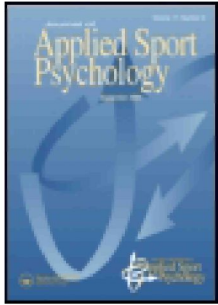


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Positive Youth Development in Swimming: Clarification and Consensus of Key

Psychosocial Assets

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain a more cohesive understanding of the assets considered necessary to develop in young swimmers to ensure both individual and sport specific development. This two stage study involved (a) a content analysis of key papers to develop a list of both psychosocial skills for performance enhancement and assets associated with positive youth development, and (b) in-depth interviews involving ten expert swim coaches, practitioners and youth sport scholars. Five higher order categories containing seventeen individual assets emerged. These results are discussed in relation to both existing models of positive youth development and implications for coaches, practitioners and parents when considering the psychosocial development of young British swimmers.

As a predominantly North American concept, positive youth development researchers view “youth as resources to be developed rather than as problems to be managed” (Roth & Brooks-

Gunn, 2003, p.94) and signals a reversal from the traditional deficit approach in the treatment of adolescent social issues and problems. Positive youth development promotes positive psychosocial development by encouraging social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive qualities in children and young people through social and environmental interactions (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). Turning to sport as a context for positive youth development, researchers have reported on the development of numerous positive characteristics in individuals such as increased self-awareness, goal setting, time management, and emotional regulation skills (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003), alongside positive peer relationships, leadership skills, and a sense of initiative (Côté & Hay, 2002). Leisure time activities are considered integral to engaging, motivating, and developing resilience in young people, all of which significantly impact upon how individuals cope in later life (HM Treasury, 2007). However, there is also evidence of negative outcomes associated with sport; such as, increased alcohol consumption, burnout, and increased aggression through low levels of moral reasoning (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Loehr, 1996; Shields & Bredemeier, 2001).

It is clear that the context within which positive development occurs needs to be clearly structured to develop these assets. To achieve this objective, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (NRCIM, 2004) proposed eight features of positive developmental settings; i.e., (a) physical and psychological safety, (b) appropriate structure, (c) supportive relationships, (d) opportunities to belong, (e) positive social norms, (f) support for efficacy and mattering, (g) opportunities for skill building, and (h) integration of family, school, and community efforts.

Despite existing research reinforcing the important, if not equivocal, role of sport in youth development (e.g., Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006), the application of psychosocial skill development in competitive sport contexts in the United Kingdom (UK) remains limited. Beyond the relative infancy of developmental youth sport psychology programs within UK sport federations, a closer examination of the literature provides some explanation as to why this may be the case. There appears to be a lack of clarity around the fundamental assets associated with positive youth development and it is this specific issue within the context of UK sport that forms the rationale for the present study.

Clarifying the Assets

In recent years, several frameworks (e.g., Benson et al., 1998; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000) have been created that aim to define the important assets of positive youth development, each utilizing a variety of terms to describe seemingly similar constructs. The following points serve to clarify just how diverse (yet associated) these frameworks have become within the youth development literature.

Benson and colleagues (1998) describe their 40 developmental assets comprised of both internal and external assets. Internal assets make up the categories of commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity that are considered to be gradually developed over time through internal processes of self-regulation. External assets, conversely, can be aligned to the categories of social support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and also constructive use of time (i.e., assets that can be reinforced and developed by the community within which young people reside). Later, Lerner et al., (2000) proposed the 5Cs of

competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring, allowing for the formation of a sixth C, contribution, when these 5Cs are actualized within the individual.

More recently, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), has identified five core competencies that positively contribute to the development of young people, namely, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004). In addition, Catalano et al., (2004), in their review of positive youth development programs, identified fifteen constructs that were targeted for development. These were stated as (a) bonding, (b) resilience, (c) social competence, (d) emotional competence, (e) cognitive competence, (f) behavioral competence, (g) moral competence, (h) self-determination, (i) spirituality, (j) self-efficacy, (k) clear and positive identity, (l) belief in the future, (m) recognition for positive behavior, (n) opportunities for prosocial involvement, and (o) prosocial norms.

When turning to the developmental literature in youth sport, this confusion is heightened by the introduction of sport-specific assets considered important to be successful in this domain. For example, Harwood (2008) recently employed an alternative 5Cs framework utilizing the concepts of commitment, communication, concentration, control, and confidence and successfully integrated coaching behaviors to develop these assets into the practice of professional youth soccer coaches. These assets were proposed to equip players with those positive psychosocial assets that would assist both soccer performance and personal development in an academy setting. Prior to this, Orlick and Partington's (1988) findings were further developed by Abbott and Collins (2004) and more recently by Bailey et al. (2009) and MacNamara, Button, and Collins (2010a, 2010b) who all highlight the importance of goal

setting, realistic performance evaluations, imagery, planning and organizational skills, commitment, competitiveness, focus and distraction control, coping with pressure, self-awareness, and self-belief. Further relevant developmental constructs forwarded by academic scholars within sport have included initiative, respect, leadership, and teamwork (Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008), discipline, commitment, and resilience (Holt & Dunn, 2004), and cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and social control (Côté, 2002).

Research investigating positive youth development through sport has become more prevalent in recent years, and once again has added further concepts to the equation. For example, Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton, and Ball (2012) considered how a physical education and sport program at an inner city school could in itself develop youth in a positive way. The main developmental outcomes supported here were empathy and social connections. Vella, Oades, and Crowe (2011) reported how coaches valued developing competence, confidence, connection, character, life skills, climate, positive affect, and positive psychological capacities in their athletes. However, when Jones, Dunn, Holt, Sullivan, and Bloom (2011) investigated the empirical validity of Lerner's 5Cs in a sample of 159 young athletes, they did not find support for the latent dimensionality of the 5Cs. Instead, only two factors representing pro-social values and confidence/competence emerged within this sport context.

In an attempt to clarify any growing confusion, Côté, Bruner, Erickson, Strachan, and Fraser-Thomas (2010) adopted a collapsed version of Lerner's 5Cs. Referred to as the 4Cs of coaching expertise, Côté et al. adopted the three constructs of competence, confidence, connection, and combined those of character and caring/compassion to form a fourth C of character/caring. These 4Cs were then integrated into Côté's previously developed Coaching

Model (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995) as the coach's objectives for athlete development. However, as with Lerner's original framework, the specific properties and developmental assets that actually comprise each C remains unclear and evidence of a scientifically rigorous content analysis of prior literature during the development of this framework appears to be absent. Hence, there appears to be no clear rationale underpinning the selection of these particular assets over all others, suggesting the need for a more in-depth approach to the formation of a collection of developmental assets for sport, or indeed, specific sports or cultures.

In summary, while research to-date has proven highly beneficial in advancing our understanding of youth development, the use of different models and terminology has made it difficult for readers to compare studies and to ascertain which assets are important when looking at both the general and sport-specific psychosocial development of young athletes.

The Cultural Context of Positive Youth Development

As has been previously mentioned, the context within which positive youth development occurs should be specifically structured to encourage the most positive development within our youth. However, within the United Kingdom, the implementation by many national governing bodies of sport of a long term athlete development plan has created a pathway structure that, in turn, has generated a highly structured and performance-focused environment. One such organization that has committed to such a development plan is the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) in England and the overarching national body - British Swimming. There are 1,151 registered swimming clubs in England alone, with 192,765 registered competitive swimmers (ASA, 2012). Within the UK, the majority of learn-to-swim programs are attached to

registered clubs, the smaller of which provide a feeder pathway to progressively larger club programs, allowing the committed swimmer to transition through talent, development, and then podium selection programs operated by British Swimming on behalf of UK Sport. Athletes are eligible to qualify for talent from the age of 12, and the most talented are selected from the annual National Age Group Championships. Although there is evidence to suggest that early specialization in particular sports can be beneficial (Côté, 1999), the exposure to such a performance-focused environment from a young age may have a detrimental effect on the positive benefits of sport participation which can be gained from a more developmental focus (Bailey et al., 2009; Côté, 1999; Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004). It may also mean that these sporting environments do not conform to the requirements of positive developmental settings as previously defined by NRCIM (2004). Taking account of these critical considerations and to advance the youth development literature in sport, the objective of this study was to review and synthesize the existing and diverse literature to offer a more concise conceptual understanding of the key assets considered important for the optimal psychological, social, and emotional development of young swimmers. By focusing specifically on competitive youth swimming, we investigated expert perceptions of the necessary psychosocial assets for British youth swimmers. This study is therefore comprised of two distinct and progressive stages, accounting for the importance of interpreting prior literature to appropriately facilitate a sport- and culture-specific position on positive youth development.

Method

Design

To achieve the objective of the study, an interpretative approach was taken in which the ontological position was one of constructivism and the epistemological approach was one of interpretivism. Ontologically, this approach recognizes that there are multiple realities and acknowledges researcher influence in the construction of the reported reality (Sparkes & Smith, 2009) while the epistemological assumption accepts subjective interaction with others in order to access the social realities that exist in people's minds and that, "the basis of truth, or trustworthiness, is social agreement" (Smith 1984, p.386). Underpinned by these ontological and epistemological assumptions, the study adopted an ideographic, hermeneutical, and dialectical methodology which directly influenced the methods used in each stage of the research (Sparkes, 1994). Stage 1 incorporated an in-depth review of youth development literature and a hierarchical content analysis that extracted and positioned all psychosocial terms mentioned. This stage was completed by employing Gerring's (1999) critical framework of concept formation to group the resultant terms into 17 key constructs. Specifically, the following eight criteria were used to determine the appropriate grouping of terms and the overall name for each psychosocial construct: (a) familiarity (how familiar the concept is to a lay or academic audience); (b) resonance (to what extent the term has meaning for the interpreter); (c) parsimony (the extent of brevity for the term and its list of defining attributes); (d) coherence (the sense in which the attributes that define the concept, as well as the characteristics that actually characterize the phenomena in question, 'belong' to one another); (e) differentiation (the extent that the attributes and characteristics are distinct from other concepts; how operationalizable the concepts are); (f) depth (how many accompanying properties are shared by the concept); (g) theoretical utility (how useful the concept is within its academic field); and (h) field utility (how

useful the concept is within a relevant and related area). Gerring surmises that concept formation is “a highly contextual process” (p. 366) during which there is a “tug of war among these eight desiderata... a set of choices which may have no single 'best' solution, but rather a range of more-or-less acceptable alternatives.” (p. 367). Within this study, each of these eight criteria were considered in their own right in regards to the final distribution of assets. Stage 2 of the study then utilized a dialectical methodology in which in-depth interviews were conducted with a panel of 10 British experts from both professional (coaches and practitioners) and academic fields within swimming and youth sport. These interviews enabled detailed insights into coach experiences within swimming, and academic’s perceptions surrounding the meaning and understanding of these concepts and terms in a swimming context. Specifically, these interviews were used to create a more reflexive process and to introduce the idea of a critical friend (Smith & Sparkes, 2006). The decision to base these interviews within a sport-specific context was taken to enhance the relevance of the resultant assets for the culture of competitive youth swimming.

Swimming was chosen as the sport within which to base this study due to the high participation numbers in the UK combined with the high level of investment that is required by athletes from a young age and, therefore, the increased potential for influence by coaches on athlete development. Swimmers report spending between 16 and 40 hr a week in training and report the same amount of contact time with their coaches (U.K. Sport, 2008). Hence, there is considerable opportunity for coaches to affect the development of youth swimmers and, thus, a responsibility for coaches to provide positive developmental experiences (Vella et al., 2011). Furthermore, the first author participated in an international career in swimming that spanned

over a decade and therefore brought in-depth knowledge about the specific psychological, social, and organizational demands of the sport. These intrinsic insights assisted in rapport building with interviewees and facilitated a richness of conversation with expert participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Stage One: Method and Results

Review of Literature and Concept Formation

Sources. Papers that were published in peer reviewed journals and in the English language prior to 2010 were included in the content analysis. These were found through three main sources: (a) electronic searches of online databases using MetaLib including ASSIA, Medline, PsychArticles, PsychInfo, SPORTDiscus, Web of Science, and Zetoc; (b) citations in papers identified by the electronic searches; and (c) manual searches of relevant sport and developmental psychology journals such as the Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, The Sport Psychologist, Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, Psychology of Sport and Exercise, and Child Development. Papers with a key theme of positive youth development, positive youth development through sport, life skills, youth sport development, psychological and psychosocial skill development, or youth sport coaching were identified and analyzed. These themes were used as the search terms for Stage 1. In addition to these research papers, thematic articles that constituted literature reviews of youth sport, published in the English language in recognized text books, and focused on developmental themes, were also included in the review. All papers that were returned from the search referred to youth development in either a general or sport context, and sampled or discussed athletes between the ages of nine and 18 years of age or coaches who

coached athletes within this age range. This search was conducted in 2010, hence the exclusion of papers beyond this date.

Initial analysis. Hard copies of all papers of interest were obtained and analyzed for mention of specific psychological, social, and/or emotional assets that were considered important for positive development in either everyday living or for successful performance. This analysis took the form of a hierarchical content analysis which “focuses on the *whats* of storytelling in such a way that it can assist researchers in developing general knowledge about the themes that make up the content of the stories [research] collected” (Smith & Sparkes, 2012). A summary table was developed detailing the asset name, literature definition, and the cited paper (available on request from the first author). Analysis of papers continued until theoretical saturation had been reached and no new terminology was forthcoming (Huberman & Miles, 2002). This resulted in the inclusion of 34 relevant, key papers which yielded 113 different terms used to describe constructs considered important for young people to acquire during their personal development. Twenty-eight of the 34 papers (82%) included in the review were North American in origin or involved participants of North American origin. Of the remaining six papers, four of these involved participants from the U.K. and one involved participants from Greece. The remaining paper reported on participants from both Canada and the UK.

Concept formation and peer debriefing. In line with Gerring’s (1999) critical framework of concept formation and in a fashion similar to that described by Gucciardi, Gordon, and Dimmock (2008), terms were compared and contrasted with each other to identify similarities and differences between terms. This interpretative approach, allowed the first author, as the interpreter, to group like terms together into similar constructs to form a more concise list

of assets considered important for positive youth development in a youth swimming environment. Definitions for these constructs were created using the existing literature definitions of the individual terms that combined to form the newly developed constructs, again utilizing criteria from Gerring's (1999) critical framework. The results of this part of the analysis were then disseminated to the second and third authors in their role as critical friends to individually study and separately respond to the first author in a separate reflexive process (Smith & Sparkes, 2006). These discussions resulted in a small number of changes to the concept groupings, with a further meeting to consider and finalize groupings and construct definitions before proceeding to the next phase of the enquiry. Stage 1 of the analysis resulted in the formation of 17 grouped constructs, the full results of which can be seen in Figure 1. These psychosocial groupings now formed the stimulus material for the Stage 2 contextualization process.

Stage Two: Method and Results

In-depth Expert Interviews

Ten experts were recruited to critically appraise the 17 grouped constructs, with specific reference to the asset names and properties, the definitions for use in youth swimming, and the applicability and accessibility of terminology used for coaches. Experts were purposively selected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) in line with meeting certain criteria, such as those used in Abraham, Collins, and Martindale (2006), including: (a) being recognized by peers as an expert in their chosen profession, (b) displaying evidence of having the ability to think critically, (c) engaging in a mentoring role to developing others, and (d) having had experience of, or currently working with, both elite and developmental athletes. All of the experts met at least three of the

criteria; and critical thinking ability was evidenced through the collaborative interview process with each expert, and in some cases additionally by academic qualifications (e.g., relevant peer-reviewed publications). Coach experts were also selected after observation of coaching behaviours, during which time coaches demonstrated a holistic approach to coaching and performance, aspects that were valued by the authors. Anecdotal swimmer reports were also considered in this regard.

Participants. Eleven participants were initially contacted by email and invited to participate in the study, with 10 agreeing and being available to take part. The participants were aged between 32 and 61 years of age ($M = 44.6$, $SD = 10.67$) and were comprised of eight male and two female participants. Four of the experts were swimming coaches with a combined total of 108 years of coaching practice, ranging between a minimum of 15 to a maximum of 35 years each. They had extensive knowledge of both age group and elite level swimming, with all coaches having developed Olympians through their respective age group programs in addition to coaching on British teams at international level. Two of the four were employed by British Swimming (the national governing body) in a coaching and development role while a third was working with current members of the British Swimming squad at the time of the research. The fourth coach was also a youth sport researcher and teacher. The remaining six participants comprised practitioners and academics with consulting experience in youth swimming or established research portfolios in youth sport and coaching. One of these academics was an ex-international swimmer who also provided extensive sport psychology support to international and age group swimmers (NB: this expert is not an author on this paper). A further

practitioner/academic had extensive experience in youth sport working alongside coaches and possessed extensive knowledge of coach education programs within the UK.

Interview procedure. Experts were given between seven and 21 days to critically review the concept groupings in detail, and were asked to note their thoughts on the 17 grouped constructs through the use of a questionnaire. Specifically, with the context of competitive youth swimming in mind, experts were asked to consider five key questions and note if they agreed, disagreed, or were unsure. The questions were: (a) does the overall name in bold accurately capture all those within the group? If not, please circle which other asset best describes the group or suggest an alternative group name; (b) do any assets need to be measured separately? If yes, please note which ones; (c) are all the assets in the correct groups? If not, please suggest which groups they should be in; (d) do you think the definition is accurate? If not, please suggest an alternative; and (e) do you think the definition is clear and will be easily understood by coaches? If not, please suggest an alternative. Participants were also informed that this study was directly focused on the sport of swimming and the instructions on the questionnaire asked participants, “when considering these assets, please ensure you are primarily reflecting on the individual in their athletic domain.” Individual interviews with the first author were then conducted with each expert to gain further insight into their thoughts and opinions on the concept groupings. These interviews ranged from 20-121 minutes in length ($M=61:00$) and were iterative in nature so that, as new ideas emerged during one interview, they were proposed to the next participant to encourage collaboration and aid social agreement (Smith, 1984).

Subsequent analysis. Individual interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, yielding 294 pages of data. Interview data was used in conjunction with questionnaire data to

form individual participant profiles in reference to both the concept groupings and the asset definitions. Participant profiles took the form of a table where one column included the original asset and definition and the other column matched this to the participant's response of what they felt the correct asset and definition for this group should be. Where there was disagreement between questionnaire and interview data, the latter took precedent as interviews provided the opportunity for discussion and hence increased clarification of thoughts and opinions.

Differences between the original and the participant-generated assets were highlighted on each profile before comparing and contrasting each profile, to note the assets that generated the most differences from the original. Decisions upon whether changes to concepts were necessary were primarily made on a quantitative basis; that is, if five or more participants indicated concern with, or suggested a change in concept grouping or definition, the concept and/or definition was adjusted accordingly. However, interpretative decisions were required on occasion to ensure academic and conceptual accuracy, and also accessibility of lay use for coaches, both of which were issues that were at the forefront of the final analysis. This analytical process allowed the development of a final grid, which summarized the final concept groupings of each psychosocial asset. Changes were made to the overarching asset names and many of the definitions; and these can be observed by viewing the similarities and differences between Figures 1 and 2.

Significantly, the majority of experts proposed the need to group the assets into higher order categories that represented key component areas within individual development. The names and groupings of these categories were alluded to by the experts, however, interpretive analysis by the first author was necessary to finalize the concept groupings.

A reflexive discussion with the second and third authors once again occurred at this stage of the analysis to further support the contextualization of the final concept groups. This process resulted in minor changes to higher order theme groupings and led to improved clarity within selective conceptual definitions. Following this, the interview transcripts and final concept grid were distributed to each expert for consideration before final follow-up interviews to evaluate participant satisfaction with the data analysis and to gain their critical appraisal of the final collective grouping of psychosocial assets. The final assets, their properties, consensual definitions, and higher order groupings are illustrated in Figure 2.

Contextual Insights from Coaches and Academics

Although the individual interviews with expert participants (C= Swim coach; A= Academic; SA= Swim/Academic expert) provided a means of contextualizing the assets, the interview process yielded a number of additional observations that served to challenge, inform, and empower the practical applicability of such a collection of assets in British swimming.

Accessible language. A consistent message from the swimming experts in this study was the need for conceptual language that was readily comprehensible to coaches. The necessity for this was highlighted by the fact that all three coaches in their first interviews commented on their current lack of understanding of the academic language used in sport psychology. For example, one coach stated, “not a lot of coaches have come from a high academic background. There’s a lot of coaches who have the intelligence and are very capable people but just haven’t come that route” (C3), thereby highlighting the need for a greater use of more generic and layman terms within both the applied and academic fields of sport psychology.

Blueprint for performance and development. In contrast to their earlier observations, however, a number of experts noted how the resultant assets served as the foundation for a blueprint to aid the psychological development of their swimmers. During his final member checking interview, Coach 3 suggested that the current assets offered a more understandable and relevant reference point for coaches.

It seems to be an on-going thing that people are not listening to what we're [coaches] saying... they're limiting their research because they're not making it fit with what's going on in the real world. Most of [what has gone in the past] is not understandable, it's not written in formats that are easily useable... what you've done in three sheets of paper is usually a whole book... and, yes, I guess you would wanna' expand on this but what you've got there as well is something pretty clear. You know, this is it, and then we'll train you how to use them, but this is it - not reams and reams of 'this is it' that you get lost in and then just don't have the slightest idea, and that's tended to be where this subject has been in the past, I think. (C3)

An academic added that the assets and their proposed structure successfully combines positive youth development and performance enhancement:

In a way which you can see how these things are useful for sport and for life and there isn't a kind of nasty junction between them which you do get on some life skills programs where you just think they've just kind of hacked it on, but actually all these things are framed in a way which coaches would think, 'ah yeah it would be really good if all my swimmers had these attributes' *and* they carry them outside of the sport context. (A5)

These sentiments were again echoed by another who commented that, “It makes a lot of sense... I can see how this is relevant to youth sport both from a psychosocial development, personal development, and well-being perspective, but also from a performance enhancement perspective” (SA2).

An additional coach passionately referred to his experiences of coach education and the potential value of this collection of assets to the system:

In the coach education [general coach education provided by national governing body] it was about energy systems, technique, and even when you come to psychology it's about goal setting, strategies, rehearsal but really there's these other areas that a coach needs to understand, operating in an organization like a club and relationships with parents, committee, and everything else, and with relationships with the swimmers... well, it's vital really... because... it's not just all about delivering sessions and delivering workouts... coaches rarely get to address these areas or receive information in these areas so I think it's important for them cos generally young coaches just learn by trial and error and they make mistakes as they go along... that upsets the dynamic of the whole team... maybe if they'd been aware of these areas then they might not have fallen into the trap in the first place so they've obviously not been made aware of these areas. (C2)

Redundancy of mental toughness. It is perhaps noteworthy that the construct of mental toughness was removed from the assets after the expert contextualization phase of the analysis. It was considered important to include the asset in the initial proposal to allow a full expert analysis and to ensure that expert feedback guided the development of the final asset groupings. Six participants, however, questioned its inclusion, with one coach stating his opinion that there are

large individual differences in how mental toughness is manifested in individuals that could cause measurement problems. This was an opinion echoed by an academic who also suggested that mental toughness was obsolete given the inclusion of all of the other assets, stating, “how would you measure it without reverting to those assets” (A1). In essence, the overwhelming view of the participants was that, if swimmers possessed all of the other assets and were able to utilize them effectively at the necessary time, then they would, by definition, be mentally tough. In this way, mental toughness was interpreted as a redundant asset. The final follow-up interviews were unanimous in confirming these above points.

Conflicting performance/development perspectives. A small number of assets did prompt some conflicting viewpoints from the coaching experts, mainly in relation to their perceived relevance at a high performance level of swimming. One coach queried the category of emotional competence and the assets within it, stating that “in a competitive swimming environment I’m not exactly sure if it’s relevant...but in life in general...you’d hope!” (C2). Coach 3’s beliefs about the value of emotional competence were entirely different: “This is way harder than some of the others...emotions are what screw us up all the time...to me, this [emotional self-regulation] is a massively undervalued asset” (C3).

There appeared to be a conflicting understanding of the role that emotions can play in a high performance environment. This conflict was highlighted within the discussion of another asset, that of conflict resolution. One coach asked “what does conflict resolution have to do as a part of performance sport?,” and he went on to say “it’s almost called ‘agree to disagree.’ You can hate your coach, have the conflict and do the mutual user thing and go on to perform great things...it doesn’t have to be happy to be successful”(C1).

Interestingly, when discussing the asset of cooperation, the same coach also noted “don’t delude yourself into thinking just because people can cooperate they’re gonna’ be good young people” (C1). Overall, these observations highlighted a potential disparity between what the scientific literature championed as important for successful performance in sport and what the coaches involved in creating this success actually felt was important for swimming.

Discussion

Sport continues to be viewed as a fundamental domain in which positive youth development outcomes may be achieved (Larson et al., 2006). However, previous research on general positive youth development has been based on data gathered within North American contexts (Benson et al., 1998; Hanson & Larson, 2005; Lerner et al., 2000), and with limited scientific attention to positive youth development in sport (Côté et al., 2010; Gould & Carson, 2008).

Grounded in a British cultural context, this study aimed to consolidate knowledge of the key assets considered important for the positive psychological, social, and emotional development of young swimmers. With care taken to theoretically draw upon on the contributions of existing frameworks, and to garner insights from expert coaches and youth sport academics, the resultant assets both complement and add to previous positive youth development research in sport.

In synthesizing knowledge to achieve sport- and culture-specific outcomes, five categories of psychosocial assets emerged that represented 17 constructs from the current scientific literature. These categories were self-perceptions, behavioral skills, social skills, approach characteristics, and emotional competence. Reflecting deductively on this final

collective, there appear to be a number of appropriate conceptual compromises with existing models that are highly pertinent to athlete and personal development in sport. For example, in his model of youth development, Lerner refers to competence as a key asset and explains this as “the ability to perform adequately in the world” (2007, p. 47) while citing social, academic, emotional, and vocational competence, as examples. In the current collective, three of the five categories represent the types of competence proffered by Lerner in his work, namely, behavioral skills (e.g., organization, discipline, self-appraisal), social skills (e.g., communication, conflict resolution), and emotional competence (e.g., emotional self-regulation). It is evident that a number of different assets need to be developed to allow the individual to operate competently within a particular context. However, although Lerner and Côté et al. (2010) in their recent adaptation of Lerner’s model to sport, acknowledge the need for underpinning assets, they are not made explicit in their respective higher order models. By identifying these lower-order assets, the current collective offers a more explicit classification of the skills and attitudes that may encompass broader competence development in young swimmers.

This greater specificity of asset is more characteristic of Benson and colleagues’ approach (1998) and their internal assets of self-esteem, motivation, and conflict resolution are directly represented in the current collection of assets. Furthermore, their higher order categories of positive values, social competencies, and a positive identity are reflected in the properties of approach characteristics (e.g., character), social skills, and self-perceptions, even if they are not labeled as specific assets. When turning to prior positive youth development literature in sport, assets such as discipline, resilience (Holt & Dunn, 2004), perceived sport competence, and

cooperation (Weiss, 2008) have been validated by experts in this study and appear to sustain relevance and meaning in swimming alongside their implicit value in other life domains.

In addition, care has been taken to offer a conceptually sensitive definition of each asset that is comprehensible to coaches working in swimming (Gould, Damarjian, & Medbury, 1999). For example, the motivation asset reflects a self-directed tendency to pursue high personal standards with an emphasis on the value of effort, mastery of skills, self-improvement, and competitiveness. Guided by underlying properties from the content analysis, this definition is informed by the extensive literature on the adaptive characteristics of self-determined, autonomous motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985), in conjunction with the empirical evidence base supporting the value of high task (mastery-approach)/high ego (performance-approach) achievement goal profiles (Elliot, 2006; Nicholls, 1984) in competitive sport. Both the main and subsequent member checking interviews assisted in the refinement of these definitions, with coaches praising the clarity and value of each asset, even if there were some differing observations over relevance to their coaching role. These supplementary insights from coaches alert researchers to several important implications with respect to informing the utility of these assets within positive youth development work in British Swimming.

External Assets and Future Research Implications

Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin (2005) note that it is the regularity and quality of reciprocal social relationships experienced by athletes with coaches, parents, and peers that underpin successful development and which are integral to effective program design in youth sport. In this context, they are referring to the external assets (Benson et al., 1998) that embody the quality of the environment shaping the child, including access to positive role models, social

support, and positive peer influence. The application of the current collective of assets in swimming depends greatly on the perceptions and behaviors of the significant others (i.e., coaches, parents, and practitioners) acting as external assets within the sport. Harwood's (2008) developmental intervention in youth soccer was driven by the premise that internal (psychosocial) asset development in young players was facilitated by positive and confident adult and peer influences (i.e., external assets: coaches, parents, teammates), a view supported by Smith and Smoll (1990). A central issue in his study rested upon the low efficacy that soccer coaches possessed in fulfilling a psychosocial role and shaping psychological assets in young players. The program, therefore, targeted improvements in coaches' knowledge, practice, and ultimately confidence in their behaviors, strategies, and interactions with players.

Consequently, a key objective of further research in swimming may be to establish the beliefs that coaches and parents hold in relation to these core psychosocial assets. If a swimming coach views his or her role in terms of solely technical and physical development, then the influence and value of the coach as an external asset is potentially diminished in terms of the psychosocial development of the youth swimmer.

As evidenced by coaches' responses to this collection of assets, a significant implication of the current study is the provision of categories for swimming coaches to aid their understanding of psychosocial assets and to limit feelings of being overwhelmed by the range of assets to consider. The five higher order categories provide coaches with a clarification of the main areas which they may consider when nurturing positive youth development within their athletes. With a greater awareness of these broad areas, they can then look to individual assets within each area to a greater degree. It is envisaged that swimming coaches may use this

collection of assets in a number of different ways by incorporating consideration of relevant assets in their session plans. Swim coaches routinely write session plans with the objective of developing physiological outcomes and, hence, it is proposed that coaches may choose to emphasize a complementary psychosocial outcome within the confines of a natural training session more intentionally and creatively. Harwood (2008) successfully modeled this approach with the main difference being the inclusion of a player-centered log book that players could use to reflect upon their sessions and matches.

In terms of future practice or application, it is also possible that the perceived value, knowledge, and relevance that swimming coaches hold for these 17 psychosocial qualities may ultimately influence their daily behaviors and interactions with swimmers. For those coaches who do place a high value on positive youth development in their program, it may be interesting to investigate the different coaching behaviors and methods that they perceive themselves to employ with respect to promoting each asset (e.g., questioning style, autonomy support, modeling behaviors, sharing experiences, planned dosages of stress). Tamminen and Holt (2012) recently offered an excellent illustration of this in terms of the strategies engaged by parents and coaches that facilitated adolescents' successful coping experiences in sport. Future research may investigate the impact that individual differences in coaches' and parents' knowledge base, confidence, and value related to each individual asset can have upon the attention given to each asset within the differing stages of youth development. It is noteworthy that the elite coaches in this investigation possessed differing beliefs about the relevance of certain emotional and social skills within competitive swimming, as well as challenging academics to promote their work in a

language accessible to coaches that would presumably enhance the inclusiveness of sport psychology in a coach's role (see Gould et al., 1999).

An important limitation of this study is the absence of youth swimmer perspectives on the proposed assets (Jones et al., 2011). The genesis of our method was largely driven by current literature which is based on models drawn from adult perceptions, and notes the importance of adults creating a structured environment focused on development (e.g., Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007; Danish et al., 2005). Future studies should therefore consider swimmer perceptions, from quantitative and qualitative perspectives, to gain their overall appraisal of these psychosocial assets as relevant needs during adolescence and young adulthood (Jones et al., 2011).

Other limitations may include the overly academic nature of the majority of the expert panel in addition to availability bias due to the way in which the assets were presented to the experts. This may have led to them selecting particular assets over others or choosing to agree with what was already presented to them. However, we believe that the rigorous nature of the interviews, during which experts were encouraged to argue and disagree would have worked to overcome this issue. Finally, although we believe that the coaches in the panel of experts were representative of swimming coaches within the U.K., it is possible that they expressed overtly biased views in terms of elite swimming values and perspectives.

Conclusion

Recent research has reported an increased coaching emphasis on personal development issues (Gucciardi, Gordon, Dimmock, & Mallett, 2009; Smith & Cushion, 2006) and, by taking a positive youth development perspective, this study offers greater clarity to a particular youth

sport system (e.g., national governing body, coach, parent, swimming club) as to the psychological, social, and emotional assets that can enable such personal development. When youth sport systems adopt the values associated with positive youth development, they challenge the youth sport experience to incorporate the holistic development of the athlete as a person that will remain intact regardless of whether the athlete attains a professional status. This legacy is one in which the young adult is able to successfully cope with the intensive demands of varying achievement settings, to navigate challenging career transitions, and to manage interpersonal, organizational, and lifestyle factors more effectively (Bailey et al., 2009). We hope that this research encourages coaches, applied researchers, and practitioners in youth swimming settings to focus on the psychosocial needs of young people and to generate optimal developmental solutions.

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| Asset | Properties | Definition |
|--|---|--|
| Perceived Sport Competence ^{1,2,3,4} | Self-efficacy ^{5,6,7,8} Self-concept ^{9,10,11} Sport confidence ¹² | One’s positive beliefs about capability or skill in swimming |
| Self-Esteem ^{3,6,9,13,14,15,16,17,18,19} | Confidence ^{1,2,5,8,9,10,12,16,19,20,21,22} Courage ^{20,23} Self perceptions ⁴ | One’s overall general belief in self and ability |

Initiative^{3,17,19,24,25,26,27,28}

Goal setting^{4,7,9,10,12,16,17,18,19,20,22,23,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,33}
 Ambitions³²
 Time management^{5,8,9,23,25,27,28,29,30}
 Planning^{6,7,12,13,19,28,29}
 Organization²⁹
 Personal responsibility^{16,17,22,23,24,25,29,34}
 Assertion^{6,16,20,33}
 Assertiveness⁷
 Autonomy^{7,29}
 Empowerment^{7,13,29}
 Self-determination⁷
 Personal control in the future¹⁰
 Decision making^{1,5,6,7,8,10,13,33}
 Judgment¹
 Problem solving^{6,7,19,23,26,27,28,30}

One's ability to set realistic goals, manage time and take responsibility for oneself

Positive Belief in Future^{6,7,10,13,19}

Optimism¹²
 Dispositional hope¹²
 Positive attitude^{4,16}

One's tendency to be hopeful and optimistic about future outcomes

Clear and Positive Identity^{7,19}

Identity exploration^{6,17,25,30}
 Identity reflection^{25,28,30}
 Self-aware¹²
 Personal power¹³
 Sense of purpose¹³

One's clear sense of self that typically evolves from trying new things, gaining self-knowledge and learning one's capabilities

Discipline^{3,9,22,29}

Sacrifices^{22,29}
 Restraint¹³
 Resistance^{6,13}
 Overcoming peer pressure²⁹
 Acquisition of a mature personality⁹
 Learning to be mature²⁹
 Maintenance of physical health³⁴
 Healthy lifestyle²⁰

One's ability to make oneself *do* things one knows one should do even when one does not want to and includes making sacrifices in other areas of life to ensure

Commitment^{13,21,22}

Motivation^{1,4,9,13,17,22,32,34}
 Effort^{9,17,19,25,26,27,29,30}
 Determination^{22,29}
 Perseverance^{1,29}
 Persistence^{19,23,27,29}
 Engagement¹³
 Work ethic^{9,12,17,18,34}
 Hard work²⁹
 Focus on personal performance²⁰
 Competitiveness^{9,12}
 Learn from mistakes¹⁹
 Adaptive perfectionism¹²
 Drive¹²

maintenance of appropriate and/or healthy habits
 One's tendency to pursue high personal standards with a focus on the value of effort, mastery, and self-improvement

Cooperation^{1,16}

Teamwork^{3,6,8,9,17,18,19,20,23,24,25,26,27,28,29}
 Connection^{2,17,18}
 Bonding¹³
 Group process skills³⁰
 Integration and links to adult and community^{17,25,28,30}
 Social capital^{8,25,28}
 Sense of belonging^{8,9}
 Peer acceptance¹⁹
 Developing peer relationships^{8,17,25,28,30}
 Developing relationships²⁹
 Create friendships⁸
 Create meaningful relationships⁸
 Interpersonal competence^{9,13,19}

One's ability to work with and help others, generally towards achieving a common goal

Communication^{5,7,8,19,21,23,24,25,29,34}

Listening^{25,34}
 Feedback^{23,25,30}
 Social skills^{6,8,9,12,17,19,25,28,29}

One's ability to listen and to give and receive feedback and non-verbal behavior

Conflict Resolution^{7,13,29}

Negotiation^{7,8}
 Compromise⁸

One's ability to peacefully resolve disagreements via negotiation and

Moral Competence^{4,7,9,18}

Character^{2,5,18}
 Integrity^{1,13,16}
 Honesty¹³
 Courtesy¹
 Sportsmanship^{1,4,12}
 Respect^{9,17,24,29,30}
 Valuing diversity^{20,28,34}
 Conformity^{19,22,23,30}

compromise

One possesses a respect both for others and for set rules and boundaries along with an understanding of the difference between right and wrong and the importance of being honest, even when it is not easy

Emotional self-regulation^{17,20,25,26,30}

Emotional control^{9,18,19,27}
 Self control^{1,16,23}
 Relaxation^{4,16,20}
 Stress management^{4,5,16,25,26}
 Control²¹
 Self-talk^{7,12,20,21,26}
 Ability to perform under pressure^{22,23,29}
 Handle success and failure^{19,23}
 Imagery^{4,12,16}
 Concentration^{17,21}
 Managing distractions^{9,12,29}
 Dealing with fatigue²⁹
 Ability to cope with and control anxiety¹²
 Self-management^{7,19}
 Ability to focus¹²

One's ability to control anger and anxiety, prevent emotions from interfering with attention and performance, acquire strategies for managing stress and to use positive emotions constructively

Leadership^{1,3,5,8,9,19,24,25,28,29,30,34}

Contribution³¹

One's ability to give back to the swimming community through encouragement of young swimmers and acting as a positive role model

Empathy^{16,25,29}

Caring^{2,13}

One's ability to

Emotional competence⁷

share and show concern for someone else's feelings, experiences or viewpoints by imagining what it would be like in their situation

Resilience^{7,11,22,29}

Overcoming adversity^{19,33,34}
Overcoming setbacks¹⁹

One's ability to use coping strategies to bounce back and to overcome obstacles

Self-Appraisal¹⁹

One's ability to examine and monitor one's strengths and areas for improvement

Mental Toughness^{9,12,16}

One's psychological edge that enables positive coping strategies to ensure consistent swimming performance and includes self-belief, desire/motivation, dealing with pressure and anxiety, performance and lifestyle related focus, and pain/hardship factors

Weiss (2008) ²Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg (2000) ³Côté & Fraser-Thomas (2007) ⁴Weiss (1991) ⁵Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung (2007) ⁶Petitpas, Van Raalte, Cornelius, & Presbrey (2004) ⁷Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins (2004) ⁸Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris (2009) ⁹Hedstrom & Gould (2004) ¹⁰Danish & Nellen (1997) ¹¹Schulman & Davies (2007) ¹²Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett (2002) ¹³Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth (1998) ¹⁴Smith, Smoll, & Curtis (1979) ¹⁵Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett (1993) ¹⁶Côté (2002) ¹⁷Holt & Sehn (2008) ¹⁸Gould & Carson (2008) ¹⁹Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones (2005) ²⁰Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris (2007) ²¹Harwood (2008) ²²Holt & Dunn (2004) ²³Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis (2005) ²⁴Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall (2008) ²⁵Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen (2003) ²⁶Holt & Jones (2008) ²⁷Larson, Hansen, & Moneta (2006) ²⁸Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin (2003) ²⁹Jones & Lavallee (2009) ³⁰Hansen & Larson (2005) ³¹Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner (2005) ³²Holt & Morely (2004) ³³Theokas, Danish, Hodge, Heke & Forneris (2008) ³⁴Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth (2000)

Figure 1: Initial conceptualization and delineation of assets after Stage 1 Analysis

| Grouping/Asset | Definition |
|-----------------------------|--|
| SELF PERCEPTIONS | |
| Perceived Sport Competence | Positive beliefs about capability or skill in swimming |
| Self-Esteem | Overall general self-worth |
| Clear and Positive Identity | A clear sense of self characterized by high self awareness and a clear purpose in life |
| BEHAVIORAL SKILLS | |
| Organization | The ability to manage and take responsibility for self in order to achieve planned goals |
| Discipline | Choosing daily behaviors that are in line with |

Self-Appraisal achieving planned goals
The ability to examine and monitor individual strengths and areas for improvement

SOCIAL SKILLS

Communication The ability to listen and to give and receive feedback and non-verbal behavior

Conflict Resolution The ability to resolve disagreements via negotiation and compromise

Cooperation The ability to work with and help others, generally towards achieving a common goal

Leadership The ability to motivate and encourage others and to act as a positive role model through the expression of desirable behaviors

APPROACH CHARACTERISTICS

Character A respect both for others and for set rules and boundaries along with an understanding of the difference between right and wrong and the importance of being honest, even when it is not easy

Positive attitude A tendency to be hopeful and optimistic about future outcomes

Motivation A self-directed tendency to pursue high personal standards with an emphasis on the value of effort, mastery of skills, self-improvement and competitiveness

Resilience The ability to bounce back and to overcome obstacles

EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Empathy The ability to share and show understanding for someone else's feelings, experiences or viewpoints by imagining what it would be like in their situation

Emotional self-regulation The ability to control both positive and negative emotions in order to prevent them from interfering with attention and performance and to learn to use them in a constructive manner.

Connection The ability to care for and bond with others in order to create meaningful relationships and develop a sense of belonging

Figure 2: Final conceptual grouping of assets following Stage 2 Expert Interviews