University of Alberta

Parents' Perceptions of Positive Youth Development Through Sport

by

Katherine Cora Neely

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

Fall 2011
Edmonton, Alberta

Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine parents' perceptions of their children's positive youth development (PYD) through participation in organized youth sport programs. Twenty-two parents (12 mothers, 10 fathers, *M* age = 38.9 years) of children 5 to 8 years who were involved in an organized sport program participated in individual semi-structured interviews. Data were subjected to qualitative analysis techniques based on the interpretive description methodology. Data analysis suggested that children developed positive self-perceptions through exploration in sport. Parents reported a range of social, physical, and personal benefits children gained through sport and there appeared to be a reciprocal relationship between these perceived benefits and the development of positive self-perceptions. Results revealed that parents and coaches contribute to children's PYD by creating an environment that focuses on enjoyment and skill development and de-emphasizes competition. Applied implications for the delivery of youth sport programs to promote PYD are discussed.

Quotation

"The spirit of sport gives each of us who participate an opportunity to be creative. Sport knows no sex, age, race or religion. Sport gives us all the ability to test ourselves mentally, physically and emotionally in a way no other aspect of life can. For many of us who struggle with 'fitting in' or our identity--sport gives us our first face of confidence. That first bit of confidence can be a gateway to many other great things."

Dan O'Brien, American decathlete

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank Sportball, the children who participate in it and their parents who support them week after week – I would not have a thesis if it were not for Sportball. I would like to thank the members of my committee and a special thanks to my supervisor, Nick Holt, for helping me complete my thesis and pushing me to do it better than I thought I could. Thank you to Katherine, Camilla, and Homan in the CASA lab for their support and the occasional dance party. And lastly, I want to thank my Mom for getting me into sport and giving me the opportunity to explore. The tears and cheers have shaped who I have become.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Sport is the most popular organized activity for youth in Canada (Guevremont, Findlay, & Kohen, 2008). Approximately 59% of Canadian adolescents aged 15 to 18 years and 51% of Canadian children aged 5 to 14 years regularly participate in organized sport through private, community, or school programs (Ifedi, 2008). Despite declining levels of overall physical activity among youth, Canada's 2010 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2010) reported that there has been an increase in the proportion of 4 and 5 year old children who are involved in organized sport programs and that 60% of 4 and 5 years olds participate in organized and unorganized sport at least once a week. This is interesting considering physical activity in preschool-aged children is severely low and obesity is becoming more prevalent at younger ages (Shields, 2006). Participation in sport may therefore serve an important public health function by providing physical activity opportunities for children.

Youth sport is important in its own right because it can positively contribute to children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development (Holt, 2008). More specifically, research suggests that sport can help foster positive youth development (PYD). There is an emerging body of literature examining PYD through sport (e.g., Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2009a; Danish, Taylor, Hodge, & Heke, 2004; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Gould, Chung, Smith, & White, 2006; Holt, 2008). Without exception, these studies have

examined issues relating to PYD among *adolescents*. There is minimal research that explores PYD in youth prior to adolescence. In particular, the young childhood period (i.e., ages 5-8 years; Shaffer, Kipp, Wood, & Willoughby, 2010) has not been covered by PYD researchers in sport. Given the importance of children's involvement in sport, research examining issues associated with PYD in young children's sport could make a valuable contribution to the literature.

Further, existing evidence on PYD through sport has been gained through studies of athletes' and coaches' perspectives. Little attention has been given to parents' views about the potential for PYD through sport. This is a limitation in the literature because parents play a vitally important role in terms of introducing their children to sport, supporting their involvement, and influencing their positive (and negative) experiences (Brustad, 1993; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). There is also evidence to suggest that parents' roles may be even more prominent during childhood than during adolescence (Green & Chalip, 1998).

Given the influential role parents have in their children's sport experience, research examining their perceptions of PYD is warranted, particularly among the parents of young children (i.e., aged 5-8 years). It is important to examine parents' perceptions of issues relating to PYD among children in this age-range because they are heavily dependent on parents for the introduction to and sustained participation in sport. The proposed study addressed this important knowledge gap in the literature. To this end, the overall aim of this study was to examine parents' perceptions of their children's PYD through participation in

organized youth sport programs. Specifically, this study addressed two main research questions:

1) What benefits do parents perceive their children gain through participation in organized youth sport programs?

2) How do parents think coaches and parents influence the benefits children potentially gain from participation in organized youth sport programs?

Given the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative approach was used. This thesis is presented via 5 chapters. In Chapter 2 (Literature Review) the conceptual context for the study will be established and relevant literature reviewed and critiqued. Method (Chapter 3) and Results (Chapter 4) are followed by a Discussion (Chapter 5) in which findings are compared back to the conceptual context and literature. Lastly, empirical and applied implications of the research are discussed.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Context

In qualitative research, theory can be useful in many ways. For the current study no single theory has been selected a priori. Rather, the conceptual context (or 'starting point') for this study was based on several theories relating to PYD along with relevant previous research. This review of literature describes the *conceptual framework* upon which the study was created. A conceptual framework is the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations and theories that supports and informs one's research (Maxwell, 2005). It provides a conception or model of relevant theories and ideas on which a study is based. Therefore, theories of PYD were not explicitly tested. The purpose of this section is to provide a background and historical perspective of the various theories that provided the conceptual context for this study.

Ecological Approaches to Development

Most theories of PYD can be traced back to ideas arising from Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). This theory describes development in terms of an interactive and dynamic relationship between the individual and the environmental context in which one is engaged. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) original research conceptualized multiple nested systems within an ecological network. The first level, and most proximal to the individual, is the microsystem. Microsystems are defined as the patterned activities, roles, and interpersonal

relations personally experienced in a setting such as the home. A child's experiences with such microsystems are supposed to have a direct influence on development and, reciprocally, a child can also influence this system. The second (and more distal) level is the mesosystem, which reflects interrelationships between two or more settings in a microsystem (e.g., the relationships between home and school). The third level is the exosystem. This level does not directly involve the individual but includes events and settings that affect the person's environment (e.g., the relationship between the home and the parent's workplace). The fourth and most distal level of interaction is the macrosystem. The macrosystem consists of broader social and cultural factors that impact human development (e.g., the community). Individuals interact with these different levels of human ecological systems from the most proximal microsystems to more distal macrosystems, but interactions within the microsystem are more influential to development, especially during childhood and adolescence (Bronfenbrenner, 2001).

Within the nested system, Bronfenbrenner's model is founded on two specific propositions. Proposition 1 postulates that human development occurs through processes of progressively more complex, reciprocal interactions between an active, bio-psychological human being and people, objects, and symbols in his/her immediate environment. These interactions are known as proximal processes and must occur on a consistent basis over an extended length of time. Examples of patterns of proximal processes include parent-child and child-child

activities, group or solitary play, reading, learning new skills, and athletic activities (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Proposition 2 postulates that the form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes influencing development vary systematically as a joint function of the individual's characteristics, the environment in which the processes are occurring, the developmental outcomes being considered, and the time in which these changes are occurring (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In order to examine all of the forces influencing human development (proximal processes, individual characteristics, environmental variables, and the temporally evolving nature of relationships between the person and different levels of their environment), the process-person-context-time (PPCT) model has been proposed (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) suggested that different settings (i.e., microsystems) are likely to provide distinct developmental experiences. Within these microsystems, the PPCT model is a useful framework for examining interactions between individuals and their environment and subsequent developmental outcomes. Pertinent to the current study, Garcia Bengoechea and Johnson (2001) used the PPCT model to explain development within a youth sport context. Proximal processes describe the interpersonal interactions that occur in youth sport, such as those with coaches and parents. Particularly, parents' beliefs about their children's athletic abilities can result in different patterns of parent-child interaction and influence developmental outcomes. Developmentally relevant personal characteristics represent the growth of personal attributes that

children acquire through sport. Children's self-perception and motivation can also impact the developmental outcomes experienced in youth sport. The context of youth sport plays an important role in the types of developmental outcomes children experience. The context includes physical features, activities, events, and people (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Coaches, parents, and peers are also contextual factors that have a significant role in children's development in sport. Finally, time is a critical factor in the PPCT model as proximal processes and interactions must take place on a regular basis in order for development to occur.

Conceptualizations of Positive Youth Development

Modern conceptions of PYD are rooted in an ecological systems perspective. The PYD approach recognizes the importance of relationships between individuals and their ecological setting and thus, focuses on personal characteristics and contextual factors in the environment that influence development (Damon, 2004). PYD is a strength-based approach to the study of child and adolescent development that views *all* youth as having the potential for positive developmental change and regards youth as 'resources to be developed' rather than 'problems to be solved' (Damon, 2004). Youth are viewed as fully able individuals, eager to explore, gain competence, and make a positive contribution to society (Damon, 2004). PYD research is focused on the skills, qualities, and characteristics that foster strong youth and the processes required for optimal development. Optimal youth development can be defined as "enabling individuals to lead a healthy, satisfying, and productive life, as youth and later as adults, because they gain the competence to earn a living, to engage in civic

activities, to nurture others, and to participate in social relations and cultural activities" (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004, p. 3).

Three approaches to studying PYD include Lerner and colleagues (2005) 5Cs of PYD, Benson's (1997) developmental assets, and Larson and colleagues' (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006) domains of learning experiences. The 5Cs of PYD was introduced by developmental psychologist Richard Lerner (Lerner et al., 2005). The 5Cs are essentially measurable constructs that represent the desired outcomes of youth development. The 5Cs are competence, confidence, character, caring/compassion, and connection. Competence represents a positive view of one's actions in domain specific areas. Confidence reflects an internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy, and one's global self-regard. Character refers to an individual's respect for societal and cultural rules. Caring/compassion is a person's sense of sympathy and empathy for others. The last C is connection and describes positive bonds with people and institutions. When all five Cs are developed, a sixth C (contribution) may occur, which enables youth to give back to their community and society.

Although the 5Cs have been prominent in developmental psychology, there is concern about the use of the 5Cs as a valid framework for assessing PYD in youth sport. Jones, Dunn, Holt, Sullivan, and Bloom (in press) examined the latent dimensionality of PYD and the applicability of the 5Cs in a youth sport setting. Two hundred and fifty-eight youth athletes (aged 12 to 16 years, *M* age = 13.77 years) completed a 30-item instrument of PYD in sport that was adapted

from Phelps et al. (2009) 78-item measure of the 5Cs of PYD. Confirmatory factor analysis failed to support the 5Cs in a youth sport context. There was too much overlap between the five factors and this could have resulted in the factors not being perceived as distinct constructs. Exploratory factor analyses revealed that the items measured loaded onto two factors. Factor 1 (pro-social values) represented items pertaining to caring/compassion, character, and family connection. Factor 2 (confidence/competence) represented items that were meant to measure the constructs of competence and confidence. While this single study in sport may reflect sample specific characteristics rather than the absence of five distinct constructs of PYD, it suggests that caution should be used when applying the 5Cs in sport contexts.

Another approach to PYD is Benson's (1997) developmental assets framework. Benson and colleagues at the Search Institute identified 40 developmental assets that are considered the qualities and characteristics needed for optimal youth development. These 40 assets are commonly known as the 'building blocks' of human development. They are separated into two broad categories (internal assets and external assets), and each category is further divided into eight sub-categories. The 20 internal assets reflect an individual's values and beliefs. They include commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. The 20 external assets are comprised of aspects of the individual's physical and psychosocial environment and include support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. It is suggested that the more assets individuals possess, the less likely they

are to engage in high risk behaviour, and youth who demonstrate more developmental assets are more likely to thrive and succeed as young adults (Benson, 1997).

The Search Institute (2011) further identified specific characteristics of the 40 developmental assets that are pertinent in childhood (aged 5 to 9 years). The external and internal assets specified for children have an increased emphasis on parents helping children develop the assets. That is, parents play a crucial supportive role in the development of the 40 assets. For example, within positive values, in adolescence, 'adolescents should accept and take personal responsibility on their own', whereas in childhood 'parents should encourage children to accept and take responsibility for their actions at school or at home.'

A similar PYD framework that considers internal and external developmental processes is Larson and colleagues' domains of learning experiences (Dworkin et al., 2003; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006). Initially based on their review of literature, Dworkin and colleagues (2003) identified six domains of learning experiences that were divided into personal and interpersonal development. Personal development describes developmental processes that occur within the individual and includes three domains: identity work, the development of initiative, and emotional regulation. Interpersonal development describes developmental processes that involve developing social connections. It includes the domains of teamwork and social skills, positive relationships including acquiring prosocial norms and diverse peer relationships, and the development of adult networks and social capital.

The six domains of learning framework was used to examine adolescents' accounts of growth experiences in youth activities (Dworkin et al., 2003). The researchers defined growth experiences as "experiences that teach you something, or expand you in some way that gives you new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of interacting with others" (Dworkin et al., 2003, p. 20). Findings from focus groups with youth aged 14 to 18 years were used to develop the Youth Experiences Survey (YES), which measures growth experiences in the six domains of learning as well as in the domain of negative experiences.

Hansen et al. (2003) used the YES survey to compare learning experiences and negative experiences reported in faith-based and service activities, academic and leadership activities, performance and fine arts activities, community organizations and vocational clubs, and sport. Hansen and colleagues found that sport activities were positively associated with higher rates of self-knowledge, emotional regulation and physical skills experiences in comparison to other youth activities. However, youth in sports programs also reported more experiences involving negative peer interaction and inappropriate adult behaviour than other organized activities. These findings suggest that there are distinct learning experiences related to different youth activities and despite more negative experiences, sports are a frequent context for identity work and emotional development.

Larson et al. (2006) extended this research when they examined youth's growth experiences in the five different youth activities and compared them to average growth experiences in school, hanging out with friends and working at a

job. Not surprisingly, higher levels of involvement in youth activities were associated with higher rates of learning experiences. In comparison to other organized activities, youth in sport reported significantly more experiences related to initiative, emotional regulation, and teamwork. Again, sport appeared to provide unique experiences compared to other organized activities which suggests that research examining PYD in sport contexts is warranted.

Positive Youth Development Through Sport

Although PYD originated in developmental psychology, the concept has more recently been applied within the sport psychology literature. Since the early days of youth sport psychology, researchers have been interested in ways in which sport participation may promote well-being. Arguably youth sport researchers have always been interested in ways to promote positive development through sport, but only recently has the nomenclature of PYD been adopted and used within sport psychology.

There are several ways in which youth sport may contribute to child development. Sport participation can improve physical health by providing youth with opportunities to be physically active, which can improve cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength and endurance, weight control, and a reduced risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes and osteoporosis (see Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007 for a review).

Sport can contribute to youth's psychosocial development by providing opportunities to learn important life skills such as respect, initiative, cooperation, teamwork, and leadership (Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox 2008). Youth sport

participation has further been associated with improved self-esteem, emotional regulation, positive peer relationships, and social character development (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Camiré & Trudel, 2010; Holt, Tamminen, Tink, & Black, 2009a). Finally, sport participation (compared to non-participation) has been associated with increased academic performance, enhanced adult career achievement, decreased school dropout, and decreased delinquent behaviours (Dwyer, Sallis, Blizzard, Lazarus, & Dean, 2001; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003).

Although there are many positive benefits of sport participation, there are also less desirable outcomes related to youth development. Negative outcomes associated with sport include overuse injuries and eating disorders, decreased self-perceptions, decreased confidence and low self-esteem, increased pressure and stress, poor sportsmanship, aggression, increased alcohol consumption, and low moral reasoning (see Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007 for a review). Several other negative experiences have consistently been associated with dropout in youth sport. These include too much pressure from parents and coaches, overemphasis on winning, negative coach interactions, and lack of playing time (see Weiss & Williams, 2004 for a review).

The extant literature on PYD through sport is primarily focused on development in adolescents (Holt, 2008). There is minimal research that explores PYD in youth prior to adolescence. As children become increasingly more involved in organized sport programs at younger ages (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2010), it is important to examine issues relating to PYD for young children (i.e., 5-8 years).

Côté, Horton, MacDonald, and Wilkes (2009) proposed that children (aged 6-12 years) who participate in multiple sports are more likely to experience a broader range of psychosocial outcomes than children who specialize in one sport. Sampling a range of sports may foster an increase in intrapersonal and interpersonal life skills, prosocial behaviors, identity exploration and subsequent healthy identity development, connections to diverse peer groups, and garner social capital. However, these broader benefits associated with sampling sport during childhood have not been empirically examined. Furthermore, there is minimal support for the benefits of sport participation during childhood in general, regardless of whether children are in a variety of sports or specialize in just one sport. The current study expands on what is presently known about benefits associated with youth sport participation by focusing on PYD in young children.

The PYD outcomes associated with sport in youth do not result from 'mere participation' in programs (Petitpas et al., 2005). That is, participation in sport does not necessarily lead to PYD. The structure of the sport program and the setting in which the sport takes place are important factors in promoting PYD. Developmentally appropriate designs, a supportive environment created through quality coach-athlete relationships, and a focus on developing life skills are essential features of sport programs (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Several frameworks for creating sport programs that foster PYD have been proposed. There are similar features in all of the proposed models, all of which essentially

suggest that it is an interaction of multiple factors that facilitate PYD through sport.

The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (NRCIM) put forth a model that outlined eight features needed to foster positive development and life skills in youth in any type of extra-curricular organized program (NRCIM, 2002). Côté, Strachan, and Fraser-Thomas (2008) adopted these features and suggested sport-specific guidelines in order to create an optimal environment for PYD in youth sport. The eight features of sport programs that facilitate PYD include physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships with coaches and parents, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support of efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill building, and an integration of family, school and community efforts.

Petitpas et al. (2005) also developed a framework for designing and implementing youth sport programs that promote PYD. This framework describes four factors that influence psychosocial development that need to be considered when implementing a youth sport program. The first component of the framework is the creation of a positive environment (or context) that is developmentally appropriate and enables youth to develop initiative. The program setting must also be child-centered, promote empowerment and autonomy, and provide skill-building opportunities. The second component of the framework consists of caring parents and coaches and the formation of supportive adult relationships. The third component emphasizes the need for programs to provide youth with opportunities to develop important life skills that can be used in various domains

of life. Although not part of the actual program, the fourth and final component of the framework is evaluation of the program itself to measure its effectiveness in promoting PYD.

Sport and Life Skills Research

One area of the sport psychology literature that is compatible with PYD is that of life skills research. The World Health Organization (1999) defined life skills as the ability for adaptive and positive behaviors that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Building on this definition, Danish and colleagues (2004) add that life skills "enable individuals to succeed in the different environments in which they live" (p. 40). Thus, the development of life skills is important for preparing youth with the qualities they need to succeed at home, in school, and in sports.

Gould et al. (2006) surveyed 154 varsity high school coaches from various team sports about how they perceived their roles and responsibilities as a coach. These coaches viewed the social and psychological development of their athletes as one of their main objectives as a coach. Specifically, teamwork, time management, the development of a hard work ethic, and goal setting were valuable skills these coaches thought they helped their student-athletes develop through sport. Further, Gould, Collins, Lauer, and Chung (2007) interviewed 10 outstanding high school football coaches about how they helped their athletes develop life skills. These coaches believed life skills were developed through effective coaching strategies and specific player development strategies. Coaches also emphasized that their athletes developed discipline, work ethic, and

emotional control through participation in competitive sport, rather than being skills they purposely taught. The findings from these studies provide insight from coaches and suggest the significant role coaches play in teaching life skills and developing optimal youth through sport.

Researchers have also examined athletes' perceptions of life skills developed through sport. Holt et al., (2009a) interviewed 40 university students who had played competitive youth sport during their adolescence and inquired about how these participants may have learned life skills through sport. The findings revealed the importance of social interactions within the sport setting in building life skills. The athletes reported that relationships with peers taught them the value of teamwork and provided opportunities to develop social skills. Athletes also learned sportspersonship and personal responsibility through relationships with their coaches and parents.

Adding to this, Holt and colleagues (2008) used an ethnographic approach to examine whether and how athletes learned life skills through their involvement on a high school soccer team. The researchers observed the team during games and practices for the entire soccer season in addition to conducting interviews with the student-athletes. Athletes reported learning to take initiative, respect, and teamwork/leadership as life skills they developed from participating on the team. Interestingly though, these life skills were not directly taught by the coach. Rather, the coach created an environment which enabled the athletes to be producers of their own experiences.

In a similar study, Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris (2009a) interviewed 20 high school-student athletes (*M* age = 15.05 years) to find out if they believed they learned life skills through sport. These athletes thought that involvement in high school sports allowed them to develop a number of different life skills that could be transferred to other areas of life. They developed social skills such as team work and a sense of belonging by being part of a team. Athletes also enhanced their self-efficacy, confidence and leadership abilities through participation in organized sport. Camiré and Trudel (2010) further explored high school athletes' perspectives of character development through high school sport participation. Qualitative interviews conducted with 10 male and 10 female student-athletes revealed that these athletes thought involvement in sport mainly benefited their social character development while moral character values were developed in contexts outside of sport. Specifically, team sport athletes thought the social values of teamwork and perseverance were the most important values they developed during high school sport participation.

The results of these studies contribute to the growing body of literature on PYD through sport by providing both coaches' and athletes' accounts of life skills that can be developed through involvement in organized sport. However, little research has examined parents' perceptions of PYD through sport. The 'athletic triangle' is comprised of the coach, athlete, and parent and represents the individuals responsible for creating and influencing the youth sport experience (Hellstedt, 1987). Although coaches have a significant role in youth sport, parents have the most powerful influence on their children's overall development and

play several important roles in youth sport. Yet despite parents' significant role, researchers have only examined coaches' and athletes' perspectives on PYD through sport. As such, a comprehensive understanding of PYD through sport cannot be complete without including parents' perceptions.

Parenting and Youth Sport Research

Although conceptualizations of PYD are the main guiding theories driving this research, given that parents were studied, it is also important to consider how parenting has been theorized. Whereas there are no studies examining parents' perceptions of PYD through sport for young children, more generally there has been fairly extensive research examining the role of parents in youth sport. For example, Fredricks and Eccles' (2004) model of parental influence on children's motivation and achievement (based on Eccles' expectancy-value model) suggests that parents influence their child's motivation for sport participation through three crucial roles: provider, interpreter, and role model. Through these identified roles, parents *may* influence the extent to which their children gain benefits associated with sport participation.

Research has shown the significant role parents have in youth sport (Brustad & Partridge, 2002; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Horn & Horn, 2007) and there is evidence to suggest that their role may be even more prominent in early childhood (Green & Chalip, 1998). Parents play an important role in socializing their children into sport and contribute to children's psychosocial development (Brustad, 1993; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Accordingly, parental involvement in youth sport can influence children's participation and development in several

ways. As previously mentioned, parents are providers of experience, act as interpreters of their children's sporting experience, and influence their children through role-modeling (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Consequently, parents have the opportunity to positively and negatively influence children's sporting experience and PYD outcomes (Brustad & Partridge, 2002).

The most direct way that parents influence children's sport involvement is through the opportunities they provide for their children to initially participate in sport programs (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Parents are primarily responsible for facilitating their children's first involvement in organized sport programs (Côté, 1999; Green & Chalip, 1998). Parents enroll their children in sports programs, pay registration fees, purchase the necessary sports equipment, and provide transportation to practices, games, and tournaments (Green & Chalip, 1998; Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004). Additionally, how willing or able parents are to rearrange their schedules to accommodate their children's sport will influence children's ability to participate in sport (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Parents also act as providers of experience by taking an active role in their children's sport through their involvement as coaches, officials, administrators and spectators in youth sport programs (Brustad & Partridge, 2002). This is particularly important in younger children's sport programs which are often contingent on parent volunteers.

Parents continue to be providers of experience for their children as they progress through sport. Initially parents are the primary providers and are often directly involved in youth sport but as children move into adolescence, parents

take on different roles as providers of experience (Côté, 1999). They provide emotional support and encouragement at competitions and continue to provide functional support, such as paying for registration fees and equipment, and providing transportation to and from practices and competitions (Côté, 1999). It is evident that parents stimulate their child's initial interest and motivation in sport and through continued support and encouragement can influence their future involvement (Brustad & Partridge, 2002).

Parents also influence children's development through their interpretations of their children's experiences. Parents' beliefs and attitudes about the value of sport influence their children's evaluation of sport and their motivation to continue being involved (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Parents also impact children's perceived competence (i.e., "individual's perceptions of their competencies or abilities in specific domains" Horn, 2004, p. 103) and self-efficacy (i.e., "belief that one can successfully execute a specific activity in order to obtain a certain outcome" Horn, 2004, p. 103). Since youth sport occurs in a fairly public context, parents have the opportunity to provide their children with immediate and specific feedback (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Throughout the initial years of sport involvement, children rely heavily on parents' feedback as a main source of information for assessing their competence (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Consequently, parents' interpretations of their children's ability are positively related to children's own perceptions of their competence, so parental behaviours and feedback significantly impact children's self-perceptions (i.e., children's beliefs about themselves and their personal capabilities) during their

early years of sport participation (Brustad & Partridge, 2002). Children who have higher competency beliefs express greater enjoyment in sport and are more likely to continue participating in sport compared to children with lower competency beliefs (Brustad, 1993). Parents' satisfaction and interpretation of their children's overall experience in sport programs are also important predictors of continued participation (Brustad, 1993). If parents believe their children are acquiring important skills and experiencing positive development, they are more likely to continue supporting their children's involvement in organized sport.

Finally, parents influence children's development by acting as role models of positive behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs about sport participation (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Parents' own participation in sport has been linked to children's level of participation and involvement in organized sport (Moore, Lombardi, White, Campbell, Oliveria, & Ellison, 1991). This association is especially evident in younger children, which suggests the importance of role modeling in youth sport. Research has shown participation levels between children aged 3 to 9 years and their parents were strongly related, whereas this was not the case with older youth in early and middle adolescence (Welk, Wood, & Morss, 2003). By being involved in sport, parents can demonstrate what behaviours are appropriate and can help socialize their children into sport.

Parental involvement is clearly essential to a child's initial and continued sport participation. Although Hellstedt (1987) proposed that parental involvement ranges on a continuum from underinvolved to overinvolved, more recent research has demonstrated that it is not the *amount* of involvement that is important; it is

the *type* and *quality* of parental involvement that influences youth's experiences in sport (Stein, Raedeke, & Glenn, 1999). Research examining parental involvement in youth sport has identified what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate parental behaviours (Shield, Bredemeier, LaVoi, & Power, 2005; Wuerth et al., 2004). As this area of research continues to develop, researchers have placed greater efforts on identifying specific behaviours for optimizing parental involvement. In both individual and team sports, youth athletes have identified their preferred type of parental involvement and how they would like their parents to behave at games and competitions (Knight, Boden, & Holt, 2010; Knight, Neely, & Holt, 2011).

Knight and colleagues (2010) conducted eleven focus groups with 42 high performance junior tennis players to identify their preferences for parental behaviours at tennis competitions. Five specific types of behaviours that represent supportive parental involvement were identified. Athletes did not want parents to provide technical and tactical advice unless their parents were highly knowledgeable about tennis. Rather they wanted parents to provide practical advice (e.g., nutritional tips). These athletes also wanted parents to comment on effort and attitude as opposed to their performance and to match their non-verbal behaviours with supportive comments. Lastly, they wanted parents to behave in accordance with tennis etiquette.

Athletes' preferences for how they want their parents to behave in team sports have also been examined (Knight et al., 2011). Individual interviews with 36 female early adolescent athletes were conducted. Athletes described distinct

preferences for parental behaviours before, during, and after team sport competitions. Before games, athletes wanted parents to help them prepare for the competition physically and mentally. During competitions, maintaining a positive and relaxed environment was important and athletes identified several specific preferences for behaviours parents should and should not display. Parents should encourage the entire team, and focus on effort rather than outcome. They should interact positively with athletes throughout the game and maintain control of their emotions. Athletes made it clear that during games they did not want their parents to stand out in the crowd, coach from the sidelines, or argue with the officials. After competitions, athletes wanted parents to provide positive and realistic post-game feedback at the appropriate time.

These studies examining preferred parental behaviours in individual and team sports reveal that athletes want their parents to be involved in a supportive manner and there are specific ways parents can behave to demonstrate this. Along with previous findings, this research identifying children's perceptions of parental involvement in sport further highlights that quality of parental involvement is more important than how much or how little parents are involved. Once behaviours for optimal parental involvement in youth sport are established, parents will be better able to help create a positive sport experience for their child as well as provide an appropriate environment to foster PYD. An understanding of parents' perceptions of PYD, and particularly how parents think they can influence PYD through sport, may provide researchers with valuable insight into

specific behaviours that promote PYD and further contribute to identifying behaviours that constitute optimal parental involvement in youth sport.

Parenting styles and parenting practices may also influence children's PYD experiences in sport. Parenting style is a broad concept and represents a parent's general approach to parenting that creates an emotional climate which is generally consistent across different domains. Parenting practices are more specific parenting behaviours or techniques used in certain contexts, such as sport, that reflect parents' goals for their children (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). While parenting styles are assumed to have a less direct influence on children's behaviours, parenting practices are believed to have a direct impact on children's behaviours. Although there is a clear distinction between parenting styles and parenting practices, specific practices are influenced by parents' general style of parenting (Baumrind, 1991).

Parenting styles can be distinguished by two core dimensions: responsiveness and demandingness. Parental responsiveness refers to the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being supportive and responsive to their children's needs and demands (Baumrind, 1991). Parental demandingness refers to the claims parents make on their children to become integrated into the family by their demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront children (Baumrind, 1991). Based on these two elements, Baumrind identified four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and rejecting-neglecting. Authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive. They are assertive and supportive and have clear

standards for their children. Authoritarian parents are also demanding but less responsive. They have high expectations and set clear rules, and maintain a high level of control over their children. Permissive parents are responsive but not demanding. They are non-traditional and lenient, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontation with their children. Rejecting-neglecting parents are neither responsive nor demanding. They have minimal involvement, place few demands on their children, and provide little to no support (Baumrind, 1991).

There is little research investigating how parenting styles and practices influence PYD in sport. In one of few studies, Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, and Fox (2009b) examined parenting styles and associated parenting practices in a youth sport context. Through season long observation with two female soccer teams and interviews with parents and their daughters, the researchers found that the majority of parents adopted an autonomy-supportive parenting style (similar to authoritative). Parents created an autonomy-supportive emotional climate through being highly involved, supporting their children's decision making within defined boundaries, and through open communication. Being able to read the child's mood was a specific parenting practice in the sport context that reflected this autonomy-supportive style. Seven families had a controlling parenting style (similar to authoritarian) and although still highly involved, controlling parents were very strict, demonstrated controlling behaviours, and provided little to no autonomy support. Practices consistent with this parenting style included poor communication and parents making decisions for their daughters as opposed to

providing freedom within set boundaries. Finally, seven families demonstrated a mixed parenting style. Parents were classified as having mixed parenting styles when the mother and father adopted different parenting styles or when individual parents changed between autonomy-supportive and controlling. The results from this study suggested that more positive parenting practices were associated with an autonomy-supportive parenting style. This may mean that autonomy-supportive parents have a greater impact on children's PYD outcomes. By gaining parents' perspectives on the benefits of sport participation as well as how parents help children gain these outcomes, it may identify certain parenting practices that contribute to PYD through sport.

Parents' Perceptions of Positive Youth Development Through Sport

Why Speak to Parents?

The decision to sample parents was made because of the prominent role parents play in children's sport involvement. Given that parents are the providers of sport experiences for their children, it is important to learn what parents think their children gain through sport. Furthermore, because this was an exploratory study, asking parents about the benefits of sport for young children was valuable because they see their children in multiple contexts and would be able to provide detailed information about how their children may experience PYD through sport.

The accuracy of parents' perceptions of their children's PYD through sport may be a potential concern. Parents do not participate in the sport program themselves and generally rely on feedback from their children as well as their own impressions of their children's experiences to assess developmental growth.

As a result, parents' perceptions may not accurately reflect the benefits children actually gain through sport participation. However, research on parents' perceptions of PYD in other contexts has demonstrated that parents can accurately interpret benefits their children gain through involvement in various organized programs (Garst & Bruce, 2003; Henderson, Scheuler Whitaker, Bialeschki, Scanlin, & Thurber, 2007). Therefore, parents have the potential to be a valuable resource in gaining a better understanding of PYD through sport.

One such study that demonstrated parents' ability to accurately interpret children's developmental experiences was a study conducted by Henderson and colleagues (2007). Two-thousand, two-hundred and ninety-four campers (*M* age = 11 years) and parents responded to pre-, post-, and 6-month follow-up surveys about their children's summer camp experience in relation to attributes of youth development. Correlations between camper and parent responses on individual survey items as well as scores in the 10 construct areas were statistically significant. The 10 youth development constructs measured were related to leadership, positive values and decision making, positive identity, making friends, spirituality, environmental awareness, social comfort, independence, peer relationships, and adventure/exploration Informal interviews with parents and campers further revealed similar interpretations of PYD through camp. Garst and Bruce (2003) assessed youth's developmental outcomes in 4-H summer camps as perceived by youth campers and their parents. Eight-thousand, one-hundred and eighteen campers (9 to 13 years, *M* age = 11 years) and 383 parents of youth campers completed surveys at 4-H camps across the United States. The primary

benefit reported by both campers and parents was related to responsibility, including taking care of their own things, developing initiative, and sharing work responsibilities.

Further support for the decision to interview parents in the current research comes from Ferrari and colleagues' (Ferrari, Hogue, & Scheer, 2004) study of parents' perceptions of their children's life skills development through their participation in the 4-H Cloverbuds program. The 4-H Cloverbuds program is for 4-H members who are aged 5 to 8 years. It is an activity-based program that aims to promote healthy development in children by providing positive learning experiences to help children develop life skills, a strong sense of self, and optimism for the future. Focus groups with 12 parents from various Cloverbuds programs were conducted. Parents of 5 to 8 year olds viewed the program as influential in life skills development, particularly social skills, learning to learn, and personal development (which included self-confidence, self-care, and self-direction). Despite the potential problem of relying on parental reports it is evident from these studies that parents' perceptions of PYD represent an accurate interpretation of their children's development and provides support that their perceptions can contribute to our understanding of PYD through sport.

Pertinent to the current study, Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris (2009b) examined parents' perspectives of adolescent athletes' development through involvement in school sports. Structured interviews were conducted with 20 parents of adolescents between 13 and 17 years of age who participated in at least one of four organized sports offered at a Canadian high school (basketball,

volleyball, soccer, and badminton). Parents thought there were physical, social, and academic benefits for youth who participated in high school sports. This was the only study found that looked explicitly at parents perceptions of youth development through sport. However, consistent with previous research on PYD through sport, it targeted PYD in adolescent aged athletes.

In summary, other than the study with parents of high school athletes (Camiré et al., 2009b), research has yet to examine what athletes' parents think about the potential for PYD through sport, particularly among the parents of young children (i.e., aged 5-8 years). Exploring PYD among young children from parents' perspective may reveal issues that parents are able to report because they see their child in various contexts (i.e. home, school, and other extra-curricular activities). This study adds to the literature because PYD research (in sport) has been dominated by conceptual/review papers (Danish et al., 2004; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt, 2008) or studies of PYD/life skills among adolescents and their coaches (Camiré et al., 2008, 2009a; Gould et al., 2006, 2007; Holt et al., 2008, 2009a).

Therefore, the overall aim of this study was to examine parents' perceptions of their children's PYD through participation in organized youth sport programs. Specifically, this study addressed two main research questions:

1) What benefits do parents perceive their children gain through participation in organized youth sport programs?

2) How do parents think coaches and parents influence the benefits children potentially gain from participation in organized youth sport programs?

CHAPTER 3:

METHOD

Interpretive Description Methodology

The research question drives the selection of the methodology and the subsequent prescriptive methods within that tradition of inquiry (Patton, 2002). That is, the methodology and methods used to collect and analyze data are chosen based on their ability to answer the research question. Research questions that aim to yield applied knowledge require a methodology that enables relevant findings to be discovered. Interpretive description (ID; Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997) was the methodology used for this study as it provided a suitable framework through which the purpose could be pursued. ID is a qualitative approach that focuses on capturing themes and patterns within subjective perceptions and experiences in order to yield findings with applied potential (Thorne et al., 1997).

Philosophical Framework

This study was approached from an interpretivist paradigm (Sparkes, 1992), which is consistent with ID. The interpretivist paradigm understands the social world at the level of subjective experiences. Ontologically, interpretivism assumes there are individual and multiple realities and these realities are developed through the meanings and understandings people obtain through their social interactions (Sparkes, 1992). Knowledge is therefore a co-construction between the researcher and the researched. ID acknowledges the constructed and contextual nature of human experience that at the same time allows for shared

realities (Thorne, 2008). That is, individuals construct their own perceptions of reality through their experiences and social interactions, but there are commonalties between people. It is possible that shared aspects of these perceptions and experiences can be identified and described. Epistemologically, the creation of knowledge is based on understanding shared interpretations and common understandings that are socially constructed (Sparkes, 1992). I believe that parents have their own unique perceptions of PYD based on their child's experiences in sport, but that parents will share similar perceived benefits of sport for children.

ID acknowledges that "the inquirer and the 'object' of inquiry interact to influence one another; indeed, the knower and the known are inseparable" (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & O'Flynn-Magee, 2004, p. 5). As participants created their own meanings, I contributed to the construction of these social truths as I interpreted parents' perceptions of PYD through sport. Additionally, how I interpreted the data and made sense of the research was influenced by my own previous subjective experiences in youth sport. Given that the researcher is the research 'instrument' in qualitative research, it is important to consider the 'researcher-as-instrument.'

Researcher-as-Instrument

Preconceptions and assumptions regarding a phenomenon must often be set aside when conducting qualitative research (Patton, 2002). However, ID recognizes prior knowledge and experiences the researcher brings to a study. The researcher's foreknowledge of the phenomena being studied is acknowledged as a

useful starting place for developing research, particularly when the area of inquiry has yet to be evaluated in a rigorous manner (Thorne, 2008). Preconceptions and assumptions are valuable in influencing the research design and process.

My experiences as an athlete in organized youth sport programs and as a youth sport coach impacted the research process and data interpretation and should be reported. I first became involved in organized youth sport in early childhood and continued to participate in competitive sport into late adolescence. I sampled a variety of sports at a young age before specializing in soccer and basketball. I think my involvement in sport has contributed to my overall development as an individual as well as my understanding of the potential benefits of sport. I also think there are several life skills I developed as a result of participating in organized sport. Additionally, my experience as a youth sport coach has provided me with some insight into the types of benefits children may gain through sport. However, it was important that I recognized how these experiences may have influenced me throughout the research process. For example, I had several positive experiences in youth sport and believe that sport participation can provide children with important developmental experiences that help them later in life. But I had to remain mindful that participants may not share my views and I had to carefully monitor my subjectivities and consider how they influenced data analysis. It is also important to note that I am not a parent myself and therefore may not share the same perspectives and understandings as the participants in my study.

Participant Recruitment

Parents of young children who were participating in an organized sport program were purposefully sampled (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants who will be able to provide rich information about the topic being studied. Given the purpose of this study, the sampling criterion was that participants were parents of children aged 5 to 8 years who were currently involved in an organized youth sport program. Parents of children aged 5 to 8 years were chosen for this study because (1) this is the approximate age that children are first introduced to organized sport, (2) this age range reflects the sampling stage of Côté's (1999) model of youth sport participation, which is when children sample a variety of different sports, and (3) it is important to interview the parents of children aged 5 to 8 years because parents may be able to provide a richer, more detailed account of issues relating to PYD than children at this age.

Participants were recruited from an organized youth sport program called Sportball. Sportball is a non-competitive sports program for children aged 16 months to 8 years. Children are introduced to fundamental movement skills from eight sports (soccer, basketball, volleyball, hockey, golf, tennis, baseball, and football). Parents with at least one child in the multi-sport program for 5 to 8 year olds were recruited from several Sportball locations across Edmonton and Sherwood Park. As a coach with Sportball, I had access to an ample population of potential participants who fit the sampling criteria. However, I did not recruit any parents of children I was actually coaching.

Sportball programs run year-round, although there are four seasons, each of which is 10-12 weeks long. Participants were recruited at the beginning of the Sportball season. During the first and second weeks of Sportball, I attended classes at 8 different locations to recruit parents. After briefly introducing myself, the purpose of the study was explained to parents. A recruitment poster (see Appendix 1.0) describing the research study was also handed out to parents. The recruitment poster provided participants with an overview of the study, described what would be required of them, and provided further instructions for those who wished to participate. Parents who were interested in taking part in the study were asked to contact me via email or telephone.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. The program director of Sportball Edmonton was contacted to gain permission to approach parents of participants in the program. Permission was granted, with additional support from Sportball coaches. Coaches were informed that a researcher would be at some of their classes to recruit parents for her study. Sportball coaches were also given recruitment posters to distribute to parents midway through the season. They were asked to remind parents about the study going on and who to contact should they be interested in participating. The program director of Sportball also personally contacted several parents who fit the criteria and who he thought would willingly participate. These parents contacted me through email and interviews were arranged.

Participants

The sample consisted of 22 parents (12 mothers and 10 fathers). The average age of the participants was 38.9 years (*SD* = 5.13). The average age of mothers was 39.0 years (*SD* = 4.7) and the average age of fathers was 38.8 years (*SD* = 5.8). Twenty of the participants were Caucasian and two were of East Indian ethnicity. All participants were of middle to upper socioeconomic status and resided in Edmonton or Sherwood Park, Alberta. All parents had at least one child between the ages of 5 and 8 years who was currently participating in Sportball or had previously participated in Sportball within the past four months. In total, the parents had 32 children (24 sons and 8 daughters) between the ages of 5 and 8 years and the average age of children was 6.15 years (*SD* = 1.14). In addition to Sportball, parents reported that their children had participated in other organized youth sport programs. These included soccer, hockey, swimming, gymnastics, skating, skiing, tennis, basketball, baseball, ringette, tae kwon do, lacrosse, golf, and dance.

Data Collection

An individual semi-structured interview was the method used to collect data from participants. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to follow the flow of the interview in a conversational manner. This enabled participants to discuss their most important experiences while still allowing me to ask all of the research questions (Creswell, 2007). Fourteen of the 22 interviews took place at one of six different Sportball locations in Edmonton and Sherwood Park. Interviews were conducted indoors in a quiet area and were scheduled during a

Sportball class while the participant's child was participating in Sportball. Eight interviews were conducted in a research office located at the Child and Adolescent Sport and Activity Lab at the University of Alberta at the participants' convenience.

Prior to the outset of the interview participants were provided with the study information letter (see Appendix 2.0) and given a verbal explanation of the study. They were also provided with an opportunity to ask any questions. All participants agreed to participate and written informed consent was obtained (see Appendix 3.0). Participants were reminded that participation was voluntary and the information they provided was confidential. Parents were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and they could refrain from answering any questions they did not want to answer. Finally, it was reinforced to parents that the interviews were not specifically an evaluation of the Sportball program but rather about their children's development through sport (which may include participation in Sportball).

I conducted all of the interviews with participants. I have been trained in qualitative data collection and have experience conducting interviews from previous research (Knight et al., 2011; Neely et al., 2011). I also have experience coaching children in organized youth sport programs and am familiar with Sportball, which helped facilitate the development of rapport with the participants.

Interview Guide

To gain an understanding of parents' perceptions of their child's growth and development through sport, the interview guide consisted of main questions and probe questions to ensure the researcher accurately understood the responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interview guide covered 6 main areas: (1) introduction, (2) child's sport participation, (3) benefits associated with sport, (4) factors associated with PYD, (5) parents' roles, and (6) summary (see Appendix 4.0 for complete interview guide). The different sections of the interview guide ensured that the research questions were thoroughly examined and that parents' perceptions of PYD were explored. Open-ended questions were asked to enable participants to discuss issues that were personally relevant to them. These types of questions "encourage people to talk about their experiences, perceptions, and understandings rather than providing a normative response or text-book-type answer" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 135). In addition to these main questions, probes were used to maintain discussion. Probing also provided clarification to unclear comments, provided further detail without changing the focus of the conversation, and encouraged participants to expand on certain ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

To create the interview guide I first brainstormed questions based on existing PYD literature and my experience in youth sport and then consulted with my supervisor to discuss the appropriateness of the questions. Once the initial interview guide had been created, the questions were discussed with the program director of Sportball. This discussion further helped establish the suitability of the

interview questions. One question was also added to the interview guide as a result. After the first two interviews had been conducted, I modified the wording of the interview questions to make them easier for participants to respond to. Finally, after the first five interviews were completed, two additional questions were added to the interview guide because they had come up in those initial interviews.

Data collection and data analysis were conducted concurrently which helped make the decision that the data were adequately saturated and thus no further participants were required. Based on previous research examining adolescents' PYD through sport (Camiré et al., 2009a; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Holt et al., 2009a), a sample size of 25 participants was initially estimated for this study. Data collection ceased at 22 participants, however, because there appeared to be an adequate level of data saturation and very little new information was being garnered from participants (Morse, 1995).

Data Analysis

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Sixteen of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher while the other six interviews were transcribed by a professional transcribing service. The transcripts were stripped of all identifying information and parents were coded with a number (P1, P2, P3, etc.) to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants' children to further ensure anonymity. Interviews ranged from 17 to 122 minutes (M = 36 minutes, SD = 21.6) and yielded 376 pages of single-spaced data (128, 869 words).

Data analysis began as soon as the first data were collected and continued in an iterative process throughout the study. Data analysis in ID does not adhere to a strict linear/prescriptive process. Rather, it relies on balancing description and interpretation of the data through the intellectual inquiry of the researcher. That said, broadly, data analysis moved through three stages: (1) content analysis, (2) organizing themes, and (3) presenting the findings. First, transcripts were read and re-read to check for accuracy, gain a sense of the content and ensure full immersion in the data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The audio recordings were also listened to again because as Thorne suggested, this step can potentially provide additional insight so the researcher can both hear and read the data (Thorne et al., 2004). During the first reviews of the data, memos were recorded. Memos were used to record initial thoughts and comments about themes and concepts as well as preliminary interpretations of the data (Patton, 2002).

Steps of descriptive content analysis, following the guidelines described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) were initially used to analyze the data. The transcripts were coded into meaningful segments of information (i.e., raw data themes). These raw data themes were then assigned meaning units and grouped by content into themes. Rules of inclusion were created and constant comparison techniques were used to help ensure that data included in each theme were similar but distinct from other themes. As Thorne (2008) suggested, borrowing certain data analysis techniques from other methodologies may be helpful in the analytic process. Constant comparison, a prominent feature in grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), was employed throughout the data analysis process because it can

help reveal commonalities within human experiences. Constant comparison involves comparing all the data to each other to look for similarities and differences and possible relationships that may exist.

After coding the first five transcripts, I met with my supervisor to discuss the emerging themes. A coding schema was created and agreed upon and the remaining transcripts were analyzed using a mixture of inductive and deductive analysis procedures. The coding schema developed from the first five transcripts was used to analyze the rest of the transcripts which was more deductive coding, but additional themes were identified and added to the coding structure as analysis progressed which was more inductive.

In developing an interpretive description of the data, it is important to avoid excessively coding the data as well as coding too early or in too much detail in the analytic process because it can take away from the overall meaning of the phenomenon. Further, premature coding can result in data misrepresentation because the researcher may not be able to see beyond the initial codes and this can limit the researcher's capacity to see patterns within the data (Thorne, 2008). Thorne recommended that broad and generic coding is more useful than precise coding in the early analytic stages so that all possible themes and patterns can be explored.

The next step in analysis involved identifying patterns and relationships within the data and organizing the essential elements into groupings (Thorne, 2008). I met with my supervisor to discuss themes and initial interpretations. Themes were questioned and challenged and different possible groupings of the

data were proposed. This lead to new associations and new ways of interpreting what the data meant. To make sense of the findings and ensure that the most important ideas are conveyed it is necessary to order the patterns and themes into a logical framework (Thorne et al., 1997). After exploring possible ways to represent the findings, an overarching conceptual claim was identified and other themes were grouped into categories.

The last step in data analysis was writing and presenting the findings. This final phase in interpretation was important because writing the results involves drafting, editing, and redrafting to ensure that the important findings are presented in a clear and coherent manner (Richardson, 1994; Thorne, 2008). A thematic summary using headings and subheadings was used to demonstrate the common themes and relationships between the data (Thorne, 2008) and provide a coherent understanding of parents' perceptions of PYD through sport. Diagrams were also created to help visually represent possible connections between themes and categories.

Data matrices can be useful to display descriptive results of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As such, a data matrix was created to illustrate which themes were represented by parents (See Table 1). The data matrix demonstrated a high level of saturation across all of the themes in the three categories. It was also created to compare any differences in benefits reported by mothers and fathers. There were no apparent gender differences so data were analyzed and reported as one data set rather than analyzing mothers and fathers separately.

The final results contain a mixture of interpretative and descriptive dimensions of categories and themes. Extensive quotations from participants are used to provide a thick description supplemented by a narrative explaining interpretations and relations between categories, themes, and main ideas.

Methodological Rigour

Verification strategies are important for enabling the researcher to identify if and when to modify the research process. Reliability and validity remain appropriate concepts for attaining methodological rigour in qualitative research, but verification strategies must also be incorporated into the research process (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olsen, & Spiers, 2002). Several techniques were used during and following analysis to enhance the rigour of this study. First, data were collected and analyzed concurrently from the outset of the study in order to make sure the data were adequately saturated. Second, during data analysis I discussed emerging themes with my supervisor. This investigator triangulation ensured that emerging themes, patterns, and relationships were constantly being questioned, and this forced me to provide explanations and justifications for my interpretations of the data.

Following analyses, a modified member-check was conducted with participants to assess the relevance of the findings to participants' experiences. Participants were e-mailed a summary of the study findings and asked to provide their feedback. They were provided with a figure of the findings and asked two questions: "(1) Does the summary of findings seem like an accurate representation of the perceived benefits your child gets out of sport? Yes or no?

Please provide an explanation, and (2) Many parents used the terms self-confidence, self-esteem, self-identity, and competence to interchangeably as a main benefit of sport participation. I grouped these terms together and interpreted the overarching theme to be that children gain an understanding of themselves and their capabilities through exploration in sport. Does this phrase make sense to you and capture what you were trying to tell me? Yes or no? Please provide an explanation." Seventeen participants responded to the email and agreed that my findings were an accurate representation of their perceived benefits of sport for their children. Although in agreement with my interpretations, two parents were more critical and provided suggestions to clarify the labels of some themes so that the data were better represented. This feedback was taken into consideration. This modified member-checking protocol helped ensure that my interpretations of the data accurately represented parents' views of their children's PYD through sport. This member-check also provided participants with an opportunity to clarify meaning and add any additional comments.

Throughout the entire research process a reflexive journal was kept. The reflexive journal was written in after each interview and several times throughout data analysis (e.g., when writing memos). It provided insight and justification for my decisions and allowed me to reflect on how my prior experiences and assumptions influenced the research process. This was particularly useful after the first few interviews because it allowed me to write out my preconceived notions about how I thought parents would respond. For example, after the first interview I made the comment "don't assume parents want kids to learn things other than

just sport skills." After the first interview I was disappointed that the participant had mainly discussed physical benefits of sport, but it was because I had anticipated that all parents would want their children to gain the benefits of sport that are discussed in the literature. The use of a reflexive journal also helped me refine the interview guide because upon reflection after each interview, new questions arose as well as how to phrase questions to make it easier for parents to understand what I was asking them. For example, after the first five interviews instead of asking "Have you noticed any developmental changes in your child in other areas of life that may be a result of participating in sport?" I changed the question to "How do you think participation in sport influences other areas of your child's life?" The use of a reflexive journal also helped me become a stronger interviewer because after conducting an interview I wrote down what I thought I did well and what I needed to improve on for the next interview, so each subsequent interview was better than the previous.

CHAPTER 4:

RESULTS

Developing Positive Self-Perceptions through Exploration in Sport

In ID it is recommended (Thorne, 2008) that an overarching theme be identified (if possible) which reflects the main 'conceptual claim' arising from the analysis. The overarching conceptual claim of this study was that children developed positive self-perceptions through exploration in sport. Parents thought through their involvement in organized sport, children had opportunities to explore their capabilities and ultimately develop a better sense of 'what they were able to do' and 'who they were'. Parents tended to use words/terms like self-confidence, self-esteem, self-image, identity, and self-competence to describe this exploration of self. Although each of these terms has its own psychological meaning from a research perspective, parents did not make such precise distinctions. All of these 'self' terms used by parents seemed to reflect ideas that have been grouped together under the 'umbrella term' of self-perceptions for the purposes of this research. In the context of this thesis then, the term self-perceptions is defined as "children's beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings about themselves and about their abilities, skills, competencies, and characteristics" (Horn, 2004, p. 102).

The overarching theme was reflected by nearly all of the social, physical, and personal benefits of sport parents perceived their children gained. In other words, it appeared that when children developed an understanding and perception of themselves through exploration in sport, this influenced or led to children

experiencing other benefits. In this sense, there appeared to be, at some level, reciprocal relationships between developing positive self-perceptions and social, physical, and personal benefits (See Figure 1).

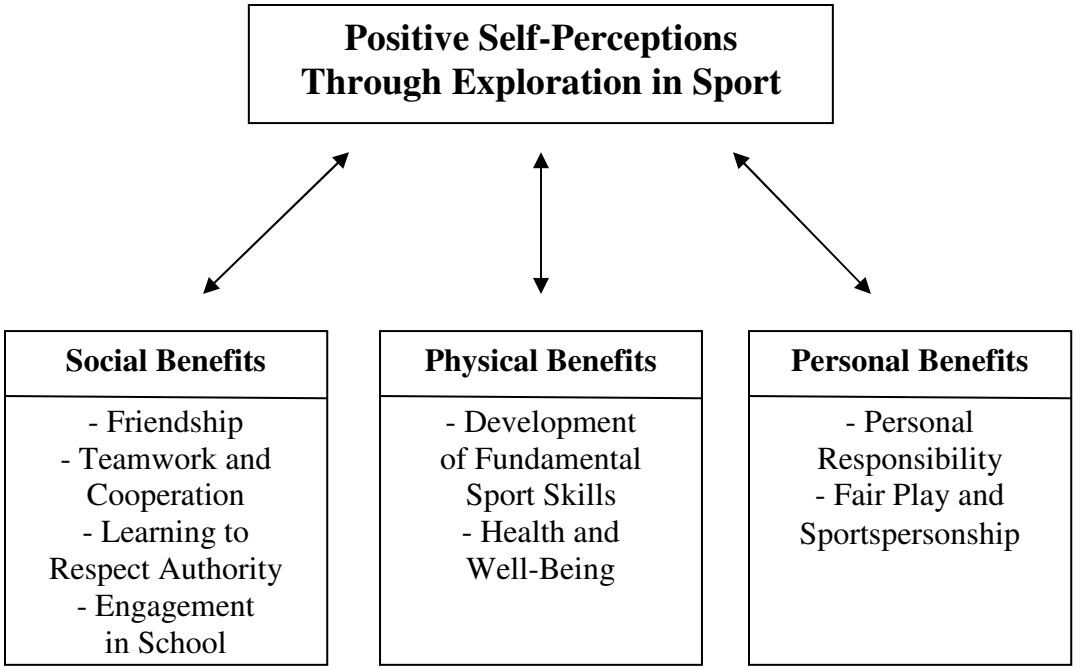

Figure 1. Parents' perceived benefits of sport for young children.

In terms of sport providing children with opportunities for exploration, Parent 22 (P22) described how sport is "just kind of an avenue where they [children] can kind of explore themselves and experience themselves and how they can improve in all aspects of their lives." One important feature was that sport provided opportunities for children to explore their *physical capabilities*, as the following quote from P16 described:

> [I think]… their willingness to try new things, new physical things so, and um to take little physical challenges and risks right. Maybe it's little things like going up the stairs two at a time or jumping

> down half a flight of stairs or something, ya know, silly little things like that. They're not as hesitant physically because they've been able to sort of explore their abilities through sport.

Additionally, parents thought that when children achieved success and mastered a specific skill, they were motivated to further explore their capabilities. In discussing his son's improvement in swimming, P14 said:

> The pride that he gets when he's gotten to that next level like when he was able to jump into the water or something… so when he's achieved a goal there's you know that, the personal satisfaction and the pride that you've done it. Um and then it builds into something now he can go onto something even cooler and neater… He's learning to take some risks um you know at his own comfort level.

P10 explained that his children playing sports has been "good for their confidence and their self-esteem and their sense that they can accomplish things if they work hard and try." Other parents also discussed how participating and succeeding in sport influenced their child's understanding of themselves. As P4 explained:

> That positive self-image, she's learning how to do something and then you feel kinda good about yourself cause you've learned how to do it and it's a physical learning, and then you do feel like you're competent, and coordinated and strong. She's really building that self-image of herself as an athlete and it's good. I

> think her confidence in general is higher than it otherwise would be because she's been in an assortment of different extra-curricular things that ya know, just give her a chance to learn something new and succeed at something new. I know she's not gonna be good at everything but if you're a little bit good at something then that does a lot for your confidence.

This point emphasized that when children have opportunities to try new sports and build their skills, it helps them to develop an understanding of who they are. P2 further expanded on this when she said:

> [Sport] gives her [daughter] an opportunity to be exposed to things that we wouldn't normally expose her to…. Like she's more inclined to take risks and do things she wouldn't normally do and that's because she's in a safe learning atmosphere as well. So she feels supported and confident in her decision making…She's more confident in what she does.

As the final part of this quote suggested, P2 thought her daughter had become more confident in herself through her involvement in sport and was therefore prepared to try other things. The idea that developing a better sense of who they were through sport positively influenced children in other contexts was a consistent theme. As P20 stated:

> The big thing for him [son] is his self-confidence, 'cause Brady was somewhat of an insecure kid and as he's starting to learn and develop and get better at sports he's starting to believe in himself

more which is great because it affects his school, it affects his relationships with his friends.

Hence, the idea of exploration through sport was central to the other findings relating to the benefits of sport. That is, it appeared that children were able to experience other benefits arising from sport participation because, in part at least, they had developed a better understanding of themselves. This concept will be reiterated in the majority of the categories describing parents' perceptions of the benefits of sport for their children, reflecting the apparent reciprocal relationships between developing positive self-perceptions through exploration and perceived benefits.

Social, Physical, and Personal Benefits of Sport

Table 1 is the data matrix that provides a visual representation (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of parents' responses to the perceived social, physical, and personal benefits of sport participation for young children. The frequency by which a theme is reported is not necessarily indicative of its importance. That is, a higher number does not indicate that there was more emphasis placed on the theme or that it was perceived to be a greater benefit for children. Rather, the matrix is provided to complement the written narrative and to give a sense of the commonalities between parents' perceptions.

Table 1 Data matrix of participants' responses (*N = 22*)

Developing Positive Self-Perceptions through Exploration in Sport								
	Social Benefits				Physical Benefits		Personal Benefits	
ID	Friendship	Teamwork and Cooperation	Learning to Respect Authority	Engagement in School	Development of Fundamental Sport Skills	Health and Well-Being	Personal Responsibility	Fair Play and Sports-personship
Mothers								
1	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
2	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
4	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
5	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
6	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
7	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
11	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
12	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
13	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
15		x	x	x	x	x	x	
19	x	x	x	x			x	x
21	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
n	**11**	**12**	**9**	**11**	**11**	**11**	**10**	**11**
Fathers								
3	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
8	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
9	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
10		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
14	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
16	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
17	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
18	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
20	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
22		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
n	**8**	**10**	**7**	**9**	**9**	**10**	**10**	**10**
N	**19**	**22**	**16**	**20**	**20**	**21**	**20**	**21**

Note: The X sign (x) indicates the presence of a parent's response in the theme

Social Benefits

Parents reported a range of social benefits that children developed through their involvement in organized sport. This category was created based on the themes of (a) interacting with other children and creating friendships, (b) learning how to work as a team and cooperate with others, and (c) developing respect for authority. Collectively, parents thought these social benefits also had a positive influence on their children's (d) engagement in school.

Friendship. Among the social benefits of youth sport participation, meeting other children and making friends was a benefit 19 parents reported. This was particularly important for one parent who thought sport was a good place for "creating friends. A lot of kids they have a hard time making friends at school or whatever so sports gives them another outlet to find and make new friends where they might not have before" (P20). P6 also thought being involved in sport gave her child a better opportunity to make new friends because "the social interactions of friends you make, you know it always seems easier to make friends when you already have a common interest sorta connecting you."

Developing friendships, especially outside of school was evidently something parents thought was a valuable benefit their children could gain from sport. In fact, one mother said that the majority of her sons' friends came from sports, not school:

> Most of their friends are strictly sport friends. They have their school friends, like with soccer it's community league so it's all the kids that live in the community but then most of those kids also

> go to the same school so those friends are school friends. But I'd say more than half of their friends they've made through the sports that they've played (P5).

It appeared that the children were able to interact and make friends because they had a better sense of who they were as a result of their various experiences in sport. P11 explained:

> I find that like through all the different activities in sports that they've been in, that they walk into a room and they're like 'hi, I'm Duncan, I'm Phil, what's your name', you know kind of stuff. And it's funny because what I realize is that kids with less experience in those kinds of environments um, kind of look at them like they have two heads. And they won't even say anything to them, and then you see other kids that have been involved in things and they just start talking right away. And you know it's um, it's a. .. . . ..life skill to be able to walk into a room of strangers and be like, 'hey this is me'.

P16 also thought there was a connection between his son's confidence and his ability to make friends. He said, "well sport can help them build their confidence and not be so shy because they meet new kids and have to interact with other kids." This quote suggests that when children have a better understanding of who they are, they are better able to interact with other children, and then as they make new friends, they feel better about themselves, thus illustrating the reciprocal relationship between self-perception and friendship.

Parents also thought that the friendships their children developed through their participation in sport would help them avoid trouble as they got older. For example, P4 thought the friends her daughter made in sport would provide support for her when she reached adolescence. She said:

> It's nice to ya know, when you go through your rocky adolescence years to have a ready-made group of friends because you're on teams. So that's your social group as well…Ya know having those social groups that are generally pretty positive…if you are involved in something you don't necessarily have a lot of free time to get into trouble or fall in with the wrong crowd or be the wrong crowd or something like that and I think that's important.

Here, although not an immediate benefit of sport for young children, developing friendships through sport was important for keeping busy and staying out of trouble during the teenage years.

Teamwork and Cooperation. All 22 parents discussed learning to work as a team, cooperating with other children, and developing tolerance for others as other social benefits their children gained through participation in sport. In fact, Parent 12 thought teamwork was "the biggest thing sport will help him with right now…and learning how to play, share, that whole teamwork thing."

Parents wanted their children to realize that everyone plays a part in teamwork and it takes effort from every individual on the team to achieve success. P9 explained:

> The team aspect…just that carries through to life…learning how to work with others to a common goal that, that's a lifelong thing for all of us, we have to do that all the time in life …everybody has a role to play, you know, and everybody has a strength and that very much comes through in sports. You know, there's the fast players, there's the very skilled players, there's the stay at home defensive players, you know, and everybody plays an important role, the goalie. And so you learn that in life uh so if we all work together you know, to something common, whatever it is, um then you can achieve neat results so I think learning that early on really transfers over to all, all areas of life.

One aspect of developing teamwork was learning how to cooperate with other children. For P19, the concept of sharing was part of learning how to cooperate. She felt being in a team sport environment helped children "just build on their social skills…so like working together, being able to get along with other kids, being able to pass instead of just taking the ball or puck and doing all the work yourself." A mother of three boys explained that one of her reasons for putting her children in soccer was so they learn how to cooperate with other children and work as a team:

> They spend so much of their time where it is just the three of them so to have them exposed to other kids and other personalities and to problem solve while they are there. They might not like somebody but they still have to work with them (P5).

In learning how to cooperate with others, parents thought sport also taught children about tolerance. Parent 14 believed that providing his children with opportunities to interact with other children through sport allowed them to develop an understanding for differences. He explained that a benefit of sport was:

> The socialized learning of being with other kids. Um particularly different backgrounds, different ethnic origins, different parts of the city, different ages, physical abilities. It's good to expose them to that…they're gonna start to learn how to deal with kids.

Learning to Respect Authority. Another social benefit 16 parents associated with sport participation was developing respect for authority. Developing respect began with learning to interact with adults outside of the family, which parents thought was important. For example, one father explained:

> Um I think for us it was just giving him [son] the exposure to other people, you know he's gonna have teachers and well everyone in his life that are gonna be external you know sources of information and, and we need him to start knowing that, that you have to take what they have to say and listen to them and… I mean we just really find it's important that they get used to interacting with other adults as early as possible you know…a lot of kids get quite petrified of you know their, their first social encounters and we kinda felt like we were arming him with a bit of you know, knowledge that that doesn't have to be a scary thing (P17).

It seemed having someone else provide feedback to their children was important to parents because they thought it helped their children develop their self-understanding. As P17 stated, "I think having other adults reinforce those things to him um has definitely, as far as I'm concerned, had an increase in, in who he thinks he is and what the things he thinks he can do." This reflects the reciprocal relationship that when children develop self-perceptions and gain the social benefits of sport, this increase in social skills actually reinforces and further develops children's self-perceptions.

Learning to take instruction and listening to coaches were essential skills for children to develop respect for authority. Parent 11 believed part of developing this respect for authority was demonstrating good behaviour. She felt "it [sport] teaches them some responsibility to behave how they've been taught to behave when we're not watching… um and it teaches them to respect the person who's in authority." Overall, it seemed parents placed the greatest emphasis on their children developing respect for the coach. One father clearly explained what he thought his son learned from having a male and female coach:

> I loved that at Sportball one of the coaches was female…and everyone learned to listen to the coach, it didn't matter whether the coach was a boy or girl, it was the coach. So I think that teaches them kind of a respect for authority and title… it definitely has taught them to respect and listen to whosever in-charge and I think that's really important (P16).

Engagement in School. Twenty parents thought the social benefits children developed through participation in sport had an influence on their engagement in school. One father explained:

> At a young age they learned to interact and play with kids um who have different abilities, different attitudes, different backgrounds…So when they get to school that tends to, the benefits tend to roll over and they're ready to be in an environment with other people where mom and dad ain't there (P14).

It appeared that parents thought the self-understanding their children developed through different social experiences in sport helped them become more outgoing at school. P1 said, "[Charlie] is more social at school…his teacher says that during the day he's very comfortable, and coming out of his shell more and more." Many parents also thought that when their children had a better understanding of themselves and belief in their abilities it helped them fit in with their peers. P10 explained:

> I know Duncan likes to play soccer and basketball during recess and I think that sport and physical activity is a big part of his school experience, certainly an enjoyable part of his school experience and so I think that contributes to his happiness and confidence and well-being at school for sure.

P1 also commented on the value of sport in regards to recess activities:

> One thing I noticed is that the kids who could kick a soccer ball around, they have friends and their recesses were occupied. And

> then the kids who didn't have those skills just kinda stood around on the sideline and weren't as happy.

The above examples suggest that sport is an important part of the school day and demonstrate that being involved in sport helped children to fit in with their peers, thus creating a more positive experience at school.

Many parents thought there was a direct link between their child's sport involvement and their achievement at school. For P20, this was evident:

> The more I've seen him play sports the more he feels confident with who he is which in turn helps him to do better in school, makes him more focused. It also helps his habits in terms of like study habits and stuff like that so, ya know you've gotta have good habits to play sports or you won't succeed and ya know that can be directly transferable to school.

Several parents shared similar perspectives, in that they believed their children did better in school because of the opportunities they had in sports. In explaining the relation between sports and school, P18 said:

> Well I think it [sport] helps them, it gives them an opportunity to, to learn how to set goals um, effectively and ah, and to learn how to go about achieving and so I think, I think there's a positive transfer of, of um thought that way from sport to school. I certainly am a believer that the more active they are, they have the opportunity to be active um away from the classroom, the more effective they can be in the classroom whether it's um, just because

> of, you know they're, they're able to get rid of some of the energy ah particularly with boys.

Many parents described why developing teamwork would benefit their children in school. For instance, P7 provided a detailed example of how being on a hockey team helped her son at school:

> I think a team sport helps you better in life because it gives you more life skills, it gives you more how to deal with other people. Like for instance with hockey where you've got five players on the ice…they're doing their passing, they know that they have to work off of each other. And I think that helps in school when they're doing group activities or just working with another partner. It's not all about you, it's about sharing ideas and participating and just giving what you can give to help the benefit of the class.

Physical Benefits

Children experienced many physical benefits through their involvement in organized sport. Parents reported that children (a) developed fundamental sport skills and that a number of (b) health-related benefits were gained through participation in sport.

Development of Fundamental Sport Skills. Twenty parents thought an essential benefit that children gained in sport was the development of fundamental sport skills. The opportunity to explore their skills through sport helped children develop physical competence. As P9 explained, mastering a new skill helped improve his son's self-confidence:

> For him the confidence he's, it doesn't come to him naturally the confidence, and so he's very proud you know, when he comes up to score. It's, you know, 'Dad, I threw the ball through the hoop'…just those little wins for him are big.

Exposure to sport also enabled children to develop a variety of sports skills and work on their coordination. P17 thought that his son "can learn specific skills of whatever it is he's learning so I mean whatever the sport is he's gonna learn better coordination and better timing of how to move his arms and legs around." Similarly, P13 thought sport "helps a lot like with their hand and eye coordination…it teaches them I think a little bit more coordination you know like with how to like handle the ball or a racket or whatever."

In particular, parents thought a multi-sport program was the most beneficial type of program because it exposed their children to a number of sports, thus allowing them to develop more skills. P15 explained that she signed her son up for a multi-sport program because she "just kinda wanted to give him a broader range of experiences to different kinds of sports." P5 agreed when she explained, "at the age that they're at I kinda just want them to learn a bit about everything before we start thinking about putting a whole bunch of time and money and stuff into just one specific sport." She went on to say:

> We've [parents] chosen to not put them [sons] in hockey um because we wanted them to be a little bit more rounded in sport instead of just focused on one…but [with Sportball] they're doing something different every day, it's not just one skill or one focus.

There was a lot of emphasis placed on children developing their fundamental sport skills because parents thought it was important to be competent to a certain extent. P22 illustrated this point when he said:

> I want them to have a good skill-set, a good well-rounded skill-set that they can kind of transition into anything fairly easily. I'm sure you've seen people that just look like natural athletes, like they'll pick up a basketball and they'll do fine and then all of a sudden give them a hockey stick and they're picking corners left, right, and center. And I think that's important, to have that well-rounded skill-set. To be able to, not necessarily be amazing at one sport, but to be pretty good at everything is important.

In other words, parents thought it was better if their children had a basic level of competency in all sports rather than be highly skilled in just one specific sport. As P1 reiterated, "I don't really want him, like I don't really care if he gets really good at it [sport] or ya know goes into competitive sports but I want him to be good at the basic skills - like throwing and kicking and catching."

Interestingly, parents perceived that developing a broad range of sport skills was also important for success in sport at school. P22 suggested that when children are not well-versed in mainstream sports, "you always tend to struggle when you get to junior high and high school and beyond when people are playing sports around you and you're just not at that level so I think to be well-rounded is very important." P11 also thought being competent in a variety of sports would

enable her sons to compete in more team sports in school because "they're going to have that skill set, that coordination already."

It appeared as though developing fundamental sports skills had social implications for children as well. P1 explained:

> Ya know I want him to basically to be able to join up with any group of boys or men throughout his life and ya know from what I see they tend to throw balls to each other, so ya know I want him to be able to do that.

Whether in an organized program or in an unstructured environment, sport was seen as a social activity and parents thought that their children would fit in better if they were competent in basic sport skills.

Health and Well-Being. According to 21 parents in this study, participation in sport had a positive impact on children's health and well-being. The most apparent benefit that parents reported was that sport provided an opportunity for children to be physically active. As P14 stated, "the big benefit is, I think the, the most immediate one is the physical activity. It's just, it's a good thing for kids to be physically active." P21 said, "just the physical activity helps too, 'cause then they're not sitting on a couch dreaming up things to do or playing video games all the time." Similarly, P8 explained he had his daughter involved in organized sport programs because "it's so easy to be sedentary. There's enough TV and games at home that it's almost difficult ya know you almost have to do stuff outside the house to ensure that they're [children] staying active especially during the winter."

Further, sport was seen by parents as an activity that children could participate in that was healthy for them (e.g., as opposed to watching television). P20 thought the biggest benefits of sport were:

> Self-confidence and health. Big time staying healthy. I mean if you don't have an outlet to be healthy then it's really hard to find one whereas with sports that's an instant outlet for being active and healthy and there's all kinds of options for physical activity as opposed to going to the gym or whatever. You can play basketball, you can play soccer, you can play hockey, you can play golf. If you wanna stay active you have all these options, so that's the biggest thing – health and self-confidence.

Parents suggested there were several more 'immediate' health benefits of sport. This was apparent for P2 who said "obviously the health benefits that go with sports like increased metabolism, better sleep at night, ya know, increased muscle tone." P17 also thought better sleep was a direct benefit of sport participation. This father thought children should be in sport to "burn 'em out, let 'em run, let 'em jump, let 'em keep going until they, until they burn enough calories to sleep all night."

Burning off energy was actually a specific advantage of participating in sport that many parents discussed. For example, one mother explained, "it helps with their energy level. Um Cameron has ADHD, so he's pretty going you know all the time, so it's helped with that, and like Riley is extremely active. So it kinda gives him a way to expend that energy" (P13).

Sport was also seen as a way for children to deal with stress. P5 said:

> When they start to get themselves worked up about something or they're worried, a lot of times they'll kick a ball around… They've learned too that it's a good relief, like if they're mad they can go out and kick a soccer ball or punch the boxing bag or whatever and it helps them kinda get rid of that [stress] so it gives them a little more of a focus, instead of yelling or screaming, and beating on their brothers.

Another aspect of health and well-being that parents discussed was ideas around healthy weight and body-image. One mother said, "I think that physical activity is good for them…He's a taller, heavier set child, so to keep him involved in things and to keep his cardio up is good" (P7). Another mother explained how she thought sport participation could influence her daughter's body image. She said:

> I think just their overall body-awareness and self-esteem goes up when they are strong and confident. One big goal, actually, that I am seeking strictly through sports is that I want them to be confident in their body type and their body-awareness and I don't want them to feel like they have to compare themselves to other girls. We try to emphasize the whole notion of being strong and fit as opposed to ya know skinny or fat. Um we really emphasize strength, and health and nutrition as opposed to ya know physical attributes or physical vanity (P2).

The last health-related benefit that parents hoped their children would gain through participation in organized sport was the development of healthy habits. P20 explained, “sport is really great for keeping them active and keeping them healthy obviously, that’s probably the biggest one, a healthy active lifestyle which if you start them young then they’ll tend to keep that habit.” Further, parents believed that by getting their children involved in sport at a young age, it would assist them in developing an active lifestyle. As P9 said, “we want them to sort of get um good physical health at an early age and get into good sort of habits like wanting to go outside more or being active and playing ball.” This father went on to explain that “lifelong physical well-being as well I think that’s, that’s a hope for sure.”

Personal Benefits

Parents thought there were several benefits of sport that contributed to children’s individual development. The category of personal development included children developing a sense of (a) personal responsibility and a sense of (b) fair play and sportspersonship.

Personal Responsibility. Twenty parents provided examples of benefits they thought contributed to children developing personal responsibility. The first example parents discussed was an understanding that ‘hard work leads to success’. P17 reiterated the benefit of persistent effort:

> There was a lot of stuff [skills] that he couldn’t do when he, when he started right so they get to see how practice and, and routine and some hard work does work, you know it does pay off. If you can’t

> do it and you keep trying and getting stronger then hey all of a sudden you can do it right?...[There's] less frustration when things aren't going right you know or if he can't physically do something now he'll, he'll, you know he's much more likely to try to solve how I can do it instead of just getting upset and getting angry about it.

In developing work ethic, parents also felt that their children were motivated to work hard which consequently pushed them to improve and explore new boundaries. Because he wanted to improve his skills, one mother said her son "takes the initiative to go grab a sport ball and get right in there and he doesn't act shy, doesn't hold back or withdraw" (P6). She thought this was because he had become more comfortable with the children in his group and was developing a better self-understanding. Similarly, P12 felt that because her son was interested in learning new sports he was more willing to step outside of his comfort zone. She said:

> I think maybe just the, the different exposures, um he's going to different places, meeting different people, like he really wants to do the sport, so he's I think, because he really wants to do that, I think he's kind of had to push himself a little bit, you know if you wanna do this then he knows he has to go out with people who, you know when he's going to a new team or something, that he hasn't met before, so I, I think it's kind of um rather than me pushing him to do things, he's pushing himself a little bit.

Parents thought children also learned to be committed to their team. For instance, P19 thought sport taught her son to "be responsible like showing up for your practices and the games, not being able to just say 'oh I don't feel like going' and actually having to show up because you're part of that team." Further, P22 provided a clear example that demonstrated his son had developed commitment to his team:

> If he's not feeling up to playing soccer or playing hockey at some point and there's been days where he's been kinda burnt out, he'll insist on going to the rink anyways just for the simple reason that he doesn't want to let his teammates down. So something even like that it really helps, it gives them a sense a responsibility not just to themselves but to other people as well so I think that's a key thing.

Organization and time management was another specific example parents provided that suggested children developed personal responsibility through sport participation. As P2 described:

> I think it's teaching her to be organized, like to make sure for example, on Thursday she has to pack an extra snack and extra water bottle and make sure she has her proper running shoes for Sportball…So her time management in terms of thinking ahead and knowing 'ok Thursday is Sportball and Monday is gymnastics' so she anticipates things and is aware of like time like she knows Mondays she has this, Tuesdays she has that.

P22 also thought sport helped his son develop time management skills and that these skills would be beneficial for him as he got older.

> I think the most important one is as they grow older it helps to really make their time valuable. Like you know you're playing sports from this time to this time so they'll need to study or do homework from this time to this time and if they have a part-time job in the future it can be slotted in. It kinda structures everything and keeps them out of trouble.

Fair Play and Sportspersonship. Developing a sense of fair play and sportspersonship was a benefit that 21 parents thought their children gained through sport. Children learned the value of rules and fair play, learned how to compete, and learned how to win and how to lose. It appeared as though learning the rules of sport was an imperative aspect of developing and understanding fair play. Through exploration in sport, P6 felt her son learned "a little bit more about the rules of the different types of sports that they were playing." As his daughter experienced multiple sports, P3 explained that she was:

> Learning how to play the game, learning how to win, learning how to lose, learning how to tie, learning how to play fair. I guess they learn how to cheat, well I guess learn how not to cheat. Ya know what you can get away with and what you can't get away with. Ya know to learn what the rules are, how to follow rules. Learn what's acceptable and what's not acceptable. I think those are the majority of things she learns through sport.

By learning the rules and thus what is considered cheating, parents believed their children gained a sense of what fair play was. P20 added that understanding fair play could also help children develop good values. He thought that children "gotta learn to either play by the rules or not play by the rules and when you [children] don't play by the rules you're penalized, and the same thing happens in life so it's a good thing to learn."

Finally, parents thought learning and playing by the rules was important for keeping sport fair and enjoyable. P17 explained:

> Following rules, every game has different rules so learning that you know you have to, if you're gonna, whether it's a game or a board game or a sport, you know unless everyone's playing by the same rules, it's no fun. And so that kind of is a you know, a tough lesson for a lot of kids to learn especially in sport.

Although it may have been a hard lesson for children, fair play was nonetheless an important concept that parents thought sport could teach their children.

The majority of participants' children were involved in a non-competitive sports program. However, parents thought that it was important for their children to learn about competition. Specifically, parents thought sport could teach their children that competition, if appropriate, could be fun. P22 explained "fostering that competitive spirit early and then being competitive but not overly competitive, and kinda keeping everything in check, just everything along those lines." P20 also thought it was important to develop "that aspect of being able to compete and having fun with competing in the right way." Although parents

wanted their children to learn to compete, they also felt competition should be limited at this age. P4 justified why she thought too much competition in sport could be negative:

> If it [sport] was really focused on splitting into teams and who wins who loses at this age that would be counter-productive as well. It's important kids learn how to win and lose but I think they can learn through other ways and learn to be a good sport about it too.

So, it appeared that competition should be put in perspective. Parents also emphasized that sport should not always be about who wins. For example, P5 said:

> I want them to learn that not everything has to be about winning and losing. That they can go out and shoot hoops with their friends and have fun with sport it doesn't have to be a competition. And that ya know you can still play a game and not keep score and not have to win.

Learning how to win and learning how to lose was a consistent theme among parents. Simply put, Parent 6 said her son was "learning how to win and learning how to lose too" which she thought "is good in not just sports but many things in life." Parent 14 further expanded on this when he said

> You gotta learn how to lose right. Life is not about, and never is about everybody winning and getting what they want at all times. Um and then learning how to be a good sport right. Being a good

> winner and you know appreciating that somebody else might be feeling kinda down 'cause they lost and you didn't so. And that's part about being just a decent human being right. There's, on the other hand is learning how to be proud of the fact that you won right. There's nothing wrong with that. Like to me there's nothing wrong with saying 'I won, hooray for me.' Um at the same time you don't want them to be rubbing it in to peoples' nose 'cause that's part about just being a kind decent person right…I do believe that you know they need, kids need to be exposed to that, that part of life.

P3 also thought learning how to deal with winning and losing (or in effect success and failure) was an imperative lesson to learn through sport because "if you can do it in sport that goes to life. I mean that's what sport is, there's the highs and then there's the lows and that's the same with work, life, relationships." Essentially, because children had experienced feelings associated with winning and losing in sport, they would be better able to cope with success and failure outside of sport.

Surprisingly, parents placed a lot of emphasis on losing in sport. For example, Parent 5 emphasized that developing a self-understanding, allowed her sons to be 'good losers'. She explained,

> I think overall they [her sons] are confident kids just because they have fun and ya know they, we've tried to teach them not just in sport but just in general that it's okay to lose, it's okay to not be the

> best but the most important thing is to be sportsmanlike about it and gracious.

The latter part of this quote suggests the importance of developing sportspersonship. Fostering a sense of sportspersonship, particularly in this age group, was reiterated by one mother who said:

> I think it's, it's very important that they start off learning sportsmanship right from the beginning. That it's not something that you try and teach some later because a lot of the time it's too late. And you don't wanna end up with a child who is a poor winner or a poor loser (P11).

Through learning the rules of sport and the importance of following them, learning how to compete, thus learning how to win and lose, parents felt their children developed a sense of fair play and sportspersonship.

The Role of Coaches and Parents in Promoting the Benefits of Sport for Young Children

Having established parents' perceptions of the social, physical, and personal benefits their children gain through participation in organized sport, additional findings identified the roles of coaches and parents in promoting the benefits of sport for young children. This category represents parents' views on how coaches and parents create a fun and positive sport experience through (a) coaches and the sporting environment, and (b) parental influences. These findings respond to the second research question.

Coaches and the Sporting Environment. Parents emphasized that coaches needed to make sport a fun and enjoyable experience for their children. A positive sporting environment included a positive atmosphere for learning and a focus on developing skills rather than an emphasis on winning. P11 thought a positive environment was conducive for gaining the benefits from sport. She said:

> It's the environment that's set up by the coach, if they set up a positive environment then there's a whole host of things that can be learned, but they can also unfortunately learn a lot of bad things from you know, depending on how the environment is… it's high fives, there's lots of positive encouragement, it's a very positive environment. And they learn more that way.

In creating a positive environment for development, parents stressed the value of placing minimal emphasis on winning. P20 thought children would gain more benefits out of sport:

> …by making sure we create the right atmosphere for kids. Ya know, like at the ages of 5, 6, 7 they don't have to be competitive, it doesn't have to be about who wins and who loses, it can be about just enjoying yourself and having fun. And ya I mean there's nothing wrong with having kids compete with themselves and having a goal and try to attain it and learn how to work hard but when it becomes dog-eat-dog world at 8, there's something wrong with that.

Parents thought it was important that coaches placed little emphasis on competition so that children could focus on developing their skills rather than feeling pressured to win. For example, P11 said:

> It's nice that when there is a group but it's not necessarily, it's not necessarily competition, they're all just doing, trying to do the best for them as opposed to beating someone else. Because then they tend to lose focus on the actual skill and they're just tryin' to win. And then you know the whole point is lost.

Further, there was less pressure on children to win when coaches created a non-competitive environment. As P22 explained, a benefit of a non-competitive sports program was that:

> It's not a pressure-filled environment, it's more about having fun, it's more about building relationships, and building a skill set versus ya know trying to go out there and just score goals and win the game which brings on a lot of pressure. So I think that's where the biggest benefit comes from non-competitive sports.

Finally, parents perceived a fun environment to be particularly important for children involved in sport for the first time. One father said:

> I guess it has to especially for young children, I think it's very important that it needs to be an encouraging situation…especially while they're learning or during that first opportunity to experience the sport, I think it could be very scary and possibly detrimental as far as any association with that sport later on (P16).

As this parent expressed, children's first experience in sport is critical for long-term participation. If children have a negative experience in sport early on, they may be less inclined to continue participating. With children starting sport at younger ages, there is more potential for negative experiences which will influence future participation. As such, it is especially important to create a positive environment and provide an enjoyable experience in the initial stages of sport involvement. As indicated by parents, a fun environment that emphasizes enjoyment and de-emphasizes competition is important for children to gain the benefits of sport as well as continued participation.

Parental Influences. Parents discussed the important roles they thought they had in creating a positive environment and promoting children's PYD. Parents emphasized the need for sport to be fun. P10 explained:

> Especially for younger children the most important thing is for things [sport] to be fun, right. For them to run around, be active, get along, respect boundaries and have fun right…the skills or fundamentals and the teamwork and all that is important but it's not going to be a benefit if they're not active and engaged and having fun.

Just as parents wanted coaches to provide a fun and enjoyable sport experience for their children, parents also recognized that they had a significant role in making sport fun. P22 said, "at this age, [parents need to] maintain the fact that it's fun first ya know the skills will come but you have to foster that interest first and that begins in the home." Further, parents understood that it needed to be

fun to keep their children involved in sport. As P21 emphasized, “it has to be fun for the kids. It’s not a job when they’re 7 and 8 years old. Um whether they win or not it’s a sport and if you don’t want them to quit it’s gotta be fun.’

Parents thought their attitudes influenced children’s enjoyment in sport and the extent to which their children gained the benefits from their participation. For example, if parents only cared about winning and not the development of their child, children would adopt the same type of attitude because, as P14 suggested:

> Kids’ attitudes in sports generally start with the parent and they emulate what their parents are like so um if winning is the only thing then that’s generally what the kids are gonna be like…‘cause of course that’s what’s gonna be reinforced.

Parents also thought that their behaviour could have a negative impact on their children’s development and enjoyment in youth sport. P4 said:

> I mean you’re putting your kids in sport or on teams or in activities to keep them active and healthy and develop them emotionally and learn how to be part of a team, but then when that is undercut by the parents squabbling or constantly criticizing the coach or constantly yelling at the ref or screaming during the games or something like that. Those are entirely negative things that really undercut the purpose of sport and probably reduce the enjoyment for the kids a lot because then they’re focusing on negative things or embarrassed by their parents. That can just, if parents can just dial it back a little bit, ya know parental involvement and

> supporting your kid is fantastic but if we could all just step back a little bit and let kids just play I think it would be better.

Similar to coaches needing to emphasize skill development as opposed to winning, parents needed to do the same thing. Being too demanding and emphasizing winning was a point that many parents explained could limit children from gaining the benefits of sport. As P20 explained:

> You see nowadays so many parents that are just so wrapped up in the success of their child as opposed to the growth and important things with the sport. There's nothing wrong with pushing your child but it's just, you should be pushing them in the right atmosphere with an encouraging and loving heart as opposed to someone who's just wanting them to succeed

P20 also thought an emphasis on winning could really take the enjoyment out of sport for young children. He said:

> Well by focusing on the end result as opposed to the experience. Ya know focusing on just 'did you win or lose?' or 'how good are you?' as opposed to like 'did you enjoy yourself?' and 'did you try as hard as you could?' So [avoid] over-stressing sports as opposed to ya know letting them just enjoy it.

Parents recognized that it was important to have realistic expectations for their children. Mainly, parents needed to realize that sport should be fun for children at this age and that they are not likely to become professional athletes so

their experience in sport should be positive so that they like sport and continue to stay involved. As P7 said:

> I know he isn't going to be a superstar jock and some great athlete but as long as he is being active and having fun, he will stay involved in sport and that's what's important to me…not that he'll be a star but that he'll keep playing because it's fun for him.

Parents did not report that they thought it was coaches roles to teach certain skills or promote the other benefits of sport, however, they did think it was their role to reinforce what their child was learning through sport at home. It appeared that some parents had specific examples where they reinforced some of the life skills their child developed through sport. For example, parents encouraged the development of personal responsibility by reinforcing the idea of commitment. P21 explained that she reinforced commitment when:

> My son would be feeling lazy and not wanna go [to hockey], it was always 'that's fine, then you phone the coach, you tell the coach you're not gonna be there. No you phone, no way buddy, this is your responsibility, you wanted to join the team, you let the coach know you're not gonna be there.'

Teamwork and cooperation was another benefit that parents quite often reinforced at home. P4 said:

> She's old enough now that she can start helping out around the house so we kind of point out 'listen we're a team, we're a family you're part of the team and you help out', ya know that sort of

> thing. So those sorts of ideas that you're part of a group and you all work together for a common goal I think is just a good life lesson and it reflects sport.

Similar to how P4 reinforced the idea of working together, many parents communicated life skills by relating it to sport. As P5 explained,

> We can and do use analogies between something that they're learning in sport to how they deal with something at home. And they seem to relate really well to that. They are active so to be able to relate it to something that they like can help them figure it out.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION

The overall purpose of this study was to examine parents' perceptions of their children's PYD through participation in organized youth sport programs. The first research question was: 'What benefits do parents perceive their children gain through participation in organized youth sport programs?' Parents reported a range of social, physical, and personal benefits for their children related to an overarching theme that children developed positive self-perceptions through exploration in sport. The second research question was: 'How do parents think coaches and parents influence the benefits children potentially gain from participation in organized youth sport programs?' Parents identified the importance of their own roles, as well as the roles of coaches, in creating a positive environment that focused on enjoyment rather than competition.

This was an exploratory study and no pre-determined theoretical framework was imposed on the data. Nonetheless, findings regarding the social, physical, and personal benefits parents associated with their children's sport participation (see Figure 1) were consistent with modern conceptualizations of PYD that provided the conceptual context for this study. The current findings were grouped according to social and personal (and physical benefits). The 5Cs of PYD can be broadly grouped into social factors (i.e., character, caring/compassion, connection) and personal factors (i.e., competence, confidence; Lerner et al., 2005). Benson and colleagues (1997) identified 40 developmental assets in terms of external assets (social benefits) and internal

assets (personal benefits). Similarly, the six domains of learning experiences are grouped into interpersonal (social) and personal benefits (Dworkin et al., 2003; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006). Clearly, the concepts of social and personal benefits reported by parents in this study are reflected in all three theories of PYD. However, parents also reported physical benefits of sport which are not included in these conceptualizations of PYD. One explanation for the exclusion of physical benefits from these three conceptualizations of PYD could be because they are based in the developmental psychology literature and do not explicitly consider the physical domain. Physical benefits are, however, included in sport-specific conceptualizations of PYD (i.e., Côté et al, 2008; Petitpas et al., 2005). The benefits perceived by parents are also consistent with proximal processes that directly influence children's development within Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development. As Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) suggested, different settings within a microsystem (e.g., sport, school, etc) may provide distinct developmental experiences.

The current findings contribute to a growing body of literature suggesting that social factors (i.e., friendship, teamwork and cooperation, respecting authority, and engagement in school activities) are among the most important benefits associated with sport participation among *adolescents* (see Camiré et al., 2008, 2009a; Holt et al., 2008, 2009a). Adolescent athletes in previous studies have also reported that factors such as teamwork and learning to work with others are skills that 'transfer' from sport to other life settings (e.g., work, school; Holt et al., 2008). The transfer of life skills from sport to other domains reflects the

mesosystem in the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) which describes the interaction of two or more microsystem level settings (e.g., sport, school) on the developing individual. The notion of transfer of skills was evident in the current study as parents thought friendship, teamwork, cooperation, and respecting authority transferred to children's engagement in school activities. For example, parents reported that developing teamwork skills through sport helped children work on group projects in the classroom. The current findings are a novel addition to the literature because they suggest that parents perceive children as young as 5 years old potentially acquire some of these important social benefits. If these social skills can be developed during the early years of sport involvement, it may lay a foundation for optimal development when children are older.

Researchers have agreed that children gain a host of physical benefits through sport participation, including the development of fundamental sport skills and various health-related benefits (see Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007 for a review). Consistent with these previous findings, parents in the current study reported their children gained numerous health-related benefits through their involvement in sport. Given increasing rates of obesity (Shields, 2006) and declining rates of physical activity among children in Canada (Tremblay et al., 2010), there is a need to increase physical activity among young children in particular (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2010). Participation in organized sport is crucial because children who are involved in organized sport programs are more active than non-participants (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2010). Further, empirical evidence demonstrates that children who participate in

sports during childhood are more likely to be physically active adults (Kjønniksen, Anderssen, & Wold, 2009). Therefore, the more children are involved in organized sport programs during childhood, the more likely it is that they will be healthy in the future.

Parents thought participation in sport provided their children with opportunities to develop personal benefits (i.e., responsibility, commitment, work ethic, fair play, and sportspersonship). These findings are again consistent with previous work showing that through their involvement in sport, adolescent athletes can develop a strong work ethic, time management and goal setting skills (Gould et al., 2006), sportspersonship and personal responsibility (Holt et al., 2009a), and social and moral character (Camiré et al., 2010). Initiative is a particularly valuable personal benefit that adolescent athletes develop through participation in sport (Dworkin et al., 2003; Holt et al., 2008). However, parents in this study did not perceive that their children developed initiative through their involvement in sport. This may be explained by the age difference between children in the current study and the older age of athletes in the aforementioned studies.

The current findings regarding parents' perceptions of the social, physical, and personal benefits of sport were largely consistent with previous research. Nonetheless, the findings from this study add an important contribution to the PYD through sport literature because they apply to younger children (whereas findings from previous studies are based on the reports of adolescent athletes and/or coaches). Only one other study has examined parents' perspectives of the

types of benefits youth can gain from sport participation, but this study was conducted with the parents of high school athletes (Camiré et al., 2009b). The current findings suggest that, according to their parents, even young children can gain social, physical, and personal benefits through sport participation.

Another aspect of the current findings that may offer an important contribution to the PYD literature is the conceptual claim that sport provided children with opportunities to explore their capabilities. Through such exploration parents thought their children gained an understanding of what they were able to do and who they were, thus developing positive self-perceptions. There also appeared to be a reciprocal relationship between the social, physical, and personal benefits associated with sport participation and children's positive self-perceptions. That is, as children acquired these various benefits, it helped them gain a better sense of self-understanding. This argument supported by related research in youth sport psychology. For example, children's perceived and actual competence in sport is strongly related to being successful in peer relations and perceiving acceptance by the peer group (Weiss & Duncan, 1992). Additionally, parents of high school athletes thought that an increase in self-perception helped their children improve their social skills and their ability to interact with peers and teammates (Camiré et al., 2009b).

The notion of exploration is essential to the conceptual claim made in the current study. Waterman (1984) argued that trying new things and learning about oneself in the process is a principal component of developing identity. Dworkin and colleagues (2003) further showed that involvement in organized activities,

including sport, provided opportunities for exploration and identity work because adolescents were able to try new things and gain self-knowledge which allowed them to "discover how things did or did not fit into their developing identity" (p. 21). One could argue that developing self-perception is similar to developing identity because both are based on developing a sense of 'who you are.' Sport appears to be an ideal context for this exploration of self, especially among young children.

The findings in this study suggest that exploration in sport can facilitate children's development of positive self-perceptions, which in turn can help children gain other benefits of sport participation. Self-perception is a complex and multi-dimensional system involving self-concept/self-esteem and perceived competence in multiple domains (Horn, 2004). As children get older, the number of subdomains that influence self-perceptions increase, but during early childhood, children's self-perceptions are predominantly influenced by the subdomains of cognitive competence and physical competence (Harter, 1999).

Within a sport context, young children gain their competence information through task accomplishment (e.g., success of a specific skill), evaluative feedback (e.g., from coaches and parents), and personal effort (Harter, 1999). Important to note is that *positive* evaluative feedback is essential. Young children often have an 'all-or-none' perspective on the self, meaning children believe they are either 'all good' or 'all bad'. As such, negative feedback from coaches and parents would be detrimental to their self-perceptions. Further, research has indicated that self-perceptions are rather stable and may be resistant to change

later in life (Horn, 2004). Developmental psychology research suggests that early to middle childhood may be the first critical period for the development of self-perceptions (Horn, 2004). Therefore, in order to enhance children's development of positive self-perceptions, coaches and parents in youth sport need to structure sport programs that provide mastery experiences, provide positive feedback, and emphasize effort. Interestingly, this is comparable to what parents reported coaches and parents could do to promote PYD through sport. Proximal processes within youth sport including the interpersonal interactions with coaches and parents have been shown to influence children's self-perceptions and motivation which can impact the developmental outcomes associated with youth sport participation (Garcia Bengoechea & Johnson, 2001).

Previous developmental research on self-perceptions has focused on children aged 8 to 14 years. It has been assumed children prior to 8 years old do not have the cognitive capability to articulate self-concept (Horn, 1999). As Horn (2004) stated "we have very little developmentally based research on the physical self-perceptions of children in the early and middle childhood years" (p. 130). The fact that parents thought exploration in sport enabled children to develop positive self-perceptions makes an important contribution to our understanding of self-perception. It also suggest that organized sport programs with a mastery environment and emphasis on effort can be an importance context for children to develop positive self-perceptions, particularly during early to middle early childhood. Future research should explore processes that lead to young children's development of self-perceptions within the sport domain.

Parents emphasized that coaches needed to make sport a fun and enjoyable experience for their children. They thought coaches did this by creating a positive and safe environment. This is a key feature of frameworks designed to foster PYD through sport (Côté et al., 2008; Petitpas et al., 2005). Parents also thought coaches should focus on skill development and place minimal emphasis on competition. Providing skill building opportunities is another component of sport programs structured to promote PYD (Côté et al., 2008; Petitpas et al., 2005). A non-competitive atmosphere was reported to be important because it allowed children to focus on developing their skills rather than being worried about winning and losing. This is supported by previous research that highlights the importance of coaches creating a mastery motivational climate that promotes learning, effort and self-improvement (Weiss & Williams, 2004). This type of environment encourages children to explore their abilities and consequently contributes to children gaining competence in their skills.

The ways in which parents thought coaches could contribute to their children's PYD are parallel to several sources of sport enjoyment reported by youth athletes (e.g., perceived competence, mastery-oriented learning environment; McCarthy & Jones, 2007). Therefore, the environment coaches create can influence children's self-perceptions and the subsequent benefits associated with sport participation. It may also have implications for children's enjoyment and continued involvement in organized sport.

Previous research has suggested coaches are not only responsible for physical skill development but they also have a role in promoting the

development of life skills including team work and respect (Gould et al., 2006). However, parents in this study did not comment on the role of coaches in specifically teaching life skills in sport programs. The current findings actually revealed that parents supported the development of these benefits/life skills by reinforcing certain skills at home (e.g., teamwork and responsibility). This is a finding worth mentioning because it shows that parents can play a significant role in fostering life skills arising from the situations their children encounter in sport. To build on these findings, future research should examine the actual ways in which parents reinforce the life skills learned through sport at home to better understand *how* parents contribute to PYD through sport.

It appeared that parents thought their attitude toward sport would dictate their children's attitudes and overall experience. Research examining the relationship between parents' expectations and values in sport and children's beliefs has consistently found that children's competence perceptions are significantly related to their parents' perceptions of their competencies (see Brustad & Partridge, 2002 for a review). This is particularly important throughout the initial years of sport involvement (i.e., 5 to 8 years of age) because children rely heavily on parents' feedback as a main source of information for assessing their competence and it is during this age that physical competencies mainly constitute children's self-worth (Harter, 1999). As such, it is important that parents emphasize the positive value of sport and maintain realistic expectations for their children's abilities in sport because of the significant impact it has on children's self-perceptions.

Previous research has revealed gender differences between the perceptions and attitudes of mothers and fathers toward youth sport participation. For example, Wuerth, Lee, and Alfermann (2004) found mothers tend to feel more responsible for child care and family life whereas fathers tend to give more sport-specific feedback to their children and push them to train harder. However, in the current study there were no apparent differences between the views of mothers and fathers (see Table 1). Qualitative research approaches are generally not very well suited to establishing between-group differences, but as reflected by Table 1, there was a very high level of consistency in the benefits of sport reported by mothers and fathers across all themes. A potential explanation as to why there were no apparent gender differences could be due to the age of the participants' children. Although gender stereotypes develop in childhood, they generally intensify as children get older and are most prominent in adolescence (Shaffer et al., 2010). As such, one may expect to find differences in perceived benefits of sport between mothers and fathers of older children and adolescents. It is also plausible that no differences were apparent because of the nature of the program the participants were recruited from. It was a non-competitive, multi-sport program for boys and girls aged 5-8 years with a focus on skill development which could imply that parents just wanted their children to learn basic sport skills and have fun being active. It would be interesting to examine differences between mothers and fathers who enrol their young children in a competitive single-sport program.

This current study examined benefits children gained through sport and did not compare perceived benefits gained between sons and daughters. Parents may view different gains for their children though. For example, in adolescence, parents are more likely to encourage their sons to be physically active and participate in sports than they are to encourage their daughters (Brustad, 1993). Future research comparing differences in parents' perceptions of PYD for daughters versus sons may reveal gender differences in the types of benefits children gain through sport. These findings could be useful in the development of sport programs specific to young males or young females that target particular PYD outcomes depending on the perceived benefits for that gender.

Although parents' perceptions of their children's PYD through sport were examined in this study, an important step for future research would involve triangulating parents' data with measures obtained from children. Given that children are competent and capable participants in qualitative research (Kirk, 2007), appropriate 'child-friendly' data collection techniques such as interviews as well as observational measures of children's behaviors in sport may provide ways of advancing research in this area.

The range of positive benefits reported in this study should be viewed in light of the fact that the participants had all voluntarily registered their children in a sport program. It is perhaps not surprising that these parents had positive views about the benefits of sport. In a study comparing views of parents of children who were sport participants versus non-participants, Jambor (1999) found that parents of participants perceived more benefits to sport participation than parents of non-

participants. Hence, the potential for sampling bias in the current study should be considered.

Strengths of this study were that the sample size appeared sufficiently large to produce an adequate level of data saturation. Obtaining a balanced sample of mothers and fathers allowed for some assessment of potential gender differences (although, as noted above, the qualitative approach used was not ideal for assessing group differences and none were observed). Other methodological strengths included a rigorous approach to the development of the interview guide, use of a reflexive journal during the research process, and engagement of 17 parents in a member-checking protocol.

This study provides some applied implications for the delivery of sport programs for young children. By establishing parents' views about the perceived benefits of sport participation the findings offer suggestions for program structure and delivery. It appears that sport programs should be tailored toward providing children with opportunities to explore their abilities and engage in a range of different types of activities. Parents and coaches should work together to create a fun learning environment with an emphasis on skill development rather than competition. Parents did not appear to think that coaches specifically taught their children life skills. However previous research suggests the important role coaches have in fostering PYD through sport. Hence, in the future, it may be important to design sport programs that include a specific focus on teaching life skills and promoting specific social, physical, and personal benefits in addition to providing opportunities for learning a range of sport skills. With these

characteristics considered, organized sport programs for young children can be an optimal context for PYD.

Conclusion

The results from this study suggest that young children develop positive self-perceptions through the opportunities they have to explore their capabilities in organized sport program. Parents also perceived that young children gain many of the same benefits of sport as adolescents. These findings add to the growing body of literature on PYD through sport. Coaches and parents played an important role in creating positive sport environments that foster PYD. In order to promote PYD through sport for young children, organized sport programs need to focus on enjoyment and skill development, minimize competition, and perhaps also include direct instructions of certain life skills. By providing enjoyable sport experiences for young children, sport can continue to contribute to children's development of positive self-perceptions and the social, physical, and personal benefits gained through sport.

REFERENCES

Active Healthy Kids Canada. (2010). *Healthy habits start earlier than you think. The Active Healthy Kids Canada 2010 report card on physical activity for children and youth.* Toronto: Active Healthy Kids Canada.

Active Healthy Kids Canada. (2011). *Don't let this be the most physical activity our kids get after school. The Active Healthy Kids Canada 2011 report card on physical activity for children and youth.* Toronto: Active Healthy Kids Canada.

Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 11*, 56-95. Retrieved from: http://jea.sagepub.com/content/by/year

Benson, P. L. (1997). *All kids are our kids: What communities must do to raise caring and responsible children and adolescents.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist, 32*, 513-531. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.32.7.513

Bronfenbrenner, U. (2001). The bioecological theory of human development. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International encyclopaedia of the social and behavioural sciences* (Vol. 10, pp. 6963-6970). New York: Elsevier.

Bronfenbrenner, U. & Morris, P. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In R. M. Lerner (Vol. Ed.), & W. Damon (Series. Ed.),

Handbook of child psychology Vol 1: Theoretical models of human development (5th ed., pp.). New York: Wiley.

Brustad, R. J. (1993). Who will go out and play? Parental and psychological influences on children's attraction to physical activity. *Pediatric Exercise Science, 5*, 210-223. Retrieved from: http://hk.humankinetics.com/PES/journalAbout.cfm

Brustad, R. J. & Partridge, J. A. (2002). Parental and peer influence on children's psychosocial development through sport. In F. L. Smoll, & R. E. Smith (Eds.,), *Children and youth in sport: A biopsychosocial perspective* (2nd ed., pp. 187-210). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Camiré, M., Trudel, P., & Forneris, T. (2009a). High school athletes' perspectives on support, communication, negotiation and life skill development. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 1,* 72-88. doi:10.1080/19398440802673275

Camiré, M., Trudel, P., & Forneris, T. (2009b). Parents' perspectives on the practice of high school sport in a Canadian context. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 1,* 239-257. doi:10.1080/1939844 0903192324

Camiré, M., & Trudel, P., (2010). High school athletes' perspectives on character development through sport participation. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy, 15,* 193-207. doi:10.1080/17408980902877617

Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (2010). *The 2009-10 Canadian Physical Activity Levels Among Youth (CANPLAY) survey*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Côté, J. (1999). The influence of the family in the development of talent in sport. *The Sport Psychologist, 13,* 395- 417. Retrieved from: http://hk.humankinetics.com/tsp/journalAbout.cfm

Côté, J., & Fraser-Thomas, J. (2007). Youth involvement in sport. In P. R. E. Crocker (Ed.), *Sport and exercise psychology: A Canadian perspective* (pp. 266-294). Toronto: Pearson.

Côté, J., Strachan, L., & Fraser-Thomas, J (2008). Participation, personal development and performance through sport. In N. L Holt (Ed.), *Positive youth development through sport* (pp. 34-45). New York: Routledge.

Côté, J., Horton, S., MacDonald, D., & Wilkes, S. (2009). The benefits of sampling sports during childhood. *Physical and Health Education, Winter,* 6-11. Retrieved from: http://www.cahperd.ca/eng/journal/index.cfm

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research designs: Choosing among five approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Damon, W. (2004). What is positive youth development? *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 591,* 13-24. doi:10.1177/0002716203260092

Danish, S., Taylor, T., Hodge, K., & Heke, I. (2004). Enhancing youth development through sport. *World Leisure Journal, 46*, 38-49. Retrieved from: http://www.worldleisure.org/about/publications/world_leisure_journal/electronic_version.php

Darling, N., & Steinberg, L. (1993). Parenting style as context: An integrative model. *Psychological Bulletin, 113,* 395-417. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.113.3.487

Dworkin, J. B., Larson, R., & Hansen, D. (2003). Adolescents' accounts of growth experiences in youth activities. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *32*, 17-26. doi:10.1023/A:1021076222321

Dwyer, T., Sallis, J. F., Blizzard, L., Lazarus, R., & Dean, K. (2001). Relation of academic performance to physical activity and fitness in children. *Pediatric Exercise Science, 13,* 225-238. Retrieved from: http://journals.humankinetics.com/pes-back-issues

Eccles, J. S., Barber, B. L., Stone, M., & Hunt, J. (2003). Extracurricular activities and adolescent development. *Journal of Social Issues, 59,* 965-889. doi:10.1046/j.0022-4537.2003.00095.x

Ferrari, T. M., Hogue, C. A., & Scheer, S. D., (2004). Parents' perceptions of life skills development in the 4-H Cloverbud program. *Journal of Extension, 42*(3). Retrieved from: http://www.joe.org/journal-archive.php

Fraser-Thomas, J. & Côté, J. (2009). Understanding adolescents' positive and negative developmental experiences in sport. *The Sport Psychologist,*

23, 3-23. Retrieved from: http://hk.humankinetics.com/tsp /journalAbout.cfm

Fraser-Thomas, J., Côté, J., & Deakin, J. (2005). Youth sport programs: An avenue to foster positive youth development. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy, 10,* 19-40. doi:10.1080/1740898042000334890

Fredricks, J. A., & Eccles, J. S. (2004). Parental influences on youth involvement in sports. In M. R. Weiss (Ed.), *Developmental sport and exercise psychology: A lifespan perspective* (pp. 145-164). Morgantown, MV: Fitness Information Technology.

Garcia Bengoechea, E. & Johnson, G. M. (2001). Ecological systems theory and children's development in sport: Toward a process-person-context-time research paradigm. *Avante, 7*(1), 20-31. Retrieved from: http://www.cahperd.ca/e/avante/articlelist_ avante.htm

Garst, B. A., & Bruce, F. A. (2003). Identifying 4-H camping outcomes using a standardized evaluation process across multiple 4-H educational centers. *Journal of Extension, 41*(3). Retrieved from: http://www.joe.org/journal-archive.php

Gould D., Chung, Y., Smith, P., & White, J. (2006). Future directions in coaching life skills: Understanding high school coaches' views and needs. *Athletic Insight, 8*(3)*,* 28-38. Retrieved from: http://www.athleticinsight.com/

Gould, D., Collins, K., Lauer, L., & Chung, Y. (2007). Coaching life skills through football: A study of award winning high school coaches. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 19,* 16-37. doi:10.1080/10413200601113786

Green, C. B., & Chalip, L. (1998). Antecedents and consequences of parental purchase decision involvement to youth sport. *Leisure Studies, 20,* 95-109. doi:10.1080/01490409809512268

Guevremont, A., Findlay, A., & Kohen, D. (2008). Organized extracurricular activities of Canadian children and youth. *Health Reports, 19,* 65-69. Retrieved from: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/4060784-eng.htm

Hamilton, S. F., Hamilton, M. A. & Pittman, K. (2004) Principles for youth development. In S. F. Hamilton & M. A. Hamilton (Eds.), *The youth development handbook: Coming of age in American communities* (pp. 3-22). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hansen, D. M., Larson, R. W., & Dworkin, J. B. (2003). What adolescents learn in organized youth activities: A survey of self-reported developmental experiences. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 13,* 25-55. doi:10.1111/1532-7795.1301006

Harter, S. (1999). *The construction of self.* New York: Guildford Press.

Hellstedt, J. C. (1987). The coach/parent/athlete relationship. *The Sport Psychologist, 1*, 151-160. Retrieved from: http://hk.humankinetics.com/tsp/journalAbout.cfm

Henderson, K. A., Scheuler Whitaker, L., Bialeschki, M. D., Scanlin, M. M., & Thurber, C. (2007). Summer camp experiences: Parental perceptions of youth development outcomes. *Journal of Family Issues, 28*, 987-1007. doi:10.1177/0192513X07301428

Holt, N. L. (2008). *Positive youth development through sport*. New York: Routledge.

Holt, N. L., Tamminen, K. A., Tink, L. N., & Black, D. E. (2009a). An interpretive analysis of life skills associated with sport participation. *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise 1,* 160-175 .doi:10.1080/19398440902909017

Holt, N. L., Tamminen, K. A., Black, D. E., Mandigo, J. L., & Fox, K. R. (2009b). Youth sport parenting styles and practices. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 31,* 37-59. Retrieved from: http://journals. humankinetics.com/jsep-back-issues

Holt, N. L., Tink, L. N., Mandigo, J. L., & Fox, K. R. (2008). Do youth learn life skills through their involvement in high school sport? A case study. *Canadian Journal of Education, 31*(2), 281-304. Retrieved from: http://www.csse-scee.ca/CJE/

Horn, T. S. (2004). Developmental perspectives on self-perceptions in children and adolescents. In M. R. Weiss (Ed.), *Developmental sport and exercise psychology: A lifespan perspective* (pp. 101-144). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology

Horn, T. S., & Horn, J. L. (2007). Family influences on children's sport and physical activity participation, behavior, and psychosocial responses. In G. Tenenbaum & R. C. Eklund (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology* (3rd ed, pp. 685-711). New York: Wiley.

Ifedi, F. (2008). *Sport participation in Canada, 2005.* Culture, tourism and the centre for education studies. Vol. Catalogue no. 81-595-MIE – No. 060: Statistics Canada; 2008.

Jambor, E. A. (1999). Parents as children's socializing agents in youth soccer. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 22*(3), 350-359. Retrieved from: http://www.accessmylibrary.com/archive/2171-journal-of-sport-behavior.html

Jones, M. I., Dunn, J. G. H., Holt, N. L., Sullivan, P. J., & Bloom, G. A. (in press). Exploring the '5Cs' of positive youth development in sport. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 34*(3).

Kirk, S. (2007). Methodological and ethical issues in conducting qualitative research with children and young people: A literature review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 44,* 1250-1260. doi:10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2006.08.015

Kjønniksen, L., Anderssen, N., & Wold, B. (2009). Organized youth sport as a predictor of physical activity in adulthood. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports, 19,* 646-654. doi:10.1111/j.1600-0838.2008.00850.x

Knight, C. J., Boden, C. M., & Holt, N. L., (2010). Junior tennis players' preferences for parental behaviors. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *22*, 377-391. doi:10.1080/10413200.2010.495324

Knight, C. J., Neely, K. C., Holt, N. L. (2011). Parental involvement in team sports: How do female athletes want parents to behave? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 23,* 76-92. doi:10.1080/10413200.2010.525589

Larson, R. W., Hansen, D. M., & Moneta, G. (2006). Differing profiles of developmental experiences across types of organized youth activities. *Developmental Psychology, 42*, 849-863. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.42.5.849

Lerner, R. M., Lerner, J. V., Almerigi, J., Theokas, C., Naudeau, S., Gestsdottir, S., et al. (2005). Positive youth development, participation in community youth development programs, and community contributions of fifth-grade adolescents: Findings from the first wave of the 4-H Study on Positive Youth Development. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 25*, 17-71. Retrieved from: http://jea.sagepub.com/content/by/year

McCarthy, P. J., & Jones, M. V. (2007). A qualitative study of sport enjoyment in the sampling years. *The Sport Psychologist, 21*, 400-416. Retrieved from http://hk.humankinetics.com/tsp/journalAbout.cfm

Marsh, H. W., & Kleitman, S. (2003). School athletic participation: mostly gain with little pain. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 25,* 205-228. Retrieved from: http://journals.humankinetics.com/jsep-back-issues

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research.* Washington: The Falmer Press.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. London: Sage.

Moore, L. L., Lombardi, D. A., White, M. J., Campbell, J. L., Oliveria, S. A., & Ellison, R. C. (1991). Influence of parents' physical activity level son activity levels of young children. *Journal of Pediatrics, 118*(2), 215-219.

Morse, J. M. (1995). The significance of saturation. *Qualitative Health Research, 5,* 147-149. doi:10.1177/104973239500500201

Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olsen, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 1*(2), 1-8. Retrieved from: http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/index

National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development.* Washington: National Academy Press.

Neely, K. C., Ball, G. D. C., Knight, C. J., Ambler, K. A., Newton, A. S., Spence, J. C., & Holt, N. L. (April, 2011). *Changes and challenges faced by families in a pediatric weight management intervention: A preliminary analysis*. Poster presentation at the 2nd National Obesity Summit, Montreal, QC.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Petitpas, A. J., Cornelius, A. F., Van Raalte, J. L, & Jones, T. (2005). A framework for planning youth sport programs that foster psychosocial

development. *The Sport Psychologist, 19,* 63-80. Retrieved from: http://hk.humankinetics.com/tsp/journalAbout.cfm

Phelps, E., Zimmerman, S., Warren, A. E. A., Jelicic, H., von Eye, A., & Lerner, R. M. (2009). The structure and developmental course of Positive Youth Development (PYD) in early adolescence: Implications for theory and practice. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 30,* 571-584. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2009.06.003

Richardson, L. (1994). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 516-529). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data (*2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sandelowski, M. (1993). Theory unmasked: the uses and quises of theory in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing & Health, 16,* 213-218. doi:10.1002/nur.4770160308

Search Institute. (2011). *40 developmental assets for children grades K-3*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.

Shaffer, D. R., Kipp, K., Wood, E., & Willoughby, T. (2010). *Developmental psychology: Childhood and adolescence* (3rd Canadian ed.). Toronto: Nelson Education.

Shields M. (2006). Overweight and obesity among children and youth. *Health Reports, 17*(3), 27-42. Retrieved from: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=82-003-x&CHROPG=1&lang=eng

Shields, D. L., Bredemeier, B. L., LaVoi, N. M., & Power, F.C. (2005). The sport behavior of youth parent and coaches. *Journal of Research in Character Education, 3*, 43-59. Retrieved from: http://www.encyclopedia.com /Journal+of+Research+in+Character+Education/publications.

Sparkes, A. C. (1992). The paradigm debate: an extended review and a celebration of difference. In A. C. Sparkes (Ed.), *Research in physical education and sport* (pp. 9-60). Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press.

Stein, G. L., Raedeke, T. D., & Glenn, S. D. (1999). Children's perceptions of parent sport involvement: It's not how much, but to what degree that's important. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 22*(4), 591-601. Retrieved from: http://www.accessmylibrary.com/archive/2171-journal-of-sport-behavior.html

Thorne, S. (2008). *Interpretive description.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Thorne, S., Reimer Kirkham, S., & MacDonald-Emes, J. (1997). Interpretive description: A non-categorical qualitative alternative for developing nursing knowledge. *Research in Nursing & Health, 20,* 169–177. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-240X(199704)20:2<169:AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-1

Thorne, S., Reimer Kirkham, S., & O'Flynn-Magee, K. (2004). The analytic challenge in interpretive description. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(1), 1-21. Retrieved from: http://ejournals.library.ualberta. ca/index.php/IJQM/index

Tremblay, M. S., Shields, M., Laviolette, M., Craig, C. L., Janssen, I., Connor Gorber, S. (2010). Fitness of Canadian children and youth: Results from

the 2007-2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey. *Health Reports, 21*(1), 1-14. Retrieved from: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=82-003-x&CHROPG=1&lang=eng

Waterman, A. S. (1984). Identity formation: discovery or creation? *Journal of Early Adolescence, 4,* 329-341. Retrieved from: http://jea.sagepub.com/content/by/year

Weiss, M. R., & Duncan, S. C. (1992). The relationship between physical competence and peer acceptance in the context of children's sport participation. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 14,* 177-191. Retrieved from: http://journals.humankinetics.com/jsep-back-issues

Weiss, M.R., & Williams, L. (2004). The why of youth sport involvement: A developmental perspective on motivational processes. In M. R. Weiss (Ed.), *Developmental sport and exercise psychology: A lifespan perspective* (pp. 223–268). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.

Welk, G. J., Wood, K. & Morss, G. (2003). Parental influences on physical activity in children: An exploration of potential mechanisms. *Pediatric Exercise Science 15,* 19-33. Retrieved from: http://hk.humankinetics.com/PES/journalAbout.cfm

Wiersma, L. D., & Fifer, A. M. (2008). "The schedule has been tough but we think it's worth it": The joys, challenges, and recommendations of youth sport parents. *Journal of Leisure Research, 40*, 505-530. Retrieved from http://www.rpts.tamu.edu/journals/JLR/

World Health Organization. (1999). *Partners in life skills education.* Geneva: Department of Mental Health: Retrieved from: http://www.who.int/mental_health /media/en /30.pdf

Wuerth, S., Lee, M. J., & Alfermann, D. (2004). Parental involvement and athletes' career in youth sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 5,* 21-33. doi: 10.1016/S1469-0292(02)00047-X

APPENDICES

Appendix 1.0: Recruitment Poster

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SPORT

Would you like to share your thoughts about your child's experiences in organized youth sport?

WHAT: This research study is going to examine parents' perceptions of their children's experiences in organized youth sport programs.

WHY: We want to find out why you chose to put your child into an organized sport program and what benefits you think your child may gain from sport.

WHO: Parents of children who are: (a) 5 – 8 years old and (b) currently involved in an organized sport program.

WHERE: Your Sportball location OR Child & Adolescent Sport & Activity Lab, University of Alberta

TIME: 1 individual interview
Interview length: approximately 45 minutes

DETAILS:
Parents of children 5 – 8 years old are being recruited to participate in this study. We want to ask parents about their perceptions of positive youth development through sport. We want to learn about the personal growth your child experiences and the life skills you think your child develops through their involvement in organized sport programs. Your input will help us understand the benefits children gain from their experience in sport.

Interested in participating?

Please contact **Kacey Neely** (Master's Student):
neely@ualberta.ca or 780-492-5644

CASA

Appendix 2.0: Information Letter

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
E488 Van Vliet Centre
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H9

INFORMATION LETTER

Study Title: **Parents' Perceptions of Positive Youth Development Through Sport**

Investigator	Co-Investigators
Kacey Neely, MA Student Child & Adolescent Sport & Activity Lab Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta Tel: (780) 492-5644 E-mail: neely@ualberta.ca	Dr. Nicholas L. Holt Associate Professor Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta Tel (780) 492-7386 E-mail: nicholas.holt@ualberta.ca

Dear Parent,

We are conducting a study to examine parents' perceptions of their children's experiences in organized youth sport programs (i.e., Sportball). **We want to find out why you chose to put your child into an organized sport program and what benefits you think your child may gain from sport.** This study is being conducted by Kacey Neely (under the supervision of Dr. Nicholas Holt) and is part of Kacey's Master's degree work. The study is separate from the Sportball program. Your participation is voluntary and will have no influence on your child's involvement in Sportball.

If you agree to participate you will complete one interview. During the interview we will ask you for your views about your child's involvement in organized sport. The interviews will be audio-taped. The **total time commitment is a maximum of 60 minutes.** We will e-mail you a summary of the findings and you can e-mail us back with your comments or we will have a follow-up telephone interview that will last no more than 10 minutes. The phone interview will not be recorded.

Benefits
Participating in this study may help you to recognize what life skills your child may learn from participating in organized sport. Additionally, the information gathered will be useful to help youth sport coaches and programmers understand more about how to promote positive development through children's participation in sport.

Risks
The risks associated with this study are minimal. If any interview questions make you feel uncomfortable, you can choose not to answer them. You can ask for the tape recorder to be switched off at any time. You may also ask for a copy of your interview record at any time. Any information that you do not wish to be included will be removed.

Anonymity and Confidentiality
When the audio files from the interviews are typed up we will remove your name (and assign you a number) and remove any personal information. Any information that you provide remains

confidential. Furthermore, all information will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office at the University of Alberta. Only members of the research team will have access to this information. The audio tapes will be kept for five years post publication, after which they will be destroyed.

Freedom to Withdraw

We would like you to help us with this study, but it is completely voluntary. This means that you do not have to participate in the study. There will be no negative consequences if you do not want to participate. Your information will be removed from the study with no consequences if you decide later that you do not want to participate. If you wish to withdraw, please contact the person who interviewed you within six weeks from the day you completed the interview (her e-mail address is provided at the top of this letter).

If you have concerns about this study, you may contact Dr. Kelvin Jones, who is the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee for the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta (780-492-0302 or kelvin.jones@ualberta.ca). Dr. Jones has no direct involvement in the study.

Sincerely,

Kacey Neely

Appendix 3.0: Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
E488 Van Vliet Centre
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H9

INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: **Parents' Perceptions of Positive Youth Development Through Sport**

Investigator	Co-Investigator
Kacey Neely, MA Student Child & Adolescent Sport & Activity Lab Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta Tel: (780) 492-5644 E-mail: neely@ualberta.ca	Dr. Nicholas L. Holt Associate Professor Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta Tel (780) 492-7386 E-mail: nick.holt@ualberta.ca

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study within six weeks from the day you completed the interview, without consequence, and that your information will be withdrawn at your request?	Yes	No
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? Do you understand who will have access to your information?	Yes	No

I agree to take part in this study:

_____ ___ _____
Signature of Research Participant Date

Please provide your contact information for study follow-up. We would like to email you a summary of the findings and find out if our interpretations are an accurate representation of your perceptions of your child's positive youth development through sport.

E-mail:_____

Telephone #:_____

Appendix 4.0: Final Interview Guide

Parents' Perceptions of PYD through Sport: Interview Guide

I am doing a study to find out about parents' perceptions of the benefits children gain through participation in sport. Your participation is voluntary and you can leave at any time. If you do not want to answer a specific question, that is fine. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. You can talk about Sportball or other sport programs you child has been involved in. I am interested in your perceptions of your child's experiences in youth sport.

1. Introduction
   - Please describe your previous sport involvement.
   - Please describe your current sport involvement.
   - What do you value in sport for yourself?

2. Child's Sport Participation
   - What organized youth sport programs is your child currently involved in?
   - Has he/she participated in other programs? (probe for details)
   - Why did you sign your child up for [program stated]?

3. Benefits Associated with Sport
   - What are the benefits of organized youth sport programs at this age?
   - What can sport teach children?
   - What do you think your child has learned through their participation in [program stated]? (probe)
   - How do you think participation in sport influences other areas of your child's life? (probe for details)
   - Have you noticed any changes in your child in other areas of their lives that may be a result of participating in sport?

4. Factors Associated with PYD
   - What do you think contributes to your child gaining the benefits of sport? (probe for specific factors)
   - How do you think coaches influence your child's development in sport?
   - What could limit children from gaining the benefits of sport? (probe)

5. Parent's Roles
   - How would you describe your general approach to parenting?
   - Do you and your husband/wife parent the same?
   - Are there times when you try to reinforce the skills you child learns in sport at home? (probe what skills and how)
   - How do parents contribute to positive/negative experiences in sport

6. Summary
    - What do you think can be done to increase kids' experiences in sport programs?
    - What do you want your kid to get out of being in sport?
    - Is there anything else you would like to add about your child's experiences in sport?