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Same Game, Different Priorities: Rethinking Value Alignment in a Girls' Hockey Association

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The rapid growth of media attention surrounding women's sport has intensified demand for developmentally appropriate youth programming, prompting renewed scrutiny of how sport organizations support long-term participation. Retention within youth sport requires attention to both parents, who often act as purchasers, and athletes, who experience programs directly. Prior research suggests that many youth sport systems remain adult-centric, privileging parental priorities over athletes' perspectives. This exploratory case study examined value alignment within a Canadian girls' hockey association offering multiple participation pathways (introductory/developmental, house league, and representative). Survey responses from 110 athletes and 38 parents were collected using the Youth Sport Values Questionnaire–2 to assess competence, moral, and status values. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the three-factor structure of the scale, followed by multi-group invariance testing to examine whether values were conceptualized similarly across groups. Results indicated partial measurement invariance, suggesting that while parents and athletes organized sport values comparably, certain items functioned differently across groups. These findings point to divergence in how youth and adults understand and prioritize sport values, rather than differences in overall value levels. The study underscores the importance of incorporating athlete perspectives into program design to promote alignment, support identity development, and sustain participation among adolescent girls.

The long-overdue rise in media attention directed towards women's sports has ignited unprecedented growth in popularity and viewership, fueling a surge in demand for programming tailored to women and girls (Leitch, 2024). Rising demand has prompted practitioners to reassess their programs to promote long-term participation among girls. Parents have long been recognized as a major factor in children's participation in sport (Eime et al., 2015). Green and Chalip (1998) classified parents as having a proxy status regarding their child(ren)'s sport participation, noting "although children are the users of youth sport services, it is their parents who are the purchasers" (p. 95). Schwab and colleagues (2010) argued that, in youth sports, both parents and children are customers, and sport organizations must satisfy both groups to retain current participants and attract new registrants.

Researchers have noted that young athletes tend to accept their parents' sport values, underscoring the importance of their role (see Danioni et al., 2017). Numerous studies have investigated the factors that influence parents' decisions when enrolling their children in sports programs and the perceived outcomes of these choices. Key attributes of youth sports programs that appeal to parents include convenient scheduling (Wigfield & Chard, 2018), affordability (Barnett, 2008; Teare & Taks, 2024), competition quality (Chard et al., 2015; Wigfield & Chard, 2018), expert instruction (Wigfield & Snelgrove, 2024), and a positive team environment (Wigfield & Snelgrove, 2024). Further, parents tend to evaluate their child's sporting experience as successful when it fosters enjoyment, imparts life lessons, enhances skill development and confidence, promotes discipline and accountability, cultivates a strong work ethic, and nurtures friendships (Chard et al., 2015; Wigfield & Chard, 2018; Snelgrove & Wigfield, 2019; Wigfield & Snelgrove, 2024).

Key reasons for participation in sport among girls and women include enjoyment, peer influence, and playing with friends, thereby fostering a sense of belonging (Eime et al., 2020; Vazou et al., 2006). Research has also noted social relationships, parental encouragement, and positive peer atmospheres as strong predictors of sustained, long-term participation in sport (Vazou et al., 2006; Zhang et al., 2024). As these motivators are rooted in social experience, related barriers, such as a lack of social support, negative peer experiences, or unsupportive environments, can reduce engagement (Newland et al., 2020). Further complicating this, as girls mature, their heightened self-awareness of competencies, body image concerns, and shifting social priorities places additional pressure on their involvement in sport (Newland et al., 2020; Piché et al., 2024). Sustaining participation into adolescence, therefore, requires a nuanced approach to sport programming that considers the broader social context of participation, including family perspectives and gendered expectations (Rauscher & Cooky, 2016). In this regard, Marra's (2015) dimensions of program evaluation related to gender equity underscore the importance of ongoing research on sport programming to assess

the extent to which activities effectively promote participation, life-skill development, and equitable outcomes for girls.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether and how values are similarly structured and prioritized between athletes and parents (including guardians) in a girls' hockey association (GHA). Traditionally, organizational values in sports are determined by adult leaders, often with little consideration for input from the athlete user group (Kihl & Schull, 2020; Thibault et al., 2010). Frank (2006) emphasized the necessity of involving youth in the planning process, arguing that assuming an adult-centric approach automatically benefits youth is detrimental, as their needs and preferences often differ. Similarly, several researchers (e.g., Kelly & Foster, 2012; MacPhail, 2011; MacPhail et al., 2003) have advocated for incorporating young people's perspectives in shaping sport policy and physical activity programming. They highlight that youth are rarely consulted, despite the crucial role of their insights in fostering participation. These perspectives underscore the importance of integrating youth voices to create supportive environments that genuinely meet their needs in sports participation.

Review of Literature & Theoretical Framework

Girls' Participation in Grassroots Sport

Opportunities for girls to participate in youth sport have increased over the last decade and continue to grow (Eime et al., 2021). Historical barriers to participation related to gender equity appear to be improving, with more programming being developed to promote a variety of sporting endeavours for girls (e.g., soccer, basketball, ice hockey; Newland et al., 2020). Moreover, Eime and colleagues (2021) found that between 2015 and 2019, the greatest increase in participation among girls between the ages of 4 and 14 years was within traditionally "male-dominated sports" such as ice hockey. However, the gap between girls' and boys' participation as they enter adolescence has persisted, indicating that girls are dropping out at higher rates (Newland et al., 2020). Consequently, as participation rates continue to rise and girls are afforded more opportunities to engage in competitive programming, it is increasingly important to better understand their priorities and values in these activities to help ensure long-term engagement.

Increased participation across the various levels of sport, particularly with respect to gender, promotes broader benefits for national healthcare systems (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute & Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, 2023). Participating in sport provides numerous benefits to youth, namely improved overall health and wellness, mental health, and other antecedent benefits. Specifically, participation in youth sports among girls has been shown to significantly improve self-esteem, confidence, and social competence (Eime et al., 2015). Throughout youth and adolescence, sport offers opportunities for both physical skill development and social interaction, including the formation of friendships (Eime et al., 2020). At the

grassroots level, it is critical that sporting activities are enjoyable and that supportive environments are created to promote sustained participation (Hull et al., 2021). Sport programming at both recreational and competitive levels developed for girls can assist in addressing the challenges that many girls experience in co-ed sports (e.g., inequal playing time, feeling left out, not getting passed to; Piché et al., 2024) while also offering a more psychologically and physically safe environment in which they can express their voices, develop their sense of self, and connect with both peers and adult staff/coaches (LaVoi, 2018).

While trends suggest that girls' participation in sport is growing, as they approach adolescence, they are at a greater risk of dropping out. Newland et al. (2020) have identified a decline in participation among adolescent girls, in part due to competing extracurricular demands and social pressures such as declining self-esteem and body image. To mitigate this decline in participation and promote retention, sports organizations must continue to develop high-quality programs that encourage girls to continue playing through their teenage years (Newland et al., 2020; Sabo, 2009). It is widely recognized that sport programming for girls should be fun, inviting, and inclusive, as environments that promote comfort and acceptance while also fostering enjoyment are associated with greater participation and sustained engagement (Matheson et al., 2023). However, reducing gender disparities in sport participation and dropout also requires continued attention to girls' perspectives, as athlete voice is increasingly recognized as fundamental to developing sport environments that reflect participants' needs and experiences (Kelly & Foster, 2012; MacPhail, 2011). Furthermore, sport organizations have a vested interest in refining their programming to ensure that participants' feedback and values are included (cf. Kelly & Foster, 2012; MacPhail, 2011; MacPhail et al., 2003). Offering participants greater choice and agency in their sporting activities may further enhance retention by better meeting their needs and desires. For example, Piché et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of women coaches and role models in programming for girls to improve retention. Together, this body of work underscores the importance of considering the unique needs of girls in sport, beginning with the systematic collection of their perspectives.

Programs developed for girls promote confidence, individual-level empowerment, life-skills development, and opportunities to participate in competitive sport. However, they can be further strengthened by consulting with families to continually develop more relevant programming that addresses the other complex dimensions of girls' lives (Rauscher & Cooky, 2016). Moreover, previous work has shown that increased engagement in sport is associated with parental involvement, assistance, and support in various capacities (e.g., financial, coaching, other types of volunteerism; Eime et al., 2015). This underscores the importance of ongoing research on girls' sport programs to evaluate the efficacy of these activities in sustaining participation through ado-

lescence and other design outcomes (e.g., team performance).

Values in Youth Sport

Previous research has explored values in sport related to positive youth development and the influence of coaching on athlete motivation; thus, it is relevant to further understand which values are most salient to youth athletes and the association of value structures with participation in sport. Lee et al.'s (2000, 2008) seminal work on youth sport value importance related to participation led to the development of the Youth Sport Values Questionnaire (YSVQ), and, through its application in research, the researchers refined into a three-scale, multi-item YSVQ-2. Since its development, the YSVQ/YSVQ2 has been applied across many cultural and sport contexts to examine parental influence, moral decision-making, and broader psychosocial outcomes in youth sport (e.g., Danioni et al., 2017; Nascimento Junior et al., 2021; Stupuris et al., 2018; Yaffe et al., 2021). The scale's three higher-order values include (a) *Competence*, comprised of self-referenced values like achievement and self-direction, (b) *Moral*, described as interpersonal values such as fairness and sportsmanship, and (c) *Status*, in reference to comparative items like winning and public image (Lee et al., 2008). The YSVQ-2 reflects Webb's (1969) early work on sport values of playing well (competence), playing fairly (moral), and winning (status). Consequently, the present study seeks to explore the context of Canadian girl athletes' participation in organized ice hockey (cf. Pitts, 2015).

Gender

In their developmental work of the YSVQ, Lee et al. (2000) examined gender differences in value importance. It was found that girls rated the 18 sport values in a relatively similar order of importance to boys, with enjoyment, achievement, and sportsmanship ranked highest, and winning lowest (Lee et al., 2000). Further research found that girls rated fairness, compassion, and the quality of competition significantly higher compared to boys (MacLean & Hamm, 2008). Additionally, they rated values such as conformity and public image significantly lower than boys did (MacLean & Hamm, 2008). Divergence of value endorsement between genders aligns with studies indicating that motivations for participation may also differ between the two genders.

In contrast, studies that applied the YSVQ-2 revealed consistent value structures across the three higher-order sport values among both girl and boy participants. Competence and moral values were rated similarly, and higher than status values (Lee et al., 2008). While this suggests that youth share broadly comparable value structures in sport, it remains essential to create spaces in which girls can explicitly articulate their own needs and priorities. The present study contributes to this aim by centering girls' voices within the evaluation of youth sport values.

Value Divergence

Parents are known to play a central role in shaping children's access to and experiences with organized sport, often serving as proxies in decisions regarding partici-

pation, program selection, and continued involvement. Parental involvement can shape youth sport experiences by building trust with coaches and fostering intrinsic motivation, emphasizing a developmental rather than purely competitive focus (Ntalachani et al., 2025). Moreover, role modelling and family culture can significantly influence youth engagement. Parents' own sports experience strongly correlates with children's participation in extra-curricular sports (Peqini & Misja, 2025) and children tend to accept their parents' sport values, especially when supported by praise and understanding (Danioni et al., 2017). However, occupying a proxy role does not necessarily imply shared priorities or value equivalence between parents and young athletes (Benish-Weisman et al., 2022; Benish-Weisman, 2024).

Developmental research consistently shows that as children enter adolescence, their values increasingly diverge from those of their parents as autonomy, self-concept, and peer influence become more salient (Benish-Weisman et al., 2022; Dixon et al., 2008; Yaffe et al., 2021). Rather than continuing to mirror their parents, adolescents become increasingly influenced by peers in shaping their values, particularly among girls (Benish-Weisman, 2024).

Currently, the literature consulted in designing youth sport programs tends to hinge on adult perspectives, particularly those of parents and coaches, with comparatively less attention to athletes' voices (e.g., Danioni et al., 2017). This body of work consistently assumes that adults set the terms of participation, seeking alignment with parents, while young people are positioned as consumers who must participate in a model they did not help design (Horn & Horn, 2007). Examining how athletes and parents prioritize and organize sport values within the same organizational context offers a means of testing assumptions of alignment, often taken for granted in youth sport programming, which will yield valuable insights for sport organizations seeking to adapt programming and promote participation as a means of sustaining athlete retention.

Achievement Goal Theory

Achievement Goal Theory (AGT) provides a useful interpretive lens for understanding how sport values may be psychologically enacted within achievement contexts (Lee et al., 2008). In developing the YSVQ-2, Lee et al. (2008) integrated AGT to theorize how competence- and status-oriented values are expressed through task and ego achievement orientations, respectively. Importantly, AGT was not used to define the value domains; rather, values were conceptualized as trans-situational principles that precede and underpin achievement orientations, which in turn shape attitudes and behavioural tendencies in sport.

Competence values reflect self-referenced criteria of improvement and mastery that align with task involvement, whereas status values emphasize normative comparison, recognition, and winning, consistent with ego involvement (Nicholls, 1989). Moral values, by contrast, are not achievement-based and were theorized to operate independently of achievement orientations (Lee et al., 2008).

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, AGT was used to contextualize patterns of value prioritization rather than to test motivational processes directly, providing a framework for interpreting how athletes and parents may differentially construe success and desirable outcomes within organized youth sport.

Further, values in youth sport are often treated as individual preferences; however, emerging work suggests they are relationally produced and negotiated within broader sport environments (Pujianto et al., 2025). From this perspective, alignment or divergence between athletes' and parents' values may indicate differing roles, expectations, and developmental trajectories rather than merely agreement or discord.

Program Evaluation Related to Gender Equity

Accordingly, program evaluation frameworks can offer a useful lens for situating value patterns within the organizational and relational contexts in which they emerge, without presuming linear change or specific intervention effects. Marra's (2015) framework for program evaluation consists of five dimensions designed to explore the complex dynamics of gender equity and value congruence within sport systems. This approach is essential for assessing the effectiveness of programming models and determining whether the values of various stakeholders, such as athletes and their parents, are being met (e.g., Newland et al., 2020; Sabo, 2009).

Adaptation suggests that individuals learn, self-organize, and co-evolve within their social environments in nonlinear ways (Marra, 2015). Evaluation through this lens focuses on interpersonal relationships and how the program context – specifically who delivers the program and how participants receive it – can influence overall performance and delivery (Kerwin & Leberman, 2023).

Self-organization examines how individuals and groups participate in and manage environmental systems (Marra, 2015). It assesses how these structures influence people's capacity to accomplish specific tasks. Within youth sports, programs that encourage self-organization foster a greater sense of agency among athletes, allowing them to collaborate and share opinions to improve the program while strengthening their relationships with leaders such as coaches (Whitley et al., 2019).

Third, interdependencies recognize that desired outcomes are reached through the interaction and information exchange of multiple individuals (Marra, 2015). By analyzing social norms and interactions within organizational structures, this lens evaluates operational effectiveness and cooperation. These connections between stakeholders (i.e., athletes, parents, and coaches) promote resource sharing and enhance the organization's capacity to deliver high-quality, gender-equitable programming (Kerwin & Leberman, 2023).

Emergence highlights that sport programming is a recursive process requiring continuous monitoring to achieve sustained change (Marra, 2015). It posits that various system components can combine to create new processes, driving continu-

ous change within the environment. Some examples of change outcomes include continued participation and engagement (e.g., athlete retention, Hull, 2021), satisfaction of key stakeholders (e.g., parents and guardians, board of directors, etc., Wigfield & Snelgrove, 2024), as well as value congruence such that those involved feel their needs are being met (Rauscher & Cooky, 2016).

Finally, embeddedness explores how relationships generate trust and sustain desired behaviours within a specific context (Marra, 2015). Because individuals often cooperate based on others' anticipated choices, social interactions are viewed as integral to influencing action (Piché et al., 2024). This perspective allows evaluators to explore how gender and values intersect within relationships, ensuring that long-term program satisfaction and sustained change remain feasible (e.g., Green & Chalip, 1998).

Research Question

By exploring how sport values are prioritized by girl hockey players and parents within the same organizational context, this study addresses assumptions of shared meaning that are often implicit in youth sport research and practice. Periods of rapid growth in girls' hockey heighten the importance of understanding whose values are reflected in organizational norms and expectations, particularly as athletes enter adolescence and renegotiate autonomy, motivation, and identity within sport settings.

RQ: Are the values of girl hockey players comparable and similarly prioritized to those of parents within the same organization?

Addressing this question clarifies how value priorities may converge or diverge between athletes and parents in organized girls' hockey. Such insight can inform discussions about organizational culture and stakeholder expectations during periods of growth, while remaining attentive to the developmental realities of adolescence.

Methodology

Study Context

The research team was approached by the Board of Directors (BOD) of the GHA, a local hockey club based in Ontario. With a membership of 500 athletes, the GHA provides programs for athletes aged seven and under (U7) through 21 (U22), across multiple development pathways, including FUNdamentals (introductory programming), house and local league (recreational team-based play), and representative (rep) programming at various competitive levels, including AA, the highest level of competition for the region.

The BOD asked the research team to help them understand how to better serve their membership. This request occurred during a timely period of rapid growth in girls' hockey participation. Specifically, in the GHA's home province of Ontario, girls' hockey registration has recently established an all-time high (Loop, 2026). More broadly, the success of the Professional Women's Hockey League and women's national team has triggered sim-

ilar growth patterns in the United States (USA Hockey, 2026). Further, the growth of girls' hockey is also being seen as a ground for programming innovation, including the emergence of alternative formats such as the Tween Girls Hockey League. The league was developed to address gaps in traditional programming by offering developmentally appropriate competition structures that better reflect girls' evolving values and participation preferences (Maharaj, 2023). The continued development of such models reflects both the potential for innovation within girls' hockey and the sustained appetite for programming that responds more directly to participant needs. Accordingly, the BOD sought to understand how parents' and athletes' views may differ, what the groups perceived the GHA was doing well, and where improvements could be made. To address these aims, a descriptive case study, guided by Yin's (2009) framework, was employed to investigate value alignment between the parents and youth athletes within the organization.

Yin (2009) identifies the case study as the preferred method when the research questions focus on "how" or "what," when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. All three conditions are met here: the study asks what values parents and athletes prioritize and how these may differ; the research team had no control over the GHA's programming or governance; and sport value alignment within a functioning community organization is an inherently contemporary and contextually embedded phenomenon. A descriptive case study design was selected, rather than an explanatory or exploratory variant, because the purpose was to describe the pattern of values held by two distinct membership groups within the same organizational context rather than to explain causal mechanisms or generate new theoretical propositions (Yin, 2009).

Consistent with Yin's (2009) approach, the case was bounded by a single Ontario-based GHA and defined by its organizational structure, membership, and program context. Yin (2009) emphasizes that case boundaries must be clearly established to distinguish the case from its context and to ensure the unit of analysis is coherent and researchable. Here, the unit of analysis is the GHA as an organizational entity, with the two embedded units of parents and athletes treated as sub-units within the single case. This embedded single-case design (Yin, 2009) allowed for both within-group description and cross-group comparison while preserving the contextual integrity of the organization as the primary case.

In line with Yin's (2009) emphasis on studying contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, data were collected from parents and athletes in the same organization to capture their perspectives on sport values. This approach enabled a focused, contextually grounded examination of how values are prioritized within the structure and programming of the GHA. Yin (2009) also emphasizes the importance of construct validity in case study research, which was supported here by involving the BOD in survey development to ensure that items reflected the organizational context and were comprehensible to the membership — while the research team retained independent control over design, data col-

lection, and analysis to preserve analytical integrity.

The GHA operates within a mid-sized city of approximately 145,000 residents, characterized by a predominantly white population with approximately 25% of residents identifying as visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2021). The organization is governed by a volunteer BOD and supported by three part-time administrators. While the BOD initiated the research and provided input during survey development to ensure contextual relevance and clarity, the research team led the design, data collection, and analysis.

Data Collection

The sample was drawn from the GHA's athlete membership (500) and their parents. Data collection occurred over a three-week period following the 2023-2024 minor hockey season. To efficiently gather substantial data within a short timeframe, a survey method was employed, enabling the inclusion of a broader range of girl hockey players and their guardians (Creswell, 2009). The research ethics board granted approval for the participation of athletes 14 years or older and their parents at the first author's institution.

Athletes 14 years or older were invited to complete the survey via a tablet prior to select team practices throughout March 2024. Research team members were accompanied by a member of the GHA's BOD through all in-person interactions with teams. The targeted age groups were selected for participation because they represent the GHA's most tenured and mature athlete groups and were perceived as able to complete the YSVQ-2 most thoughtfully. In total, 110 usable responses were collected. The majority (62%) of athlete respondents reported playing organized hockey for more than eight years. Respondents varied in their level of competition from recreational to AA, with 75% playing competitively.

Parents and guardians of the GHA's 500 members were invited to complete an online survey from March 20 to April 4, 2024. The survey link was distributed via the GHA's email list and shared on social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram. The survey received 111 complete responses from parents and guardians. For this study, 38 parent responses were deemed usable for comparison with the athlete group because they reported having an athlete in the same age group as the athletes in this study. All 111 responses were used to inform the GHA's BOD in making adjustments to their structures and programming.

Measures

The questionnaire administered to the GHA's membership consisted of three parts. The first presented respondents with items from the YSVQ-2. Following suit with Lee et al. (2008), responses were recorded on an asymmetrical bipolar seven-point rating scale, where -1 = "This idea is opposite of what I believe", 0 = "This idea is not important to me", and 5 = "This idea is extremely important to me".

Part II of the survey asked respondents to rate the importance of specific

features of the GHA's programming. This part of the survey was not built using validated scales or standardized constructs and therefore were excluded from this analysis. Responses were collected using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all important" to "Very Important." However, as these items were not derived from validated scales or standardized constructs, they were excluded from the present analysis.

The final part of the survey (Part III) asked respondents to rate their overall satisfaction with their experience with the GHA and collected demographic information used to contextualize the findings of this study.

For the present study, data from Part I were analyzed alongside the demographics collected in Part III. All other collected data were developed for, and used to inform, the BOD and their decision-making ahead of program registration for the upcoming season. The researchers chose to focus on the YSVQ-2 outcomes, as this validated measure directly aligned with the study's objective of examining sport values. The remaining survey items were collected to support the organization for internal program evaluation and decision-making and were not intended to assess standardized constructs.

Table 1 .

Athlete Participant Demographics

	n	**%**	***M***	***SD***
Age	110		16.48	2.89
Level of Competition				
House League	21	19.4		
Rep BB	21	19.4		
Rep A	30	27.8		
Rep AA	31	28.7		
Experience				
First year	4	3.7		
2-4 years	9	8.3		
5-7 years	22	20.4		
8-10 years	32	29.6		
10+ years	36	33.3		

Note. All participating athletes identified as girls/women.

Sport Values

To measure the importance placed on different value domains within the GHA, the YSVQ-2 was employed. Previous research has demonstrated the scale's strong psychometric properties across multiple contexts and has been widely used to assess moral, competence, and status values in youth sport research (Berengui et al., 2021; Nascimento Junior et al., 2021; Stupuris et al., 2013; Yaffe et al., 2021). Originally developed by Lee et al. (2008), the YSVQ-2 conceptualizes these sport values as guiding principles that shape how young athletes interpret success, regulate behaviour, and justify decisions within competitive contexts.

The scale comprises 13 items representing three value domains salient to youth sport. Competence values (four items) reflect self-referenced improvement and mastery, emphasizing skill development, effort, and personal progress (e.g., self-direction and achievement). Moral values (five items) capture fairness-oriented principles that regulate social conduct in sport, including respect for rules, sportsmanship, and concern for others. Status values (four items) represent

Table 2.

Parent/Guardian Participant Demographics

	n	%	*M*	*SD*
Gender				
Women	17	44.7		
Men	11	28.9		
Age	38		48.45	4.06
GHA Volunteer Involvement	14	36.8		
Household Income				
$90,000 to $99,999	1	2.6		
$100,000 to $124,999	3	7.9		
$150,000 to $174,999	2	5.3		
$175,000 to $199,999	5	13.2		
$200,000 or more	5	13.2		
Current Employment				
Full-time employment	32	84.2		
Part-time employment	1	2.6		
Self employed	2	5.3		
Prefer not to answer	3	7.9		

Note. Only 2 respondents identified as non-white/Caucasian. This reflects the demographic nature of the GHA's surrounding city (see Statistics Canada note). No one in the sample reported being currently unemployed.

externally referenced outcomes linked to social comparison and recognition, such as winning, public image, and leadership. Consistent with Lee et al.'s (2008) framework, these domains are understood not as isolated preferences but as interrelated value structures that influence achievement orientations and ethical attitudes in youth sport environments.

The athlete respondents were provided with the YSVQ-2 in its original form, where the only modification was to the stem. This modification clarified that athletes were to answer the items in reference to their hockey participation. Conversely, the parents were given an adapted version of the YSVQ-2. Here, the stem was "Please rate how important you perceive each idea is to ensuring a positive hockey experience is delivered to a participant." Additionally, the proxy statements were revised to reflect parental expectations and values associated with enrolling their child(ren) in hockey programming. For example, "I show good sportsmanship" was changed to "Players show good sportsmanship." A complete list of proxy statements is provided within the data analysis (see *Table 4*).

Demographic and experience-related variables

Respondents were asked demographic questions related to age and gender. Ath-

letes were also asked to report their level of competition in hockey and the number of years of hockey experience at the time. Conversely, parent respondents were asked to report their household income, the number of children in the GHA, and whether they volunteer with the GHA, among other items. Further details are provided in *Tables 1 and 2*.

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using JASP (jasp-stats.org). Preliminary data screening included verifying that numerically coded responses fell within the specified range, reported ages were within plausible limits, and that household characteristics were feasible in the local context. During this early stage, participants who failed to respond to more than two items on the YSVQ-2 (16% missing data) were excluded from the dataset via listwise deletion. This approach was consistent with recommendations to exclude cases with substantial missing data to preserve the reliability of composite measures (Hair et al., 2019) and aligned with methods used by other researchers in the field (e.g., Potwarka et al., 2017). The remaining missing values were analyzed using the missing value analysis (MVA) procedure to determine whether they were missing at random or had a systematic explanation. The MVA indicated that item-level missingness was low (< 2%). Little's MCAR test was significant, suggesting that the data were not missing completely at random. Given the low level of missingness and the absence of systematic patterns of missingness, the data were treated as missing at random (MAR) and analyzed using full-information maximum likelihood (FIML).

Scale Validation

Since the YSVQ-2 was previously validated by Lee et al. (2008), a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used in place of an exploratory factor analysis. With the modifications made to the scale for the parent questionnaire, a multigroup CFA was conducted to evaluate whether the three-factor structure of the YSVQ-2 (moral, competence, and status) functioned similarly for the athlete and parent groups. Only parents who reported having an athlete in the GHA who fell within the same age bracket as the athlete group were included. The number of cases remaining for analyses was 38 parent responses and 110 athlete responses.

Fit indices were used to indicate how well the model fits the data used to evaluate it. For instance, a poor match, produced by heavy cross-loadings between constructs, produces poor (low) fit indices, while a strong match produces strong (high) indices. The fit indices used to assess the model were: a) chi-square/df ratio (χ^2/df); b) comparative fit index (CFI); c) Tucker-Lewis index (TLI); d) standardized root mean square residual (SRMR); and e) root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), along with its confidence interval (CI) and associated *p*-value (PCLOSE). Hair et al. (2019) suggested that strong measurement models should have a χ^2/df ratio of less than 3; CFI greater than .90 and preferably above .95; CI less than .070; an SRMR under .08;

Table 3.
Model Fit Statistics for CFA

Model	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	PCLOSE	SRMR
Model 1: Proposed CFA model	1.640	.876	.844	.093	.003	.087
Model 2: Re-specified CFA model	1.039	.994	.992	.023	.783	.059

and an RMSEA that is less than .05 with a PCLOSE that is not significant at the .05 level.

Results

The results suggested that the measurement model (*Table 3)* had an inadequate fit, with χ^2/df = 1.640, CFI = .876, TLI = .844, RMSEA = .093 (p = .003), 90% CI [.069, .116], SRMR = .087. Byrne (2013) suggests that, in such situations, model estimates and modification indices should be examined to determine whether the model can be improved. One factor in the moral domain, "I follow directions from coaches or instructors", showed weaker internal coherence, with lower standardized loadings (≈ .45–.52) and higher residual variance relative to other moral indicators. Succinctly, the item may be more indicative of rule compliance than of moral concern. In response, we removed the item from the model. Similarly, an item in the status domain ("I am a leader in the group") was removed due to strong overlap with competence-related items, thereby increasing inter-factor correlations and reducing discriminant clarity between the status and competence domains. Following their removal, the model indices were strengthened, and factor overlap was minimized, which indicated a substantial improvement in global fit (e.g., RMSEA decreased from .093 to .023; CFI increased from .876 to .994) and more coherent factor relationships.

The re-specified model (*Table 3*) demonstrated excellent fit, $\chi^2(82) = 85.20$, p = .383, which indicated no significant discrepancy between the observed and model-implied covariance matrices. Incremental fit indices exceeded recommended thresholds (CFI = .994, TLI = .992), and absolute fit indices further supported model adequacy (RMSEA = .023 (p = .783, 90% CI [.000, .070], PCLOSE = .783; SRMR = .059; Hair et al., 2019). Collectively, these indices indicated that the re-specified factor structure provided a better representation of the data. The parameter estimates for the items in the re-specified measurement model (Model 2) are presented in *Table 3*. All standardized factor loadings were statistically significant (p < .05) and ranged from moderate to strong across factors.

Before Model 2 was assessed further, it was important to establish the validity and reliability of its constructs (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). As outlined in *Table 4*, the results indicated that composite reliability (CR) values were generally acceptable across constructs and groups. All values

Table 4.
Parameter Estimates for Respecified CFA, Model 2

Athlete (A) Proxy Statements	Parent (P) Proxy Statements	M (A)	M (P)	λ (A)	λ (P)	SE (A)	SE (P)	CR (A)	CR (P)
Moral		4.041	4.125					0.746	0.718
…I show good sportsmanship	*Players show good sportsmanship.*	4.473	4.684	0.522***	0.454**	0.085	0.172		
I help people when they need it.	*Players help people when they need it.*	4.027	4.342	0.746***	0.430*	0.065	0.168		
I always play properly.	*Players always play properly.*	3.827	3.595	0.54***	0.725***	0.083	0.136		
I try to be fair.	*Players try to be fair.*	3.836	3.842	0.741***	0.679***	0.066	0.155		
Competence		4.207	4.289					0.774	0.794
I improve my skills.	*Players improve their skills.*	4.464	4.421	0.806***	0.789***	0.053	0.074		
I use my skills well.	*Players use their skills well.*	4.282	4.237	0.549***	0.949***	0.078	0.051		
I set my own goals.	*Players set their own goals.*	3.700	3.605	0.674***	0.380**	0.065	0.145		
I improve my performance.	*Players improve their performance.*	4.382	4.211	0.739***	0.805***	0.059	0.073		
Status		2.156	0.956					0.826	0.892
I show that I am better than others.	*Players show that they are better than others.*	1.789	0.605	0.775***	0.887***	0.057	0.055		
I win or beat others.	*Players win or beat others.*	2.299	1.368	0.708***	0.835***	0.062	0.064		
I look good.	*Players look good.*	2.440	0.895	0.845***	0.842***	0.054	0.063		

Note. λ = standardized factor loadings, CR = composite reliability, ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$

exceeded or approached the recommended threshold of .70, an indication of adequate internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019).

Construct validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was examined by comparing the average variance extracted (AVE) with the maximum and average shared variance (MSV, ASV), and convergent validity was assessed using the AVE. Discriminant validity was largely supported, as AVE values generally exceeded both MSV and ASV. One exception emerged in the moral domain among parents, in which MSV exceeded AVE, suggesting conceptual overlap with adjacent constructs. Evidence for convergent validity proved more variable. Al-

though AVE for the moral domain among parents fell below the .50 threshold, composite reliability exceeded .60, indicating adequate convergent validity (Bagozzi et al., 1991).

Overall, Model 2 demonstrated acceptable reliability and construct validity within both groups, with minor deviations concentrated in the moral domain among parents. These findings indicated that the model provided an adequate foundation for subsequent invariance testing and suggested that the moral domain may be somewhat context- or role-sensitive.

The configural model demonstrated an acceptable fit across groups (CFI = .994, RMSEA = .023, SRMR = .059), indicating a comparable factor structure. This provided evidence that athletes and parents shared a common structural conceptualization of the value domain. In short, the three-factor structure was comparable across the groups. Next, metric invariance was tested with constrained factor loadings that were equal across athletes and parents. When equality was imposed, the model fit declined markedly (CFI = .951, RMSEA = .061, SRMR = .088). The difference in CFI between the configural and metric models (ΔCFI = .043) exceeded recommended thresholds for invariance testing, indicating that metric invariance was not supported. Given the magnitude of the deterioration in model fit under equality constraints, further attempts to establish metric or scalar invariance were not pursued, and the data were treated as configural. Accordingly, cross-group comparisons of latent means were not conducted, and subsequent analyses focused on within-group relationships among value domains.

Inspection of group-specific standardized loadings (*Table 4*) indicated substantial divergence for several indicators, most notably within the moral and status domains. Moral items that reflected prosocial behaviour and sportsmanship showed weaker, more variable loadings for parents compared to athletes. This suggested that differences may exist between how moral values are inferred and how they are directly experienced in sport contexts. Similarly, within the status domain, items that emphasized social comparison and self-presentation showed notably stronger loadings for athletes, indicated greater salience of these indicators for those embedded in competitive environments. Smaller but meaningful discrepancies also emerged for selected competence indicators. Taken together, these patterns helped to explain the lack of metric invariance and supported the interpretation that athletes and parents shared a common factor structure but differed in how they weigh indicators when constructing value judgments.

Configural invariance was used to establish a shared factor structure across groups, to permit the interpretation of latent relationships within groups (Byrne et al., 1989; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). The analysis revealed distinct patterns in within-group latent factor correlations between athletes and parents, see *Table 5*. Among athletes, moral values were moderately associated with competence (r = .438) but were not reliably associated with status (r = -.218). All values were statis-

Table 5.
Latent Factor Correlations by Group (Single-Group CFA)

Panel A. Athletes

Domain	1	2	3
1. Moral	-	0.438*	-0.218
2. Competence		-	0.273*
3. Status			-

Panel B. Parents

Domain	1	2	3
1. Moral	-	0.443*	0.662*
2. Competence		-	0.327*
3. Status			-

Note. Latent factor correlations are standardized estimates derived from single-group confirmatory factor analyses. Correlations are interpreted within groups only due to a lack of metric invariance. * = $p < .05$ unless otherwise indicated. The moral-status association among athletes was not statistically reliable ($p = .062$).

tically significant to $p < .05$, except the moral-status-relationship in the athlete group ($p = .062$). Competence and status domains demonstrated a small-to-moderate positive association ($r = .273$). In contrast, among parents, moral values were moderately associated with competence ($r = .443$) and strongly associated with status ($r = .662$); competence and status were also found to be moderately positively associated ($r = .327$). Taken together, these patterns indicated that although athletes and parents shared a common factor structure, the relational organization of moral, competence, and status values differed meaningfully by group. Such findings further contextualize the lack of metric invariance observed in the multi-group analyses.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to test the assumption of sport value alignment between athletes' and parents' values within a GHA. Adults, including parents, are primarily responsible for leadership, guidance, and safeguarding within youth sport environments (Kihl & Schull, 2020; Thibault et al., 2010). Research has shown the central role parents and coaches play in transmitting values, shaping motivation, and influencing athletes' experiences (Danioni, et al., 2017; Gao et al., 2024). It is well known that participation levels fall drastically in girls beyond age 13 (i.e., Newland et al., 2020). When paired with the growing body of literature supporting the inclusion of youth voices in program development (e.g., Kelly & Foster, 2012; MacPhail, 2011; MacPhail et al., 2003) as well as the program itself being designed to provide enjoyment and skill development (Matheson et al., 2023), we believe it worthwhile to compare how parent and girl athlete values compare. In doing so, this study provides valuable insights for community sport organizations to craft

programs that foster athlete satisfaction, identity development, and continued participation, with potential implications for improved team performance (cf. Kerwin & Lebermann, 2023; Piché et al., 2024). Due to their proxy status, parents have long been characterized as the stakeholder group which youth sport programs are designed to satisfy (Eime et al., 2015; Green & Chalip, 1998; Schwab et al., 2010). This prioritization of parental satisfaction persists among youth sport practitioners despite several calls to incorporate youth perspectives into shaping sport policy and physical activity programming (Frank, 2006; Kelly & Foster, 2012; MacPhail, 2011; MacPhail et al., 2003). Research advancing the understanding of value alignment between athletes and parents in a single organization is particularly important in the context of girls' sports, where participation rates continue to rise – especially in traditionally male-dominated sports like ice hockey – though many organizations still face challenges with long-term retention (Eime et al., 2021; Newland et al., 2020).

The present study indicates that while athletes and parents shared a broadly similar high-order value structure, the meaning and prioritization of specific values diverged in important ways. Although direct latent mean comparisons were not conducted due to a lack of metric invariance, observed mean differences and relational patterns suggest consistent differences in how athletes and parents prioritize and interpret sport values. In particular, divergence at the indicator level indicates distinct emphases across shared value domains, reflecting the differing roles, experiences, and developmental positions of athletes and parents within the GHA. Viewed through an AGT lens, these interpretive differences may reflect athletes' greater orientation toward task-based conceptions of success centered on learning and improvements, alongside more normative success frameworks embedded within adult perspectives (Nicholls, 1989). Rather than indicating misalignment or dysfunction, these patterns are consistent with developmental research highlighting increasing differentiation in values during adolescence, as young athletes renegotiate autonomy, identity, and conceptions of success within sport contexts (e.g., Schiefer et al., 2012).

Findings from the multi-group analyses suggest that parents and athletes within the GHA share a common structure of sport values – competence, moral, and status – but differ in how these values are weighted and interpreted. Evidence of configural invariance indicates that the two groups organize their sport values similarly, whereas the absence of metric invariance highlights meaningful differences in the salience of specific indicators across groups. In this sense, value congruence exists at the conceptual level rather than the metric level. Parents' and athletes' shared emphasis on competence and moral domains reflects parents' long-standing proxy role in youth sport participation, whereby adults evaluate programs according to developmentally desirable outcomes such as skill acquisition, fairness, and character development (Green & Chalip, 1998). From this per-

spective, parents often view their child's involvement in sports as an investment, seeking returns in the form of personal growth, social development, and health benefits (Chard et al., 2015; Wigfield & Chard, 2018; Wigfield & Snelgrove, 2024). However, the lack of metric equivalence suggests that parents and athletes do not ascribe equal importance to the specific behaviours through which these values are enacted. While both groups endorse competence and moral values in principle, athletes' experiences in competitive environments may shape a more differentiated understanding of how these values operate in practice. Thus, rather than indicating full value congruence, the findings point to a shared value framework accompanied by structurally meaningful differences in interpretation that reflect distinct roles, experiences, and evaluative lenses within the youth sport system.

The desire for autonomy aligns with broader developmental theories and adds to the literature supporting the importance of giving athletes more of a voice in order to foster athlete-centred environments that empower girls to develop identity and agency within their sport experiences (e.g., Newland et al., 2020; Piché et al., 2024). Importantly, youth preferences and developmental needs are key components of wellbeing, which is well situated within the broader literature on self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2011). SDT highlights *autonomy*, the need to feel a sense of volition and choice in one's actions, *competence*, the need to feel effective and capable of growing within the sport, and *relatedness*, the need to feel a sense of belonging and connection, as essential to youth motivation to participate in sport (Deci & Ryan, 2011). The social ambience and interpersonal climate provided by adults is, therefore, salient and a primary determinant of youth's motivational quality. Deci and Ryan (2011) suggest that providing autonomy-supportive environments where athletes are given the opportunity to make choices in their involvement leads to an increase in youth engaging out of interest and further internalizing the values of sport. This coincides with movements in youth sport in European contexts, notably Sport England's *Play Their Way*, which centers programming on three pillars (youth voice, choice, and their journey) to focus on athletes themselves and their priorities in sport (Armstrong, 2023). In the context of this exploratory study, the girls in the GHA are old enough to evaluate their sporting journey honestly and to highlight the key values they seek through their participation in sport. To truly serve their membership – comprised of athletes and their parents and guardians – and to deliver on their organizational mission, the GHA should continue to offer opportunities for athlete voices to be heard and prepare to adapt accordingly.

From a program perspective, the observed patterns of value alignment and divergence can be interpreted through Marra's (2015) program evaluation in gender equity framework as a lens rather than an explanatory model. In particular, the differentiation in how athletes and parents prioritize and organize competence, moral, and status values highlights

the embedded nature of values within relational sport environments. These findings suggest that values are not merely individual preferences, but are shaped through ongoing interactions amongst athletes, parents, coaches, and organizational structures. Rather than indicating program effectiveness or failure, the divergence in value weighting points to adaptive tensions that sport organizations must navigate as athletes mature and renegotiate autonomy, identity, and performance goals. Viewed in this way, program evaluation frameworks help contextualize how value patterns may inform organizational decision-making and stakeholder engagement without presuming linear change or specific intervention outcomes.

In the context of sport, programs that prioritize athlete growth through novel social interactions, skill-building challenges, and physical development are more likely to foster long-term positive outcomes. This is consistent with previous research on girls' sport programs, which has emphasized the importance of creating psychologically and physically safe environments where girls can express themselves, develop their sense of self, and form connections with peers, adult staff, and coaches (LaVoi, 2018; Piché et al., 2024). For practitioners, establishing alignment between the organization's programming and its athletes' values, rather than relying exclusively on parents' values, is crucial to overcoming longstanding barriers to retention in girls' sports (Newland et al., 2020).

In summary, this study challenges the assumption that value alignment between parents and athletes in youth sports can be understood as a simple agreement on priorities or magnitudes. It is comparable in some ways yet differs meaningfully in how the values are interpreted and emphasized. These differences may reflect athletes' increasing engagement with competitive evaluation and role differentiation as they progress through organized sport, alongside parents' continued emphasis on developmental and character-related outcomes. Rather than signalling misalignment, the observed divergence highlights the evolving and role-dependent nature of values within youth sport systems. Understanding value alignment as structural similarity paired with interpretive variation provides a more nuanced lens for examining stakeholder dynamics and underscores the importance of athlete-centered perspectives during key developmental transitions.

Practical Implications and Strategies

The study identifies several key areas for strategic development from a parental and organizational perspective. The findings highlight the importance of athlete voices and consultation in shaping their sport experiences. Thus, it is critical that youth feedback be included in program evaluations to ensure that organizations are adequately servicing these participants. Concomitantly, the feedback and evaluation results from the youth perspective should be available and published for review by all stakeholders. It is critical that those who make policy and program decisions have access to participants' voices to ensure their needs are being met. To

further elevate athlete voices, it may be beneficial for youth participants to be involved in BOD meetings, such as Annual General Meetings or other program evaluation discussions. Athletes' perspectives are important for adult stakeholders' understanding of what is most pertinent to the athlete experience and for prioritizing improvements. In doing so, organizations may foster greater alignment between stakeholder perspectives, enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of their programming.

Parents should be cautioned not to become overly engrossed in the quality of the sports programs from their own perspective. Rather, they should be emphasizing and encouraging the changing values of their children, especially as they age and mature. Further transparency related to the results of participant feedback may aid in discussions between parents and their athletes about what is most salient to their experience. By delivering published evaluation findings, parents can be better informed to recognize and support what their children want from the program. As youth age, they become more autonomous and desire setting their own goals (e.g., Benish-Weisman et al., 2022; Daniel et al., 2012), and thus, parents must be flexible in their own priorities or values to support their children(s)'s pursuit. Flexibility from this lens is important to acknowledge that attitudes such as likes and dislikes will change as they grow up, so parents should be cognizant that their child will not have the same satisfaction or feedback at 8 and 14 years old. Longitudinal program evaluations, coupled with the dissemination of findings, will help parents discuss shifts in values and priorities more effectively, ensuring that the sport programming fits the needs of all stakeholders, athletes included.

In this specific case, athlete feedback to the GHA led to the establishment of a leadership program designed to expose girls approaching their final years of youth hockey to coaching, if they were interested. This improved peer-to-peer learning and connections within the organization, as it has now led to more older players supporting the younger or "beginner" teams within the GHA. This participant feedback from the program evaluation has also allowed the organization to expand opportunities for players to engage with athletes from the local University women's team rather than just the coaches who support some skill development sessions. This focus on mentorship is vital specifically for young women (Newland et al., 2020; Piché et al., 2024). This underscores the vital need for sport organizations to consult their youth to better understand their priorities and values. Further, this feedback must then be shared to organizational leaders so they can integrate what athletes want into larger decision making and the programs themselves.

Limitations & Future Research

This study provides insight into how athletes' and parents' sport values are structured and interpreted within a single GHA; however, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the findings are context-specific and reflect the experiences of one organization operating within

a particular social and demographic environment. As such, generalizability beyond this setting is limited. Examining value structures across multiple hockey associations, including those that differ in size, geographic location, socioeconomic composition, and organizational resources, would strengthen the external validity of future research and enable more nuanced comparisons across contexts.

Second, the cross-sectional design captures values at a single point in time, restricting the ability to assess developmental change or value evolution across stages of sport participation (Neuman & Robson, 2014). As Priest et al. (1999) note, differences observed between age groups in cross-sectional data may reflect cohort effects rather than true developmental processes. Longitudinal research tracking athletes and parents over time would allow for a more precise examination of how value structures, interpretations, and congruence shift as athletes progress through competitive pathways.

A further limitation of this study relates to the inability to isolate relational and role-specific dynamics within the dataset. Parent and athlete responses were not paired, as athletes were recruited in person during team activities (e.g., off-ice training sessions) and completed the survey on a tablet, whereas parents were invited to participate separately via email and social media. Although this approach preserved anonymity, it limited the ability to examine value alignment within specific parent-athlete dyads and instead required group-level analysis.

Additionally, while parents were asked to report whether they volunteered within the GHA, the study did not capture the specific nature or extent of these roles. As such, potential differences in value prioritization associated with varying levels or types of organizational involvement could not be meaningfully examined. This limitation was further compounded by the relatively small parent sample ($n = 38$), which restricted the ability to conduct more detailed subgroup analyses with sufficient statistical power. Future research should consider incorporating an anonymous matching procedure to link parent-athlete responses and collecting more detailed measures of parental involvement to better capture how values may vary across relational and organizational roles. Extending this line of inquiry to include a broader range of adult stakeholders, such as coaches, administrators, and board members who are not necessarily parents, would further enhance the understanding of how value prioritization may differ across positions with varying levels of influence in organizational decision-making.

Future research would benefit from comparative designs that examine boys' and girls' hockey organizations operating under similar structural conditions (e.g., access to facilities, funding models, governance structures). Such comparisons could help disentangle gendered value patterns from broader organizational or resource-based influences and further inform whether programming models developed for boys adequately reflect the

girls' values and experiences. Given the rapidly growing and evolving landscape of women's hockey and the evidence that girls' participation is shaped by distinct priorities and constraints (e.g., Benish-Weisman, 2024; Matheson et al., 2023), continued investigation across diverse program contexts is warranted, including emerging innovative models such as the Tween Girls Hockey League in Toronto, Ontario.

Extending upon this work, longitudinal examination of how parental values evolve alongside athletes' developmental transitions may clarify how proxy roles shift over time and how organizations balance competing stakeholder perspectives. Such work would further inform program evaluation efforts and support the design of sport environments that remain responsive to athletes' changing needs while sustaining parental interest and engagement. Advancing this line of inquiry would benefit from the development of measurement tools capable of capturing value structures across both youth and adult stakeholders, enabling a more direct and meaningful comparison across groups.

Conclusion

Taken together, this study contributes to youth sport scholarship by demonstrating that value alignment between athletes and parents is not a matter of simple agreement, but rather one of shared structure accompanied by meaningful interpretive divergence. By distinguishing between conceptual similarity and metric non-equivalence, the findings highlight how values operate differently across stakeholder roles within the same organizational context. In doing so, this work advances a more nuanced understanding of value congruence in girls' sport, one that recognizes athletes as active agents rather than passive recipients of adult-defined priorities. As participation opportunities for girls continue to expand in traditionally male-dominated sports, acknowledging these differentiated value perspectives is critical for developing sport environments that remain responsive, developmentally appropriate, and capable of sustaining engagement across adolescence.

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