



## **Newcomers' Perspectives on Acculturation and Identity Exploration Through Community-Based Recreational Sport**

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## Author Biographies

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## Abstract

Community-based recreational sport (CBRS) offers newcomer youth meaningful contexts that can support settlement, socialization, and integration into new communities. Ongoing intercultural interactions within CBRS facilitate exposure to diverse cultures and the (re)shaping of identities during adolescence, a critical dimension of positive youth development (PYD). Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) supports identity development by upholding diverse cultural practices and identities. This study examined newcomer parents' perspectives on their children's participation in CBRS to theorize how cultural sustainability and PYD can be fostered through experiences of acculturation and identity exploration within CBRS. A grounded theory approach was used to examine the perspectives of 13 newcomer parents. Data were collected through focus groups and one-on-one interviews and analyzed using initial, focused, and theoretical coding. The findings revealed that newcomer parents perceive CBRS as a space for: (1) opening a new chapter of life, (2) engaging in positive (trans)formation, and (3) fostering social and cultural capital.

**Keywords:** community-based recreational sport; acculturation; identity exploration; culturally sustaining pedagogy; positive youth development

## Résumé

La pratique sportive récréative communautaire (CBRS) offre aux jeunes nouvellement arrivés des contextes significatifs qui peuvent favoriser l'établissement, la socialisation et l'intégration dans de nouvelles communautés. Les interactions interculturelles continues au sein du CBRS facilitent l'exposition à diverses cultures et la (re)construction des identités durant l'adolescence, une dimension critique du développement positif des jeunes (PYD). La pédagogie culturellement durable (CSP) soutient le développement identitaire en valorisant la diversité des pratiques et des identités culturelles. Cette étude a examiné les perspectives de parents nouvellement arrivés sur la participation de leurs enfants au CBRS afin de théoriser les façons dont la pérennité culturelle et le PYD peuvent être favorisés à travers les expériences d'acculturation et d'exploration identitaire vécues au sein du CBRS. Une approche fondée sur la théorisation ancrée a été utilisée pour analyser les perspectives de 13 parents nouvellement arrivés. Les données ont été recueillies par le biais de groupes de discussion et d'entretiens individuels, puis analysées en utilisant un codage initial, ciblé et théorique. Les résultats révèlent que les parents nouvellement arrivés perçoivent le CBRS comme un espace permettant: (1) d'ouvrir un nouveau chapitre de vie, (2) de s'engager dans une (trans)formation positive et (3) de développer un capital social et culturel.

**Mots-clés:** pratique sportive récréative communautaire; acculturation; exploration identitaire; pédagogie culturellement durable; développement positif des jeunes

## Introduction

The number of newcomer youth from immigrant and refugee families who settle in Canada has been steadily increasing, as Canada continues to welcome large numbers of newcomers each year (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2022; Kalchos et al., 2022). Although current immigration policies aim to reduce temporary resident arrivals, they continue to prioritize family reunification and refugee resettlement as part of Canada's humanitarian commitments, contributing to a continuous increase in newcomer youth (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2025). *Acculturation* is understood as the cultural and psychological changes that occur through continuous interactions with different cultural groups (Berry, 2005). These social and intercultural interactions allow newcomer youth to learn the host society's languages and cultural practices while negotiating the extent to which they maintain their heritage culture or adopt new cultural practices (Berry, 1997).

Sport represents a meaningful context for such interactions, as it facilitates engagement with others from diverse backgrounds (Bruner et al., 2017). Community-based recreational sport (CBRS) has the potential to enhance acculturation experiences by promoting social relationships, social skills, language learning, and understanding of diverse cultures, and a sense of belonging within the community (Bruner et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2016). Newcomer youth's participation in CBRS serves varied purposes, including facilitating adaptation to new cultural environments and maintaining a sense of home (Allen et al., 2010).

Identity exploration is an iterative process of examining individual's present self and envisioning a future self through the development, maintenance, and reconstruction of identities in desired directions (Allen-Collison, 2020; Kaplan & Flum, 2012; Shah et al., 2021). Adolescence is a developmental period centered on identity exploration (Côté & Levine, 2016). Through intercultural interactions and ongoing cycles of confirmation and evaluation, newcomer youth renegotiate their relationships, perspectives, and cultural practices (Côté & Levine, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2014). Belonging to multiple social and cultural groups exposes youth to diverse norms and expectations, shaping their social roles and identities (Newman et al., 2021; Pfeifer & Peake, 2012).

Positive youth development (PYD) theory frames adolescence as a period of growth where youth draw on individual strengths to build positive identities (Lerner et al., 2005; Holt, 2016). The five Cs—competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring—represent core outcomes of PYD, which together foster a sixth C, contribution to self, family, and society (Lerner et al., 2005). Developing a positive identity supports these six Cs in social contexts, enabling youth to explore social roles and relationships within their communities (Bowers et al., 2015; Pfeifer & Peake, 2012; Xing et al., 2015).

In multicultural contexts, CBRS programs built on PYD principles need to account for diverse cultural traditions, values and identities, yet previous frameworks have not sufficiently addressed culture-related outcomes (Smith et al., 2017). Incorporating cultural perspectives and practices can meet the needs of culturally diverse youth and enhance culturally respectful behaviours built on cultural competence (Kenyon & Hanson, 2012; Smith et al., 2017), which support more socially inclusive environments for all youth. In addition, accounting for newcomers' diverse cultural backgrounds can support youth-centered PYD initiatives that empower newcomer youth to achieve the core outcomes of PYD (Arnold, 2017; Harper et al., 2021).

Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) is an educational approach that upholds the diverse cultures, languages, and identities of racialized students by supporting them in using and reflecting

on their own cultures to empower marginalized learners and centering their diverse cultures (Paris, 2012; Alim & Paris 2017). With the purpose for promoting culturally pluralistic society (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), this approach focuses on “[supporting] young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). CSP was built on culturally relevant pedagogy that encouraged marginalized people to assert their linguistic and cultural sovereignty (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Culturally relevant pedagogy centred the experiences, voices, and needs of students marginalized due to their different cultural backgrounds to foster their academic, social, cultural, and civic success through academic achievements, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021).

CSP extends culturally relevant pedagogy by framing culture as diverse, dynamic, and evolving, thereby sustaining and revitalizing diverse cultural ideas and practices (Paris, 2012; Alim & Paris, 2017). Rather than imposing a one-to-one mapping of identity, CSP creates spaces for youth to bring their own cultures as resources for engaging in identity (trans)formation processes with other cultures (Alim & Paris, 2017). Given that youth identities are multiple and shifting across contexts, CSP provides spaces that expand possibilities for identity exploration by conceptualizing culture in ways that encompass both traditional and evolving forms (Paris & Alim, 2014). Despite its theoretical foundations, the practical application of this approach in CBRS remains underexplored. This gap may inadvertently privilege dominant cultural norms and promote the assimilation of diverse youth into mainstream practices, thereby limiting equitable and accessible opportunities for participation.

There is a lack of empirical research applying a PYD lens to newcomer-specific contexts to examine how youth’s unique experiences of acculturation and identity exploration relate to the six Cs. Given that these experiences, shaped through social interactions within new sociocultural environments, can significantly influence psychological and social development, greater attention to cultural aspects in the PYD framework is integral. In addition, existing studies that draw on parental perspectives have tended to focus primarily on newcomer youth’s adaptation to dominant mainstream cultures in the host society. This study addresses these gaps by exploring newcomer parents’ perspectives on their youth’s acculturation and identity exploration through participation in CBRS. Specifically, the study examined two research questions: (1) How would newcomer parents perceive the impact of CBRS on acculturation and identity exploration among newcomer youth? and (2) How would these processes and outcomes influence PYD and cultural sustainability?

## **Methodology**

### **Grounded Theory**

A grounded theory approach was employed to construct a theory grounded in the perspectives of newcomer parents using flexible, comparative, and systematic methods for collecting and analyzing qualitative data (Charmaz, 2006). This approach involved analyzing data collected through multiple methods in an inductive manner, conducting multiple phases of coding to develop a data-grounded theory of social phenomena, particularly in areas where existing theories are limited (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2015). A grounded theory approach was used to develop a theoretical understanding of how CBRS provides newcomer youth with opportunities to navigate new sociocultural environments and explore their identities from the perspectives of newcomer parents. In addition, the study theorized how experiences of acculturation and identity

development are linked to the promotion of PYD and cultural sustainability, both of which require a stronger theoretical foundation for deeper understanding.

### **Participants**

13 newcomer parents were recruited from three different Canadian cities in two Canadian regions: the Prairie Provinces and Central Canada. To recruit participants, a convenience sampling strategy was employed to identify the most available and fit participants considering the scope and objectives of the study (Morse, 2010). The recruitment process included CBRS programs and organizations with which the research team has existing collaborations and connections.

Inclusion criteria required parents to: (1) have lived in Canada for at least two years; (2) have children aged 11–18; and (3) having that child participate in CBRS programs for at least six months. Participants recruited during the initial phase shared similar ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. The participants included three women and ten men participants, all of whom were originally from varying Asian countries. Their children's participation in CBRS ranged from one to more than five years.

### **Data Collection**

Multiple methods were employed to collect data, including focus group and one-on-one interviews, field notes, and reflexive journals (Charmaz 2014; Patton, 2015). Focus group and one-on-one interviews served as the primary means of discussing participants' perspectives on CBRS (Patton, 2015). During focus groups, participants were encouraged to reflect collectively on the interview questions (Barbour, 2008; Patton, 2015). Two groups of four participants were formed based on regions of residence and shared cultural backgrounds. Five participants who were unavailable for focus group participation due to privacy concerns or scheduling constraints were invited to take part in one-on-one interviews instead.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom or in person, according to participants' preferences. Each interview lasted up to two hours and was video-recorded with consent. A semi-structured interview guide was used, including questions such as:

- “What experiences have your children had with diverse cultural practices, ideas, and people in community-based sport programs?”
- “How have your children's cultural practices, languages, and behaviours influenced their identity (trans)formation?”

All interview transcripts were de-identified and reviewed by participants for respondent validation (Patton, 2015). Following the initial focus group or individual interviews, participants were invited to take part in follow-up one-on-one interviews to clarify earlier responses or further elaborate on perspectives they did not wish to discuss in a group setting. Follow-up interviews were conducted with five participants via Zoom, lasted up to 60 minutes, and were video-recorded for transcription.

Throughout both focus group and individual interviews, the researcher used field notes to document contextual details (e.g., interview environment) and reflections on the research process (Patton, 2015). These notes also captured emerging ideas, additional questions, and preliminary codes for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Patton, 2015). In addition, the researcher kept reflexive journals in the form of personal documents to record evolving thoughts, positionality, and interpretations of the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Field notes and self-reflective journals supported data triangulation by enabling comparison of documented codes and interpretations with interview data.

## Data Analysis

Coding is the central analytic process in grounded theory, requiring researchers to ask questions to deepen their understanding of the phenomena under study (Charmaz, 2006; Holton, 2007). This study employed three phases of coding: initial, focused, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006). During initial coding, the researcher generated provisional codes that best represented the data by exploring theoretical ideas, concepts, and possibilities. Line-by-line reading of interview transcripts was conducted to identify recurring words and phrases that informed the initial codes (Charmaz, 2006, 2014).

Focused coding involved comparing, synthesizing, and refining initial codes into more abstract conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2006). The most significant or frequent initial codes were identified and selected as focused codes, representing categories that synthesize multiple codes and provide conceptual definitions and relationships among categories. Through constant comparison, similar codes were merged to develop focused codes that best capture the underlying codes. Theoretical coding represented a more advanced analytic stage, aimed at enhancing the precision and coherence of the emerging theory. Drawing on underlying concepts and logics from acculturation (e.g., cultural learning, social relationships), PYD (e.g., the six Cs), and cultural sustainability (e.g., multicultural and multilingual identities), theoretical codes were identified and used as analytical tools. These theoretical codes integrated relationships among codes, categories, and concepts into a cohesive framework explaining how newcomer parents perceive newcomer youth's identity development and acculturation through CBRS, with implications for promoting cultural sustainability and PYD. Throughout this process, memo writing captured emerging questions and insights, supporting the refinement of categories and the theoretical integration (Charmaz, 2014).

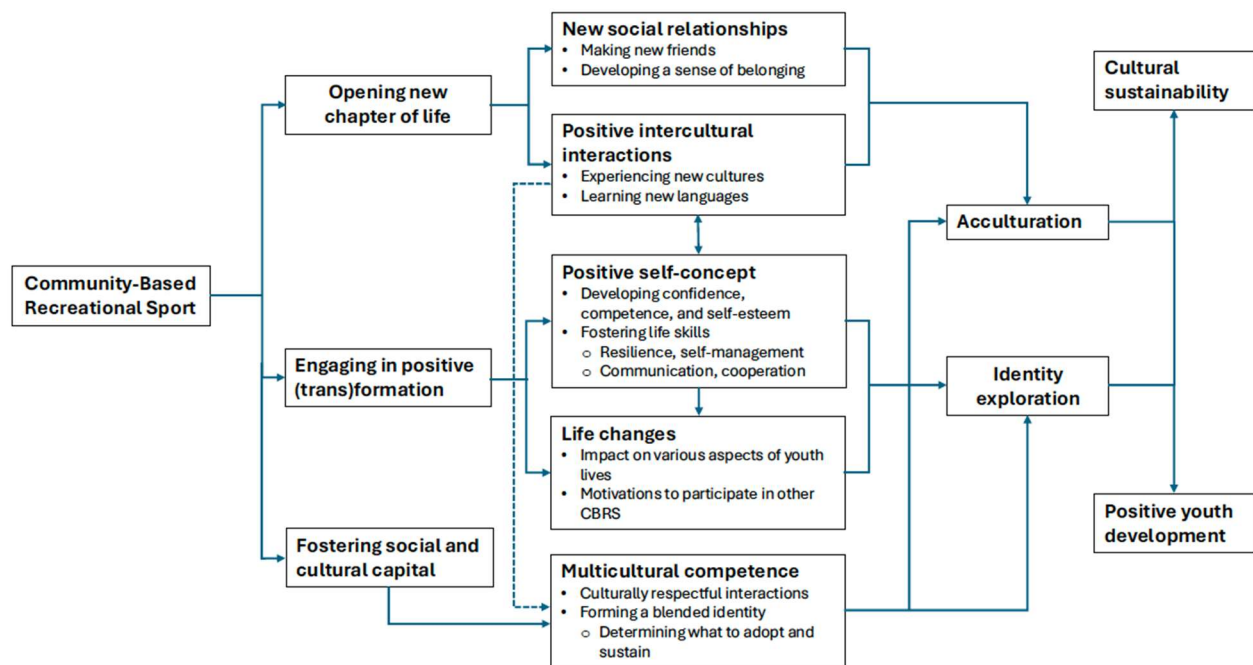
## Trustworthiness

Credibility was established through data triangulation, which cross-checked the consistency of findings across multiple methods (i.e., interviews, field notes, and self-reflexive journals), and through respondent validation, whereby participants reviewed the analyzed data (Charmaz, 2014). Originality was demonstrated by situating the study's insights and theoretical contributions in relation to existing literature on the promotion of cultural-specific outcomes of PYD and cultural sustainability through CBRS (Charmaz, 2014). Resonance was ensured through thick description of participants' perspectives and experiences while safeguarding their privacy (Charmaz, 2014). Usefulness was enhanced by highlighting the applicability of findings to broader contexts, such as physical education and elite youth sport (Charmaz, 2014).

## Results

Figure 1 presents the categories that describe how newcomer parents perceived CBRS and illustrates the relationships among these categories and related concepts. According to participants, CBRS provides an accessible entry point for newcomer youth to navigate and engage with their new communities, offering diverse opportunities for social interaction. Three core categories were developed to conceptualize CBRS as a space for: (1) opening a new chapter of life, (2) engaging in positive (trans)formation, and (3) fostering social and cultural capital. In this section, these core categories and their interrelated subcategories are presented alongside illustrative interview excerpts.

**Figure 1**  
*Grounded Theory of the Impact of CBRS*



### Opening a New Chapter of Life

This category captures the perceived impact of CBRS through two interrelated sub-categories: the development of new social relationships and positive intercultural interactions. According to participants, CBRS exposes newcomer youth to different sociocultural environments with new people from diverse cultural backgrounds, creating opportunities to build social networks and engage in positive intercultural exchanges that shape their acculturation experiences.

### New Social Relationships

When asked about their perceptions of adaptation to new social and cultural environments through CBRS, most participants agreed that the program provides a venue for newcomer youth to develop new friendships. Forming new social connections was one of the primary hopes parents expressed when encouraging their children to participate in CBRS. Although newcomer youth may initially have limited English proficiency, Participant 2, whose children have participated in CBRS for more than three years, viewed CBRS as a space where “kids can join sports regardless of language barriers in Canada,” emphasizing that play and movement is a universal language (Lee, 2020).

Participant 1, a parent of child who has participated in CBRS for five years, reported that involvement in CBRS created “more chances to talk and connect with others” through shared interest in sport. Building friendships in their new community supported newcomer youth’s ongoing and expanded social interactions with peers. Participant 7, whose children are 16 and 12 and have participated in CBRS for approximately two years in Central Canada, described how their child’s social engagement expanded after joining CBRS: “Before starting community sports, my child would just go to school and come straight home. Playing football gave him the chance to connect with teammates, share tactics, and, most importantly, have something to chat about with

friends.” Sustained positive interactions in this new environment further fostered a sense of belonging among newcomer youth. As Participant 6, whose children are 15 and 13 years old and have engaged in CBRS for five and two years respectively, noted, their child began to feel “part of the team,” rather than experiencing a sense of difference in the new setting.

### ***Positive Intercultural Interactions***

Participating parents perceived CBRS as a space in which newcomer youth naturally encounter peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, enabling them to recognize and develop an understanding of cultural diversity within their new community. Participant 5 from South-Central Asia, whose child has attended CBRS for three years in the Prairie Provinces, described her daughter’s experiences of meeting new friends through CBRS as an important opportunity to learn about different cultures:

*My daughter joined the program and made friends. She got to know about different cultures and the countries of her friends. Now, she has a lot of friends outside of our own community. Maybe their friends are from five or six different countries.*

As discussed in the interviews, CBRS was viewed as a valuable context for intercultural contact, particularly because many programs are open to all community members, regardless of racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Social relationships formed through CBRS facilitated ongoing interactions with peers, supporting experiential cultural learning that occurred naturally within sport settings.

Interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds enabled newcomer youth to learn about the cultural practices of others who brought different perspectives and ways of living. As Participant 10, whose child has participated in CBRS for four years in the Prairie Provinces, articulated, these intercultural interactions allowed newcomer youth to “better understand cultural diversity in a more hands-on way, by seeing their friends’ cultures up close, rather than just reading about them in books.” Moreover, strong peer relationships developed through CBRS often extended beyond the program itself, leading to continued intercultural interactions in other social contexts, such as visiting friends’ homes. As one participant noted, spending time with friends or visiting their homes provided opportunities to experience diverse cultural ideas and practices, including different lifestyles, languages, and parent–child relationships. Participant 7 also noted that sustained intercultural interactions grounded in social relationships developed through CBRS enabled newcomer youth to “directly experience cultural diversity in society by getting to know the different cultures in the lives of their new friends they meet in CBRS.” Such opportunities to experience diverse cultures support newcomer youth in developing an understanding of cultural diversity in Canadian society.

Participants also identified improvements in language skills as a major impact of CBRS. Language learning was perceived as central to cultural adaptation and social interaction in new environments. Beyond serving as a means of communication, some participants emphasized language as an integral component of culture, suggesting that learning English facilitates greater opportunities for interaction and cultural engagement. Participant 11, whose children have been involved in CBRS for three years in Central Canada, described that “language reflects the cultural and historical background of the country,” highlighting that learning the language of the host society plays a critical role in understanding its culture and identity. Additionally, Participant 1 discussed how improved language proficiency further facilitated social and intercultural interactions, creating more opportunities for “chatting about diverse cultures of their friends during

[CBRS],” which enhance newcomer youth’s confidence in interacting with others. Moreover, Participant 7 articulated that positive intercultural experiences and improved language skills increased cultural understanding, which helped newcomer youth “socialize better and feel more included in the multicultural society.”

Participants also suggested that participation in CBRS offered opportunities for newcomer youth to learn about Canadian culture through engagement in mainstream sports, such as ice hockey. They emphasized that sport reflects societal values and practices, including lifestyle and shared community interests. Participation in popular sports in Canada was therefore seen as a meaningful avenue for cultural learning and social integration. Participant 12, whose two children are aged 15 and 13 and have participated in CBRS for three years in Central Canada, highlighted the role of hockey in facilitating both cultural learning and social connections:

*Skating is such a big thing in Canada, and I thought if my kids learned how to skate, they’d be able to enjoy the long winters here and play ice hockey. Since hockey is so popular in Canada, I felt like playing hockey would give them more chances to join teams, make friends in the community, and interact with others.*

CBRS provides newcomer youth with positive acculturation experiences by facilitating the formation of new social relationships in unfamiliar environments, supporting their transition into new communities, and promoting ongoing intercultural interactions that enable them to learn about the cultures of their friends.

### **Engaging in Positive (trans)formation**

Participants perceived CBRS as influential in the development, maintenance, and Transformation of individual identities. They reported that the positive identities fostered through CBRS extended to various aspects of youth’s lives, including school, family relationships, and broader social interactions.

#### ***Positive Self-concept***

All participants emphasized the significant role of CBRS in fostering positive self-concepts among newcomer youth through the development of self-esteem, confidence, and competence. As Participant 9, a parent of a 13-year-old child stated, youth could be “more sensitive and serious during their adolescence.” Participation in CBRS and good relationships with others there helped them have positive experiences in recognizing their identities, which helped them go through this important period for their growth in a positive way. Positive experiences related to building social relationships and learning about new cultures within CBRS were identified as key contributors to confidence development as an outcome of PYD. Participant 12 also agreed that participation in CBRS provided “shared spaces and topics” that fostered the “confidence and courage to initiate conversations and build relationships with others.”

In addition, Participant 2 noted that positive social interactions with peers and coaches—such as receiving encouragement, compliments, and constructive feedback—further enhanced self-esteem and confidence, helping newcomer youth “feel more comfortable” in new environments and with new peers. As Participant 7 emphasized, mutual encouragement during CBRS contributed to self-esteem development as “kids talked about each other’s strengths and how they help the team.” This positive experience with teamwork boosts newcomer youth’s self-esteem and helps them “feel more included in the team.” Moreover, Participant 13, whose children have been involved in CBRS for four years, further observed that confidence in forming social

relationships and interacting with others in new environments increased newcomer youth's "confidence in whatever they do and wherever they are."

Participation in CBRS fostered the development of a range of life skills that contributed to positive changes in newcomer youth's lives. First of all, Participant 10 perceived CBRS as a context in which youth could develop resilience through experiences of "healthy, positive failure," enabling them to learn how to cope with challenges and setbacks encountered in sport. This participant further explained that the life lessons youth can learn from negative experiences and consequences in CBRS can positively impact their development in the future: "I wanted my kids to experience failure through sports. They need to learn that you can't always win and how to accept failure and defeat to move forward. It's a healthy, positive failure that motivates them to work harder." Developing resilience through these experiences was also perceived to motivate youth to manage challenges more effectively by setting realistic goals for self-improvement.

Participants further highlighted the impact of team-based CBRS on promoting experiences of teamwork, which contributed to the formation of identities shaped by passion, commitment, and shared goals. As Participant 6 explained, engagement in team sports enabled newcomer youth to view themselves "as members of the community," rather than defining themselves primarily by race, culture, or immigration background. This parent further noted that team-based CBRS facilitated the development of interpersonal skills, including communication and cooperation. Teams in CBRS were perceived as functioning like a "small society" in which youth could acquire essential skills for working effectively with others. Participant 9 echoed this positive aspect of participation in CBRS, noting that newcomer youth learned "how to be considerate of others, rather than being selfish," which influenced not only their engagement in CBRS but also their broader social relationships.

Interacting with peers and coaches allowed youth to practice collaboration and teamwork in various ways, as highlighted by Participant 11, including learning to "sacrifice for the sake of the team's goals." Participants emphasized that working toward shared goals and engaging in respectful team interactions supported newcomer youth's social-emotional development and sense of responsibility, which were viewed as central to their identity development and PYD. CBRS provided a meaningful context for newcomer youth to explore multifaceted positive identities that integrated personal characteristics, social identities, and a sense of social responsibility.

### ***Life Changes***

Participation in CBRS also influenced other aspects of youth's lives, contributing to their identity development. Participant 6 observed that youth's positive current and future self-concepts and ways of living supported their development into "good people" who can "find a good way in life," benefiting both themselves and their communities. According to Participant 9, experiences of interacting with culturally diverse peers through CBRS made youth "more open to people from different racial and cultural backgrounds." Some newcomer families may have had limited exposure to cultural diversity prior to migration, particularly if they previously lived in culturally homogeneous contexts. In addition, individuals newly arriving in a host society may initially prefer to form relationships with others from similar cultural backgrounds due to feelings of comfort and familiarity. These prior experiences and preferences can create challenges in forming relationships with culturally diverse peers. However, relationships developed through CBRS helped newcomer youth interact more effectively with peers from different cultural backgrounds, expanding their social networks.

It was reported that life skills developed through CBRS transferred positively to youth's school lives as these skills were "carried over into their school lives" as discussed by Participant 2. Parents highlighted self-control—particularly the ability to manage emotions and behaviors in challenging situations—as a key outcome of CBRS. Participant 9 viewed this skill as especially beneficial for school-based social relationships, as youth learned "how to behave, how to talk to others, and why being on time is important," all of which positively influenced their school experiences. Participant 10 also highlighted that increased competence, confidence, and self-esteem—commonly identified outcomes of PYD through CBRS—contribute to youth "[liking] school more" and enhanced ability to "expand their social networks at new schools", thereby further supporting their acculturation. Participation in CBRS also positively affected relationships between newcomer youth and their parents. Parents described CBRS participation as providing shared topics for conversation, enabling them to better understand their children's lives in the new environment. Participant 10 echoed this perspective:

*I, as a parent, am really curious about their lives, their relationships, and everything they're experiencing in this new environment. After they started participating in CBRS, we had new things to talk about in their daily lives, and it really helped our relationship in a positive way.*

The development of confidence and self-esteem through positive social interactions in CBRS fostered youth's motivation and willingness to try different CBRS programs in new settings. As youth became more confident in making friends in unfamiliar environments, they were more inclined to explore new opportunities for social engagement. Participant 13 described noticeable "changes in personal characteristics," explaining that their child had previously been very shy and struggled to interact with unfamiliar peers. Participation in CBRS, which enhanced the child's confidence in social interactions with diverse people, motivated them to broaden their social relationships by engaging in additional CBRS programs, thereby affirming the development of positive identities.

### **Fostering Social and Cultural Capital**

Experiences with diverse cultures through interactions with culturally diverse peers within CBRS provide newcomer youth with opportunities to learn and internalize social and cultural norms. Participant 2 reported that these interactions helped youth understand how to "interact with people from different cultures in a culturally appropriate manner." Such social and intercultural experiences offer newcomer youth both knowledge and practical skills related to cultural diversity, thereby supporting the development of social and cultural capital.

Social capital refers to the value generated through social networks, including bonding among similar individuals and bridging across diverse groups, often facilitated by reciprocity. Fundamentally, it is rooted in the ways people interact and build relationships (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001). Strong social connections contribute to individual well-being, resilience, and overall quality of life. Cultural capital encompasses the cultural knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that individuals acquire and develop over time, enabling them to navigate social and cultural contexts effectively (Bourdieu, 1986). The development of cultural capital supports engagement with culturally diverse groups in culturally appropriate ways (Banks, 2016).

### ***Multicultural Competence***

CBRS is perceived as an effective context for newcomer youth to acquire knowledge about the diverse cultures of their peers through ongoing and meaningful interactions. Such knowledge and experiences contribute to the development of cultural competence, defined as a set of

knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enables individuals to interact appropriately and effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds (American Psychological Association, 2023; Cross et al., 1989). Participant 7 also highlighted that developing knowledge of diverse cultures supports culturally appropriate interactions with others:

*My kids learned about other cultures from the new friends they met in community sport programs, for example, Muslim prayer practices and Chinese New Year fireworks. ... By learning about these cultures, my kids also came to understand appropriate ways of speaking to and interacting with people from those backgrounds, which helped them socialize better and feel more included in the multicultural society.*

In the multicultural Canadian context, the ability to interact with culturally diverse individuals in culturally safe and respectful ways facilitates (re)socialization and social inclusion for newcomer youth, which significantly affect their acculturation experiences. To cultivate multicultural competence, Participant 5 emphasized the importance of being “open to learn about diverse cultures” in Canada, rather than simply adopting a single mainstream culture, reflecting the diversity of Canadian society.

Cultural competence, which links PYD outcomes with cultural aspects, contributes to the expansion of social networks with which newcomer youth can engage confidently and appropriately. CBRS with culturally diverse peers provides an important opportunity to build relationships across cultural boundaries, enabling newcomer youth to experience diverse cultures through interactions with them. Cultural competence further supports newcomer youth in navigating new socio-cultural environments they have recently entered.

Multicultural competence, grounded in knowledge of both individuals’ heritage cultures and the new cultures they encounter, supports the process of identity exploration. When discussing newcomer youth’s identity exploration in Canada, participants expressed anticipation regarding the formation of blended identities in their children. All participants emphasized the significance of cultural differences between their home countries and Canada, highlighting the need to understand diverse cultures to integrate positive aspects of each into the identity formation process. Participants underscored the importance of both sustaining heritage cultures and adopting new cultural practices. Participant 13 suggested that the original cultures of newcomer youth can serve as a “cultural foundation” for identity development, which should then be “harmonized with other cultures they learn from the new society.” Participant 4, a parent of a 11-year-old child, emphasized that maintaining a strong connection to traditional heritage cultures prepares youth to incorporate new cultural elements into their evolving identities, thereby helping to avoid “identity confusion.”

While participants acknowledged the importance of learning about the culture of the new society, they also emphasized that this does not require abandoning one’s own culture or identity to fit in. Participant 9 particularly expressed a desire for their children to retain positive aspects of their heritage cultures, such as “diligence,” “respect and manners,” and “punctuality,” while simultaneously learning valuable elements of Canadian culture, including “inclusivity for people with disabilities and openness to new possibilities.” As noted by Participant 8, whose child is 11 and has participated in CBRS for four years, blending heritage and host cultures was seen as essential for supporting the development of positive identities among newcomer youth:

*Even though we live here as newcomers, I don’t think we should just follow the mainstream culture in Canada. I know there are things we can learn from it, but our own culture also has a lot that kids should learn and keep. The*

*important thing is finding a way to bring the good parts of both cultures together.*

As a means of sustaining heritage cultural identities, newcomer parents emphasized the importance of maintaining proficiency in their heritage languages. Regarding the relationship between language and identity, it was highlighted by Participant 11 that “keeping your identity starts with keeping your language.” Accordingly, parents who wished for their children to maintain connections to their heritage cultures expressed a strong desire for them to retain proficiency in their mother tongue. Recognizing the central role of language in sustaining cultural identity, many participants agreed with encouraging their children to speak their heritage language at home, even as they became increasingly comfortable using English.

Participants also observed that newcomer youth’s cultural identities evolve in relation to the languages they speak, their social relationships, and the social and cultural norms of their environments. Participant 11 viewed language skills as essential for understanding “public sentiment,” “cultural expressions,” and the “cultural backgrounds of the community” shared among community members, all of which contribute to the formation of identities at the community, societal, and national levels. In addition, participants noted that many newcomer youth develop bilingual abilities by learning English in Canada while maintaining their heritage language. This bilingualism was perceived to foster confidence and self-pride in youth’s ability to engage with diverse cultures, promoting both the ability to sustain their heritage cultures and PYD in a multicultural environment. Collectively, these experiences suggest that fostering bilingualism not only supports the preservation of heritage cultural identities but also enhances confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging in the host society.

## **Discussion**

The three main themes and their subthemes are interconnected, conceptualizing CBRS as a sociocultural space in which newcomer youth encounter new environments that facilitate the exploration of relationships and social interactions. These relationships and interactions significantly influence newcomer youth’s processes of sharing their cultures and negotiating cultural identities through ongoing intercultural engagement. CBRS also fosters the development of confidence, skills, and knowledge needed to engage with diverse cultures, creating opportunities to both sustain and adopt cultural practices, and thereby supporting processes of identity exploration.

### **Sociocultural Context for Intercultural Learning and Social Networking**

The findings of this study indicate that newcomer parents perceive CBRS as a sociocultural space in which newcomer youth practice developing new social relationships through cultural sharing, despite unfamiliarity with new cultures and language barriers. Participants all agreed that involvement in CBRS provides valuable opportunities for newcomer youth to learn about diverse cultures. The findings indicate that social networks established through CBRS serve as an important point for youth to engage with Canadian culture. As highlighted by participants, CBRS enables youth to establish friendships even with limited language proficiency. Participation in CBRS significantly influences newcomer youth’s development of social relationships and their understanding of new socio-cultural environments and its cultural practices (Barrick, 2023; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2012). CBRS, thus, has considerable potential as

a medium to foster social connection and inclusion, transcending cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic barriers (Barrick, 2023; Block et al., 2025; Kölbel, 2025).

CBRS programs play a critical role in connecting newcomer youth to their communities and facilitating relationship-building through team-based activities and diverse forms of communication, including nonverbal cues. Participants further emphasized that language proficiency is a critical factor in cultural adaptation, facilitating social and cross-cultural interactions, navigation of new environments, and participation in social networks (Flensner et al., 2021; Nakhaie, 2020). Team-based CBRS, in particular, offers structured contexts for social and intercultural engagement. For newcomer youth, these contexts increase opportunities to build social relationships and support the processes of understanding and navigating the social, cultural, and behavioural norms of their new environment (Elbe et al., 2016). In this way, participation in CBRS supports the acculturation process and broader social development (Block & Gibbs, 2017; Darnell & Dao, 2017; O'Donnell et al., 2020).

CBRS provides an accessible space for newcomer youth to initiate social and intercultural interactions within the new environment (Kölbel, 2025). Engagement in CBRS fosters a sense of belonging and strengthens youth's identities as community members. Continuous cross-cultural interactions within and beyond CBRS, including with program coaches whose pedagogical practices and communication styles are culturally influenced, enhance learning about diverse cultures (Barrick, 2023; Borges et al., 2023; Urgun et al., 2025). As participants noted, sport also conveys aspects of national identity; for example, winter sports such as ice hockey reflect Canadian cultural identity (Allain, 2019; Wong & Dennie, 2021). Therefore, participating in popular local sports can provide newcomer youth with meaningful insights into the culture and identity of their new society.

### **Development of Positive Youth Identities and Life Skills Supporting PYD**

Newcomer youth's experiences of intercultural interactions and social networks in and through CBRS influenced their processes of identity transformation (Barrick, 2023), which were considered essential for their PYD following immigration. As discussed by participants, positive relationships and social interactions with peers and coaches contribute to the development of self-esteem and confidence (Holt, 2016). Such development relates not only to youth's physical competence and confidence in performance during CBRS but also to their ability to initiate and meaningfully engage in social and intercultural interactions across various environments with diverse individuals. These experiences, in turn, motivate youth to actively engage in their current CBRS programs, providing opportunities to enhance both competence and confidence in social and intercultural interactions (Bruner et al., 2023). Competence and confidence developed through CBRS further lead newcomer youth to explore more opportunities for CBRS. As such, participation in CBRS fosters the development of positive character traits by learning personal values, prosocial behaviours, and ways of interacting harmoniously with others (Lower-Hoppe et al., 2021).

Moreover, resilience is cultivated when newcomer youth encounter negative experiences, such as defeat or failure, during CBRS participation. Developing effective coping strategies allows youth to maintain and strengthen their confidence and self-esteem (Andersen et al., 2019). In turn, positive identities characterized by self-assurance and resilience enable youth to recover from negative experiences, reflect constructively, and plan realistic steps to improve performance and navigate challenges both in sport and in broader social contexts (Hu et al., 2025). Collectively, these experiences within CBRS support not only skill development but also the psychosocial

growth and identity formation of newcomer youth in multicultural environments (Hu et al., 2025; McDonald et al., 2022).

Experiences in team sports through CBRS provide newcomer youth with opportunities to develop life skills that enhance their social relationships and contribute to both CBRS groups and the broader community. Within team-based CBRS settings, newcomer youth learn sport-specific skills as well as the social and cultural norms of the host society through sustained interactions with others while working toward shared goals. Team-based CBRS contexts provide a site for collaboration, communication, and the negotiation of social roles, further reinforcing the outcomes of social development (Bruner et al., 2011; Denault & Poulin, 2016). Through these processes, youth learn how and why to cooperate with others and how to behave in ways that contribute positively to their teams, supporting their development as ‘good people’ with ‘positive ways of living’ in society. Ongoing interactions with culturally diverse peers further strengthen communication skills and create opportunities for meaningful relationships with peers and coaches, thereby supporting social inclusion and positive identity development in the new society.

### **Fostering Multicultural Competence to Thrive in Multicultural Society**

The findings revealed that newcomer parents desire multi-directional acculturation for their children by sustaining diverse cultural practices that are enacted, rather than assimilation into dominant Canadian cultures (Aim & Paris, 2017; Smart et al., 2020). Participants emphasized the importance of CBRS in providing spaces for engagement with diverse cultures through interaction with culturally diverse individuals, supporting newcomer youth’s capacity to critically navigate their cultural identities (Paris & Alim, 2014; Smart et al., 2020). Through these experiences, youth can discern which elements of newly encountered cultures to adopt and which aspects of their heritage cultures to sustain, thereby supporting the construction of positive, blended identities that enable them to thrive within a multicultural society.

CBRS exposes newcomer youth to diverse perspectives and cultural practices, encouraging critical reflection on their own cultural identities while fostering respect and understanding for others (Alim & Paris, 2017). Although some parents supported participation in mainstream sports to facilitate engagement with Canadian culture, this did not reflect a desire for their children to abandon their heritage cultures. Rather, parents emphasized the (trans)formation of blended cultural identities (Park & Sarkar, 2007), whereby youth sustain valued aspects of their heritage while acquiring new cultural identities in the host society. This perspective aligns with CSP, which recognizes the dynamic nature of youth cultural identities and underscores the importance of creating spaces for critical reflection and empowerment to sustain these identities (Alim & Paris, 2017; Eichas et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2014).

When discussing adaptation to Canadian culture, participants often referred to a cultural mosaic. They acknowledged that Canadian society brings together diverse cultures while preserving distinct cultural characteristics, although White cultural norms remain relatively central. Regarding the acculturation processes of newcomer youth, many parents expressed caution about assimilation into dominant cultures in the host society, particularly when such assimilation may undermine the preservation of heritage cultures (Berry, 2005). A culturally sustaining approach provides opportunities for newcomer youth to critically engage with and understand diverse cultures, including their heritage cultures, supporting the development of blended cultural identities that integrate valued elements from multiple cultures. (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2012). Although CSP has been increasingly examined in music and language education (Good-Perkins, 2022; Pejic et al., 2025), it remains underexplored in physical activity and sport. The findings

reveal that the core principles of CSP are applicable to physical activity contexts, given their impact on multidirectional acculturation, positive blended cultural identities, and multicultural competence.

Participants also emphasized the importance of heritage language maintenance as a critical component of sustaining cultural identity. Language not only supports cultural continuity but also strengthens family bonds, facilitating intergenerational transmission of values and traditions. As such, cultural education at home, implemented by parents, was highlighted as a key strategy for promoting youth's heritage awareness, fostering family cohesion, and supporting the exploration of new cultures encountered in the host society. Parents serve as conduits for transmitting cultural practices and knowledge across generations, educating children about languages, religions, histories, lifestyles, and social norms of their homeland (Halder, 2012). As previous literature indicated, parents play a significant role in guiding youth through the processes of acculturation and identity exploration by responding sensitively to their children's needs and experiences (Glozman & Chuang, 2019; Kaniušonytė & Žukauskienė, 2018).

Participation in CBRS contributes to the development of social and cultural capital through varied social and intercultural interactions (Smart et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019). It was emphasized by participants that CBRS facilitates understanding and practicing respectful ways of interacting with diverse communities. These outcomes contribute to social development and the accumulation of social and cultural capital, which are assets for engaging with culturally diverse individuals in socially and culturally appropriate ways (Block et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2019). Engagement with diverse cultures within a multicultural society provides newcomer youth with opportunities to maintain their heritage cultures—thereby strengthening family bonds—while also remaining open to adopting new cultural practices that support culturally safe and appropriate interactions with others. These findings also contribute to the PYD literature by explaining how sustaining cultures and cultural identities promotes culture-specific PYD outcomes, including competence in culturally respectful interactions, confidence in intercultural contexts, enhance connections, and positive, blended cultural identities, thereby supporting multiculturalism in society.

## Conclusions

This study provides novel insights into how CBRS participation shapes newcomer youth's acculturation experiences and identity exploration, and how these processes and outcomes contribute to the promotion of PYD outcomes and cultural sustainability. The findings conceptualize CBRS as a space where newcomer youth begin a new life chapter through social and intercultural engagement that supports acculturation, positive identity and life transformations, and the development of social and cultural capital grounded in multicultural competence, fostering positive blended identities and cultural sustainability.

The grounded theory approach contributed to the development of a context-specific theory that explains how CSP facilitates multidirectional acculturation and the development of positive cultural identities through ongoing intercultural experiences within CBRS, thereby supporting culture-specific PYD outcomes. The findings provide a foundation for integrating CSP across different physical activity settings, including school physical education. The grounded theories developed in this study can also inform the design of structured intercultural interactions and the intentional integration of diverse cultural practices into physical activity and sport programs to support meaningful participation among culturally diverse individuals.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. Most participants shared similar national and cultural backgrounds, which may have shaped their perspectives in comparable ways. Gender imbalance among participants is another limitation, as it may introduce bias and limit the capture of diverse experiences of identity development and acculturation. Future research should include more culturally diverse and gender-balanced participants to better reflect a broader range of values, traditions, religions, and social norms. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling may have led to the recruitment of participants whose children continued participation in CBRS due to positive experiences, potentially biasing the data toward favourable perspectives. Future research needs to employ sampling strategies that maximize variation, including participants whose children have experienced challenges or negative outcomes in CBRS, to capture a broader range of perspectives on its impact. Given the potential discrepancy between parents' perspectives and youth's firsthand experiences of acculturation and identity development, future studies should examine youth perspectives to more accurately reflect these processes in and through CBRS.

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