological integrity of the present study.

Ethical Considerations

There were a number of ethical considerations I was cognizant of as I was conducting

this research. Firstly, all of my participants were under the age of 18, and therefore I paid special

attention to ethical requirements when conducting research with adolescent participants. This

included obtaining parents' consent as well as participants' assent to participate in the interviews.

I also reviewed the nature of consent virtually with all participants at the beginning of the

interviews. I informed participants that their participation in this study was voluntary and that

they were welcome to stop and/or take breaks at any time throughout the interview. Throughout

the interview, I also monitored for signs of distress. My graduate training in psychology, as well as my experiences as a child and youth counsellor, allowed me to assess distress and provide support as necessary. However, no participants indicated any signs of distress throughout the data collection process and no participants requested to stop and/or take any breaks. I also created lists of counselling resources that could be provided to participants, should they have required additional emotional support after participating in this study (see Appendix F).

In conducting this research, I also went to great lengths to protect the safety and confidentiality of all participants. As data collection took place online, I was very diligent in minimizing the risks associated with data collection. This included using the highest security settings on Zoom, as well as ensuring that my laptop's security and anti-virus software was up to date. Participants' anonymity was protected through the creation and use of a pseudonym. Once a pseudonym was chosen, by the participant or by myself, only their pseudonym was used on study materials. As I transcribed the interviews, I also changed or omitted any identifying or potentially identifying information to further honour my participants' safety and confidentiality.

Summary

I chose IPA as it allowed me to gain an in-depth and nuanced understanding of adolescents' experiences of self-compassion when navigating a difficult friendship dissolution. Both data collection and analysis were heavily influenced by Smith et al.'s (2009) recommendations for conducting IPA research. Data collection consisted of one-on-one semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews with available participants (Smith et al., 2009). When analyzing the data, I began with immersing myself in the data and then subsequently identified relevant themes within and across cases. Finally, I took several steps to ensure

methodological integrity and followed all relevant ethical guidelines in accordance with the

appropriate governing bodies.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning and lived experiences of self-compassion among adolescents navigating difficult friendship dissolutions, through the use of IPA. In line with IPA's emphasis on idiography, I will first present brief participant vignettes. These vignettes provide a brief summary of the participants' experiences with difficult friendship dissolutions and their experiences of self-compassion. Following the vignettes, I will then present the common themes that appeared across participants.

Participant Vignettes

Jane

Jane was a 13 year-old teen who identified as White and female (she/her/hers). Jane and Ayan had been best friends for six years, and for many of those years, they had been a part of a larger group of friends. One day, Jane began to notice that Ayan and her other friends had been ignoring her at school. Jane felt hurt and confused by this, so she decided to confront Ayan about her feelings. When Jane expressed her hurt and confusion to Ayan, Ayan informed her that she no longer wanted to be friends. Jane was overwhelmed with feelings of disbelief, sadness, and loneliness, asking herself, "Did this really just happen?"

Shortly after the dissolution, Jane began practicing self-compassion, as a way to cope with this difficult loss. From Jane's perspective, part of self-compassion meant reassuring herself that she could navigate difficult moments, as well as reminding herself not to worry because "everything [would] be okay." When Jane lost Ayan, she also lost her extended friendship group. Making new friends then became an important part of Jane's recovery, healing, and growth. In Jane's experience, self-compassion helped her to step out of her comfort zone and talk to new people: "I told myself that if I did talk to people and try to move on and make other

friends,…it'll get better and, I wouldn't have to be sad anymore." As Jane's new friendships deepened, she started to notice stark differences in how she was treated by her new friends compared to how she was treated by Ayan and her old friendship group. Jane felt gratitude for her new friends and attributed much of her ability to move on and make new friends to treating herself with compassion.

Rory

Rory was a 16-year old who identified as White and non-binary (they/them/their). They met their best friend Maddie in the seventh grade, and the two remained close for the following three years, bonding over the challenging nature of grades seven, eight, and nine. The two friends attended school virtually for the ninth grade due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rory shared that navigating the pandemic together brought them closer as friends. However, when Rory and Maddie began the tenth grade and began attending in-person school again, Maddie joined another group of friends and stopped talking to Rory. Rory described their friendship dissolution with Maddie as something that "was like a slow drift, but it also happened all at once." When Rory confronted Maddie about the two friends drifting apart from each other, their friendship ended abruptly after an intense and emotional discussion that escalated into a fight. Although they had been best friends for nearly three years, Rory expressed that the dissolution was "a long time coming," as the two friends were very different people.

From Rory's perspective, self-compassion partly meant letting themself grieve the friendship and experience the sadness that accompanied that loss: "I [felt sad] for myself because I [knew] what it was like for me and I [knew] that I lost a good friend." Self-compassion also helped Rory to accept the friendship dissolution and begin to move on from it. In some ways, Rory saw self-compassion as a necessity throughout their healing process, stating that they're

"never going to move on if [they] don't have compassion for themself]." However, Rory also

stated that they experienced some obstacles to self-compassion. Growing up, Rory was raised in

a Catholic home and felt they were raised to put others before themself. Rory shared that they

sometimes struggled to be self-compassionate, as they feared self-compassion was synonymous

with being "self-righteous" and "self-absorbed." However, as Rory continued to use self-

compassion to navigate this difficult friendship dissolution, they began to see that it was possible

to "take care of other people while also taking care of [themself]."

Patricia

Patricia, who identified as White and female, was 14 years old (she/her/hers). She met

her friend Laura in high school, and the two were best friends for approximately a year. One day,

Patricia found out that Laura was "talking about [her] behind [her] back," and Patricia felt

extremely hurt by this. Patricia subsequently decided to end the friendship. In this study, Patricia

was the only participant to have initiated the friendship dissolution. She maintained that making

the choice to end the friendship was an act of self-compassion, as she recognized that Laura was

"not treating [her] the way [she] *should* be treated." After ending the friendship, Patricia

continued to practice self-compassion as a way deal with the friendship dissolution.

A major benefit of self-compassion for Patricia was how it helped her gain greater

perspective. For example, through practicing self-compassion, she was able to see the ways she

had often been mistreated by Laura. Self-compassion then helped Patricia see the improvements

in her life after ending the friendship. Patricia's compassionate self-talk included reminding

herself that she was "happier" and "healthier" without Laura in her life. In Patricia's case, being

self-compassionate also meant prioritizing herself and her needs. For example, self-compassion

included being intentional in how she took care of herself. It meant doing "simple things" such

as attending to her skin-care routine, painting her nails, and eating foods that she enjoyed. From

Patricia's perspective, "putting [herself] first before other people" by focusing on "more things

that [she] was interested in," rather than activities and experiences that her friends were

interested in, was also an expression of self-compassion. Patricia shared that with Laura, she

often felt like a "people pleaser," and practicing self-compassion helped Patricia to move away

from her people-pleasing tendencies and embrace more self-focused habits.

Meghan

Meghan was a 15 year-old teen who identified as White and female (she/her/hers).

Meghan and Emily met at the elementary school they attended together and quickly became best

friends. The two were close friends for approximately three years. However, when they

transitioned to high school, the girls no longer went to the same school. Despite attending

different high schools, Meghan wanted to remain close with Emily. However, Meghan found

herself consistently reaching out to Emily to make plans and rarely receiving a response. After a

few months, Meghan confronted her friend and asked her to start initiating conversations and

play a more active role in maintaining the relationship. After the confrontation, Meghan stopped

hearing from Emily completely, and subsequently realized that their friendship was over.

For Meghan, self-compassion included reminding herself of the effort she put into

maintaining the friendship. Her self-talk was often comprised of "reminding [herself] that she did

everything [she] possibly could to keep" the friendship. Self-compassion also meant internalizing

the compassion she received from others. For instance, while navigating the friendship

dissolution, Meghan often relied on her other friends and family for emotional support; and when

they validated her feelings about the situation, she internalized their supportive statements and

repeated them to herself, as needed. In addition to relying on her friends and family for

emotional support, an important aspect of self-compassion for Meghan was connecting more deeply with her religion and spirituality through daily prayer and journaling. Occasionally, this meant reminding herself that God would always be there for her: "There's always someone that can help,… even if I did lose all my friendships, I would still have [God]."

Andrew

Andrew identified as White and male, and was 15 years old (he/him/his). He met his best friend Sophia when he was in pre-school, as his parents were close friends with her parents. Andrew shared that he and Sophia grew up together; he considered her to be "part of [his] family." The children attended pre-school and elementary school together until Sophia and her family moved to another city. After the move, the two friends started to lose contact with one another. Andrew described his dissolution with Sophia as a "slow burn" and expressed that despite their friendship ending, he still cared deeply for her. When Andrew approached Sophia about the distance between them, she told him he was "too immature for [her]" and she ended the friendship. Andrew stated that being self-compassionate helped him deal with hearing those unkind words from Sophia. When Sophia ended their friendship, Andrew often "put [himself] down about it," attributing the blame for the dissolution to himself. Self-compassion helped him to change his inner critical voice and remind himself that the dissolution "wasn't [his] fault." Another consequence of self-compassion for Andrew was that it encouraged him to surround himself with people who didn't "think [he] was immature and… [who] like [him] for who [he is]."

Initially after the dissolution, Andrew found that practicing self-compassion helped him to remain hopeful about a reconciliation with Sophia. His self-talk was very optimistic: "You guys can reconnect, and it'll be great." However, as time progressed, self-compassion also

helped him to accept the dissolution. In Andrew's experience, part of self-compassion meant

reassuring himself that he would be okay even if he and Sophia *didn't* reconnect: "I would tell

myself, if she doesn't respond, that's okay, it's going to be okay." Finally, self-compassion for

Andrew also included engaging in enjoyable activities, such as spending time in nature, as a way

of coping with the difficult loss of his friendship with Sophia. Self-compassion also meant

exploring new hobbies and activities, with Andrew having recently discovered a passion for

cooking.

Common Themes

Six common themes emerged across participants' experiences: (a) focusing on the

positive, (b) developing and strengthening one's sense of self, (c) soothing the body and mind,

(d) connecting with and expressing emotions, (e) reaching out and connecting with others, and

(f) reflecting on friendship. Table 1 indicates which participants endorsed which themes. In the

paragraphs that follow, I have provided detailed descriptions of the themes. Within the detailed

descriptions, I have also included quotations from participants that further illustrate participants'

experiences of self-compassion when navigating difficult friendship dissolutions.

Table 1

Occurrence of Themes in Participants' Interviews

Participant/Theme	Focusing on the Positive	Developing and Strengthening One's Sense of Self	Soothing the Body and Mind	Connecting with and Expressing Emotions	Reaching Out and Connecting with Others	Reflecting on Friendship
Jane	•	•	•	•	•	•
Rory		•	•		•	•
Patricia	•	•	•		•	•
Meghan	•			•	•	•
Andrew	•	•	•	•	•	

Note. • bullets indicate for whom a theme was present.

Focusing on the Positive

For all but one participant, self-compassion included focusing on the positive. Pertaining to Jane's experience, one benefit of self-compassion was that it resulted in a shift towards positive thinking and maintaining a positive outlook. From Jane's perspective, self-compassion helped her to "kind of [take] the good out of" her painful friendship dissolution. In Jane's experience, another important aspect of self-compassion was paying closer attention to the positive feelings that she experienced after the ending of her close friendship. For instance, it meant noticing feelings of happiness and gratitude:

> Just because I was so much happier, and so much more grateful for everything and I had a lot of gratitude and happiness and better feelings… than I did while I was going through [the friendship dissolution with Ayan].

Although Jane's practice of self-compassion included focusing on positive thoughts and emotions, continued proximity to her friend Ayan and their extended friendship group (e.g., through being in some of the same classes) made it challenging to maintain her positive outlook. Despite these difficult moments, Jane maintained that self-compassion helped her to focus on the positive aspects of her friending with Ayan ending. More specifically, it helped her to focus on the positive feelings, such as gratitude, that accompanied the acquisition of new friends.

Like Jane, Patricia also perceived self-compassion as including an emphasis on gratitude: "I appreciate, just like, everything in general." From Patricia's perspective, experiencing greater happiness was a consequence of self-compassion as it made her feel like "one big happy [Patricia]." For two of the other participants, self-compassion meant directing their attention towards hope, faith, and optimism. From Andrew's perspective, practicing self-compassion led to increased hopefulness and the possibility of reconciling with his friend Sophia. Furthermore,

in his experience, remaining hopeful positively impacted his mental health and well-being. As he

explained, without self-compassion, Andrew's self-talk would have been significantly more

pessimistic; and those pessimistic thoughts might have "[ruined his] mental health." For Meghan,

focusing on positive feelings, as an aspect of self-compassion, revolved around faith and

optimism. Through the practice of self-compassion, Meghan was able to believe that she could

"step out of [her] comfort zone and be okay" when making new friends and navigating her

difficult friendship dissolution. Although focusing on the positive varied among the participants,

focusing on positive thinking and emotions was an important part of self-compassion for them

all, and an important part of their recovery.

     Self-compassion, for Meghan and Andrew, also meant engaging in enjoyable activities

and other experiences that elicited positive feelings. Sometimes this included activities that

participants already found enjoyable. Meghan described this aspect of self-compassion as

"[finding] ways" of "doing [her] hobbies that made [her] feel better" and helped to "keep [her]

mind off things." For example, given the enjoyment that she derived from reading fiction, she

prioritized reading as a way of self-compassionately coping with the ending of her friendship.

Meghan conveyed that she liked "to read to go into other worlds and imagine [herself] there."

Similarly, Andrew who enjoyed videogames, perceived "playing games on [my] computer" as a

way of being compassionate toward himself. Self-compassion also meant riding his "mini

motorbike" because that activity was always "really fun" for him. Andrew also found that one

aspect of self-compassion for him was developing new hobbies and interests, such as cooking

and spending time in nature, as it "[helped him cope] a lot." From Andrew's perspective,

practicing self-compassion resulted in an increased openness to explore new hobbies and

activities: "I'm in a cooking class now… and I really like that, and I don't know, [self-compassion] helped me find new hobbies… and discover what I like."

Developing and Strengthening One's Sense of Self

For most of the participants, having a close friendship end negatively impacted their sense of self. Part of participants' self-compassion journeys included developing and strengthening that sense of self. This often included looking inward and engaging in meaningful self-reflection and self-discovery. In Jane's case, treating herself compassionately meant "learning more about [herself]." Self-compassion, in Andrew's experience, meant asking himself "what can I do to help myself?" and then thoughtfully responding to his needs. Similarly, through self-reflection, Patricia identified that she wanted to learn more about herself and learn new coping strategies and she subsequently purchased books that offered her practical tips for dealing with the feelings of hurt and disappointment that she had after ending her friendship with Laura.

From Rory's and Patricia's perspectives, self-compassion helped both participants to prioritize taking care of their own wants and needs. In Rory's case, self-compassion helped to counterbalance thoughts of self-sacrifice and self-denial they experienced due to their catholic upbringing:

> Growing up, in my generation, [I] was raised on put others before [myself] and be kind to others… I was also raised catholic, which makes it even more complicated… I think that a lot of the time, I still feel guilty, when I put myself first, [but now] I think you can take care of other people while also taking care of yourself… now I think kids are being taught more about their own needs and I'm glad that's happening.

Through the practice of self-compassion, Patricia was also able to prioritize and assert her own needs with others. One of the challenges that Patricia faced after ending her friendship with Laura is that Laura would often reach out to Patricia in hopes of reconciliation. Treating herself with compassion, from Patricia's perspective, meant prioritizing her need for distance from Laura. Whereas in the past, Patricia may have felt compelled to re-connect with Laura, self-compassion helped her to assert her own needs and boundaries.

For two of the participants, self-compassion encompassed an element of recognizing their unique strengths and skillsets. For Jane, self-compassion "made [her] realize the ability that [she] has" to deal with the difficult friendship dissolution. Similarly, Meghan viewed self-compassion as including her recognition of the growth that she experienced as a result of her friendship ending. In the case of Meghan, self-compassion also included the practice of affirming her ability to navigate difficult situations and circumstances: "If worse things come in the future, I how to handle [them] better."

Self-compassion helped three of the participants, Jane, Rory, and Patricia, to develop a relationship with themselves characterized by self-acceptance and self-appreciation. For all three participants, self-compassion included accepting their authentic selves. From Jane's perspective, "Self-compassion taught me to love myself and [accept] that who I am is who I am." When reflecting on how self-compassion had impacted them, Rory shared:

> I think it did change in a good way, I think for the most part, it changed the way that I
> think about myself… if I reflect on myself, I think that now I do have a bit of a reminder,
> I feel like I am more confident in saying that I like who I am.

Similarly, Patricia maintained that self-compassion helped her to "feel a lot better about [herself]" and "feel more comfortable in [her] own skin." Self-compassion, from Patricia's

perspective, not only included *accepting* her authentic self, but it also meant *embracing* her authentic self, especially "bubbly" and "weird" aspects of her personality. Patricia also stated that when she was friends with Laura, there were often times when Patricia would not recognize her reflection in the mirror. After ending the friendship with Laura, and utilizing self-compassion, Patricia looked in the mirror and offered self-affirmations such as, "That's me, you rock!"

Soothing the Body and Mind

For most of the participants, self-compassion included relying on a variety of techniques for soothing the body and mind in times of pain and distress. Some body-focused techniques included deep breathing and taking walks, whereas some of the mind-focused techniques included engaging in reassuring self-talk and showing oneself patience, forgiveness, and understanding. Andrew shared that taking walks was one of his favourite body-focused soothing techniques. Similarly, walks served as an expression of self-compassion for Rory, as they used walks to familiar and calming places as one of their "go-to" coping strategies. Rory also relied on taking deep breaths as a body-focused coping strategy. Although Rory utilized some body-focused techniques, they also expressed that "on a more emotional level" they had to "take care of their mind." For Rory, and other participants, engaging in reassuring self-talk often helped them to soothe their minds. Rory maintained that they often spoke to the "anxious part" of themself to remind themself that they were safe and surrounded by people who cared about them:

> These people love you, these people care about you, they are not going to leave you *or* if they do, you are not going to die… nothing dangerous is going to happen [to you], you are going to find friends again, you have your family.

For both Jane and Andrew, reassuring self-talk often included the phrase, "It's going to be okay."

As Patricia was the one participant who initiated the difficult friendship dissolution, her

reassuring self-talk usually centered around reassuring herself that she made the "right" decision.

She would often say to herself: "You're better than [the friendship with Laura], you deserve

better [than the way Laura treated you]."

Connecting with and Expressing Emotions

Jane, Meghan and Andrew all expressed that, from their perspectives, self-compassion

helped them to feel, identify, and express their emotions. One benefit of practicing self-

compassion, from the participants' perspectives, was that it enabled them to sit with the difficult

emotions, most often sadness, that often accompanied their difficult friendship dissolutions. In

Andrew's experience, self-compassion allowed him "to feel [his] feelings." Similarly, one aspect

of self-compassion for Meghan included telling herself that "it was okay to be sad about [the

friendship dissolution]." In addition, self-compassion often helped participants to identify their

emotions. Jane shared that self-compassion helped her "to recognize what [she] was feeling."

Meghan conveyed that self-compassion helped her "feel a lot better" and "more control of [her]

feelings" and not feel overwhelmed by her emotions. For Jane, self-compassion helped her to

realize the beneficial nature of expressing her emotions, rather than isolating herself and keeping

her emotions hidden:

> It's a good thing to cry, because if you keep it in, it can get a lot more [difficult to cope
>
> with]… [At first] I was like, "I need to stop this" but then afterwards I realized it was
>
> probably a good thing that I cried so much because it was a way to get my feelings out.

 For Megan, self-compassion also helped her to express her emotions, as she realized that she

"didn't have to fake to [her] friends" that she was experiencing hurt and sadness. In addition to

expressing her emotions to her friends, Meghan experienced self-compassion as expressing her emotions in creative ways such as journaling, and "[drawing] about things [she] was feeling."

Reaching Out and Connecting with Others

Reaching out and connecting with others was an important component of self-compassion for all participants. As the dissolution of a close friendship resulted in a sense of social isolation or disconnection for some participants, making new friends was experienced as an important act of self-compassion. In Jane's case, losing her friendship with Ayan also meant losing her connection to their extended friendship group. Jane shared that without self-compassion, she "[didn't] think she would have really talked to anyone and [she] would have spent a lot of time alone." From Jane's perspective, connecting with others, instead of isolating herself, was a crucial component of practicing self-compassion. Making new friends and building new connections was also an expression of self-compassion for Meghan. In the case of Meghan, who described herself as being "shy," self-compassion helped her "get out of [her] comfort zone" and talk to her classmates. Through the practice of self-compassion, Meghan felt more comfortable speaking openly and honestly with unfamiliar peers and building new connections with them.

For all five participants, self-compassion included an element of strengthening their existing interpersonal relationships and leaning on those connections for support. All but one of the participants experienced this with their family members. Patricia revealed that "strengthening bonds with [her] family" was an important aspect of her self-compassion journey. As Patricia prioritized treating herself compassionately, she gave more thought to the impact she had on those around her; this led to a greater commitment to be a "more positive person" and be "nicer" to her younger brother. In addition, Patricia began to spend more time with people and family

members (including her two affectionate dogs) who made her feel loved and worthy of extending

that same compassion to herself. Rory also stated that they "have a good relationship with [their]

parents," so they "talked to them a lot about [their friendship dissolution]." Rory discovered that

spending more time with their family members helped them to remember that they weren't

"alone," despite losing an important friendship. Meghan also found that talking to her parents

about the friendship dissolution was helpful, as "they assured [her] that this stuff has happened to

them all the time."

In the cases of Jane and Rory, self-compassion meant reaching out to other trusted adults,

such as their teachers. Shortly after her friendship dissolution with Ayan, Jane reached out to one

of her teachers to advocate for herself:

> I talked to my teacher about it because I didn't want to be in an uncomfortable situation,
>
> like with groupwork with [Ayan] or anything, because it's still pretty awkward between
>
> us… since our friendship ended… so I talked to people about it and it helped.

For Jane, part of self-compassion meant reminding herself that support was available and

subsequently asking for that support: "I [knew] that I could always ask someone for help if I

needed it." Rory also reached out to one of their teachers during the dissolution: "I had to talk to

my teachers… I told all my teachers what was going on."

One of the participants, Meghan, found that connecting more deeply with her religion

offered her significant support and acted as an important expression of self-compassion. Meghan

found that connecting with God, through daily journaling and prayer, was one way that she could

treat herself compassionately. When Meghan struggled to consistently relate to herself with

compassion, and found herself engaging in self-critical thinking, she found that turning to her

religion helped her stay consistent in her self-compassion practice.

Reflecting on Friendship

Reflecting on friendships, both past and future, was a meaningful part of the participants' self-compassion journeys. When reflecting on past friendships, self-compassion allowed participants to observe their friendships (and their friendship dissolutions) in a more balanced manner. This was evident in the case of Rory, where self-compassion helped them to not attribute blame entirely to either member of the dyad, but instead recognize the complicated nature of friendships and friendship dissolutions. It also helped Rory have compassion for both themself and Maddie:

> When you're mad at someone, or you feel betrayed, you do things... And I'm sure we both did things in anger and we also both used each other while we were friends, so there were mistakes made by both of us and so I have compassion for both of us.

Self-compassion also contributed to Meghan's ability to not attribute the blame for the dissolution completely to herself. Part of reflecting on her friendship with Emily included "reminding [herself] that [she] did everything [she] possibly could to keep [the friendship]."

In addition, in the cases of Jane, Patricia, and Rory, self-compassion meant reflecting on how they were mistreated by their friends. For Jane and Patricia, this included recognizing their lack of autonomy in past friendships. Jane maintained that in her old friendships, her friends often "bossed [her] around a lot and told [her] what to do." Part of self-compassion, from Jane's perspective, meant learning "about what was so wrong about [those friendships] that [she] didn't need in [her] life anymore." In her new friendships, Jane expressed that she feels "a lot happier now that there's no one telling [her] what to do." Patricia also reflected on past friendships, recognizing that she was "being too much of a people pleaser and the friendship was [putting] extreme stress on [her]." Rory reported that self-compassion meant taking a deeper look at their

habits and behaviours in friendships. Rory stated that they "never really had healthy best friendships, because [they got] really latched to one person." In an attempt to find their person, Rory would often "force" themselves to be friends with someone; however, they expressed feeling as though their current "friendships are really natural."

For all but one of the participants, self-compassion included developing a greater understanding on the nature of healthy friendships. In Meghan's case, self-compassion helped her to more closely examine the dynamics of how healthy versus unhealthy friendships can make her feel:

> [Self-compassion] helped me remember what friends are good for me or not, because looking back, sometimes I didn't even want to hang out with [Emily] because she just, made me feel not right with myself, but I didn't realize it until I got out of it, what good friends and bad friends are.

When in the past, participants would have accepted friendships that were destructive and dysfunctional, they now craved friendships that supported and enhanced their mental health and well-being. Patricia explained that, from her perspective, self-compassion meant approaching future relationships with more caution than she had in the past. Treating herself compassionately helped her to have the "realization that [she was] worth building better" and "healthier" relationships. This realization impacted the traits that Patricia prioritized in future friends, with her wanting to find friends that supported her unconditionally, just as she would support them:

> [I want] someone who's generally in a positive attitude and who I know will stick up for me if I need it, and just someone who will be there for me because I know that I'm going to be there for them.

Relatedly, Jane wanted to build connections with peers that were "welcoming" and "super kind." In Meghan and Rory's experiences, treating themselves with compassion also helped them to feel more comfortable and confident in confronting conflicts in future friendships. In both cases, the participants shared that they would feel more comfortable confronting or ending friendships that did not enhance their mental health and well-being.

Finally, self-compassion also helped participants to understand that friendships, like all relationships, ebb and flow, and sometimes end. In the case of Rory, showing themself compassion meant seeing changes in relationships as a natural part of growing up:

It just kind of showed me that, high school friendships aren't necessarily permanent. And so I was like, if I lose these people that I really trust, or these people that I find my sense of security in, that I'll be okay.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of adolescents' experiences of self-compassion when navigating difficult friendship dissolutions. In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the key findings in relation to existing research, as well as the implications for counselling and clinical practice. I also review limitations of the present study, and offer suggested directions for future research.

Discussion of Key Findings

The experiences of self-compassion of the adolescents who participated in this study centered around six key themes: (a) focusing on the positive, (b) developing and strengthening one's sense of self, (c) soothing the body and mind, (d) connecting with and expressing emotions (e) reaching out and connecting with others, and (f) reflecting on friendship. The section that follows addresses each of these themes in relation to existing literature and research.

Focusing on the Positive

When reflecting on what self-compassion meant to them, most of the participants articulated that it included the cultivation of positive emotions and states of mind such as happiness, gratitude, hope, and faith. The interplay between self-compassion and happiness varied among participants, manifesting in diverse and nuanced ways. For example, some participants interpreted their focus on feelings of happiness as an expression of self-compassion. In other cases, it was the deliberate engagement in self-compassionate practices that was perceived as resulting in increased feelings of happiness. The practice of self-compassion being associated with heightened feelings of happiness is not unique to the present study. Self-compassion has been identified as a predictor of happiness and positive affect in other studies with adolescent populations (Galla, 2016; Inam et al., 2021). Empirical research has also

identified the co-occurrence of hope and gratitude alongside self-compassion. In one recent study, Jiang et al. (2022) explored how gratitude and hope relate to non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) among Chinese adolescents. Their results revealed that gratitude and hope were negatively associated with adolescent NSSI, and that self-compassion (alongside positive family relationships) mediated the relationship between the two positive states of mind (i.e., gratitude and hope) and self-harming behaviours. Additionally, many self-compassion interventions and programs include modules dedicated to the cultivation of other positive emotions and states of mind, such as gratitude. For example, in both Mindful Self-Compassion for adults (MSC; Neff & Germer, 2013) and Mindful Self-Compassion for Teens (MSC-T; Bluth, Gaylord et al., 2016), the final lessons focus on helping participants cultivate an attitude of gratitude towards oneself and one's life circumstances.

Several of the participants in the present study also conveyed that self-compassion meant maintaining an optimistic outlook, another finding that is supported by the extant literature. In Klingle and Van Vliet's (2019) qualitative investigation of self-compassion from the lens of adolescents, several of their participants reported that self-compassion helped them to maintain a positive outlook and remain hopeful in the face of adversity. Muris et al.'s (2019) exploration of self-compassion and adolescents' coping strategies yield similar results, with self-compassion being significantly correlated with increased optimism and perspective taking. This aligns with the notion that when confronted with challenges, such as ruptures and endings in their close friendships, adolescents find adopting a positive mindset to be a pivotal facet of self-compassion.

In addition to a focus on positive thoughts and emotions, participants shared that self-compassion included intentionally pursuing experiences that elicited positive feelings. This finding aligns with another one of Klingle and Van Vliet's (2019) findings that self-compassion

among adolescents often includes engaging in activities for the purpose of pleasure and enjoyment. In both the present study, and the study conducted by Klingle and Van Vliet, adolescents reported that engaging in pleasurable activities acted as a positive distraction. At first glance, these findings might seem to be at odds with Neff's (2003a) conceptualization of self-compassion as her interpretation of self-compassion entails remaining present with one's inner experiences (without denying or distracting one's attention from difficult emotions and situations). However, the findings are consistent in the sense that participants in the present study *did* report approaching and tolerating their difficult emotions in addition to turning their attention to sources of pleasure and comfort. In other words, the findings from the current study suggest that distraction and mindfulness may at times complement each other rather than being mutually exclusive when it comes to coping with friendship dissolution.

Participants in the present study also expressed that an integral part of self-compassion was discovering and exploring *new* passions and hobbies. Although there appears to be little in the existing literature on the relation between self-compassion and exploring *new* passions, researchers have established a connection between self-compassion and curiosity/exploration (Bluth et al., 2018). Together with the current body of literature, the present study underscores the importance of participating in enjoyable activities and its relevance to self-compassion among adolescents experiencing difficult friendship dissolutions.

Developing and Strengthening One's Sense of Self

After experiencing the ending of a close friendship, most of the participants shared that their senses of selves were negatively impacted. This finding should not be surprising considering the salience of friendships to identity development among adolescents (Jones et al., 2016). Developing and sustaining close friendships during adolescence helps young people with

the exploration of who they are and who they want to be. Therefore, when one of their close friendships ends, it is understandable that it would have an adverse effect on adolescents' development of identity and sense of self-worth. For the participants in the current study, rebuilding and repairing that damage was commonly an important component of their self-compassion journeys. This process often began with meaningful self-reflection and self-discovery. It was evident that self-reflection and self-discovery, as perceived aspects of self-compassion, appeared to be adaptive coping mechanisms for the participants. This finding fits with other researchers' assertions that self-compassion is often closely related to self-understanding (Bates, 2005; Gilbert, 2009b; Leahy, 2005). For example, Gilbert's (2009b) approach to self-compassion and CFT often begins with helping clients to "develop compassionate and validating reflection" on the fact that many of their existing coping strategies, albeit sometimes veiled with self-judgment and self-criticism, were developed out of necessity (p. 202). In Gilbert's (2014) view, self-compassion also requires an element of "wisdom" that gives individuals the ability to use their knowledge and understanding of themselves to make effective decisions. In the case of the participants in the present study, meaningful self-reflection was often a process that then allowed participants to make better decisions regarding their own mental health and well-being. Elements of self-reflection and self-discovery were also incorporated into Neff and Germer's (2013) Mindful Self-Compassion Program as one of the sessions is dedicated to helping clients identify, and live in accordance with, their core values. These notions, considered in tandem with the findings in the present study, further illustrate that compassionate self-reflection may be an adaptive coping strategy among adolescents.

In addition to engaging in self-reflection, several participants reported cultivating a relationship with themselves that was characterized by embracing their authenticity. Authenticity

refers to "the sense of being one's true self," and also relates closely to the importance of identity development for adolescents (Thomaes et al., 2017, p. 1045). Among adolescents, increased authenticity has been associated with enhanced well-being (Thomaes et al., 2017). Furthermore, researchers have established connections between self-compassion and authenticity among adult populations. In a series of studies, Zhang and colleagues (2019) found that self-compassion and authenticity were closely related in a myriad of ways. In their first study, results demonstrated that self-compassion was positively associated with authenticity. In one of their follow-up studies, Zhang et al. randomly assigned participants to one of three conditions: self-compassion, self-esteem, or control. Results revealed that participants in the self-compassion condition reported significantly higher levels of authenticity than participants in both of the other conditions (self-esteem or control). As the literature currently stands, the relationship between self-compassion and authenticity in adolescent populations remains relatively unexplored. Thus, this study provides valuable insight into the connections between self-compassion and authenticity among adolescents, particularly among adolescents navigating difficult friendship dissolutions.

Soothing the Body and Mind

For the majority of participants, self-compassion meant employing a variety of self-soothing techniques in times of pain and distress. In some cases, these self-soothing techniques centered around calming and soothing the body. Adolescents in other studies have also acknowledged that self-compassion includes an element of soothing the body. For example, in Bluth et al.'s (2023) recent study, transgender and gender-diverse youth participated in a virtual mindful self-compassion group, with many participants reporting that they found the body-focused grounding techniques, such as bringing attention to the soles of the feet or palms of the

hand, to be very calming. In the present study, a few of the participants noted that taking walks was an expression of self-compassion. Existing compassion-based therapies identify walking as an expression of self-compassion. For example, Bluth's (2017) Self-Compassion Workbook for Teens includes walking as a self-compassionate behaviour. Furthermore, according to Gilbert (2023), one of the key competencies in compassionate mind training is "using the body to support the mind" through posture, breathing, yoga and other physical practices (p. 66). The aforementioned literature, considered alongside findings from the current study, further demonstrate the connection between self-compassion and body-focused calming techniques.

For most of the participants in the present study, self-compassion also involved an emphasis on soothing the mind. Soothing the mind, for some of the participants, included engaging in reassuring self-talk. Furthermore, from the participants' perspectives, engaging in reassuring self-talk helped them to manage the emotional reactions that were associated with the dissolution of a close friendship. The beneficial nature of reassuring oneself has also been explored by Gilbert and colleagues (2004). When Gilbert et al. explored self-criticism and self-reassurance among female college students, they found that the ability to be self-reassuring was inversely correlated with shame and depression. Soothing the mind, for some participants, also included an element of self-forgiveness, which is another construct that has been commonly associated with self-compassion (Neff, 2003a).

Connecting with and Expressing Emotions

In the present study, participants indicated that feeling, identifying, and expressing their emotions were fundamental aspects of self-compassion. Participants in this study reported experiencing a myriad of negative emotions when they had a close friendship end. This finding aligns with existing literature suggesting that friendship dissolutions among adolescents can be

considerable sources of pain and distress (Bowker et al., 2023; Flannery & Smith, 2021). From participants' perspectives, an important aspect of self-compassion was sitting with this pain and distress, even when difficult. Mindfulness, as one of the three facets of Neff's (2003a) self-compassion, encourages individuals to be non-judgmentally aware of their thoughts and feelings. Thus, the current findings are consistent with Neff's model of self-compassion, which includes mindfulness as one of three key components.

Practicing self-compassion also helped participants in the present study to feel more in control of their emotions. Consistent with the present study's findings, treating oneself compassionately has been theoretically and empirically linked with the promotion of healthy emotion regulation (Neff, 2003a; Leary et al., 2007; Muris et al., 2019). According to Lennarz and colleagues (2019), emotion regulation refers to the "ability to modify the experience and expression of emotions" (p. 1) and plays a pivotal role in the developmental trajectory of adolescents (Fombouchet et al., 2023; Lennarz et al., 2019). In the present study, participants experienced self-compassion as helping them manage their emotions and subsequently find appropriate ways of expressing them, during a developmental period wherein the acquisition of emotion regulation abilities is of the upmost importance (Gross, 2013). These findings provide further empirical support for the connection between self-compassion and healthy emotion regulation among adolescents, while also spotlighting the pivotal function of healthy emotion regulation in the process of recovering from the termination of a close friendship.

Reaching Out and Connecting with Others

For all participants, reaching out and connecting with others emerged as an important part of their encounters with self-compassion. More specifically, participants built new connections, strengthened their existing relationships, and relied on their interpersonal relationships as sources

of social and emotional support. As previously stated, self-compassion, as defined by Neff

(2003a), includes three components, with one of those elements being common humanity. Self-

compassion, therefore, involves a "fundamental connection with others through an understanding

of our common humanity" (Bluth & Blanton, 2014, p. 4). Additionally, self-compassion has been

positively associated with connectedness among adolescents and young adults (Neff &

McGehee, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that positively connecting with others emerged as

such a crucial component of self-compassion for the participants in the present study. These

findings also correspond with existing literature in the realm of adolescents' development of

their social networks. More specifically, this study highlights how adolescents' interpersonal

relationships often facilitate psychological resilience (Graber et al., 2015; van Harmelen et al.,

2017). In this case, self-compassion, for all participants, meant relying on their interpersonal

relationships to help them cope. Furthermore, this study also supports Schater and Margolin's

(2019) findings that adolescents rely on a variety of sources (e.g., parents *and* friends) to provide

them with social and emotional support during difficult times. Finally, Gilbert asserts that

"feeling connected [with others] helps us feel less lonely" and allows us, as human beings, to

move into feelings of "social safeness" (Gilbert, 2020, p. 19). For the participants in the present

study, connecting with others helped them to feel less alone as they navigated their difficult

friendship dissolutions. Thus, this study highlights the importance of reaching out and

connecting with others as an important process for adolescents navigating difficult endings of

their close friendships.

Reflecting on Friendship

Most participants in the present study expressed that being self-compassionate included

elements of reflecting on friendship. Participants' experiences of reflecting on friendship often

included reflecting on past friendships and looking forward to future friendships. Findings on the instrumental role that such contemplation played in participants' experiences of self-compassion are unique to this study, most likely due to the fact that self-compassion had not yet been examined in the specific context of friendship dissolution. However, many of the findings in the current study may be understood in relation to existing literature. For example, self-compassion helped one of the participants, Rory, to reflect on their old friendship from a more balanced perspective, showing compassion for both members of the dyad. Bluth and Blanton (2014) have suggested that among adolescents, compassion for the self may be closely related to compassion for others:

> An acceptance of one's own imperfections and awareness that as part of being human, we are all flawed, may lead adolescents to have greater compassion for others' imperfections, recognizing that if their own flaws are forgivable, then others' flaws may be as well. (p. 12).

In Rory's case, self-compassion helped them to reflect on their friendship dissolution with feelings of understanding and forgiveness, which helped to reduce feelings of upset and frustration.

Self-compassion, for some of the participants, also impacted their thoughts and emotions about developing and maintaining future friendships, another finding that may be supported by previous research. For example, participants in the present study shared that part of self-compassion included reflecting on their needs in friendships, advocating for those needs, and asserting oneself and setting boundaries with others when necessary. The findings from the current study also align with Neff's (2021) assertion that self-compassion involves taking one's needs seriously, taking steps to get those needs met, and setting appropriate boundaries with

others. Similarly, when Bratt and colleagues (2020) examined the experiences of CFT among

adolescent girls, many participants reported that CFT included asserting oneself. Furthermore,

both Neff (2003a) and Gilbert (2009a) have suggested that adopting a self-compassionate

mindset may be associated with compassionate behaviours that nurture an individuals' health and

well-being. In the present study, participants reported notable shifts in their approaches to future

friendships, with many of these behavioural shifts being proactive behaviours that served to

protect participants from experiencing future pain and distress in the context of dysfunctional

friendships.

Implications for Counselling and Clinical Practice

The findings that emerged from this study have several implications for counselling and

clinical practice. Although the literature on friendship dissolutions among adolescents is

growing, it remains sparse. Therefore, the present study adds to the existing literature on

friendship dissolution, further illustrating that friendship dissolutions are a source of distress

among adolescents. However, it centers the voices of participants who are persevering through

these difficult experiences with strength and self-compassion, and consistent with counselling

psychology's emphasis on fostering well-being (Bedi et al., 2011), this study illustrates ways that

adolescents actively contributed to their own journey of recovery and flourishing. With the

insights derived from this study, practitioners may feel better equipped to support adolescents

navigating difficult friendship dissolutions.

This study reaffirms many of the established benefits of self-compassion for adolescents.

Therefore, therapists and other mental health professionals supporting adolescents with difficult

friendship dissolutions might consider incorporating existing self-compassion exercises into their

sessions. For example, focusing on positive emotions and states of mind, such as gratitude, was

helpful for several of the participants in the present study. Several compassion-based interventions and programs such as MSC (Neff & Germer, 2013) and MSC-T (Bluth, Gaylord et al., 2016) already have lessons and activities dedicated to the cultivation of gratitude and optimism. Counsellors might also support clients in exploring positive activities and experiences. One novel finding in the present study was that self-compassion resulted in a willingness and desire to explore new passions and hobbies; therapists might consider incorporating the exploration of new interests into their work with clients.

Participants also described the negative impact that experiencing a friendship dissolution had on their sense of self, and expressed that treating themselves compassionately helped them to rebuild and strengthen that sense of sense. For most of the participants, this rebuilding and strengthening process was grounded in compassionate self-reflection. Participants in the present study were motivated to learn more about themselves (e.g., through reading self-help books), and therapy may offer adolescents a safe and supportive environment for self-reflection and self-discovery. Participants in this study also expressed that self-compassion helped them to accept and embrace their authentic selves. Therefore, mental health professionals may find it useful to build meaningful relationships with their clients characterized by acceptance and modeling authenticity. Offering clients unconditional positive regard, as recommended by Rogers (1959), may prove beneficial in creating spaces wherein adolescent clients feel that they can be their authentic selves.

In the present study, participants valued engaging in a variety of self-soothing and emotion-regulating behaviours as they navigated losing a close friend. Counsellors might consider incorporating self-soothing and self-validation techniques into their practice with clients. For example, Rathus and Miller (2015) offer mental health professionals a plethora of

self-soothing and self-validating worksheets in their DBT Skills Manual for Adolescents. Self-compassion, from the perspective of the participants in the present study, also helped them to feel, identify, and express their emotions. Therefore, counsellors may find it beneficial to help their clients with emotional awareness, tolerance, and expression. For one of the participants in the present study, self-compassion meant expressing herself creatively (e.g., through journaling and drawing). Thus, it is possible that some adolescent clients might benefit from the incorporation of self-compassionate writing and/or drawing exercises into counselling sessions.

Finally, this study demonstrated that among adolescents who experienced the difficult ending of a close friendship, self-compassion was not only an intrapersonal process, but also had interpersonal components. Therefore, understanding the vital role of interpersonal connections among these adolescents may further enable counsellors and other allied professionals to best support their clients. For example, most participants mentioned that strengthening their relationships with their family members was an important aspect of self-compassion for them. Some participants also found that reaching out to their teachers was an expression of self-compassion that helped with coping with the termination of a close friendship. Counsellors and other mental health professionals may find it beneficial to help teens identify sources of support within their existing networks (e.g., family, friends, and teachers). Similarly, as most of the participants expressed that part of self-compassion included making new friends, therapists may find it beneficial to strategize with their clients on how they might build new social connections and what traits clients might be looking for in new potential friends.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this study contributes to the literature on the role of self-compassion in the face of difficult friendship dissolutions, it also has its limitations. First and foremost, a limitation of this

study was that it only included White participants from Western cultural backgrounds. It would be important for future studies to include participants from more diverse cultures and backgrounds. Additionally, two of the participants were not able to provide feedback on their interview transcripts or participate in follow-up interviews with the researcher. Therefore, they were not able to confirm accuracy of the transcripts or answer additional follow-up questions about their experiences of self-compassion in the face of a difficult friendship dissolutions.

Another limitation of the present study relates to the selection process. IPA (Smith et al., 2009) recommends that researchers "recruit purposive samples of participants who share a particular lived experience" (p. 180). Thus, I sought participants who identified as treating themselves with self-compassion after a difficult friendship dissolution. However, adolescents who had navigated difficult friendship dissolutions, but did not identify as treating themselves compassionately, may have been able to offer unique perspectives as well, particularly on the challenges and obstacles adolescents face when trying to cultivate self-compassion. Future research might consider including participants who both do and do not identify as self-compassionate.

In the present study, only one of the participants was the initiator of the friendship dissolution. All four of the other participants were not the initiators of their dissolutions. Although all five participants shared many common experiences of self-compassion, future research might consider including more participants who were the initiators of their friendship dissolutions. This would allow future research to compare the experiences of self-compassion among adolescents who were and were not initiators of friendship dissolutions.

Considering the positive experiences of self-compassion that the participants in this study shared, this study helps provide a foundation for future research focusing on a targeted self-

compassion intervention for adolescents navigating difficult friendship dissolutions. Friendship dissolutions are extremely common among adolescents (Flannery & Smith, 2021), yet the research on interventions and strategies to support adolescents in sparse. A mixed methods/longitudinal study on the feasibility, acceptability, and benefits of a self-compassion program for young people navigating friendship dissolutions might yield additional helpful insights that help mental health professionals better their ability to support those adolescents.

Conclusion

This study explored the meaning and experiences of self-compassion among adolescents navigating difficult friendship dissolutions. Using IPA methodology, five adolescents participated in semi-structured interviews about the role that self-compassion played in helping them navigate the loss of a close friend. From the participants' perspectives, self-compassion centred around focusing on the positive, developing and strengthening their senses of selves, soothing their bodies and minds, and connecting with and expressing emotions. In the present study, self-compassion for the participants was also a process that included reaching out and connecting with others and reflecting on friendship. Overall, findings from this study provide support for the notion that self-compassion may promote recovery among adolescents experiencing difficult friendship dissolutions. However, additional research, conducted with culturally diverse participants, is needed in order to best support adolescents in coping with difficult endings of their close friendships.

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Appendix A – Recruitment Poster

PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH!

Are you between the ages of 12-16?

Have you recently had a difficult experience with a close friendship ending?

Did you then treat yourself with compassion, or were you kind to yourself?

Are you open to talking about your personal experiences?

If you answered YES to any of the above questions then you may be elligible to take part in this study!

The Meaning and Experiences of Self-Compassion and Friendship Dissolutions among Adolescents

I am a graduate student in Counselling Psychology conducting research as a part of my Master's thesis. Adolescents between the ages of 12-16 who are English speakers and have experienced a difficult friendship dissolution are asked to contact Lindsey Feltis, principal researcher in this study.

Participants will participate in a recorded interview via zoom and receive a Cineplex gift card valued at $25.00.

University of Alberta REB Study ID#: Pro00118833

Contact Lindsey Feltis Email: lfeltis@ualberta.ca

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Contact Lindsey Feltis Email: lfeltis@ualberta.ca

Contact Lindsey Feltis Email: lfeltis@ualberta.ca

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Contact Lindsey Feltis Email: lfeltis@ualberta.ca

Contact Lindsey Feltis Email: lfeltis@ualberta.ca

Appendix B – Parent Information Letter and Consent Form

INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY (Parent Copy)

Title of Project: Experiences of Self-Compassion and Friendship Dissolutions among Adolescents

Principal Investigator: Lindsey Erin Feltis, Graduate Student
                                Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta
                                Email: lfeltis@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Dr. K. Jessica Van Vliet, Professor
                                Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta
                                Email: jvanvliet@ualberta.ca

Background and Purpose: My name is Lindsey Feltis. I am a Master's student in the Counselling Psychology program at the University of Alberta. As a part of my Master's thesis, I am doing research on how adolescents experience self-compassion if/when their close friendships end. Although self-compassion can mean different things to different people, some people think of it as being kind and caring to oneself when upsetting things happen in their lives. Participants will be kids and teenagers between the ages of 12 and 16. We hope that this project may help other young people who have had close friendships end.

Procedures: If your child agrees to participate, they will be asked to:

1. **Participate in an interview** (approx. 45 minutes to 1 hour): Your child will be asked to participate in an interview conducted online on Zoom. In the interview, they will be asked about their experiences of being kind to themself when a close friendship has ended. The interview will be audio and video recorded and then typed out on a computer.
2. **Participate in a follow-up interview** (approx. 20 – 30 minutes): Your child may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview conducted online on Zoom. This interview will also be recorded and then typed out on a computer. In this follow-up interview, I may ask them questions about anything they said in the first interview.

Risks: In the short-term, some people might find it upsetting to talk about their experiences of self-compassion if/when friendships have ended. If they feel upset while taking part in this study, they will be asked to speak to the interviewer, Lindsey Feltis (myself), who can provide them with counselling resources. I will also attach a list of counselling resources to this consent form, for your information.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to participating in this research study. However, they may enjoy contributing to research that I hope will make a difference in people's lives. As a small way of thanking them for participating in this study, they will receive a $25 Cineplex gift card.

Voluntary Participation: Your child is under no obligation to participate in this study. Their participation is completely up to them. They can refuse to answer any questions, and they can leave the study at any time without getting in trouble. They can also take breaks throughout the interview if they want. If they do choose to leave the study, they will have up to two weeks after their interview is typed out to withdraw their data. After that point, the typed-out version of their interview will be kept in the study.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: All data collected in the study will remain confidential. Your child's name will not be connected to any aspect of the data. If I suspect your child is being abused and/or neglected, then I may have to share that information with someone. Additionally, if I suspect that your child is seriously thinking about hurting themselves, or someone else, then I may have to share that information with someone to help provide safety. Any information that could identity your child or others will be changed or removed. Their privacy will be protected by using a pseudonym (fake name) rather than their real name to identify the data. Paper-based documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my research supervisor's office/lab.

Online Data Collection: As interviews will happen online using zoom, there are some inherent risks to online data collection. To keep your child's information safe, I will ensure my Zoom has the highest security settings. I will also be saving all information on a password-protected and encrypted laptop in my office. Audio/video recordings will be transferred to an encrypted USB key and will be stored in the locked filing cabinet for 5 years. They will then be deleted. All other data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years, then destroyed.

Uses of Data: The information that your child shares will be used for the purposes of research and education. Data and findings will appear in publications and presentations. In the future, it is possible that the data will be used for other research purposes. If that happens, I will obtain Research Ethics Board approval before proceeding.

THE FOLLOWING IS TO CERTIFY THAT I, _____ (type name), have read and fully understand the above study information and consent form. I have also been given the opportunity to ask questions and to have these questions answered to my satisfaction. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I hereby agree for my child to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form via email after it has been signed by the study administrator (i.e., person obtaining consent).

_____   _____
Signature of Participant's Parent/Guardian (hand-written or electronic)   Date (MM/DD/YY)

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent (hand-written or electronic)   Date (MM/DD/YY)

Further Information: If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact the principal investigator, Lindsey Feltis, whose contact information has been provided above.

The plan for this study has been reviewed and approved by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can contact the Research Ethics Office at the University of Alberta by emailing reoffice@ualberta.ca. This office is independent of the study researchers.

Appendix C – Participant Information Letter and Assent Form

INFORMATION LETTER AND ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY (Participant Copy)

Title of Project: Experiences of Self-Compassion and Friendship Dissolutions among Adolescents

Principal Investigator: Lindsey Erin Feltis, Graduate Student
                                   Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta
                                   Email: lfeltis@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Dr. K. Jessica Van Vliet, Professor
                                   Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta
                                   Email: jvanvliet@ualberta.ca

Why am I doing this study? My name is Lindsey Feltis. I am a student in the Counselling Psychology program at the University of Alberta. As a part of my program, I am doing a research project. I want to learn about how young people (just like you!) experience self-compassion when you have close friendships end. Self-compassion can mean different things to different people. However, some people think of it as being kind and caring to yourself when upsetting things happen. Participants will be kids and teenagers between 12 and 16. We hope that this project may help other young people who have had close friendships end.

What will happen during this study? If you agree to join the study, you will be asked to:

1. **Participate in an interview** (approx. 45 minutes to 1 hour): You will be asked to participate in an interview that happens online on Zoom. In the interview you will be asked about your experiences of being kind to yourself when a close friendship has ended. The interview will be recorded and then typed up on a computer.
    2. **Participate in a follow-up interview** (approx. 20 – 30 minutes): You may be asked to participate in another interview. This interview will also be conducted online and recorded on Zoom. In this interview, I might ask you questions about things you said in the first interview.

What are the risks? In the short-term, you might find it upsetting to talk about your experiences. If you feel sad or mad during the study, you can talk to Lindsey Feltis (me). I can then provide you with some phone numbers that you can call for counselling.

What are the benefits? There are no direct benefits to participating in this project. However, you might like helping with research that I hope will make a difference in people's lives. As a small way of thanking you, you will also receive a $25 movie gift card.

Do I have to participate? No. You don't have to participate in this study. Your participation is completely up to you. You can say no to answering any questions, and you can leave the study at any time without getting in trouble. You can also take as many breaks as you want to during the interview. If you do choose to leave the study, you will have up to two weeks after your interview is typed up to withdraw your data. After that point, the typed-up version of your interview will be kept in the study.

Will my information be kept private? Yes. Anything you share with me will be kept private. Your name will not be connected with any parts of your interview. Any information that could identity you or anyone else will be changed or removed. Your privacy will be protected by using a pretend name rather

than your full name to identify the data. However, there are a few reasons I might need to talk to someone about things you tell me. If I think someone is hurting you or another child, or someone might hurt you or another child, then I might have to tell someone. If I think you are seriously thinking about hurting yourself, or someone else, then I also might need to tell someone to get help. Any paper documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my research supervisor's office. Because we are using zoom, there might be some risks that happen any time we use computers or other technology. To keep you and your information safe, I will make sure I save the interview on my password-protected and encrypted laptop in my office.

What happens after the interview? The information that you tell me will be used to help me with my research study. It also might be used to help other kids and teenagers. What I learn might appear in papers and presentations. In the future, it is possible that the interviews will be used for other reasons. If that happens, I will make sure I get approval through my university research ethics board before moving forward.

Do you understand that you have been invited to take part in a study looking at your experiences of self-compassion when a close friendship ended?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you will be asked to take part in an interview which will take 45 minutes to 1 hour?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you may be asked to take part in a follow-up interview which will take between 20 and 30 minutes?	Yes	No
Do you understand that these interviews will be audio/video recorded?	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Has the issue of privacy been explained to you?	Yes	No
Do you understand that even if your parents say yes to you participating in this study, you can still say no?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you have the right to refuse to answer any questions and have the right to leave the study at any time?	Yes	No
Do you understand that if you choose <u>not</u> to take part in this study and/or refuse to answer any questions and/or choose to leave the study that you will not get in trouble?	Yes	No
I agree to participate in this study.	Yes	No

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Participant (hand-written or electronic)   Date (MM/DD/YY)

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent (hand-written or electronic)   Date (MM/DD/YY)

Further Information: If you have any other questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me, Lindsey Feltis. You can find my email address at the top of this page.

The plan for this study has been reviewed and approved by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can contact the Research Ethics Office at the University of Alberta by emailing reoffice@ualberta.ca. This office is independent of the study researchers.

Appendix D – Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:
Time of Interview:
Interviewer:
Interviewee Pseudonym:

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your close friendship that ended?

    a. Follow-up if needed: How long were you two friends?

    b. Follow-up if needed: How did this friendship end?

2. Can you tell me about how you were compassionate/kind to yourself when that close

    friendship ended?

    a. Follow-up if needed: What types of kind things did you say to yourself, if any?

    b. Follow-up if needed: What types of kind things did you do for yourself, if any?

3. How did being compassionate/kind to yourself impact your mental health and well-being

    as you were going through that close friendship ending?

4. How did being compassionate/kind to yourself impact how you feel about yourself when

    you were going through that close friendship ending?

5. How was it hard to be compassionate/kind to yourself when you were going through that

    close friendship ending, if it was hard at all?

Appendix E – Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Demographics Questionnaire

What is your age? _____

What grade are you in? _____

What is your gender?
Girl	□
Boy	□
Non-binary	□
Other	□
Prefer not to say	□

Other □ Please specify (if you feel comfortable): _____

In this research study, we welcome and encourage people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. What is your ethnic background?

Black	□
East Asian	□
Indigenous/First Nations	□
Latinx	□
Middle Eastern	□
South Asian	□
Southeast Asian	□
White	□
Other	□
Prefer not to say	□

Other □ Please specify (if you feel comfortable): _____

Appendix F – Lists of Counselling Resources

Alberta Counselling Resources

University of Alberta Clinical Services

Clinical Services at the University of Alberta provides support to the community by providing low-cost counselling services to the general public.

Phone: (780) 492-3746

Canadian Mental Health Association Edmonton

The Canadian Mental Health Association of Edmonton runs a 24/7 distress line that provides confidential, non-judgmental, and short-term crisis intervention for people in crisis or distress.

Phone: (780) 482-4357

Catholic Social Services-Mercy Counselling

Mercy Counselling, run by Catholic Social Services, provides counselling to children, adolescents, adults, couples, and families. These services are open to all, regardless of religious and/or denominational background.

Phone: (780) 719-2760

The Family Centre- Edmonton

The Family Centre in Edmonton provides counselling for children, adolescents, and adults with a variety of mental health challenges.

Phone: (780) 423-2831

Momentum Walk-In Counselling

Momentum Walk-In Counselling provides same-day services to children, adolescents, and adults who are in distress and do not know where else to turn to.

Phone: (780) 757-0900

Kids Help Phone

The Kids Help Phone provides 24/7 phone and internet counselling for children and adolescents.

Phone: 1 (800) 668-6868

Ontario Counselling Resources

Kitchener-Waterloo Counselling Services (Kitchener-Waterloo)

KW Counselling Services is a multi-service agency providing individual, family, group, and outreach supports to the community.

Phone: (519) 884-0000

Front Door Mental Health (Kitchener-Waterloo)

Front Door Mental Health is a multi-service agency that provides support for children and youth (up until their 18th birthday) who are currently struggling with a variety of life's challenges.

Phone: (519) 749-2932

Child and Parent Resource Institute (CPRI; London and Middlesex Area)

Child and Parent Resource Institute provides trauma-informed assessment and treatment for children and adolescents with a variety of mental health challenges.

Phone: (519) 858-2774

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH; Toronto)

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health provides rapid access to mental health assessment and treatment for children and adolescents in crisis and/or in distress.

Phone: (416) 535-8501

Kids Help Phone

The Kids Help Phone provides 24/7 phone and internet counselling for children and adolescents.

Phone: 1 (800) 668-6868