

**TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF YOUNG ATHLETES'
PERCEPTIONS OF COMPETENCE, CONFIDENCE,
CONNECTION, AND CHARACTER**

by

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Abstract

The 5Cs (competence, confidence, connection, character and caring/compassion) have been proposed as important constructs that describe the presence of *positive youth development* (PYD; Lerner et al., 2005). While the 5Cs are intuitively appealing, a recent study failed to provide support for the framework of the 5Cs within a sample of youth sport participants (Jones, Dunn, Holt, Sullivan, & Bloom, in press). Rather than abandoning the framework of the Cs in the youth sport setting, this finding highlights the importance of developing a sport-specific framework. In applying the 5Cs to sport, Côté, Bruner, Erickson, Strachan, and Fraser-Thomas (2010) found that competence, confidence, and connection were well represented in the sport literature, but that caring/compassion were embedded within the character literature. As a result, they collapsed the 5Cs into a 4Cs framework, which has been used in the current study. The purpose of the current study was to garner an understanding of what each of the 4Cs mean to a group of youth sport participants in the sport context. To this end, 10 single-sex focus groups were conducted with 49 youth sport participants (24 boys, 25 girls), 9 to 13 years old ($M=10.8$ years). The participants were involved in a variety of sports, with soccer, hockey, baseball/softball, and lacrosse being the most common. Data analyses revealed the types of information that participants use to form their perceptions of the 4Cs, along with the sources from which this information is obtained. Participants indicated that they used information from coaches, parents, peers, self-perceptions, and the sport context in creating their understanding of the 4Cs. Participants referred to obtaining information from peers regarding all 4Cs. Conversely, coaches were

referenced regarding competence, confidence, and connection, but not character. Parents were not referenced by the participants in their understanding of connection or character in the sport setting. Notable findings also include the strong emphasis participants placed on their level of effort in determining their competence and confidence. Overall, results highlight the importance of providing young athletes opportunities to experience success and interact with peers in a fun and inclusive sport environment.

Co-Authorship

This thesis represents the original work of Colleen Markun Coakley in collaboration with her supervisor, Dr. Jean Côté.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed the emergence of *positive youth development* (PYD), a theoretical approach that views young people as assets, rather than liabilities (Lerner et al., 2005). Prior to the PYD approach, a problem-centered vision of youth was common. This problem-centered, or deficit perspective presented youth “as a period fraught with hazards, and many young people are seen as potential problems that must be straightened out before they can do serious harm to themselves or others” (Damon, 2004, p. 14). From this approach, even instances of positive development were explained as the absence of negative behaviours, rather than the presence of positive factors (Benson, 2003). The PYD approach, on the other hand, views all youth as having potential for positive growth; youth are seen as “resources rather than as problems for society” (Damon, 2004, p. 15). Sport has been shown to be the most popular leisure time activity among youth (Hansen & Larson, 2007) and has been presented as an effective avenue through which positive youth development can be achieved (Larson, 2000; Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte & Jones, 2005).

Sport has been found to be the most common extra-curricular activity among children and adolescents. For example in Canada, a survey of over 12,000 Canadian youth (ages 6-17) showed that 76.4% of respondents participated in organized sports in the previous year (Guèvremont, Findlay, & Kohen, 2008). More specifically, sport participation rates are highest for the 10-13 year old category, with 83% of respondents participating in sports. With over 75% of youth participating in organized sport, sport

presents itself an effective venue through which a high percentage of youth can be accessed in hopes of achieving positive outcomes. Youth sport, however, has the potential to produce both positive and negative developmental outcomes in participants (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin (2005) summarized the findings of research on experiences and outcomes of youth sport participation, which include physical development and health, social development, and psychological and emotional development. However, these benefits do not occur automatically in the sport setting. In other words, simply giving a group of kids a ball and a field by no means guarantees a positive experience or positive outcomes. Fraser-Thomas and colleagues' (2005) review actually revealed that youth sport participation has also been associated with negative outcomes, such as injuries, eating disorders, increased stress which can lead to lowered self-confidence and self-esteem, burnout and dropout, and increased aggression.

Given the contradictory outcomes of youth sport participation, in order to increase opportunities for positive outcomes and minimize the negative outcomes, further understanding of the youth sport experience is necessary. To this end, the purpose of this study was to garner an understanding of young athletes' perspectives on specific desired outcomes of youth sport participation through the use of focus groups.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Positive Youth Development

The growing popularity of the PYD approach, which views youth as assets rather than liabilities, brought about a need for a common language or framework with which to discuss PYD (Lerner et al., 2005). In response to this need, Little (1993, as cited by Lerner et al., 2005) introduced *competence*, *confidence*, *connection*, and *character* as indicators of the presence of PYD. *Caring* (or *compassion*) was later added as a potential fifth C (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003a, 2003b). Organized extra-curricular activities such as sports, arts, and academic clubs are suggested as effective venues for promoting positive development in youth (Larson, 2000; Petitpas et al., 2005). Competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring or compassion (the 5Cs of PYD) have been presented as desired developmental outcomes that can result from participation in organized activities (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). Subsequent work by Jellicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, and Lerner (2007) offered general working definitions of the 5Cs, which are paraphrased here. *Competence* is the positive view of one's own actions within a particular activity, while *confidence* is a global sense of self-worth and self-efficacy. *Connection* refers to bidirectional exchanges or relationships that are developed in different contexts. *Character* is described as having morality or integrity. Lastly, *caring* or *compassion* involves the virtues of sympathy and empathy. The framework of the 5Cs encompasses positive developmental aspects of youth sport participation, including physical, social, and emotional benefits.

However, it is important to note that the 5Cs of PYD are not the only existing framework or conceptualization of PYD. Dworkin, Larson, and Hansen (2003), for example, presented six domains of growth experiences: (1) exploration and identity work, (2) development of initiative, (3) emotional self-regulation, (4) developing peer relationships and knowledge, (5) teamwork and social skills, and (6) adult networks and social capital. The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (NRCIM, 2002) suggested eight setting features that will promote youth development in four main areas: (1) physical, (2) intellectual, (3) psychological/emotional, and (4) social. In addition, the Search Institute (Benson, 1997) outlined 40 developmental assets of youth development, which fall under the broad categories of internal assets and external assets and are further divided among eight sub-categories: (1) commitment to learning, (2) positive values, (3) social competencies, (4) positive identity, (5) support, (6) empowerment, (7) boundaries and expectations, and (8) constructive use of time. Among this pool of conceptualizations of PYD, the 5Cs framework was selected for the current study because it is one of the most commonly used frameworks in youth development (King et al., 2005) and has been previously linked within the youth sport literature to the context of youth sport (e.g., Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2005).

Researchers differ in whether they refer to 5Cs, as introduced above (e.g. Lerner et al., 2000), or 4Cs, with the concept of caring/compassion included within character (e.g. Côté et al., 2010). The present study used the 4Cs framework. When discussing various studies, the specific framework used within each study (i.e. 5Cs vs. 4Cs) will be

noted. When no distinction is necessary, they will simply be referred to as the Cs, or the Cs of PYD. The Cs have been presented as “metaindicators of PYD, that is, terms that constitute latent constructs that may capture the essence of to-be-developed indicators of the numerous mental, behavioural, and social relational elements that could comprise PYD” (Lerner et al., 2005, p. 22). In other words, youth who are developing the Cs would be considered to be experiencing PYD. Yet while the concepts of the Cs are intuitively appealing to many who work with youth, the Cs lack empirical evidence in specific contexts such as youth sport.

Lerner and colleagues (2005) conducted a large-scale longitudinal study of US youth, which aimed, among other things, to address this lack of empirical support for the 5Cs in connection with PYD. The first wave of this extensive study was to determine whether or not there was empirical evidence that the 5Cs are in fact indicators of PYD. In order to do this, a demographically diverse sample of 1,700 Grade 5 students completed a series of questionnaires. The participants were recruited through their involvement in various youth organizations (i.e. 4-H, Scouts, YMCA) which emphasize PYD. Measures included in the series of questionnaires were identified through an exhaustive literature search and were then pilot tested with over 300 youth. Within the set of questionnaires were a number of pre-existing instruments that served as indicators of each of the 5Cs. For example, the Eisenberg Sympathy Scale (ESS, Eisenberg et al., 1996) served as a measure of caring, the Peer Support Scale (PSS; Armsden & Greenberger, 1987) served as a measure of connection, and the Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC; Harter,

1983) served as a measure of different dimensions of the 5Cs. Statistical analyses result in the first empirical evidence that the presence of the 5Cs indicates the latent construct of PYD.

In order to examine whether these results would remain consistent throughout early adolescence, Phelps and colleagues (Phelps, Zimmerman, Warren, Jelicic, von Eye, & Lerner, 2009) followed-up Lerner et al.'s (2005) findings by re-administering the questionnaires to Lerner et al.'s sample when the students reached Grade 6 and Grade 7. In order to counteract dropout, which was mostly due to scheduling issues from the schools' perspective, additional participants were added each year. Specifically, 976 participants were added in Grade 6, resulting in a total sample of 1967 youth, and 778 participants were added in Grade 7, resulting in a total sample of 1893 youth. In addition, Phelps and colleagues (2009) also made adjustments to questionnaires, which reflected their evolving understandings of the constructs over time. As one example, the researchers deleted items addressing Interpersonal Skills from the character measure because they felt the Interpersonal Skills construct was related more closely to competence than character. Statistical analyses of the data supported Lerner et al.'s (2005) 5-factor model of PYD in Grade 6 and Grade 7.

Despite the promising results of this initial work by Lerner and colleagues (2005) and Phelps and colleagues (2009), there are a few downfalls to using this approach. Specifically, with this approach participants are given a lengthy set of questionnaires to fill out— a two hour period was used in the Lerner et al. (2005) study—which can be

challenging for young participants to complete. At this point there is no validated single measure of the Cs. Also, the instruments are not adapted to a specific age range or type of activity, such as sport participation.

Children and Sport

In a recent review of literature, Côté and colleagues (2010) linked the Cs to the youth sport domain and suggested them as desired outcomes of youth sport participation. Côté and colleagues (2010) found that competence, confidence, and connection were well represented individually within the sport literature, but that caring and compassion were embedded within the character literature (e.g., Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). To better reflect the developmental literature in sport, Côté et al. (2010) collapsed the 5Cs into 4Cs (competence, confidence, connection, and character, as originally proposed by Little, 1993, as cited by Lerner et al., 2005) within their work. The framework of the Cs of PYD is fairly recent, but concepts of the Cs have long been studied within youth sport. However, rather than being examined as a complete system, past studies have examined the concept of each C individually, independent of one another.

This section offers a brief overview of the youth sport literature on competence, confidence, connection, and character with respect to the age range of the current study. The focus of the current study, and therefore the literature review, was to study young athletes between the ages of 9 and 13. This age range was selected because youth sport participation rates are at their peak (Guèvremont et al., 2008) and because this time is important as it sets the stage for future involvement in sport (Kirk, 2005). Kirk (2005)

stated that “quality early learning experiences not only develop physical competencies, but crucially, also perceptions of competence that underlie the motivation that is vital to continuing participation” (p. 251). During this period, children are able to experience the various positive physical, social, and psychological developmental outcomes associated with sport involvement. However, this is also an important age range to target because youth sport participation rates begin to drop off after age 13 (Guèvremont et al., 2008), indicating that not all youth have the positive experience that we intend them to have.

Beginning with competence, in a comprehensive review of youth sport literature, Weiss and Williams (2004) identified *developing and demonstrating physical competence* as a prominent reason *why* youth participate in sport. This includes learning and mastering skills, attaining goals, and physical health. Research on children’s sense of self indicates that early childhood self-representations such as judgments of physical competence tend to be all-or-none in nature (Harter, 1999). This means that in early childhood, children do not yet understand that they can have dichotomous emotions at the same time or be good at one skill and bad at another skill. They see themselves as either “all good” or “all bad,” with self-representations usually being “unrealistically positive” (Harter, 1999, p. 39). As children progress through childhood, higher level thinking develops and they are able to differentiate self-representations in various contexts. In other words, they are able to distinguish between being a good baseball player and a bad piano player. During this period, self-representations increasingly tend to be affected by interpersonal relationships with peers (Harter, 1999).

Translating this to sport, Horn and Weiss (1991) conducted extensive research on self-judgments of physical competence in youth. They reported that when evaluating their own physical competence, children under the age of 10 place more weight on the feedback of adults while youth over 10 years of age tend to place more importance on comparison with peers. Additionally, as peer comparison replaces adult feedback as the significant criterion for youth judging their own physical competence, the accuracy of their self-judgment improves (Horn & Weiss, 1991). Horn and Weiss (1991) demonstrated this by comparing the actual physical competence (measured with a shortened version of the Teacher's Rating Scale) with the children's self-judgments of physical competence (measured by the Perceived Competence Scale for Children). The correlation between children's perceived competence and actual competence was higher for children over 10 years of age than for children under the age of 10.

In addition to developing physical competence, involvement in sport also has the potential to positively impact youth's confidence, a global sense of self-worth or self-efficacy. Feltz and Lirgg (2001) explained that the construct of self-efficacy "is one of the most influential psychological constructs thought to affect achievement strivings in sport" (p. 340). High self-worth is associated with low anxiety, optimism, adaptability, emotional stability, happiness, and life satisfaction (Horn, 2004). Low levels of self-worth are associated with depression, thoughts of suicide, eating disorders, antisocial behaviours, and delinquency (Horn, 2004). Perceived support from coaches is associated with increased levels of self-esteem in athletes (Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979). Coaches

can increase their athletes' confidence by creating an environment in which the athletes are challenged, yet also able to succeed (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995).

Connection has also been studied within the literature, as an important benefit of youth sport is the potential it has to develop strong interpersonal relationships. Two of the top three reasons Weiss and Williams (2004) found for participating in youth sport are related to connections with others. Young athletes cite *acceptance and approval*, which includes feeling part of a group and making friends; and *enjoyment*, which is related to all aspects of having fun, as reasons to participate. In order to capitalize on the importance of relationships among youth sport participants, coaches must consider how the age of their athletes impacts the development of interpersonal relationships. For example, as children enter elementary school and continue into middle school, the school environment and peers play an increasing role in socialization (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). During this period children are not fully able to see themselves from the perspective of others, which leads to friends being identified in terms of "another child who can help or do things with them" (Semrud-Clikeman, p. 26). Involvement in a peer group, such as a sport team, is associated with development of a healthy sense of self (Hart, Newell, & Olsen, 2003). Coaches should give youth athletes time to develop friendships within the sport setting and offer support in demonstrating loyal and helping behaviours with peers (Côté, et al., 2010). In addition to developing connections with peers, youth sport participants may also develop meaningful connections with coaches. Scanlan and colleagues (Scanlan, Carpenter, Lobel, & Simons, 1993) found that positive relationships

with coaches are associated with higher levels of participant enjoyment. Their study of over one-thousand youth sport participants was conducted to determine the sources of sport enjoyment. Included in the model of five significant predictors of sport enjoyment was *Positive Coach Support*.

Conventional wisdom holds that sports build character (Sage, 1990). However, sports have been shown to lead to both positive and negative character development (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). As indicated earlier, there is nothing inherent about involvement in sport that leads to positive outcomes such as the development of character, caring, or compassion. Rather, “when we talk about building character through sport, we are referring to the potential influence of the social interactions that are fostered by the sport experience” (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995, p. 178). The outcomes of sport participation, whether positive or negative, are largely dependent upon adult leadership (i.e. coach or parent) and type of experiences provided (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Weiss, Smith, & Stuntz, 2008). As the prominent adult in the youth sport environment, coaches can play a significant role in the positive character development of their athletes by acting as a role model and promoting prosocial behaviours (Weiss et al., 2008). One aspect of character development is moral behaviours and attitudes, which can be shaped by both coaches and peers (Smith, 2003). Although the Cs are well-represented individually within the youth sport literature, in order to understand how the Cs of PYD apply to youth sport, the Cs need to be examined as a unit rather than individually.

Positive Youth Development in Sport

Recently, researchers have begun to study the Cs as a complete system (of 4 or 5Cs) as they apply to youth sport. While Lerner et al. (2005) and Phelps et al. (2009) examined the 5Cs across a variety of youth activities, Jones and colleagues (in press) have recently applied Lerner et al.'s 5Cs to youth sport. A sample of 258 12 to 15 year old athletes who were attending a summer sport camp completed a 30-item measure (PYD-Sport), adapted from Phelps et al.'s (2009) 78-item measure. Contrary to the two previously discussed studies (Lerner et al., 2005; Phelps et al., 2009), confirmatory factor analysis in the Jones et al. (in press) study did not identify a 5-factor (5Cs) model of PYD; subsequent exploratory factor analysis resulted in a 2-factor model. The first factor, which was labelled pro-social values, included 15 items that were expected to measure caring, character, and connection. The second factor, competence/confidence, included 13 items designed to measure confidence, competence, and connection. Jones and colleagues (in press) suggested that the difference in findings could be due, in part, to similarities between the Cs and their measures. In fact, Lerner et al. (2005) stated that “although an ideal model assumes no correlation between manifest variables, we did not expect this to be the case, as these measures are expected to overlap somewhat conceptually” (2005, p. 60).

Jones and colleagues (in press) offered a number of additional factors that may have contributed to the differences between their findings and previous findings. For example, the mean age of the sample in the Jones and colleagues' (in press) study was

older than the mean age of the sample in the previous two studies. The researchers suggested that it is also possible that using the original 78-item measure (rather than the adapted 30-item measure) with the same sample, or using the adapted 30-item measure with a different sample, may have resulted in the original 5-factor model of PYD. Lastly, Jones et al. (in press) noted that although the participants were instructed to answer questions based on their “main sport”, it is possible that they considered their current sport experience in the summer sport camp. This could have affected results because participants may have been experiencing a new sport for the first time and also because the environment of a summer sport camp is very different from the environment of a team during a competitive season. Jones and colleagues acknowledged the limitations of their study and caution against drawing broad conclusions from a single study. At the same time, they concluded: “we encourage researchers from blindly accepting the 5Cs as the best conceptual model for PYD in sport (and any other setting for that matter) until they can empirically demonstrate the validity of this conceptualization in the research settings they are examining” (p. 21).

Cumming and colleagues (Cumming, Smith, Smoll, Standage, & Grossbard, 2008) noted that many instruments commonly used within sport psychology were developed and validated with adult populations. It is essential that instruments be validated for the age of participants and the context within which they are used (Cumming et al., 2008; Eys, Loughead, Bray, & Carron, 2009a, 2009b). Specific to PYD in sport, Côté and Bruner (2010) suggested that a valid measure of the Cs in the youth

sport context should meet four criteria: (1) items should be based on sport literature, (2) items should emerge from sport participants' experiences, (3) measures should be age and context specific, and (4) items should measure "changes over time". The measures used in past studies of the Cs did not meet these criteria. Specifically, the lengthy compilation of questionnaires used in Lerner et al.'s (2005) study was not developed for a particular type of activity, such as sport participation; rather, the measures used were gathered from a variety of contexts and are generic enough that they are presented as a way to measure PYD in a vast array of contexts. Phelps et al. (2009) later cut Lerner et al.'s questionnaires to 78-items, while Jones et al., (in press) subsequently used 30 of the 78-items.

Criteria for a valid measure of the Cs in youth sport, specifically that the instrument should be age and context specific (Côté & Bruner, 2010; Eys, et al., 2009a, 2009b), reflect our understanding that athletes have different needs and expectations depending on their age and level of development, and that these needs and expectations must be met by coaches (Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007). Côté and colleagues (2007) presented four typologies of coaches, which differ based on the developmental level of athletes and the competitive level of the sport context: (a) participation coach for children, (b) participation coach for teens and adults, (c) performance coach for young adolescents, and (d) performance coach for late adolescents and adults. Each of the four types of coaches would have different objectives. For example, Côté and Gilbert (2009) suggested that a participation coach for children should have five coaching objectives: (1)

adopt an inclusive focus as opposed to an exclusive selection policy based on performance, (2) organize master-oriented motivational climate, (3) set up safe opportunities for athletes to have fun and engage playfully in low-organization games, (4) teach and assess the development of fundamental movements by focusing on the child first, and (5) promote the social aspect of sport and sampling (p. 317).

Building upon the four typologies of coaches, and after a lengthy review of the coaching literature, Côté and Gilbert (2009) proposed the following definition of coaching effectiveness: “The consistent application of professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve the athletes’ competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts” (p. 316). This definition underscores the assertion that the personal characteristics (e.g. professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge) of the leaders of youth development programs are essential factors in the success of the programs (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Peterson, 2004). Vella, Oades, and Crowe (2011) found that youth sport coaches do in fact see themselves as responsible for developing in their athletes outcomes commonly associated with positive youth development, including the 4Cs. Vella and colleagues (2011) conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with 22 participation coaches for adolescents in order to develop an understanding of the coaches’ goals for outcomes in their athletes. Interviews revealed that the athlete outcomes that the coaches work towards fell into eight interrelated themes: competence, confidence, connection, character, life skills, climate, positive affect, and positive psychological capacities.

Importance of Children's Perspective

Although the Cs have been presented as desired outcomes of youth sport (Côté et al., 2010) and coaches view themselves as responsible for developing the Cs in their youth athletes (Vella et al., 2011), no research has examined what these constructs actually mean to the youth sport participants themselves. The constructs of the Cs were developed from adolescent-based populations and have subsequently been applied to children by adults. The past two decades have shown a progressive increase in the value placed on understanding experiences from the child's point of view (Cook & Hess, 2007). "To learn about a child's perspective adult researchers have to get beyond their own beliefs about a situation and listen to children in different ways" (Cook & Hess, 2007, p. 31). Rather than asking parents, who may give differing accounts, children will "provide reliable responses if questioned about events that are meaningful to their lives" (Scott, 2008, p. 88). In this way, it is important to view children as playing a significant and active role in their own development rather than passively experiencing their environment (Larson, 2000; O'Kane, 2000). While research has traditionally used adults as agents for children, we now understand that adults' perceptions of a child's experience often differ from the child's own perception of their experience (Cook & Hess, 2007). For example, researchers in the past would ask parents and teachers questions about children's experiences rather than asking the children themselves (Scott, 2008). More specifically, Horn (2004) explained: "we need to *understand* children's sense of self before we can begin identifying ways to *enhance* their sense of self" (p. 102). Thus, if

coaches and youth sport programmers are asked to develop the Cs in their participants, and in order to develop an instrument to measure the Cs in the youth sport context, it is necessary to first identify the participants' understandings of the Cs.

Sport psychology researchers have used focus groups as an important step in the development of instruments specific to the youth sport context. Eys and colleagues (2009b) conducted focus groups with high school team sport participants, providing the researchers with an understanding of what cohesion meant to the participants as an initial step in the development of the Youth Sport Environment Questionnaire, a measure of cohesion in a team sport setting (YSEQ; Eys et al., 2009a). Likewise, Bolter (2010) employed focus groups with adolescent individual and team sport athletes as a preliminary step in the development of the Sportsmanship Coaching Behaviors Scale (SCBS).

Just as it is important to ask youth about their own experiences, it is necessary to ensure that any instruments or questionnaires used are age-appropriate. Many of the measures used within sport psychology were developed and validated using adult populations; it is unreliable to apply existing measures to youth populations without first confirming that the reading level is appropriate to the sample and that the targeted dimensions are reproducible in the younger sample (Cumming et al., 2008).

Purpose of the Study

Recent research (i.e. Jones et al., in press; Lerner et al., 2005; Phelps et al., 2009) has begun to examine the Cs in various contexts of youth programming via

questionnaires. However, in order to adequately evaluate and eventually measure the Cs in sport, it is important to first further our understanding of the youth sport experience. Côté and Bruner (2010) presented four criteria for a valid measure of the Cs in youth sport: (1) items should be based on sport literature, (2) items should emerge from sport participants' experiences, (3) measures should be age and context specific, and (4) items should measure "changes over time." As a potential contribution to the development of a youth sport measurement of the Cs, the present study most specifically addresses the second criterion that *items should emerge from sport participants' experiences*. To this end, the purpose of this study was to garner an understanding of each of the 4Cs from the perspectives of children participating in sport.

Chapter 3: Method

Participants

Participants in this study were 49 youth athletes between the ages of 9 and 13 years (24 males, $M=10.4$, $SD=0.8$; 25 females, $M=11.1$, $SD=1.1$). Ten single-sex focus groups (5 for males, 5 for females) were conducted, each comprised of 4-6 participants. The selection criterion for participation was involvement in at least one organized sport, either currently or within the past year. This information was obtained verbally from the parent or participant during the recruiting process.

Upon approval from the University's General Ethics Review Board, a convenience sample of participants was recruited from youth sport programs in south-eastern Ontario and northern New York. After obtaining permission from league officials, the primary researcher attended practices and games in order to introduce parents to the study and hand out packets consisting of a (1) Letter of Information, (2) Parent/Guardian Consent Form, (3) Participant Assent Form, and (4) a brief demographics questionnaire (see Appendix B for all forms). Completed forms were collected at a second practice or game and the focus group took place immediately prior to a third practice or game. In addition to recruiting at sporting events, word-of-mouth communication through the primary researcher and colleagues led to the successful recruitment of participants for some focus groups.

The participants were involved in a variety of organized sports, with the most commonly represented sports being soccer, hockey, baseball/softball, and lacrosse. The

number of years of sport participation was self-reported by each participant at the beginning of each focus group; this information was obtained to confirm that participants had in fact participated in organized sport and also to help them feel comfortable speaking at the beginning of the focus group.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were employed as the research method because they are a useful resource for understanding what young people think about a particular topic (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In addition, focus groups were selected rather than one-on-one interviews in order to shift the power balance between the adult interviewer and the young participants (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Because it was expected that the participants would have a great deal of insight to share about the topic, groups were purposely kept small, with four to six participants per group (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Morgan and Krueger (1998) caution that members of a heterogeneous focus group may spend a significant amount of time explaining themselves to each other and working to develop trust, rather than discussing the topic. Morgan and Krueger (1993) also note that a major consideration in the composition of a focus group is the participants' comfort level in talking to each other about the subject matter. Thus, youth sport programs provided an ideal setting for data collection of the current study. Each focus group was comprised of participants who were members of the same team, sport organization, and/or social circle; they were similar to each other in many ways, creating a comfortable environment in which to speak. Single-sex groups were used because elementary age

boys and girls tend to have very different communication styles (Scott, 2008). Separating boys and girls provided the opportunity for smoother sessions in which each participant felt comfortable speaking; this also provided the potential for making comparisons across sexes (Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

Pilot testing. Pilot testing was conducted in order to evaluate and improve the interview guide, as well as to give the primary researcher, who moderated all focus groups, first-hand moderating experience prior to conducting the study. In the initial pilot session a single male participant (11 years old) was asked the *key questions* in a number of different forms. As one example, each of the 4Cs was included in a question (e.g., What does *competence* in sport mean to you?). However, the participant asked for clarification of the terms prior to answering these questions, thus defeating the purpose of obtaining the participant's understanding of the constructs. The participant also had difficulty distinguishing between competence and confidence. In addition to questions containing the terms of the 4Cs, more broadly phrased questions, similar to questions ultimately used in the focus groups, were also tested. After this pilot session and significant discussion, it was decided that the 4Cs (the terms *competence*, *confidence*, *connection*, and *character*) should not be used directly in the questions. Another important aspect which resulted from the initial pilot test was the inclusion of negatively-phrased questions (e.g., How do you know when you are *not* doing well in a sport) in addition to the positively-phrased questions (e.g., How do you know when you *are* doing well in a sport). This adjustment came about when it was apparent that the participant

had an answer in his head but was having trouble finding the right words to express it. As a probe, the question was asked in the negative form and the participant was readily able to articulate his thoughts.

The second pilot session was a focus group with three male participants (a 10 year old and two 11 year olds). In this session, the *key questions* were asked in their current form, but in an order different than in the study focus groups. Specifically, all four positively-phrased questions were asked prior to the negatively-phrased questions. In the study, focus groups each corresponding positive and negative question was asked prior to moving onto the next pair of questions. A colleague of the primary researcher, who is familiar with both the research of the 4Cs and the age group of the participants, contributed to the pilot sessions and subsequent discussions about the study.

Interview guide. The interview guide (see Appendix A for final version), following Krueger and Casey's (2000) five categories of questions, was developed and used to direct the focus groups. Specifically, the interview guide included (a) opening questions, to encourage each participant to speak, (b) introductory questions, to set up the overarching topic, (c) transition questions, to shift the group conversation towards the main questions, (d) key questions, questions that form the basis of the study, and (e) ending questions, questions that bring closure to the session. Probing questions were used as needed to have participants elaborate upon their answers, particularly when answering the key questions. In addition, the moderator frequently summarized the participants' answers to ensure she understood the participants' answers.

Opening questions. In addition to helping the participants feel comfortable talking within the group, the opening questions allowed us to obtain data regarding the current and previous sport involvement of the participants. Participants were asked to tell the group their age, the sports they play or have played, and the approximate number of years they have played each sport. In many cases the participants found it easier to say they had played a particular sport since they were a certain age.

Introductory and transition questions. The introductory and transition questions consisted of asking the participants to identify a recent sports experience and talk about something they particularly enjoyed about it. In addition to providing participants more time to become comfortable speaking within the group, this portion of the focus group also allowed participants the opportunity to spark their memory regarding sport experiences and provide a common context for the subsequent discussion.

Key questions. The key questions, displayed in Table 1, were central to the focus group and were designed to have the participants elaborate upon aspects of their experiences in sport surrounding each of the 4Cs. As indicated above, pilot work and extensive discussion among the research team led to the decision to not use the terms competence, connection, confidence, and character in the key questions. Based upon existing literature, the key questions were developed to be specific enough to capture the essence of each of the 4Cs while also being broad enough to allow participants the freedom to impart new meaning through their answers.

The negatively-phrased questions (e.g., How do you know when you are *not* doing well in sport?) were included, in response to pilot testing, in order to provide the young participants an additional way of thinking about the key question in case they were having difficulty articulating their thoughts. In other words, the negatively-phrased questions were not asked in order to gather a complete understanding of low levels, or a lack of each of the 4Cs, but rather as an alternate way of going about obtaining the same information as the positively-phrased questions.

Table 1. *Focus Group Key Questions*

Competence

How do you know when you are doing well in sport?

How do you know when you are not doing well in sport?

Confidence

What makes you feel good about yourself when you are in sport?

What makes you feel bad about yourself when you are in sport?

Connection

How do you know when you are getting along well with others in sport?

How do you know when you are not getting along well with others in sport?

Character

How do you know when you are being a good person in sport?

How do you know when you are being a bad person in sport?

Throughout the focus groups, and especially when discussing the key questions, probes (Patton, 2002) were used for clarification and to encourage participants to elaborate on their answers. Examples of probes include: “You mentioned that ‘people tell me I’m doing well,’ who are these ‘people?’” and “Could you tell me more about that experience?” The researcher was careful not to ask leading questions.

Ending question. The ending questions were designed to give participants a last opportunity to elaborate upon previous answers and offer additional information.

Participants were first asked “Is there anything you would like to add to your previous answers?” Lastly, they were asked “In thinking about the discussion we have just had, is there anything else about your sport experience that you think it is important for me to know?”

Procedure

Focus groups took place in a variety of quiet settings, including school classrooms, conference rooms at arenas, and participants’ homes. In the two cases of a focus group being conducted in a participant’s home, the participants were acquaintances through sports or school and all parents approved of the location beforehand. Each group was audio recorded to allow for verbatim transcriptions to be made. Duration of the focus groups ranged from 28-55 minutes ($M=42.9$, $SD=10.7$), with the girls’ focus groups ($M=49.6$, $SD=7.1$) generally lasting longer than the boys’ focus groups ($M=36.3$, $SD=9.8$).

Prior to the *opening question*, each focus group began with an Explanation of Confidentiality, which ensured that the participants understood what it meant to “protect the confidentiality of the group.” In addition, Kruger and Casey (2000) note that by presenting the participants as the experts on the topic they will be less hesitant to speak up; in the introduction to each focus group the moderator explained to the participants that they were “the experts” on their sport experiences and reminded them that there were

no right or wrong answers. In order to guard against the possibility of conformity of answers (Morgan & Krueger, 1993) the moderator explained to the participants that, because their answers were based on their individual sport experiences, some of their answers would be similar to other participants' answers and some answers would be different than other participants' answers.

Data Analysis

Each focus group was transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher, resulting in 96 pages of single-spaced text. The initial steps of data analysis were taken as soon as possible after each session, which allowed subsequent focus groups to be improved, as they were informed by previous sessions (Krueger & Casey, 2000); this also dictated when data saturation had occurred. After each focus group was transcribed, the primary researcher listened to the audio recording while following along with the transcription. Any transcription corrections were made and the names of participants or any other information which threatened the anonymity of the participants were changed. In addition, notes relevant to the tone of the focus group were added to the transcript in brackets (e.g., sarcastic tone, participants nod yes, long pause, laughter, etc.). Each transcript was read in full to provide the primary researcher with an overall sense of the focus group (Tesch, 1990).

Once all focus groups were complete and the aforementioned steps were taken, data were analyzed by first coding each transcript into meaning units, which are words or phrases that represent a single idea (Tesch, 1990). Throughout the data analysis process

responses to each of the four key questions, which represented the 4Cs, were kept separate; thus, four distinct data analyses were performed. As the meaning units from each focus group were combined, responses from boys and girls remained distinguishable by different color fonts in order to allow for subsequent comparisons by sex. Following the recommendations of Côté, Salmela, Baria, and Russell (1993), for each data analysis (each of the 4Cs) similar meaning units were then grouped together into themes. The themes represented types of information the participants used to form their understanding of the corresponding construct in the sport context and some similar themes emerged across the 4Cs. Quantitative analysis was conducted by recording the number of meaning units comprising each theme.

Trustworthiness. A number of steps were taken to establish the trustworthiness of the study. To begin with, the primary researcher received guidance from a researcher with extensive experience in moderating focus groups and also conducted coursework in qualitative methods. Pilot testing was employed to provide the moderator experience and to test the interview guide. Data was triangulated through transcripts, member checks during focus group sessions, and the moderator's notes. The primary researcher (who was also the moderator) kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process. This provided a record of the rationale for all decisions and also included notes taken immediately after each focus group session.

As an additional step toward developing the trustworthiness of the study, a reliability check was conducted by an independent researcher who was familiar with the

study. The independent researcher was given a random sample of 48 (12 for each key question, out of a total of 468) meaning units to place into the themes provided by the primary researcher. This reliability check resulted in the independent researcher placing 45 of the 48 meaning units (93.8%) into the correct theme. As a last step to increase trustworthiness, the primary researcher continued to keep a reflexive journal throughout the data analysis phase.

Chapter 4: Results

From the 96 pages of transcripts, 468 meaning units were identified. Of the 468 total meaning units, 141 were generated in response to the key question about competence, 109 from the key question about confidence, 105 for connection, and 113 for character. In line with the purpose of the study, which was to garner an understanding of each of the 4Cs from the participants' perspective, meaning units were grouped and analysed in accordance with the key question from which they were generated. In other words, four separate data analyses were conducted. Therefore, all meaning units fell naturally into competence, confidence, connection, or character. Across the four key questions 35 themes were identified, each representing a type of information that the participants would use to form their perceptions of the 4Cs. It was not uncommon for a theme, such as *positive reinforcement*, to emerge from more than one key question. Data analysis revealed that the participants' perceptions of the competence, confidence, connection, and character in the sport context were formed through information from, or interactions with, five distinct sources: (1) coaches, (2) parents, (3) peers, (4) self-perceptions, and (5) the sport context. Each theme came from one or more of the five sources. The results, which are also displayed in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5, are presented by construct: competence, confidence, connection, and character. Within each construct, the themes are introduced in the order of number of meaning units. Unless specifically noted (see Table 4), each theme emerged from transcripts of both the boys' focus groups and the girls' focus groups. In the presentation of results the number within parentheses

following the name of the theme indicates the number of meaning units which comprised the theme. Likewise, a (B) or (G) follows each participant quote, indicating whether it came from a boy or a girl.

Competence: How do you know when you are doing well in sports?

In response to the key question about competence, 14 themes, which are displayed in Table 2, emerged from the data, with indications of competence coming from all five of the sources: coach, parents, peers, self, and the sport context. The most prominently discussed indicators of competence were *positive reinforcement* from coach, parents, and peers; a sense of *accomplishment* or sense of *failure*; and a sense of *effort* or *lack of effort*. These themes will be presented below, followed by the remaining themes that emerged from the key question about competence.

Positive reinforcement. *Positive reinforcement* was represented by 46 meaning units. In every focus group, the first responses to this key question related to the participants being told by others, including coaches (16), peers (16), and parents (14), that they were “doing well.” This verbal positive reinforcement was not necessarily tied directly to specific athlete behaviour; rather, participants spoke of receiving verbal information from others in the form of general encouragement, cheering, and compliments. The participants perceived this information as indicators that they were doing well. For example, regarding positive reinforcement from the coach, one participant stated: “Your coach says ‘great job, you did good’” (G). Another example

was: “Sometimes when the hardest coach on your team says you’re doing something well, then you know you’re definitely doing it well because they’re hard on you” (G).

Table 2. *Indicators of Competence in Young Athletes*

<u>Source</u>	<u>Doing Well in Sport</u>	<u>Not Doing well in Sport</u>
Coach	Positive reinforcement (16) Gestures of approval (2)	Negative evaluation (5) Corrective feedback (5) Loss of playing time (3)
Parents	Positive reinforcement (14)	Corrective feedback (1)
Peers	Positive reinforcement (16)	Ignoring(2) Negative evaluation (2)
Self-Perceptions	Accomplishment (15) Effort (12) Challenge (2)	Failure (making mistakes) (22) Lack of Effort (16)
Sport Context	Winning (4) Scoring (3) Awards (1)	

Note. The number in parentheses represents the number of meaning units.

Positive reinforcement from peers (teammates) was most commonly in the form of compliments, such as: “Your teammates say ‘good job’ when you get off [the field] and tell you that you did good” (G) and “I know when I’m doing well because when my friends are saying ‘you’re getting a lot better’ and people start cheering you on and everyone starts talking about how good you’re doing” (B). Participants’ references to parents providing positive reinforcement were very straightforward and not elaborated

upon. For example, one boy said: “My mom and dad [tell me I am doing well]. My dad is usually like “Go Sam!”

Accomplishment or failure. Whereas positive reinforcement indicators of competence came directly from other people, participants also spoke of an internal sense of *accomplishment* (15), or sense of *failure* (22), as indicators of doing well or not doing well in sport. A sense of accomplishment, or a feeling of doing things correctly, is a theme which represents competence. One quote that represents this theme is: “Whenever I’m doing figure skating and learning something new, I usually fall a lot. And then after I practice it, I get better” (G). Another participant, a soccer player, felt that she did well in her game despite not scoring: “The first time I went down from midfield all the way of the end of the field and I almost kicked a goal, but it felt good because I was on one of their best players.”

Participants also reported a sense of failure, or a feeling of making mistakes, as an indicator of a not doing well, or a lack of competence. Two quotes that represent this theme are: “You’re starting not to hit the ball in baseball” (B) and “When you come off the ice and have that feeling, like ‘I could have done this better instead of doing what I did’” (G).

Effort or lack of effort. Other self-perceived indicators of competence were a sense of *effort* (12) and a sense of *lack of effort* (16). A sense of effort or working hard was commonly represented by physiological indicators, such as sweating, being out of breath, and feeling tired. Two boys explained that they know when they have done well

in sports when: "...it's a little harder to breath, like you're panting is when you know you've done a good job...because you're working hard" and "your muscles are aching and you just want to lie down and take a nap." One participant said:

For me I think I've done a good job . . . I can tell when I can't, like breath, 'cause I know I've been working hard and my legs feel really, they're really tired. And it just, if I feel like I need a drink or something, like I just feel tired out it feels like I've done well. (G)

Alternatively, a lack of effort was reported as an indicator of a lack of competence, or not doing well in sport. For example, one participant stated: "If you don't feel like you've worked hard and you could have worked harder and you're not tired, then you know you haven't done as well as you could have" (G). Another participant believed that you are not doing well in hockey "when you are not sweating every shift. Our coach puts us on [the ice] for like 30 seconds and if you're not out of breath then you know that you're not skating hard enough or working hard enough" (B).

Other indicators of competence. The remaining nine themes that emerged from the responses to the key question on competence are represented by 30 meaning units (MUs). Participants felt that *winning* (4), *scoring* (3), and *awards* (1) indicated that they were doing well in sport. Two participants said that they were doing well in sport when they felt that they were being *challenged*. The following quote about hockey represents this theme: "Everybody, defensemen aren't actually just sitting there and waiting for you to come in, they're actually trying to stop you" (B). The final theme indicating the

presence of competence was *gestures of approval* by the coach, which included high-fives or “fist bumps”.

Participants responded that *negative evaluation* from coaches (5) and peers (2) lets them know that they are not doing well. One participant said: “You can know [when you are not doing well] when your coach yells at you” (B). *Corrective feedback* from coaches (5) and parents (1) also let the participants know that they were not doing well. For example, one girl reported that you are not doing well “when the coach is telling you to go to a certain spot” (G). *A lack of playing time* indicated to participants that they were not doing well in sport. This included the coach taking them out of the game after making a mistake and teammates are playing more minutes than them. Lastly, participants noted that their teammates *ignoring* them served as an indication that they were not doing well.

Confidence: What makes you feel good about yourself in sport?

Sixteen themes, represented by 110 MUs, emerged from the key question about confidence and are displayed in Table 3. As with competence, participants referenced all five sources as contributing to their feelings of confidence in sport. The three most referenced themes were *scoring*, sense of *accomplishment* or *failure*, and a sense of *effort* or *lack of effort*.

Accomplishment or failure. As with competence, an internal sense of *accomplishment* (19) or *failure* (26) emerged from the transcripts as prominent indicators of confidence levels in sport. Quotes which represent a sense of accomplishment are:

“When you get a drill right, after having a hard time with it” (G) and “When you try a new move and it actually works and you get it right “(B).

A sense of failure or making mistakes made the participants feel badly about themselves in sport. For example, “At the end of the game and you’re defense and you have to pass because you’re being covered, and you pass the other team accidentally, with 30 seconds left on the clock and they score” (B).

Table 3. *Indicators of Confidence in Young Athletes*

<u>Source</u>	<u>Feeling Good About Yourself in Sport</u>	<u>Feeling Bad About Yourself in Sport</u>
Coach	Positive reinforcement (3)	Loss of playing time (4) Negative evaluation (2)
Parents	External Rewards (1)	
Peers	Positive reinforcement (5) Togetherness (4) Gestures of approval (2)	Ignoring (3)
Self-Perceptions	Accomplishment (19) Effort (9) Fun (6)	Failure (making mistakes) (26) Lack of Effort (6)
Sport Context	Scoring (17) Winning (1)	Losing (1)

Note. The number in parentheses represents the number of meaning units.

Scoring. This theme, represented by 17 MUs, simply refers to the idea that the participants reported that they feel good about themselves in sport when they *score*,

whether it be a homerun in baseball, a goal in hockey, or a foul shot in basketball. When asked this key question, one boy answered: “When you score or get an assist, like when you’re defence and you pass it up the boards and they score, you feel good.” Beyond the 17 MUs, one participant replied that *winning* makes him feel good about himself and another said that *losing* makes him feel bad about himself in sport.

Effort or lack of effort. Again, similar to competence, the themes of *effort* (9) and *lack of effort* (6) emerged as indicators of levels of confidence in sport. The following quote best exemplifies how a high level of effort made the participants feel good about themselves in sport:

You know you tried your hardest and did the best you could do, even if it wasn’t the best you have done, it was the best you could do at the time and you tried as hard as you could to put everything into the game that you had. (G)

Conversely, a lack of effort made the participants feel badly about themselves in sport. One girl explained that she feels badly about herself “when you’re like sitting out and you have the energy to cheer on your team and the other team, but you just don’t do it.” One boy simply stated that he doesn’t feel good about himself: “When I don’t try.”

Other indicators of confidence. The final 30 MUs that emerged from the key question about confidence represent eight themes. In regard to confidence, or feeling good about yourself in sport, participants’ responses again brought up the theme of *positive reinforcement* in the form of general encouragement, cheering, and compliments from coaches (3) and peers (5). Two other themes, *togetherness* (4) and *gestures of*

approval (2), were also referred to as indicators of confidence coming from peers. The theme of togetherness is represented by the following example: “Spending time with your friends [in sport]. And also being with your team, like in the locker room before the game and after the game” (G). Gestures of approval include high-fives and “fist bumps.” The self-perception of *fun* (6) also emerged as a theme representing feeling good about yourself in sport. In answering this key question, one girl replied:

Sometimes I think that I’d like to be a really successful hockey player, but I just like playing the game. I just have fun playing it, it doesn’t really matter if I am successful. It might be fun to be [successful] but in the end, I just like playing the game. (G)

Lastly, parents were referenced just once regarding confidence, as one boy said he feels good about himself “when your parents think you did so good that they take you out to McDonalds or something.” This response made up the theme *external reward*.

In answering the negatively-phrased key question for confidence, two themes emerged referencing the coach and one theme emerged referencing peers. Participants reported feeling bad about themselves when receiving *negative evaluation* (2) from the coach, as in: “When the coach has yelled at you for doing something wrong” (G). *Losing playing time* (4) also made the participants feel badly about themselves in sport, whether it be that the coach took them out of the game after making a mistake or that the coach did not allow them to play as often as other players. For example, “When you’ve only gone on the [basketball] court twice and you have to sit out for the rest of the game and

the coach just wouldn't put you in and you get really mad, like 'why won't you just put me in?'"(G). Finally, being *ignored* (3) by peers also made participants feel badly about themselves. In explaining how being ignored by teammates makes her feel badly about herself, one girl said: "Usually you know that when you do something good, people will at least give you a high-five, but say some people ignore you, you think in your mind that you did something bad and that you can't fix it."

Connection: How do you know when you are getting along well with others in sport?

The key question about connection generated 105 MUs, which are represented by 13 themes as shown in Table 4. Contrary to competence and confidence, participants' responses regarding connection referenced only three of the five sources: coaches, peers, and self-perceptions. The most prominent themes referenced peers and the results will be presented below in terms of interactions with teammates and interactions with opponents.

Teammates. The most commonly referenced theme was *positive reinforcement* (15) from teammates, which included general encouragement, cheering, and compliments. Participants' responses also elicited the themes of *social inclusion* (12) and *sport inclusion* (12). Social inclusion includes the idea of making teammates feel included outside the actual playing of sport, which could mean in the locker room prior to a game or away from the sport altogether. For example, one participant explained:

If you're in a tournament and are at a place [a hotel] and you're hanging out, and there's a new player just by themselves, you could go over to them and hang out with them, then you know you're getting along well. (G)

Table 4. *Indicators of Connection in Young Athletes*

<u>Source</u>	<u>Getting Along Well With Others in Sport</u>	<u>Not Getting Along Well With Others in Sport</u>
Coach	Gestures of acceptance (2)	
Peers		
Teammates	Positive reinforcement (13) Social Inclusion (12) Sport inclusion (12) Close relationships (12) Accepting mistakes (6) Positive gestures (4)	Exclusion (14) Negative interactions (9)
Opponents	Positive interactions (8, girls only)	Bullying (8, boys only) Negative interactions (2)
Self-Perception	Empathy (3, girls only)	

Note. The number in parentheses represents the number of meaning units.

Sport inclusion, on the other hand, encompasses the inclusion of teammates within the game itself. The following quote best exemplifies the theme of knowing you are getting along well with others by including teammates in the play:

If you were trying to work as a team. And if you were trying to, like not just being selfish with the puck, not just trying to get all of the goals yourself, you're

trying to pass it and make other people do well as well. And try your best to make everybody get the puck and be included in the plays and stuff. (G)

The importance of *accepting mistakes* (6) emerged as a theme representing connection. This theme refers to participants talking about comforting and reassuring a teammate after making a mistake. One participant explained: “like not getting mad at that person [a teammate] because they did something wrong. You can just say ‘good job, it’s not the end of the world,’ like we’re supposed to have fun” (G). This theme is also illustrated by the following quote:

Sometimes, even if it is somebody’s fault [the other team scoring], you don’t want to rub it in, you should just look on the bright side for them and say ‘you know what, maybe next time we can...’ Like you help them plan ahead for better playing next time. (G)

Positive gestures (4) emerged as a theme which indicated connection with teammates, including the quote: “if you score a goal, most of them [teammates], well if it’s hockey, they’ll bang their sticks on the bench” (B).

In addition to the abovementioned themes, which referred to connections with teammates in general, the theme of *close relationships* (12) with a particular teammate also emerged. Participants’ responses that were included in this theme referred specific teammates who tended to always be partners in drills, “goof around” together, or sit next to each other in the locker room. This theme is best illustrated by the following quote:

If you have a drill or something where you get to be partners, you get to choose them. It might be the person choosing their best friend on the team to be their partner. Or, in some practices I might get to hang out with my friend, like goofing off and stuff. That's probably when you can tell a lot of the time when people are really good friends with somebody because they're probably laughing and maybe not paying attention [to the coach or the drill] (G).

Two themes regarding teammates emerged from the negatively-phrased question for connection, *exclusion* (14) and *negative interactions* (9). The idea of both sport exclusion and social exclusion is illustrated with the following quote: "When you're not passing to them even if they're wide open. You think you're the best on the team and you don't like that person because they're not popular, so you pass it to the more popular people" (B). The last theme that indicated not getting along well with people in sport included *negative interactions* with teammate like arguments over not passing the ball or making a mistake.

Opponents. Some of the only differences in responses between boys and girls occurred when referring to the role of interactions with opponents indicating connection. First, *positive interactions* (8) with opponents were brought up exclusively by girls. This theme generally included comments like 'nice goal' or 'that was a nice kick,' but also included the following quote:

One time in lacrosse I was talking to these two girls on the other team because the ball was on the other end of the field, so we were just waiting for it to come back

to our side. And I was just standing there talking to them and we were like chatting and everything. (G)

The theme of *bullying* (8), on the other hand, was brought up exclusively by boys in response to the negatively-phrased key question about connection. One boy talked about watching a friend's lacrosse game from the stands and having the following exchange with players from a team he had previously competed against: "They were coming over, calling us names. We told them to stay away, but they kept coming back" (B). Other responses included in this theme referred to bullying behaviour in the game, such as: "They're [opponents] are bullying you. Like they might kick the ball at you, push you, trip you on purpose. Or push you out of the way so they can get the ball" (B).

Other indicators of connection. Three MUs, all contributed by girls, comprised the theme of *empathy*. This theme differed from positive reinforcement with teammates in that responses included in this theme referred to interacting positively with teammates because it would make you feel good. For example, one girl explained a scenario in which a good player complimented a weaker player after scoring: "If someone didn't tell you to go up and give them a hug or something [but you did anyway], then you know that it's you inside who is doing your best to make them feel good." The final theme for getting along well with others was *gestures of acceptance* (2) from coaches, which included high-fives, "fist bumps", or a pat on the back.

Character: How do you know when you are being a good person in sport?

In response to the key question about character, 14 themes, represented by 113 MUs, are displayed in Table 5. Participants’ responses referred to peers, self-perceptions, and the sport context, but not coaches or parents. Similar to connection, prominent themes refer to interactions with teammates and interactions with opponents. Other prominent themes are respecting or disrespecting the game and sportsmanship or a lack of sportsmanship.

Table 5. *Indicators of Character in Young Athletes*

<u>Source</u>	<u>Being a Good Person in Sport</u>	<u>Not Being a Good Person in Sport</u>
Peers		
Teammates	Positive reinforcement (15) Sport inclusion (13) Accepting mistakes (6)	Negative interactions (7) Exclusion (3)
Opponents	Positive interactions (12) Gestures of respect (11)	Gestures of disrespect (9)
Self-Perception	Sportsmanship (6) Respect for others (6)	Lack of sportsmanship (8)
Sport Context	Respecting the game (5)	Disrespecting the game (10) Aggressive spectators (2)

Note. The number in parentheses represents the number of meaning units.

Teammates. The five themes that emerged regarding interactions with teammates in terms of character were also found in connection. To begin with, *positive*

reinforcement (15) with teammates served as indicators of being a good person in sport. Again, this included interactions such as general encouragement, cheering, and compliments. *Sport inclusion* (13) was another prominent theme. The following quote represents this theme: “Like if you give up your time [in the game] to somebody that doesn’t play as much, so they get to play rather than you” (G). The theme of *accepting mistakes* (6) also served as an indicator of being a good person in sport. In response to the negatively-phrased key question about character, the themes of *negative interactions* (7) and *exclusion* (3) emerged.

Opponents. In referring to interactions with opponents as indicators of being a good or a bad person in sport, the most prominent themes were *gestures of respect* (11) and *gestures of disrespect* (9). Participant’s responses included within these themes generally referred to post game handshakes. For example, one boy explained that “in wrestling when you begin, you shake hands with the other opponents. And afterwards, whether you lose or win, you have to shake hands.” A gesture of disrespect is illustrated in the following quote: “I’ve seen people, probably to be rude at after the game, when they were shaking hands they’d just put a fist out there and punch your hand” (B). Participants, both boys and girls, also spoke of general *positive interactions* (12) with opponents as being indicators of being a good person in sport. The following simple quote illustrates this theme: “Whenever I say ‘good try’ or something to the other team” (G).

Respect or disrespect for the game. The themes of *respect for the game* (5) or a *lack of respect for the game* (10) also emerged from the interviews. Respect for the game included responses such as “playing fair” (G) and “not breaking the rules” (B). The following quote best illustrates the theme of disrespecting the game: “In hockey, I remember a couple of times where kids were yelling at the ref because they thought something [a penalty] should be called and nothing was” (B).

Sportsmanship or lack of sportsmanship. The themes of *sportsmanship* (6) and *lack of sportsmanship* (8) emerged from the transcripts. Participants’ responses were placed in these themes when they specifically referenced “sportsmanship”, or being a “good sport” or a “bad sport.” Both of these themes are exemplified by the following quote:

Say you’re winning by like three goals and at the end of the quarter you’re cheering and saying how your team is the best and how you’re going to win. That’s unsportsmanlike. And sportsmanship is when you are a good sport. Like if you lose, you don’t bang your stick against the ice or the boards. You just don’t be rude I guess. (G)

Other indicators of character. The theme of *respect for others* (6) emerged in response to the key question about character. Responses included within this theme were distinguished from other responses in that the participant specifically mentioned the idea of treating others as they would like to be treated themselves. This idea of being able to put themselves in another’s place is best illustrated by this quote:

When someone gets hurt in a game, don't just skate off, you should get on the ground and kneel. You shouldn't just skate off to your bench, because that's kind of unsportsmanlike. Because what if that was you, wouldn't you want people kneeling for you and not just skating off and pretending or not caring at all that you broke your leg or something? (G)

Lastly, the theme of *aggressive spectators* (2) was expressed in the following quote, which exemplifies that being a good or bad person in sport is not limited to the participants themselves: "You don't have to be on the team, someone in the audience, say it's [professional] football and they really like the Giants and they really hate the Jets. When they're at the football game they keep booing and booing and booing the Jets" (B).

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to garner an understanding of the 4Cs—competence, confidence, connection, and character—from the perspectives of children participating in sport. However, before delving into a discussion of the results, it is important to address the general interrelatedness and overlap between the constructs of competence, confidence, connection, and character. This overlap is evidenced in the current study by the fact that a number of themes emerged pertaining to more than one of the 4Cs. For example, the theme of *positive reinforcement* was common to all 4Cs. Participants referred to positive reinforcement from coaches, parents, and peers as an indication of competence; positive reinforcement from coaches and peers as an indication of confidence; and positive reinforcement from peers as an indication of both connection and character. In other words, receiving positive reinforcement from their coach made the participants feel that they were doing well in sport (competence) and also feel good about themselves (confidence). Other examples of this overlap were demonstrated in the themes of *effort* (and *lack of effort*) and *accomplishment* (and *failure*) as indicators of both competence and confidence. From a practical point of view, it would be logical to assume that a young athlete who was developing competence and character within the sporting environment would also be developing a degree of connection and confidence. Vella and colleagues (2011), who interviewed coaches of adolescent athletes to explore which athlete outcomes the coaches hoped to develop in their athletes, also found overlap among the themes that emerged from their results: “Each theme is not developed in

isolation, but is dependent upon the facilitation of each of the other themes” (Vella et al., 2011, p. 44).

The conceptual interrelatedness of competence, confidence, connection, and character has presented challenge to developing empirical support for the framework for the Cs of PYD. For instance, Lerner and colleagues’ (2005) longitudinal study of PYD found that the 5Cs were highly correlated, therefore not measuring distinctive factors. They also stated that “although an ideal model assumes no correlation between the manifest variables, we did not expect this to be the case, as these measures are expected to overlap somewhat conceptually” (p. 60). Likewise, Jones and colleagues’ (in press) CFA of the 5Cs resulted in a 2-factor model that integrated competence with confidence for the first factor and integrated connection, character, and caring into the second factor, called pro-social values.

While the constructs of competence, confidence, connection, and character are by no means understudied in the youth sport context, the unique contribution of the current study was the approach of understanding these constructs qualitatively, from the participants’ own perspective. In light of the interdependence of the constructs of the 4Cs, a discussion of the results organized by construct would become redundant. Rather, results will be discussed under the following headings, which represent important findings: coach, parents, peers, effort, accomplishment, respect, and gender differences. This section will conclude by addressing the question of how many Cs should be included within this framework of PYD.

Coach

Research has consistently emphasized the important role of adult leaders, including coaches, in influencing outcomes in the youth with whom they work (e.g., Fraser-Thomas et al., 2009; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Horn, 2008; Peterson, 2004; Vella et al., 2011). In the current study, the participants indicated that they used information from their coach when determining whether they were doing well in sport (competence) and whether they felt good about themselves in sport (confidence). Most notably, positive reinforcement from the coach in the form of general encouragement, cheering, and compliments, served as an indicator of competence in the participants. Participant responses regarding coaches are consistent with Smith, Smoll, and colleagues' long line of research on coaching (e.g., Smith & Smoll, 2007; Smith et al., 1979), which suggests that coaches should provide positive reinforcement and technical instruction and limit punitive behaviours. Participants also responded that they felt a lack of competence and a lack of confidence when their coach provided negative evaluation in the form of yelling, as well as when the coach limited their playing time.

One potential anomaly surfaced as the participants indicated that they felt a lack of competence when receiving corrective feedback from their coach, despite the fact that the coaching literature emphasizes the importance of providing corrective feedback in positive coaching practices (Smith & Smoll, 2007; Tzetzis, Votsis, & Kourtessis, 2008). The basis of corrective feedback is to point out a lack of competence in a given situation; in other words, to let someone know that they are *not* doing well in the given situation.

Although the participants saw corrective feedback as an indicator of a lack of competence, the lack of competence was in reference to a particular moment in time. It is quite possible that the corrective feedback ultimately led to a feeling of greater competence in the participants. In addition, participants did not reference corrective feedback from the coach regarding confidence. Future research could delve deeper into participants' perceptions of competence to see if that was the case. Also, considering the interrelatedness of the Cs, it would be interesting to see if how an instance of receiving corrective feedback might impact an athlete's confidence.

With the exception of two meaning units referencing "fist bumps" (similar to high-fives) from coaches as an indicator of connection, the participants did not discuss coaches in responding to the key questions about connection and character. This is somewhat surprising, considering the research supporting the coach's role in the connection and character of their athletes (Scanlan et al., 1993; Smith & Smoll, 1997; Weiss et al., 2008). In interviews with coaches of adolescents, it was found that the coaches made conscious efforts to teach their athletes about the importance of character traits such as respect, morality, and honesty, as well as to promote a sense of connection through positive friendships among teammates (Vella et al., 2011). Participant responses in the current study reflected the aforementioned aspects of character and connection, but did not include references to the coach. Based upon past research, it is likely that the participants' coaches did play an important role in teaching them about aspects of character (Weiss et al., 2008) and provided the environment in which positive

connections with teammates were able to thrive (Scanlan et al., 1993; Smith & Smoll, 1997). However, it appears that, at this age, the participants were unable to readily make the link between their understandings of these two constructs and where they obtained that information.

A similar disconnect may be present in the participants' responses to the key questions about competence and confidence; specifically, the themes of *accomplishment* and *failure*, which emerged under both constructs. Participants spoke frequently of feeling competent and confident when they had a sense of accomplishment, such as making a nice pass or doing a drill correctly. Conversely, a sense of failure included missing a chance to score or letting the other team score. Research suggests that coaches play a significant role in the participants' conceptualizations of what is a "good" or a "bad" pass, or doing a drill "right" or "wrong" (Smith & Smoll, 2007), but it appears that young athletes do not necessarily make this connection. For the purpose of this study it is important to recognize that young athletes may not always be able to make the connections between their perceptions and their coaches' behaviours. However, future research could examine whether this is a case of a discrepancy between athlete perceptions and coach behaviours, or if the coach behaviours are actually not having an impact on the athletes.

Parents

Participants referenced both positive reinforcement and corrective feedback from parents as indicators of their competence in sport. In addition, one participant said an

external reward from his parents increased his confidence. Participants made no reference to parents for connection or character, despite the fact that parents have been shown to play an important role in their child's athletic development (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Similar to the aforementioned discrepancy regarding the role of the coach, there is an apparent disconnect between athlete perceptions and what we know of parent behaviours from past literature (e.g., Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). The fact that the participants did not readily make the association between their parents' influence and their perceptions of connection and character in sport might be looked at as a benefit. In other words, it is possible that parents are helping their children develop connection and character in sport when they create an environment in which the children do not necessarily see their parents' impact.

Peers

In the current study, peers were referenced extensively by participants in response to the key questions about all 4Cs. In fact, 228 out of 468 (49%) meaning units referenced peers. The large emphasis that participants' placed on peers in discussing their perceptions of the 4Cs lends support to Smith's (2003) call for increased research on peers in the youth sport setting. Though there is not a complete lack of research on peers in the youth sport setting, there is a relative dearth of research on peers in comparison to the large amount of research on the role of adults in the youth sport setting (Smith, 2003). Findings from the current study compliment previous research on the important role of peers in youth sport.

First, the prevalence of references to peers by the participants highlights Weiss and Williams' (2004) finding that two of the top three reasons youth cited for why they participated in sport were related to peers. Specifically, in addition to developing and demonstrating competence, Weiss and Williams found that youth participate in sport for acceptance and approval, and enjoyment. Overall, in the current study participants felt that they were experiencing the 4Cs when they were interacting in a positive manner with peers, including exchanging positive reinforcement, being together, accepting each others' mistakes, and including each other socially and within the sport. Conversely, a lack of the 4Cs was experienced when the participants felt excluded and had negative interactions with peers.

In addition, positive reinforcement from peers also played an important role in the participants' feelings of competence, which provides mixed support to previous research showing that peer comparisons and information from peers influences perceived competence in the sport setting (Horn & Weiss, 1991; Weiss & Duncan, 1992). Participants responded that they used information from peers as indicators of competence, but no participants explicitly stated peer comparison as an indication of competence. As the mean age of participants in the current study was 10.8 years, this appears to be a contrary finding to Horn and Weiss' (1991) research which found that youth over the age of 10 tend to place more weight on peer comparison in judging their competence. It is unclear why this is the case with participants from the current study. Participants felt good about themselves, meaning they felt confident, when they were

feeling a sense of togetherness with their teammates and were receiving gestures of approval from them. Conversely, participants felt badly about themselves, a lack of confidence, when they felt ignored or excluded by teammates. This reinforces previous work which linked peer acceptance in youth with feelings of self-worth and self-esteem (Smith, 1999; Smith, 2003).

In regard to the nature of interactions with peers, participants spoke of interactions with their team in general, as well as one-on-one interactions with specific individuals. In many cases, participants spoke of having a particularly close relationship with a teammate or two; these teammates would sit next to one another in the locker room and on the bench, act as partners whenever possible in practice drills, and “goof around” together. The concept of having different levels of interactions reflects Holt and colleagues’ (Holt, Black, Tamminen, Fox, & Mandigo, 2008) qualitative work with female adolescent soccer players. Through interviews with 34 athletes, Holt and colleagues (2008) found that peer interactions in the sport setting fit into three levels: interactions, relationships, and group processes. At the interaction level, athletes engaged in short-term exchanges with athletes who were new to the team or “different” from themselves, meaning outside their close circle of friends. The relationship level referred to repeated interactions with an individual over time. From the current study, participant responses regarding a particularly close relationship with a teammate or teammates would fit here. The last level, group processes, would include responses from participants in the current study which referred to teamwork and inclusion. Overall, the

abundance of participant responses which referenced the importance of peers in all 4Cs supports Smith's (2003) assertion that peers play a significant role in youth's sporting experience and more research on peers in the youth sport context is necessary.

Effort

The themes of *effort* and *lack of effort* emerged from the focus group, as the participants equated their level of effort with feelings of competence and confidence. Participants perceived that they were doing well and felt good about themselves when they sensed that they were working hard. Indicators of effort or working hard were sweating, breathing hard, and "trying your best." Conversely, participants thought they were *not* doing well and felt badly about themselves when they did not work hard. The participants also referred to a sense of *challenge* as an indication of their competence, which included comments about feeling that they were doing well when they felt that opponents were working their hardest against them. The fact that participants placed importance on effort in determining their feelings of competence and confidence complements MacDonald and colleagues' (MacDonald, Côté, Eys, & Deakin, 2011) finding that effort expenditure was one of the four strongest predictors of positive sport experiences in a diverse sample of athletes.

Larson (2000) also highlighted the importance of effort in positive youth experiences. *Initiative*, which Larson (2000) suggested is an integral outcome of any positive youth development, has the potential to develop in youth if an activity is *intrinsically motivating*, involves *concerted engagement* in the environment, and the

engagement occurs *over time*. Larson (2000) explained that concerted engagement includes exertion or effort. Larson (2000) compared the contexts of school, experience with friends, and sports, all of which occur over time, to illustrate his assertion that initiative can be developed in youth sport. In general, adolescents in school will experience concerted engagement, but it is not intrinsically motivating. Being with friends, on the other hand, is usually intrinsically motivating, but does not require concerted engagement. Sport, along with a number of other extracurricular activities, involves all three requirements: intrinsic motivation, concerted engagement, and engagement over time. Considering the amount of emphasis the participants placed on effort in determining their levels of competence and confidence, this provides support to Larson's (2000) contention that sport is an ideal activity for PYD.

Accomplishment

Participants also referred to winning and scoring as indicators that they were both doing well (competence) and feeling good about themselves (confidence) in sport. It is interesting to note that twice as many meaning units about scoring and winning emerged for confidence as for competence; while scoring and winning indicated to the participants that they were doing well, even more participants said that scoring made them feel good about themselves. The link between achieving success and levels of confidence is represented in youth sport literature. For example, mastery, meaning mastering or improving personal skills, has been shown to be an important source of confidence for youth athletes (Chase, 2001; Vealey, Hayashi, Garner-Holman, & Giacobbi, 1998). Also,

MacDonald and colleagues (2011) found that a task climate was a significant predictor of positive experiences in sport. A task climate refers to an environment in which the focus is on personal skill development without comparison to the performance of others (Harwood, Cumming, & Fletcher, 2004). The important implication of these findings is that coaches of young athletes need to provide opportunities for their athletes to be successful in sport, preferably in a task climate.

Respect

In response to the key questions about character, a number of themes regarding respect emerged: *respect for others*, *gestures of respect / disrespect*, and *respecting / disrespecting the game*. These themes, along with the themes of *sportsmanship* and *lack of sportsmanship*, are consistent with research findings that sport can lead to both positive and negative character development (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). What is unclear is why the participants did not refer to coaches in response to the questions about being a good person in sport, because research has shown that coaches play a significant role in the character development of their players (Smith, 2003; Weiss et al., 2008). It may likely be the case that coaches purposively set up a sport environment for their athletes to develop character and respect without the athletes necessarily noticing when this learning occurs.

Gender Differences

Across ten single-sex focus groups, differences in responses between the sexes surfaced for three of 35 themes. The first theme which elicited a difference in responses

between boys and girls was *empathy*, which emerged in response to the key question about connection (i.e., How do you know when you are getting along well with others in sport?). This theme was comprised of three meaning units, all contributed by girls. Responses included within this theme involved the idea of being able to put yourself in another's shoes in order to make a decision of how to act in a certain situation. Another distinct difference between the responses of boys and girls, involving two themes, also came about in the discussion of connection. The theme of *positive interactions* was comprised of eight meaning units, all of which came from girls. The girls who provided responses in this theme spoke of exchanges of compliments and encouragement with opponents during competition. Boys, on the other hand, contributed all eight of the meaning units which comprised the theme *bullying*. The boys' responses representing this theme included comments about purposefully fighting, hurting, or instigating an opponent. Interestingly, when the theme of *positive interactions* with opponents emerged in response to the key question about character (i.e., How do you know when you are being a good person in sport?) both boys and girls contributed. Interpreting these differences, it appears that girls were able to regard opponents with some level of friendship, while boys did not consider opponents in terms of "getting along well with others in sport".

One possible explanation for this difference between the sexes could be the nature of the sports that participants were active in during the focus groups. Although this data was not formally collected, during the recruitment process the primary researcher gained

an understanding of the types of sport program the participants were active in. At the time of their participation focus groups, a number of the girls were participating in a house league sport (co-ed soccer or girls hockey), meaning they may have been competing against friends or classmates. A number of the boys, on the other hand, were playing on teams which competed against teams from other towns. Focus groups were audio recorded, meaning that individual comments cannot be reliably attributed to a particular participant. Therefore, it is not possible to determine whether or not this factor contributed to this discrepancy between the sexes. However, these differences do complement consistent research findings that girls' relationships with friends are perceived to be more intimate and supportive than boys' relationships with friends (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

Two, Four, or Five Cs?

The conceptual interrelatedness of the constructs of the Cs of PYD brings up the question of how many Cs should be included within this framework of PYD. Lerner's extensive line of research (e.g., Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2000; Zarrett et al., 2009) follows the framework of 5Cs: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion. Taking a similar approach, Jones and colleagues' (in press) analyses resulted in a 2-factor model, competence/confidence and pro-social values. Alternatively Côté and colleagues (2010) collapsed the 5Cs to 4Cs when applying this framework to the youth sport context. In an extensive review of youth sport literature, the researchers found that the concepts of caring and compassion were embedded within literature on

character. This finding, in addition to the general connectedness of the three constructs led Côté and his colleagues to combine them under the construct of character. This 4Cs framework was the focus of the current study. Within the Cs framework caring or compassion has been given the working definition of “a sense of sympathy and empathy for others” (Jelicic et al., 2007, p. 265). In the current study, participant responses which would fall under this definition were included most notably in the theme *empathy*, which emerged from the discussion about connection, and the theme *respect for others*, which emerged from the discussion about character. This reinforces the position that there is considerable overlap between the constructs.

While it is unlikely that there is an absolute answer to the question of how many Cs should be included within the framework, it *is* important to come up with a single common framework across disciplines. The results of this study support the framework of the 4Cs. It is important for youth sport researchers to continue to examine the different constructs of PYD, the 4Cs, as a complete system rather than individually. Rather than spending more time questioning the number of Cs included in the framework, researchers should also work towards informing the youth sport community of the importance of this framework and the message of PYD in sport.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to garner an understanding of the 4Cs—competence, confidence, connection, and character—from the perspectives of children participating in sport. This understanding was obtained through the use of single-sex focus groups with 9 to 13 year old youth sport participants. The unique contribution of this study was the qualitative approach to exploring what the 4Cs mean to youth sport participants themselves. Results indicate that youth sport participants obtain information with which they form their perceptions of the 4Cs from five sources: coaches, parents, peers, self-perceptions, and the sport context. Participant responses referenced all five sources when discussing competence and confidence. For connection, participants referenced information from coaches, peers, and self-perceptions; and for character, participants referenced peers, self-perceptions, and the sport context. Positive reinforcement was the most common theme, emerging across all 4Cs and from multiple sources. Peers, including both teammates and opponents, were the most consistently cited source of information, being referenced by participants for all 4Cs. Other notable findings included the importance that participants placed on level of effort for determining their competence and confidence; and the positive impact of achieving success, including scoring goals or feeling a sense of accomplishment, on levels of competence and confidence.

The findings of this study complement the youth sport literature and have implications for youth sport coaches. The implications for coaches can best be

summarized by Côté and Gilbert's (2009) five objectives for *participation coaches for children*: (1) adopt an inclusive focus as opposed to an exclusive selection policy based on performance, (2) organize mastery-oriented motivational climate, (3) set up safe opportunities for athletes to have fun and engage playfully in low-organization games, (4) teach and assess the development of fundamental movements by focusing on the child first, and (5) promote the social aspect of sport and sampling (p. 317). Based upon the results of the current study, an emphasis on inclusion and the social aspect of youth sport will allow the athletes to develop meaningful relationships, contributing to feelings of connection and character. In addition, by creating a mastery-oriented climate that is safe and focuses on the development of fundamental movements, young athletes will be able to achieve instances of success, which will increase their competence and confidence.

From a methodological perspective, the outcomes of this study support the notion that perspectives of young people, including children in sport, are important and unique (Cook & Hess, 2007; Scott, 2008). While the findings of this study generally support and echo previous research, a few notable exceptions arose. Specifically, despite the general understanding that coaches play a role in athletes' connection and character (e.g., Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2009; Vella et al., 2011), participants in the study gave little to no reference to coaches for connection and character and little to no reference to parents for confidence, connection, and character. This underscores the fact that a children's perceptions of a situation can vary from an

adult's perception of the same situation (Cook & Hess) and provides support for future research to similarly appreciate children's distinct perspective.

Limitations

Despite the important implications noted above, there are some limitations of this study which must be addressed. First, there are certain potential limitations inherent in any use of focus groups. Negative group dynamics may come into play, such as the development of a group consensus, power struggle, and participants feeling reluctant to speak up before the group (Thomas & Nelson, 1996). However, steps were taken to minimize or avoid altogether these negative instances: participants were repeatedly reminded that they were being asked about their experiences and that there were no right or wrong answers; participants were presented as the "experts" on the topic; participants were informed that it was likely that different members of the group would have different experiences and thus different answers; and introductory and opening questions were used to help participants become comfortable speaking in front of the group.

The second potential limitation of the study is that the four key questions were asked in the same order throughout every focus group: competence, connection, confidence and character. And in every instance the positively-phrased questions was asked immediately prior to the negatively-phrased question for the corresponding C. While there was a certain amount of overlap between the 4Cs, evidenced by the fact that common themes emerged under more than one C, this overlap could be underestimated; it is possible that participants may have been reluctant to bring up common themes near the

end of the focus group because they had already been discussed for a prior question or questions. Last, the unit of analysis during data analysis was the meaning unit. In some cases focus group research uses the focus group as the unit of analysis due to the possibility of participants influencing one another (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Future Directions

There is ample opportunity for future research to build upon the findings of the current study. First, future research should consider conducting a similar study with older youth sport participants. Athletes have different needs and expectations depending on their age and level of development (Côté et al., 2007) so it would be helpful to garner an understanding of older athletes' perceptions of the 4Cs though the same methods employed in the current study. For example, would older athletes naturally acknowledge the role of coach in their perceptions of connection and character? Also, would older kids equate effort with competence and confidence in the same manner as participants in the current study?

It may also be worthwhile for future research to explore the apparent inconsistencies that emerged with regard to the role of the coach in the development of connection and character and the role of parents in confidence, connection, and character. This research would determine whether these are discrepancies between athlete perceptions and actual coach or parent behaviours, or that the coach and parent behaviours are not having their intended effects on athlete outcomes. This could be done by observing parents and coaches and interviewing the youth athletes. Considering the

interrelatedness of the 4Cs, future research could examine whether or not young athletes have an understanding of this interdependence. For example, can you be doing well (feel competent) but not feel good about yourself (have no confidence)? Or can you be a good person (display character), while not getting along well with others (not experience connection)? Last, in response to Côté and Bruner's (2010) call for a valid measure of the 4Cs in the youth sport environment, data from the current study may contribute to the generation of items for such a measure.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Guide

Explanation of Confidentiality: "Prior to beginning the interview, it is important for each of you to understand the steps we are taking to make what we discuss today confidential (not traceable to you). First, I promise that if I repeat anything any that you say today, I will not use your real names. I will only use false names. Second, I would ask each of you to promise to do the same. This means that you will not identify the other participants by name or discuss what the other specific participants say during the interview. You can tell others what you talked about, but please don't tell people what "Johnny" or "Suzie" said. Do you understand? Can we all agree to that?"

Opening Questions

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- What sports do you play?
- How long have you been playing organized sports?

Introductory Question

- Can you tell me about a recent sport experience that you enjoyed?

Transition Question

- What is something that you particularly enjoyed about that experience?

Key Questions

- How do you know when you are doing well in sport?
 - How do you know when you are not doing well in sport?

- How do you know when you are getting along well with others in sport?
 - How do you know when you are not getting along well with others in sports?
- What makes you feel good about yourself when you are in sport?
 - What makes you feel bad about yourself when you are in sport?
- How do you know when you are being a good person in sport?
 - How do you know when you are being a bad person in sport?

Ending Questions

- Is there anything that you would like to add to your previous answers?
- In thinking about our discussion, is there anything else that you think is important for me to know about your experiences in sports?

Appendix B: Participant Forms



School of Kinesiology and Health Studies
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28 Division Street
Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7L 3N6
PHONE (613)533-2666, FAX (613) 533-2009

Letter of Information
Understanding Children's Perceptions of Learning Outcomes in the Sport Environment

We would like to ask for your son or daughter's assistance with a study that is being carried out by researchers at Queen's University. The purpose of this study is to garner an understanding of how children perceive the learning outcomes expected from participation in organized sport. The findings of this study will provide important information to youth coaches and youth sport programmers. By having a deeper understanding of how young athletes perceive outcomes of sport, programs can be designed to focus more specifically on developing these positive learning outcomes. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines and Queen's policies.

Participation in this study requires that the youth be between the ages of 10 and 13 years and are currently participating in an organized sport. Participants will take part in a single focus group with other youth sport participants of the same sex. The focus group will be audiotaped. The focus group will take approximately one hour. During the focus group the participants will be asked open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of various positive outcomes of youth sport involvement.

This is part of a research project for which Colleen Coakley is the primary researcher. Should you provide consent for your child's participation, all personal information and data will remain completely confidential. All information will be secured in a locked file cabinet or password-protected computer file during all stages of the study and indefinitely after completion of the study. Only the researchers listed on this sheet will have access to the data. There are no known or foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study and no deception will be used. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, with no explanation or consequences. To withdraw from the focus group a participant can simply walk away from the group. The participant will remain under the supervision of a research assistant until the participant's parent or guardian returns. If a participant chooses to withdraw, his or her data will be removed and will not be used in the analysis.

Results of this study may be presented in academic journals and relevant conferences; direct quotations from the focus groups will be presented under a pseudonym and all identifying information will be removed, thereby ensuring your child's anonymity. Focus group participants will also be asked to respect the confidentiality of the group.

If you and your child decide that he or she would like to be a part of this study please sign and return the two attached forms; the *parent/guardian consent form* to be signed by you and the *participant assent form* to be signed by your child. Should you or your child have further questions or concerns regarding any aspect of this study, please contact any of the individuals listed below.

Primary Researcher
Colleen Coakley
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Supervisor
Jean Côté, PhD
Director, School of Kinesiology and Health Studies
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General Ethics Review Board
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Parent Consent Form
Understanding Children's Perceptions of Learning Outcomes in the Sport Environment

I have read the information letter and understand that my child's participation in this study involves participation in a one hour focus group session with other children of the same age group. I have been informed that the focus group will be audiotaped and that my child will be asked questions about his or her experience in sport, including their perceptions of what they learn through participating in organized sport.

I have been informed that my child's confidentiality will be protected throughout the study. While the results of this study may be published in academic journals and presented at conferences, I understand that any results will be presented under a pseudonym (false name) and that any identifying information will be removed – thereby maintaining my child's anonymity.

I have been informed that the primary researcher and her supervisors will be the only people who have access to the data. All information provided through the focus groups will be stored in a locked office or password-protected file at Queen's University indefinitely after the completion of the study.

I understand that my child's participation in this research project is completely voluntary and that the participants reserve the right to not answer any question(s) that they do not feel comfortable with. I also recognize that my child may withdraw from the study entirely at any time without explanation. To withdraw from the study my child can simply walk away from the group. He or she will remain under the supervision of a research assistant until I return.

Finally, any questions I had about this research project and my child's participation have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am invited to contact the primary researchers, the project supervisor, and/or the General Ethics Review Board should any further questions or concerns about this research project and my participation arise at any time.

By signing this form I consent to my child's participation in this research project.

Name of Parent/Guardian	Signature	Date
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Child's Name

Primary Researcher
Colleen Coakley
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Participant Assent Form
Understanding Children's Perceptions of Learning Outcomes in the Sport Environment

I have read the Letter of Information with my parent(s)/guardian and understand that for this study I will be asked to participate in a focus group interview. This means that I will be in a room with an interviewer and four or five other children my age who also play sports. The interviewer will ask us questions about what we learn in sports. The focus group will be audiotaped.

I have been told that nobody but the researchers will have access to the information I provide. When results of this study are published or presented at conferences, I understand that any quotations will be presented under a pseudonym (false name) – so nobody will ever know my identity. I will respect the privacy of the other group members, which means that if I discuss the content of the focus group I will not identify specific individuals.

I understand that my participation in this research project is completely voluntary and I do not have to answer any questions that I am not comfortable answering. I have also been told that I can stop the study at any time and do not have to give a reason. To stop participating I can simply walk away from the group. I will stay with a research assistant until my parent or guardian returns.

Finally, the researcher has answered all of my questions about participating. If I have any more questions I can contact any of the people listed below.

By signing this form I am agreeing to participate in this study.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Primary Researcher

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Demographics Worksheet

Child's Name: _____ Age: _____ Sex: _____

2010-2011 School and Grade Level: _____

Parent/Guardian Occupation: _____

Parent/Guardian Occupation: _____