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**ON AND OFF THE ICE: A CASE STUDY OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF
PARENTS IN COMPETITIVE YOUTH HOCKEY**

by

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B.Sc., University of Ottawa, 2001

M. A., University of Ottawa, 2003

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ABSTRACT

Initially played for fun, friendship, and an opportunity to exercise, hockey has since become a Canadian tradition rendering it an obsessively competitive culture year-round (Russell, 2000). Several incidents of inappropriate parental behaviours at minor hockey games have recently received national media attention (Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010). Hence, it is critical that parents examine their own beliefs and attitudes regarding what they believe youth sports should be all about (Heinzmann, 2002), which highlights the need for research in the area of parental involvement in youth hockey.

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the involvement of parents in competitive youth hockey from a symbolic interactionist perspective. More specifically, the purpose was: (a) to explore how parents create their role within the competitive youth hockey culture, and (b) to explore how parents perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the hockey environment.

The study focused on a 'Peewee AA' (11-12 years old) boys' hockey team (parents, players, coaches) registered in a minor hockey association. Within this specific team, three families were also recruited to serve as multiple cases from which in-depth accounts were portrayed. Data were collected throughout a hockey season using: direct observation, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and in-depth interviews.

Findings of this study showed that youth hockey becomes a "lifestyle", whereby the demands were remarkably comparable to that of a professional endeavour, allotting minimal time for "kids to be kids". Parents acknowledged that issues of aggression arise as competition increases, yet they somehow did not recognize themselves as complicit contributors to their existence. Rather, they projected blame on the conflicting yet prevailing beliefs embedded in the culture. While parents expected their children to behave in the manner they deemed "acceptable", much of their own observed behaviours displayed incongruence, creating a sometimes hostile environment among parents, whereby policies were neglected and responsibility for helping ensure a healthy and respectful environment was disregarded. Findings highlight the need for parents, with the support of the larger youth hockey movement, to be held accountable for their behaviours as much as they need to be responsible for sustaining this cultural creation.

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External Evaluator: Dr. Kevin Young (University of Calgary)

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To *family members, friends, teammates, and colleagues* who frequently asked "are you done yet?" The answer is finally YES!!!

DEDICATION

This road would have been much bumpier? Who am I kidding?
This journey would not have been possible without the both of you.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, for providing me with every opportunity to pursue my dreams, while challenging me to be the best that I can be. I love you!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sport is one of the most common types of activities in which youth engage worldwide (Ewing & Seefeldt, 2002). In recent years, a large growth rate in youth sports has resulted in more children participating in community programs and interscholastic events (Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005; Smoll, 1998). Evidently, the youth sport world inherently represents a social context that intersects with other important social contexts, such as school, family, and community life (Wiese-Bjornstall, LaVoi, & Omli, 2009). Consequently, the experiences children have in sport should be rewarding and provide opportunities to learn lifelong values and develop sound fundamental skills (Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007). Not only does sport stimulate growth and lead to improved physical and emotional health, it also has the potential to enhance personal development (Smith & Smoll, 2002). Participating organized sport allows children to meet new people, develop special bonds, as well as affiliate themselves with a team (Coakley, 2004). Research has also shown that children who participate in sport get higher grades in school and have higher educational aspirations than non-participative children (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003). However, the effects of participation in youth sport can result in both positive and negative outcomes (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000).

Although sport is considered a forum for ongoing learning, many people also believe that it has the potential to create negative environments (Coaching Association of Canada, 1997; Robinson, 1998). In contact sports, such as hockey, intimidation, aggression, and violence are used as strategies for winning games, promoting athletic careers, as well as increasing fan-based entertainment (Coakley, 2004). Although the practice of hockey

depends on how the rules are written and how they are interpreted and enforced (Theberge, 1997), it appears that certain types of behaviours are not only praised but also expected within this environment (Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010). Hockey Canada's (2010) mission statement reads: "Lead, develop, and promote positive hockey experiences." Their mandate states that the organization believes in creating positive hockey experiences by emphasizing sportsmanship and ensuring safe environments. It seeks to develop lifelong skills and instill the values of honesty and integrity in all participants. Finally, it stresses the importance of promoting a proud and successful representation of our Canadian tradition. But is this really the case? Consequently, this concern has led researchers to further explore how coaches, teammates, and the media promote and defend aggressive behaviour in sport, including hockey, which may shed light on our understanding of why and how aggression has become an important feature within the hockey culture.

Over the past decades, many studies have focused on the role and influence of coaches on the development of young athletes (Brustad et al., 2001). Naturally, coaches have many responsibilities but their primary concern should be to create environments which allow for optimal performance and quality attitudes for young athletes (Coaching Association of Canada, 1997). Unfortunately, there are endless reports of coaches throwing their clipboards in disbelief or taunting and mocking opponents (Coakley, 2004). As the level of competition increases, coaches often integrate aggression into their game plans, influencing the athletes' views on the acceptability of certain behaviours (Loughead & Leith, 2001; Robinson, 1998). Furthermore, coaches often use language that promotes aggression as a means to increase their players' motivation and intensity (Pappas, McKenry, & Catlett, 2004). For example, coaches will use language that refers to hard hits, intimidation, playing

with guts and courage, as well as ‘taking one for the team’ during pre-game pep-talks in order to try to psyche up their players. According to Smith (1979), hockey coaches believe that aggressive play not only helps win hockey games, but strengthens the character of athletes. The message most coaches send to players is that competence is linked to aggressive behaviours (Pappas et al., 2004).

Additionally, research has shown that through interactions, peers influence and reinforce the attitudes and behaviours of others (Brustad et al., 2001). In hockey, boys discover that by being aggressive, they avoid social labels, such as ‘wimp’ and ‘sissy’ (Ingham & Dewar, 1999; Smith, 1979). Players are aware that turning away from fights or avoiding rough play will earn them the labels of weak character and team failure (Weinstein, Smith, & Weisenthal, 1995). Although these expectations are not formulated into explicit codes of conduct, they are nevertheless part of an informal set of understandings that are used by players to make sense of aggressive behaviours on the ice (Robinson, 1998; Sheldon & Aimar, 2001), which are also often highlighted by the media.

Many professional sport leagues use images of intimidation, retaliation, aggression, and even violence to promote their sport (Coakley, 2004). Robinson (1998) highlights how the famous hockey commentator Don Cherry implicitly encourages language of aggression. During his television segments between periods of National Hockey League (NHL) games, he often applauds big hits and promotes aggressive play, while his video compilations isolate and praise aggressive acts within the sport (e.g., “Rock’Em Sock’Em”). According to Coakley (2004), children who watch these types of media coverage are more likely to imitate athletes when they are themselves engaged in informal games and/or organized youth sports. As such, if the NHL serves as an ultimate dream for hockey players, it is reasonable to expect

younger players to try to emulate their sporting idols (Visek & Watson, 2005). Evidently, exposure to these types of behaviours may be harmful to the physical and emotional health of children (DeArth-Pendley & Cummings, 2002). Clearly, however, the media does not reflect reality, which is why adult viewers have a responsibility for revising, organizing, and making sense of the messages and images promoted by the media (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). It is unjustifiable to solely blame the media for the use of aggression and violence in sport, both at the professional and youth levels (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). Nevertheless, when tendencies of aggression in sport occur, people are quick to assume that society's moral foundation is thinning and children are learning undesirable behaviours (Dunning, 1999), from not only coaches, teammates, and professional athletes, but parents as well.

Although the literature provides insight into the influence of parents in youth sport (Anderson, Funk, Elliott, & Smith, 2003; Côté & Hay, 2002b; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995), the degree of understanding in terms of how parents create their roles within the competitive hockey environment and how they deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the sport is minimal. Therefore, this study focuses on the involvement of parents in competitive youth hockey by taking us into the daily lives and sharing the experiences of parents, players, and coaches of a 'Peewee AA' team throughout the course of a season timeline.

Description of the Problem

With more than 500,000 Canadians registered in minor hockey (Hockey Canada, 2010), it is unfortunate that the youth hockey environment has become synonymous with the problematic behaviours of parents. In the past few years, several incidents of parental violence at minor hockey games have received national media attention (Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010). For example, a police constable in Winnipeg was arrested and charged

with threatening another parent during his nine-year-old son's hockey game (Deacon, McClelland, & Smart, 2001). Another incident occurred in January 2005 when a proud hockey father was ordered to take anger management classes after allegedly choking his son's coach until he blacked out because the coach had benched his son for missing team practices, which was an association policy the coach was obeying (Kohler, 2005). A few months later, a Toronto father was charged with assault after allegedly jumping onto the ice surface and punching two officials (Kohler, 2005). Finally, the following example made headlines worldwide. It is the criminal case of Thomas Junta, a dedicated hockey father, who was charged and found guilty of involuntary manslaughter after a fatal fight with another parent (CNN, 2002, January 25). It has been said that the two men argued and fought over the rough play between their sons during a hockey practice.

There have been numerous cases of parents banned, fined, and even arrested for inappropriate behaviours at youth sporting events (Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010; Shields, LaVoi, Bredemeir, & Power, 2007). Although these cases may be considered random and infrequent, there are many examples that demonstrate how aggression has become a part of youth sport (Bergin & Habusta, 2004). For example, how many times are parents in the stands seen harassing referees or publicly disagreeing with the coaching staff? It is not uncommon to see parents emphasizing winning at all costs, even to the detriment of the development of their children's social and moral skills (Durand-Bush, Salmela, & Thompson, 2004).

Clearly, youth sport programs have a responsibility to ensure that their environments cater to the positive characteristics of sport (Eitzen, 2006; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007). DeFrancesco and Johnson (1997) revealed that there is a definite need for youth sport

programs and associations to pay more attention to parental behaviours deemed inappropriate and out of control. Consequently, in 1997, Hockey Canada developed and implemented the “Speak Out” program in order to raise awareness and prevent bullying, harassment, and abuse in hockey across Canada. During the 2002 and 2003 seasons, mass national media campaigns entitled “Relax, it’s just a game” were launched in an effort to educate parents who have children playing in youth leagues (Hockey Canada, 2010). The purpose of these campaigns was to create and send powerful messages to parents, coaches, and spectators on the issues of inappropriate parental behaviours not only in minor hockey, but youth sports in general. Finally, another youth hockey initiative that gained great currency consisted of implementing codes of conduct for all members (e.g., athletes, coaches, referees, parents, administrators). Although these codes of conduct list acceptable behaviours, it is difficult to estimate the power that the hockey sub-culture has on parents, where institutionalized types of aggression are promoted (Robidoux & Trudel, 2006). According to Heinzmann (2002), implementing codes of conduct is not ‘the solution’ but only one approach to help curtail this current national predicament.

If the Canadian world of hockey is to truly follow the mandate and mission put forward by its national organization, changes need to be made. To ensure that hockey is a positive and learning environment where young hockey players’ dreams can be fulfilled, a better understanding of the culture is required (Robinson, 1998). As stated by Smith (2003), what society perceives as aggression “has a great deal to do with what people are willing to do about it” (p. 215). In essence, the cultural definitions and expectations within youth hockey potentially create a range of conflicting beliefs for parents, which is why it is important that their involvement be further investigated.

Significance of the Study

Over the years, numerous studies have found that a positive relationship exists between parental involvement and children's performance in various domains, such as in academic success (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004), literacy abilities (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002), and achievement in music (Davidson, Howe, Moore, & Sloboda, 1996; Sichivitsa, 2007). In sport, research has repeatedly shown that parents play a significant role throughout the sporting career of their children (Baker, Horton, Robertson-Wilson, & Wall, 2003; Côté, 1999; Côté & Hay, 2002b; Durand-Bush, 2000). As stated by Coakley (2004), parents essentially play multiple roles (e.g., banker, chauffeur, cheerleader, and cook) in order to enable their athletic child to pursue sporting endeavours. However, little is known about the involvement and behaviours of parents specifically within the competitive environment of youth hockey, a longstanding Canadian tradition. According to Baker and colleagues (2003), the importance a country places on a particular sport can highly influence the meaning it is given by its participants.

This study is significant in light of the current gaps that exist within the world of youth sport, specifically as they relate to parents. The findings of this study add to the existing youth sport literature on the involvement of parents in competitive youth hockey, whereby there is little knowledge as to why and how parents choose to behave within the youth sport world (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). In fact, much of the literature on parental involvement in sport focuses on the perceptions of athletes and coaches, while limited studies have included the perceptions of the parents themselves (Harwood & Knight, 2009a). As such, this study recognizes the importance of understanding the experiences of parents through the meanings and definitions they give to situations, people, and physical things

within the competitive youth hockey environment. This study therefore provides a voice to parents while acknowledging the complexity of parental involvement in youth sport and the need to be sensitive to a range of perceptions and behaviours.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 served to introduce the research topic, further describe the research problem, and highlight the significance of this study. The next chapter, Chapter 2, presents a review of the literature which focuses on pertinent empirical information on several domains relevant to the present study, including the ideologies and practices of the hockey culture, as well as the youth sport world and parental implications. Chapter 3 outlines the conceptual framework, purpose of the study, research questions and assumptions, as well as the research design that guided the present study. It also presents the methodology and procedures that were used to collect, analyze, and interpret the data. The limitations of this study are also discussed in this chapter. Descriptive accounts of the findings of the study are presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. According to Wolcott (2009), the descriptive account in qualitative research provides the “foundation upon which qualitative inquiry rests” and represents the major contribution of the phenomenon under study (p. 27). In chapter 7, the findings are subsequently discussed in light of the literature within and beyond sport. The conclusions are outlined in Chapter 8, along with practical implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Although limited research specific to parents in hockey exists, many studies have been conducted in sport that may offer some insight into researching how parents make sense of their involvement within youth hockey. More specifically, research has focused on the role of parents in the development of expertise, the nature of their involvement throughout their child's athletic career, as well as their overall influence on the child's sport participation in terms of support, pressure, expectations, and so forth. The following literature review presents research in several domains relevant to the present study. The first section discusses the ideologies and practices that persist today within the culture of hockey, while the second section provides a brief overview of the youth sport world as it relates specifically to the involvement and roles of parents.

The Culture of Hockey

Hockey may be recognized as a social construction created and continuously modified in cultural and social environments (Coakley, 2004; Whitson & Gruneau, 2006). With its roots on frozen North American ponds, hockey has become part of Canada's culture and heritage (Robinson, 1998; Russell, 2000). Initially played for fun, friendship, and an opportunity to exercise, it has since become a Canadian tradition rendering it a potentially obsessive competitive culture year-round (Russell, 2000; Whitson & Gruneau, 2006). Contrary to popular belief, Hockey Canada's (2010) ultimate goal is not to increase the number of Canadians in the NHL. Rather, they believe that the focus should be placed on the quality of youth experience at all age and skill levels because this is what will allow

Canadian hockey players to reach elite levels and/or stay involved in the game in various capacities (e.g., player, coach, official, administrator).

Structure of the Youth Hockey Environment

In minor hockey, there are various recreational and competitive leagues in which children can participate. Hockey seasons typically begin at the end of August and continue into March, sometimes even April. During this time, teams engage in various events, including practices, games (e.g., exhibition, league, playoff), tournaments (e.g., in and out of town), as well as other team activities (e.g., dryland/fitness training, meetings, parties). Players are categorized by their age, sex, ability level, and geographic location. Within the boundaries of minor hockey, there are six age groups: Initiation (five and six years old), Novice (seven and eight years old), Atom (nine and 10 years old), Peewee (11 and 12 years old), Bantam (13 and 14 years old), and Midget (15 to 17 years old). Each age group also has its own level of calibre. In most local associations, the calibre of teams ranges from 'AA' (most competitive) to 'C' (recreational only), however some associations also have 'AAA' teams (Bantam age and up), which then becomes the most competitive level.

Notably, as the level of calibre increases, so does the financial commitment. Coakley (2004) reported that the cost of having one child playing in a competitive youth hockey league in the United States can range anywhere between \$5000 and \$16000, which includes registration fees, travel, equipment, as well as other related expenses. In Canada, the financial demands are similar. There is no set cost to participate in hockey, as it varies depending on provinces, leagues, and individual teams (Hockey Canada, 2010). For example, registration fees may vary from a few hundred dollars (recreational level) to over one thousand

(competitive level). Travel costs also fluctuate based on the geographical restrictions of leagues as well as the number of tournaments teams choose to attend.

Generally, highly-skilled players are selected to play for competitive and/or traveling teams and are continuously competing for positions as well as ice time against their own teammates. It is also at this time that the prominent notion of winning at all costs is often introduced (Ingham & Dewar, 1999; Robinson, 1998). Hence, as athletes become older and choose to play in the more competitive leagues, the path to excellence can become obscure and more complicated (Hockey Canada, 2010). Children and parents are faced with difficult decisions as they try to navigate through the competitive dream of signing the big contracts or representing their country. The turning point for many families can occur for players as young as 12 years old when scouts, coaches, and agents start to show interest in the young hockey hopefuls. As the ‘scouting’ begins, some of the difficult life decisions they may encounter consist of moving to another community, changing associations, living with a billet family, transferring schools, and so on (Hockey Canada, 2010). Consequently, athletes quickly learn and adapt to the implicit demands and expectations of the sport.

Rules of the Game

In hockey, many rules have been formulated and implemented, pertaining to the objectives of the game, equipment requirements, and behaviour regulations. Rules are enforced by on-ice officials, whose primary responsibilities include maintaining order and ensuring the safety of participants. As stated by Hockey Canada (2010), the role of the official can be defined in two words: safe and fair. Hence, with those two words in mind, the official should be able to call (i.e., officiate) a game that is acceptable to all of the

participants, and it is through the enforcement of the rules that positive hockey experiences will be emphasized and skill development promoted.

Yet, body checking is one skill that brings much controversy to the rules of hockey (see Robidoux & Trudel, 2006 for a review). Defined as an individual defensive skill designed to specifically separate the puck carrier from the puck, body checking is completely legal within the boundaries of the game (Hockey Canada, 2010). In other words, according to the rules, a player can intentionally hit an opponent who has possession of the puck. It differs from body contact which is also an integral element of the game at all levels and age groups and consists of any type of incidental contact between players (King & LeBlanc, 2006). For example, a defensive player may make (body) contact with the puck carrier through the use of angling and positioning, yet there is no hitting involved.

Previous research has focused on the impact of body checking in youth hockey, including the number and types of injuries (Hagel, Marko, Dryden, Couperthwaite, Sommerfeldt, & Rowe, 2006; Marchie & Cusimano, 2003; Warsch, Constantin, Howard, & Macpherson, 2009). Despite evidence showing that body checking increases injury risks, it is introduced at the Pee wee level (11 and 12 years old) in most provinces countrywide. Three of Hockey Canada's governing branches (of a total of 13) are integrating body checking at the Atom level (nine and 10 years old) as part of ongoing research initiatives on various topics (e.g., sport safety, injuries in sport, skill acquisition, growth and development), all of which have direct implications on the introduction and integration of body checking into the game (Hockey Canada, 2010).

Although the rules of the game remain generally the same for both men and women, one critical difference is the integration of body checking. More specifically, in men's

hockey, body checking is deemed an essential skill, whereas in women's hockey it is prohibited. While the women's game emphasizes speed, strategy, and playing skills, the men's game tends to focus on power, force, and hard hits (Theberge, 1997). Consequently, hockey is said to be consistent with the traditional male gender role in our society today in that it allows male athletes to exhibit traditional masculine qualities of power, strength, dominance, and violence (Allain, 2008; Pappas et al., 2004). Hockey, along with other contact sports such as football and rugby, offers male athletes an opportunity to stake claim and prove their masculinity, which is defined as a socially constructed set of meanings, values, and practices (Goig, 2008; Light, 2007; Robinson, 1998; Weinstein et al., 1995). In other words, by using aggressive behaviour, they are socially constructing themselves as typically masculine as well as demonstrating their place within the masculinity hierarchy (Pappas et al., 2004; Theberge, 1997).

Aggression in Hockey

According to Bandura (1973), cultures have the potential to produce and/or reinforce aggressive tendencies in individuals by valuing, modeling, and rewarding aggressive behaviours. Hockey represents one of the few areas of life in which force and intimidation are still allowed to triumph, and toughness and willingness to 'pay the price' are celebrated (Robinson, 1998; Theberge, 1997). From a general standpoint, aggression has been defined as "verbal or physical actions grounded in an intent to dominate, control, or do harm to another person" (Coakley, 2004, p. 203). It is important to note the difference between aggression and assertion, as both terms are often used interchangeably (or incorrectly) by coaches, players, and parents. Assertive behaviours include high levels of intensity, competitiveness, and emotion but lack the intent to inflict harm to others (Dorsch, Paskevich,

& Loughhead, 2007; Lemieux, McElvie, & Stout, 2002). In fact, when coaches suggest that their players compete more aggressively, they are generally referring to assertive types of behaviours (Dorsch et al., 2007). In contrast, Coakley (2004) refers to violence as the “use of excessive physical force, which causes or has the potential to cause harm or destruction” (p. 202). In other words, violence in sport can be viewed as extreme acts of aggression whereby excessive physical force is used beyond the fundamental objectives of the game (Dorsch et al., 2007).

Young hockey prospects know that they have limited control over their future in hockey when it comes to the politics of the game. Due to the fact that there is no guaranteed process or curriculum to follow, there is a belief that they must pursue a path that will get them noticed and bring them closer to fulfilling their dreams (Robinson, 1998). Although some hockey players appear to have the ‘special scoring touch’, most often, young teenagers rely on other means for getting noticed on the ice. Toughness, dirty play, and eagerness to fight are usually attributes that impress higher level coaches, are wanted by scouts, and progressively accepted by parents (Robinson, 1998). They also serve as means to prove athletes’ self-worth, athletic identities, as well as status among teammates and sporting communities (Coakley, 2004). Most young hockey players do not define their behaviours as aggressive or violent but rather as natural and necessary to their overall success in hockey (Sheldon & Aimar, 2001).

In a study conducted by Loughhead and Leith (2001), which quantitatively investigated the perceptions of youth hockey players and coaches on the prevalence of aggression, it was found that as the levels of calibre became more competitive, the number of aggressive behaviours increased as did the overall acceptance of such behaviours. Although

players' on-ice behaviours were examined, researchers focused solely on the game scoresheets, whereby types of penalty were identified for each player. Consequently, this leads one to speculate that many aggressive acts were not included in the overall study, because players may not have always been penalized for such behaviours and therefore no records were included on the scoresheet. Nonetheless, both players and coaches perceived certain types of aggressive acts as being, at times, 'part of the game'. Similarly, in another study, Visek and Watson (2005) examined whether the perceived legitimacy of aggressive behaviour (specific to hockey) changed as the level of competitive play increased. To do so, 87 male hockey players of various age groups and calibre levels participated in the study. Results revealed that even the younger hockey players (seven to 10 years old) deemed aggressive behaviours as acceptable elements of the game, even more so as the levels of competitiveness increased, which is consistent with Loughhead and Leith's (2001) study. The researchers also suggested that the longer a hockey player continues to compete in the sport, the more socialized he becomes, and the more accepting he may become of aggressive behaviour.

Nevertheless, the legitimacy of aggression or violence in sport is characterized by the fact that it is often perceived to be necessary and justified (Smith, 1983), which clearly conflicts with other societal currents. Bullying in schools, for example, has become a topic of public concern around the world (Smith, Ananiadou, & Cowie, 2003). In Canada, local, provincial, and national organizations have developed and implemented various initiatives to prevent and reduce risks of bullying behaviours in attempts to make schools and communities safer for children and youth (Craig & Pepler, 2003). While most anti-bullying programs have focused solely on the school setting, Smith and colleagues emphasize the need to examine

how abusive and/or aggressive behaviours are accepted and tolerated within society as a whole. Clearly, the hockey world is one environment that condones both overt and covert aggressive behaviours on the ice.

According to Coakley (2004), situational factors may help shape aggressive and/or assertive behaviours, such as: (a) meaning and importance of the event (e.g., playoff game), (b) history and rivalry between teams, (c) location of the event (e.g., home versus away), (d) team's recent performances (e.g., losing streak), and (e) consistency and competency of officials. However, what happens when those engaging in such behaviours are the parents rather than the young hockey players themselves? Despite the large interest in aggression in sport, limited research has focused on the dynamics underlying aggressive behaviours, including those of parents. Evidently, the behaviours of the people in the stands highly influence and shape the behaviours of the players on the ice (Young, 2000). Arguably, any adult who encourages aggressive and/or violent behaviours misrepresents the explicit formal goals and espoused values of organized youth sport.

The Youth Sport World

According to Eccles and colleagues (2003), organized activities are a good use of adolescents' time because they provide opportunities for developing social, physical, and intellectual skills, which can be applied to other areas of their lives. These activities also enable adolescents to develop a sense of belonging as a member of a group, establish supportive networks, and experience and overcome challenges (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003). One of the most popular organized activities in which youth participate has consistently been that of sport (Eccles & Barber, 1999). In 2005, more than half of Canadian children aged five to 14 regularly participated in an organized sporting activity (Clark, 2008).

Côté and Fraser-Thomas (2007) reported that youth sport has the potential to achieve three primary objectives: promote physical health, develop psychosocial skills (e.g., discipline, self-control, cooperation), as well as learn and refine motor skills. In terms of promoting positive development, skills of leadership, teamwork, sportpersonship, and character-building are commonly attributed to youth sport (Clark, 2008; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009), all of which can be transferable to other areas, such as the classroom and/or community (Danish, 2002). Research has shown that children primarily participate in sport because of the elements of fun and enjoyment it involves (Côté, 1999; Ewing & Seefeldt, 2002). Sources of fun that are routinely mentioned by young athletes are: skill level, perception of competence, challenge of activity, social interactions, positive parental involvement, as well as extrinsic rewards (Mandigo & Couture, 1996; Strean & Holt, 2000). Noticeably, winning rarely appears to be a predominant source, which is why youth sport programs should focus on skill development, positive experiences, and active involvement (Strean & Holt, 2000), throughout children's athletic participation.

Stages of Participation in Sport

Becoming an expert in a specific area is a process that requires the development and refinement of skill and knowledge over an extensive period of time (Wann & Côté, 2007). Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Römer (1993) stated that it is between the ages of three and eight that athletes are exposed for the first time to the sport of interest, which was most likely determined by the parents' own past experiences with the same sport (Smoll, 1998). In one particular study, Baxter-Jones and Maffulli (2003) conducted semi-structured interviews with 282 children (33 soccer players, 71 gymnasts, 82 swimmers, and 96 tennis players) and their parents in order to determine how elite athletes were introduced to their sport. They found

that children's early sport participation highly depended on parental involvement, although the reasons for the initiation differed between sports and parental gender. In swimming and gymnastics, mothers played a significant role, while in soccer, it was fathers who tended to be more influential. In tennis, however, both parents actively initiated their young child to the sport. Results also reported that many talented young athletes with less motivated parents are less inclined to be involved in sport. Finally, the researchers indicated that though parents introduced their children to sport, their role was not nearly as influential when children moved from recreational to competitive training.

Côté and Hay (2002a) proposed a model that outlines three distinct stages of participation in sport: the sampling years, the specializing years, and the investment years. An alternative stage, the recreational years, accounts for individuals who could not or chose not to participate at an elite level or did not want to focus on a single sport. Their model is particularly significant because it was developed based on the perspectives of not only athletes but also those of parents and siblings. Following is a description of the stages in the model and for each stage, the role of parents is highlighted.

The sampling years consist of a period in which the children participate in a variety of sports and activities. It is also usually the period during which they are introduced to organized sport, whereby their participation is active, enjoyable, voluntary, and intrinsically motivating. Côté (1999) found that during this time period, children and siblings are encouraged by their parents to experiment with different sports and games for pure pleasure rather than for attaining specific goals. The parents seek to provide their children with opportunities to have fun and develop motor skills, motivations, values, and beliefs about sport and physical activity (Durand-Bush, 2000).

During the specializing years, typically around the age of 13, children commit to one or two sports, a decision that is often influenced by the support and encouragement from parents, siblings, and coaches. At this level, although fun and excitement still remain central elements in the process, the emphasis is on the development of sport specific skills through more structured practice (Durand-Bush, 2000). Investing considerable time and money to support their child's participation, the parents typically become involved in one way or another (i.e., spectator, coach), as their interest in the sport continues to develop (Côté, 1999).

The investment years are characterized by the desire for the children to pursue a superior level of performance in one specific sport. Children typically reach this level around the age of 15, but it varies depending on the sport. The investment years are notably more intense with respect to the time and effort athletes dedicate towards training. Throughout these years, the parents show great interest in their child's athletic career and help their children overcome challenges and/or cope with setbacks such as injuries, lack of motivation, and disappointments. The parents also continue to provide financial support to sustain their child's participation in sport (Durand-Bush, 2000).

In sum, Côté and Hay's (2002a) stages of participation present an insightful model into the development of children in sport and highlight the need to cater to the needs of the athletes through each stage. It also provides useful information for parents to foster and monitor the development of their athletic child while adapting their roles throughout the stages. As suggested by Streat and Holt (2000), parents should continually seek to create sport environments intended to promote desirable behaviour and meet the needs of their children.

Sport Socialization

Sport may be considered a microcosm for societal living which allows participants to develop and refine social skills through socialization (Nucci & Young-Shim, 2005), an area that has received considerable research attention (Baker et al., 2003; Greendorfer, 2002; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995). According to Bandura (1977), socialization can be defined as a shared interactive social process whereby individuals are exposed to important forms of information, such as behaviours and norms, within a particular environment. In other words, it is a progression whereby individuals learn to behave in accordance with the values and expectations set forward by a particular group or setting (Dixon, Warner, & Bruening, 2008). It requires individuals to embrace, reject, and question the interactive process in order to develop their own social identities (Nixon, 1990). In sport, socialization has been characterized by two types: into sport and through sport. Socialization into sport focuses on the features responsible for attracting athletes to sport, while socialization through sport refers to the positive or negative experiences that may occur as a direct result of participation (Greendorfer, 2002; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995).

Research suggests that parents contribute to their child's socialization into and through sport by (a) providing experiences, (b) acting as role models, and/or (c) interpreting experiences (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). As providers of experiences, parents facilitate the involvement in sport by providing their children with not only the opportunities, but the resources (e.g., finances, transportation), equipment, and/or encouragement required to participate. As role models, parents' behaviours demonstrate the value of sport by actively engaging in various roles, such as coaching, participating, and/or even watching. Lastly, as interpreters, parents enable the interpretation of their children's

experiences by transmitting and communicating their values, beliefs, acceptances, and expectations.

As children remain involved in sport, their parents inevitably become active members within their organizations. Generally, most youth sport organizations rely upon parent-volunteers to help manage teams and/or local associations (Kremarik, 2000). Typical responsibilities include fundraising, coaching, managing finances, and scheduling (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). Hence, as parents become involved in their child's sport participation, they are also becoming a socializing and socialized member of an organization. Green and Chalip (1997) investigated the dynamics of children's and parents' involvement in soccer by surveying 153 pairs of parent and child from youth soccer programs. Results reported that the sport organization highly influenced the socialization of parents, perhaps more so directly than the athletic child. It was also found that the parents' level of satisfaction is a necessary foundation for parental commitment to their child's sport organization in that the more satisfied they are with the program, the more willing they are to support it. Yet, although the researchers acknowledged the importance of their study, they also suggested the need to better understand how parents' socialization processes may vary over time through personal experiences and perspectives.

According to Coakley (2006), overall family lifestyles and expectations have changed considerably within the past two generations. Some of these changes may be attributable to the cultural beliefs of traditional values, the emphasis and progression of gender equity, as well as the increase of single-parent families and two working-parent households (Coakley, 2006; Messner, 2009; Thompson, 1999). Research has shown that, in youth sport, mothers and fathers contribute and reinforce traditional gender ideologies through their behaviours

and responsibilities within the environment (Chafetz & Kotarba, 1995; Coakley, 2006; Thompson, 1999). For example, mothers tend to engage in tasks that facilitate the sport participation of their child, such as preparing meals, driving to and from facilities, ensuring uniforms are laundered, and scheduling family commitments. On the other hand, fathers are more inclined to consult with coaches, provide instructional feedback, evaluate the performance of officials, and critique the team's performance. Wuerth, Lee, and Alfermann (2004) examined the pattern of involvement of parents in youth sport from the perspective of both the athletes and their parents. As such, 193 young athletes and their parents (both mothers and fathers) were administered a questionnaire, which they completed twice within a 12-month period. Results from their study were consistent with previous research whereby parents generally conform to gendered divisions of labour. Hence, mothers typically provide more positive support and are more involved in the overall sporting commitment, while fathers focus on coaching and demand strong work ethics. Nevertheless, the results stated that successful athletic careers require the involvement of both parents. The researchers also suggested that while it is important for mothers and fathers to maximize their involvement opportunities, they must do so without interfering or trying to control the process.

Parental Involvement in Sport

Within the world of education, parental involvement is a key predictor of student's success at school (Desimone, 1999; Yan, 1999). In a study conducted by Barge and Loges (2003), the purpose was to examine parent, student, and teacher perceptions of parental involvement and communication within the school context. Findings revealed that the most helpful forms of parental involvement were identified as: (a) helping with homework, (b) encouragement, and (c) interacting with schools (i.e., parental attendance). In contrast, the

least helpful forms of parental involvement were most often linked to parent-child interactions, as well as failure to interact properly with the school. Negative parental involvement included: (a) unnecessary punishment, (b) indifference, (c) unconcern for grades, (d) active disregard for education, and (e) criticism.

In sport, as in education, parents are among the most influential people in the sporting career of children (Côté, 1999; Durand-Bush, 2000). According to Hellstedt (1987), parents can be placed on a continuum based on their level of involvement: over-involved to under-involved. Due to the fact that greater competition for athletic scholarships and professional sport opportunities exists, some parents are becoming emotionally over-involved in their child's sport participation (Cumming & Ewing, 2002). In other words, parents who begin to lose proper perspective view their child's sport involvement as a means of achieving fame, glory, and/or monetary rewards, such as scholarships or professional contracts. When parents become over-involved, this frequently results in the child being considered more as 'an investment' than one's own family member (Heinzmann, 2002). Common behaviours of over-involved parents include yelling from the stands, disagreeing with coaches, and coaching from the sidelines (Côté & Hay, 2002b; Hellstedt, 1987). Children of such emotionally involved parents often feel embarrassed, guilty, and/or stressed, possibly affecting their performance and overall sport experience. As a result, these types of negative parental behaviours can lead to competitive stress, decreased self-esteem, poor performance, and even dropping out of the sport (Petlichkoff, 1993). In contrast, positive parental behaviours have been shown to enhance children's levels of enjoyment and perceived competence (Brustad et al., 2001).

Parental support is essential to a child's sport participation and success by acting as either a helping hand or a barrier (Brustad et al., 2001). The competitive nature of the sport can prove to be very gruelling for young athletes; therefore, parents are in a position to either provide support or add unnecessary extra pressure (Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008; Leff & Hoyle, 1995). In a study conducted by Brown, Frankel, and Fennell (1989), it was found that children who receive more encouragement and support from parents and peers were more likely to continue participating in sports than were those who received less positive influences. In the same manner, research has shown that athletes, who perceive lesser parental pressure, have greater enjoyment of the activity (Brustad, 1988). Leff and Hoyle (1995) defined parental support as "the young athlete's perceptions of his or her parents' behaviour aimed at facilitating his or her involvement and participating in sport" (p. 190). Ultimately, supportive parents have the ability to acknowledge their child's individuality and forego their own dreams and wishes (Tofler, Knapp, & Drell, 1999).

In contrast, parental pressure has been defined as "behaviour exhibited by parents that is perceived by their children as indicating high, unlikely, or possibly even unattainable expectations" (Leff & Hoyle, 1995, p. 190). The importance is typically placed on social advancement and financial benefits (Tofler et al., 1999), both of which implicitly involves controlling participation and imposing performance standards (Anderson et al., 2003). Evidently, unrealistic expectations (or exploitations) of young athletes often reflect extrinsic gains for parents, which often leads to negative consequences for children (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000). Hellstedt (1990) examined the amount of parental influence or pressure, as perceived by elite junior skiers. Participants completed a 36-item questionnaire which focused on their perceptions of parental pressure in relation to their participation in

skiing. Results indicated that young athletes perceive moderate to excessive levels of parental pressure, yet they did not always characterize this pressure as negative. Rather, at times, this pressure was viewed as positive and supportive. For the most part, 50% of the athletes believed that their parents were “not upset” after poor performances, while 12% felt that their parents were “very upset”. These results indicated that some athletes are apprehensive of their parents’ emotional reaction when they perform poorly. The data also suggested that a relationship exists between high levels of parental pressure and negative responses from young athletes, which the researchers caution may lead to dropout, withdrawal, and/or parent-child conflicts.

From a different perspective, Barber, Sukhi, and White (1999) conducted a study to investigate whether or not there were differences in participation motivation and competitive state anxiety for children who were coached by their own parent. Results revealed that parental pressure was not evident in children coached by their parents, a surprising finding due to the fact that the parent would have more opportunities to push and pressure their child before, during, and after competitions. However, one reason why parent-coaches may not pressure their child to the extent of other parents in the stands may be that they have more knowledge and experience in sport, and they are aware of the consequences of parental pressure. Nonetheless, according to Anderson and colleagues (2003), because there is limited knowledge in the area of parental pressure and child enjoyment, most parents are probably not aware of the consequences of their pressuring behaviours.

Young athletes’ successes are important for many parents who see sport performances as visibly reflecting their parenting abilities (Coakley, 2004). Grenfell and Rinehart (2003) reported that many young athletes are used as a means for displaying parenting skills as

markers of the parents' social statuses. For example, many parents enjoy being labelled as the mother of the team captain or the father of the league's top scorer. Ericsson and colleagues (1993) have found that parents who recognize talent in their child will consequently be motivated to provide them with instructional support and appropriate learning opportunities. Children who are frequently told by parents and coaches that they are talented are in an advantageous position, as it increases confidence and motivation, and helps develop persistence and determination during both the good and bad times (Ericsson et al., 1993). According to Musolf (1996), significant others play an important role by acting as a looking-glass, where their view often automatically shapes how children view themselves. Therefore, the beliefs a parent has in regards to their child's sporting talent will be directly linked to the child's own perception of his or her ability and competence (Ericsson et al., 1993; Leff & Hoyle, 1995). In the same manner, parents' behaviours will inevitably affect the way children view their own sport experience (Brustad et al., 2001).

Within the area of moral development in youth sport, research suggests that adults have a strong influence on their children's attitudes and behaviours because of the continuous modeling process that routinely occurs in the environment (Guiverneau & Duda, 2002; May, 2001). Notably, it has been found that it is not only the modeller's actual beliefs that are of importance, but rather how these beliefs are perceived by others (Carr & Weigand, 2002; Givvin, 2001; Kanters et al., 2008). For example, players who witness their coach berating opponents or refusing to shake their hands may assume that sportspersonship is not a valued quality, regardless of what the coach preaches. One can assume that the same would apply to the behaviours of parents: A child may believe that shouting at the referee is acceptable because he or she has observed the exact behaviour from his or her parents. In a study

conducted by Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker, and Hegreness (2009), it was found that positive sportspersonship behaviours of coaches and spectators (most often parents) resulted in greater positive behaviours of athletes. It was also reported that negative behaviours by spectators (i.e., parents) predicted higher levels of negative behaviours of athletes, while the negative behaviours of coaches had less of an impact. It was suggested that perhaps this was due to how athletes view the role and responsibilities of their coaches. If a coach yells at a referee, for example, athletes may view this behaviour as part of the coach's role. However, when a parent exhibits this same behaviour from the stands, it is more noticeable because it is outside of their expected roles.

Musolf (1996) states that children learn to behave morally in public places by being taught by adults who are themselves morally accountable and responsible. At local minor hockey games, parents in the stands are heard yelling for players to hit one another and cheering loudly when opposing players are knocked down. Unfortunately, children learn the unwritten and unspoken rules for public socialization by most often observing others in similar situations (Denzin, 1992). For example, parents often communicate their attitudes regarding aggression directly and indirectly by words, gestures, and deeds (Smith, 2003). Yet, parents sense no wrongdoing in their actions and justify their behaviours by implying that it is part of the game and that is what hockey players do (Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010). However, the tables turn rather quickly when it is their child who becomes victim to aggressive and/or violent on-ice acts. In these situations, parents' interpretations tend to change (Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010); they no longer believe that aggression should be tolerated and considered as 'part of the game'.

Although research on parents in youth sport has identified the importance of their involvement and influence, both positive and negative, limited research has focused on the experiences of parents themselves. One study which attempted to understand the perceptions of parents in relation to their involvement was conducted by Harwood and Knight (2009a), who surveyed 123 tennis parents from across the United Kingdom to determine the types of internal and external stressors they experience. More specifically, the study examined the *different demands parents had encountered throughout their child's tennis participation*. As an indicator of parental commitment, more than half of parents (53%) reported watching 75 to 100% of their child's tennis matches, while another 20% watched over 50% of matches. Results revealed that parents commonly experienced a diverse range of stressors, which were categorized into the following themes: process of competition, coaches' behaviours and responsibilities, financial and time requirements, sibling resentment and unequal attention, inefficiencies of sport organizations, and developmental concerns. Although the study provides essential information on the types of stressors parents may experience in sport, the methodology did not account for how stressors may vary in frequency and intensity throughout an athletic season.

In sum, as reported by Wood and Abernethy (1991), although parents are important influences on positive youth sport experiences, they are also likely to have a negative impact on the development of their athletic child. Consequently, for significant progress to occur within the sport world, it is critical that parents examine their own beliefs and attitudes regarding what they believe youth sports should be all about (Heinzmann, 2002). Although research on parents in youth sport has gained scholarly interest in recent years, it remains an area that requires continued attention (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Furthermore, from a

methodological standpoint, many of the studies that have focused on the involvement of parents in sport have utilized questionnaires or surveys to explain athletes, coaches, and parents' feelings and perceptions about specific topics such as participation motives, family influences, and socialization processes. While the use of such data collection techniques have provided researchers with answers to such questions, the reasoning behind those responses remains vaguely understood. As such, by employing qualitative methods, the researcher seeks to develop a greater understanding of individual experiences by providing in-depth interpretation of previous quantitative results.

The following chapter will describe the methodology that was used to address the present qualitative inquiry through the lens of symbolic interactionism.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Broadly, qualitative researchers seek to understand the meaning underlying human behaviour (Schwandt, 2001), and therefore “use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). As such, qualitative researchers frequently use designs that employ multiple methods involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the subject matter they study and observe (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the conceptual framework that was used to guide the present qualitative inquiry. It also provides detailed information concerning the research design, participants, data collection and analysis procedures, as well as strategies that were used to enhance trustworthiness.

Conceptual Framework

Social psychology is the study of the relationship between individual behaviour and the rules, patterns, and processes that represent society (O’Brien & Kollock, 2001). Numerous theoretical perspectives within social psychology have been developed, all of which have their own belief as to how ‘reality’ is created with regard to human activity in social settings (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2003). Symbolic interactionism (SI) is one such perspective that focuses on human behaviour and social life, as a means to uncover, interpret, and attempt to explain society (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2004). It typically focuses on everyday life in the quest to gain a better understanding of how meaning is shaped and reformed every time the individual intersects with society (Merriam, 2002; Rousseau, 2002).

With the belief that people act toward situations rather than toward social structures, roles, or institutions (Miles & Huberman, 1994), SI places the individual as well as society on the same level and analyzes the reciprocal relationships between individual action and social patterns as an ongoing process (Blumer, 1969; O'Brien & Kollock, 2001). More specifically, advocates of SI are interested in (a) how people make sense of their experiences, (b) what meanings they attribute to these experiences, and (c) how they construct their realities (Merriam, 2002). Consequently, an assumption of SI is that human beings create the worlds of experience they live in, which is why it seeks to understand how humans develop their own accounts and motives for explaining their actions to one another (Blumer, 1969; Hewitt, 2007; Rousseau, 2002). They do this by acting on things in terms of the meanings things have for them, which are shaped by self-reflections people bring to their situations. This in turn directly relates to the interactions they experience. In order to better understand how definitions of social objects, ourselves, and situations underlie human behaviour, SI emphasizes the direct examination of the empirical social world: It situates its problems in the natural world, conducts studies within it, and interpretations arise from naturalistic types of inquiry (Blumer, 1969; Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003).

Schools of Symbolic Interaction

Defining the major schools of thought of SI is not easy to do (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). In fact, Reynolds (1993) argues that “depending on which author one happens to read, there are anywhere from 2 to 15 varieties of contemporary symbolic interactionism” (p. 73); however, while different schools offer their own varieties to the perspective, their focus remains on understanding human behaviours and social life. More specifically, all the schools share the view that realities are constructed by human beings through a process of

interaction. Four major schools to which SI lays claim are discussed briefly below. They include: (a) Chicago School, (b) Iowa School, (c) Dramaturgical Genre, and (d) Ethnomethodology (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1978; Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003).

The Chicago School

Early SI stems from various theorists, who used pragmatism as a guiding philosophy (Hewitt, 2007). Within the University of Chicago, major influences included John Dewey, William Isaac Thomas, and especially George Herbert Mead. Outside of Chicago, additional influential ideas came from William James, Charles Horton Cooley, and James Mark Baldwin. Initially, interactionists faced many critiques because of the school's lack of scientism and use of qualitative methodologies. They argued, however, that studying human experience in laboratory was ineffective because human life is ongoing and ever-changing (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003). The goal of SI has always been to understand human behaviour, not to predict or control it, nor to gather mere statistical knowledge about it (Musolf, 2003). Opposed to determinism, Chicago interactionists emphasized the subjective intentions of actors, which were rendered possible through Mead's concept of taking the role of the other, Cooley's notion of sympathetic introspection, and Thomas' definition of the situation. Field research became the primary focus within the Chicago-School Interactionism, and included life histories, observations, informal interviews, historical archives, and so forth (Musolf, 2003).

It was however Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead, who coined the term 'symbolic interaction' in 1937. In fact, it was Blumer who more thoroughly and explicitly developed the interpretive tradition generated by Cooley, Mead, and others (Prus, 1996). Building primarily on the works of Mead, Blumer developed his own ideas and eventually made

significant contributions himself. He challenged the prevailing (quantitative) positivist tradition that existed in the social sciences and developed a clearer, more focused sociological statement on studying human lived experience using the interpretive paradigm (Prus, 1996). Other second-generation Chicago-School interactionists include: Howard S. Becker, Erving Goffman, Tamotsu Shibutani, Bernard N. Meltzer, Anselm Strauss, and Ralph Turner (Fine, 1995).

Iowa School

The Iowa school of SI was initially developed by Manford Kuhn (Prus, 1996). Considered a social psychologist and symbolic interactionist, Kuhn was in agreement with many of Mead's formulated concepts, such as role-taking, language, and the importance of self; however it is believed that his position was more inclined towards the works of Max Weber, than those of Mead (Prus, 1996). While he supported Mead's statement that knowledge should be grounded in observation, he was apprehensive of subjective data. In fact, Kuhn sought to develop a theory pertaining to self and social interaction that was quantitative, causal, and objectively-sound (Katovich, Miller, & Stewart, 2003). Since the mid-60's, Carl Couch (along with some of his students) has become a dominating force within the 'new' Iowa School, which primarily focuses on studying processes and structure of coordinated social conduct (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003).

Although both traditions, the Iowa and Chicago Schools, claim to be rooted in the works of Mead, major differences are evident in terms of how one might study human life (Prus, 1996). For one, the most fundamental point of divergence between both schools is their views on methodology (Meltzer et al., 1978). For example, Blumer (interpretivist) believed in methodologies that emphasized lived experiences, while Kuhn (positivist) was

interested in developing standardizing measures of human behaviour in hopes of formulating causal explanations (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003). Secondly, Blumer recognized how human beings view, define, and shape their behaviours through interaction with others, while Kuhn shared a deterministic view whereby people's behaviours were caused by predetermined attitudes based on a specific role (Prus, 1996). Finally, the third major Blumer-Kuhn difference revolves around the notions of process versus product. Blumer stressed the processual development of human behaviour, whereas Kuhn emphasized that human behaviour was the product of a set of attitudes that reflect the positions one holds in society (Prus, 1996). Evidently, much tension and rivalry exists between these two schools (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003).

Dramaturgical Genre

Dramaturgy, considered a sociological perspective, stems from SI and is much more reflective of the Chicago School version than that of Iowa. This approach, which was first coined by Erving Goffman, represents the study of how human beings attain meaning in their lives (Brissett & Edgley, 1990). More specifically, it uses a theatrical metaphor of stage, actors, and audience to explain social interaction. Therefore, within situations, expectations, norms, and cultural values ('scripts') are implicitly presented to individuals ('actors'), which ultimately guide and shape their conduct ('performance'). As such, human beings have the ability to take on many roles, depending on the situation in which they find themselves (Meltzer et al., 1978). Evidently, in this presentation of self, the objective is for the audience to view the actor as he or she wants to be viewed. Human beings choose to play a role on stage with the hopes that their performance will yield positive and favourable impressions from their audience, a concept that Goffman (1961) refers to as 'impression management'.

Linking every day life to theatrical performances, Goffman was interested in micro-settings of face-to-face interactions, whereby individuals repeatedly share meanings and have the ability to anticipate what their actions and/or gestures represent to others (Prus, 1996). While the use of his metaphorical vocabulary in viewing the social world provided him with the opportunity to further pursue the ideas associated with SI as offered by Mead, Blumer, and Hughes, Goffman acknowledges Kenneth Burke as the major influence of his dramaturgy approach (Meltzer et al., 1978).

Ethnomethodology

Considered an offshoot of SI, ethnomethodology, a term coined by its founder Harold Garfinkel, provides a distinctive perspective on the nature and origins of social order (Maynard & Clayman, 2003). At its basic level, it consists of the examination of how people make sense of the situations they find themselves in within their everyday lives. More specifically, Garfinkel (1967) defines ethnomethodology as “the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life” (p. 11). According to Churchill (1971), ethnomethodologists seek to answer the question ‘how is social activity done’, therefore emphasizing the process by which we understand the world we live in. Consequently, like SI, ethnomethodology views the continuous construction of every day reality as a process. While there appear to be many differences that separate ethnomethodology and SI, it is difficult to overlook how both approaches share congruent concepts, especially with regards to language and the use of symbols (Maynard & Clayman, 2003). It also offers resemblance to the Chicago School through its methodology preferences which include participant observation and Cooley’s sympathetic introspection.

In sum, like most perspectives in qualitative studies (Schwandt, 2001), SI comes in a variety of forms, which Reynolds (2003) suggests is in part due to chronological accounts of the framework and the major influences that have shaped the perspective. As stated by Plummer (1996):

If the world is as the interactionists depict it, then we can assume that (1) there is no one fixed meaning of symbolic interactionism; (2) that “accounts” of its nature and origins will change over time, and indeed be open to renegotiation; and (3) that what it “means” will indeed depend upon the definition of the significant others whose interaction constitutes its meaning. Thus, the very origins and history of the theory are themselves a contested domain (p. 225).

While there are a number of versions of SI, the conceptual framework of the present thesis relies primarily and more specifically on the “Chicago-style” (Prus, 1996, p. 75) version elaborated by “Blumer-Mead” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 245), who believed that other social psychology approaches either focused primarily on external stimuli and/or neglected to view the self as an active human being (Blumer, 1969). Hence, this version of SI is described in more detail below in terms of its research assumptions, methodological assumptions, basic premises, and central ideas.

Research Assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionists advocate that scientific knowledge is not a direct representation of a ‘real world’ (Sandstrom et al., 2003). Rather, it is based on systems of thought that are culturally and historically bound (O’Brien & Kollock, 2001). Advocates of SI believe that multiple realities exist because they are constructed by the numerous individuals involved in a given situation (Creswell, 2007). Mead described reality as a symbolic experience, one that can only be created and transmitted during social interaction through the use of shared symbols (Blumer, 1969; Prus, 1996). As such, SI takes on a relativist stance, implying that realities consist of numerous, intangible mental constructions,

all of which are socially and experientially based, as well as local and specific in nature (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). More specifically, SI rejects the concept of grand totalizing theories (Charon, 2004; Hewitt, 2007), ultimately denying that there are universal truths (Schwandt, 2001). According to Denzin (1992), grand theories are ineffective because society is always changing, thus making it impossible to write a global theory about it. In the same manner, new found knowledge is local because it is dependent on the environment in which it is being investigated.

Within the SI perspective, knowledge is “subjective, the product of the context within which it was constructed” (O’Brien & Kollock, 2001, p. 48). SI is founded on the idea that human behaviour involves choices and that choices are based on the definitions of reality that people form as they interact with others (Coakley, 2004). It is through interaction between and among the researcher and those being investigated that knowledge is created (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). As a result, it is understood that researchers do not merely gather and observe ‘facts’ that interpret themselves. Rather, it is a process of selection and interpretation of the data which are constructed by the observers (O’Brien & Kollock, 2001). Symbolic interactionists understand that a complete body of knowledge will never be complete and achieved (Hewitt, 2007), as it is continuously being negotiated and modified through our experiences and interactions (Blumer, 1969).

Methodological Assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism

Ultimately, symbolic interactionists seek to understand truths as they are produced, understood, and enacted by subjects (Blumer, 1969). Hence, social reality and society should be understood from the perspective of the actors who are being studied. Blumer criticized experimental and survey types of research because they fail to grasp the distinctive nature of

human social life (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003). Consequently, SI requires that researchers take an active role by entering the worlds of the people being studied in order to fully grasp the situation in which the actors find themselves (Schwandt, 2001).

According to Blumer (1969), naturalistic inquiry consists of two phases of research. The first phase consists of exploration, which is the way in which a researcher can form a close and comprehensive rapport with a distinct social group. Also referred to as depiction, this flexible phase allows the researcher to shift from one line of inquiry to another, implement new points of observation, move in new directions, and change his or her recognition of what data are relevant (Blumer, 1969). The purpose of this phase is to ultimately develop and create an accurate, rich, and descriptive picture of the area of study. The second phase, inspection or analysis, consists of an intensive focused examination of the empirical content gathered, such as field notes and interview transcripts (Blumer, 1969). The procedure used to examine the analytical element entails approaching it in different ways, viewing it from different angles, and asking different questions about it (Blumer, 1969).

Numerous procedures can be used to carry out exploration and inspection, such as direct observation, field study, participant observation, case study, interviewing, life histories, letters and diaries, panel discussions, public documents and archives, and conversations (Blumer, 1969). Regardless of the method(s) selected, the key is for the researcher to see the participant's objects as he or she sees them. This requires the researcher to "take the role of the other" because the people being studied act on the basis of the meaning that things have for them, not on the basis of the meaning they have for the outside researcher (Blumer, 1969).

Premises of Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer claims that SI is characterized by three primary premises (Blumer, 1969). The first premise is that human beings act toward physical things and other beings in their environment on the basis of the meanings those things have for them (Blumer, 1969). Meanings vary based on how we define them, interpret them, and respond to them, which ultimately shape the actions we will undertake toward them. Consequently, if we want to understand human behaviour, we must first know how people define the things (e.g., objects, events, behaviours, people) they encounter in their environment (Fine & Sandstrom, 2005). For example, a penalty in hockey means different things for different people. For some, it means strategic aggressive play, while for others it implies breaking the rules of the game.

The second premise of SI is that the meaning of the things defined is derived from or arises out of the social interaction that one has with others (Blumer, 1969). Clearly, human beings are not born knowing the meaning of things, nor do they determine them through individual experiences (Fine & Sandstrom, 2005). Rather, it is through interaction with others that we learn and attribute meanings to the things around us. Through language and symbols, we create, recreate, and share meanings within a society. For example, parents of competitive young hockey players may feel the need to act in certain ways because they are influenced by cultural and social factors. The competitive sport context in which these parents are immersed and the social interaction that it includes will influence the meanings they attribute to things they encounter. For example, if a child displays an act of retaliation toward an opponent during a hockey game, the parent may justify the behaviour as a normal hockey feature. However, if the same incident were to happen in a different context (e.g., classroom), it is assumed that the parent would be upset and disappointed in their child's behaviour.

Finally, the third premise of SI is that meanings are managed and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters (Blumer, 1969). Meanings are selected, checked, and transformed according to how he or she defines the situation. These meanings are used and revised to guide and shape human action (Fine & Sandstrom, 2005). For hockey parents, their need to act in certain ways reflects their subjective interpretation of the situation. For example, a coach's decision to sit players at the end of a tied game may be viewed and interpreted differently by two parents from the same team. One parent might feel as though it is part of the game, while another might be frustrated because all children should have equal playing opportunities. As such, the meanings they associate with the situation are different, which in turn, influence their interpretation.

Central Ideas of Symbolic Interactionism

To further expand and shed light on the perspective of SI, five central ideas are briefly discussed: (a) importance of symbols, (b) nature of the self, (c) centrality of mind, (d) social interaction, and (e) society.

Importance of Symbols

Symbolic interactionists emphasize that it is because of symbols that social life exists (Hewitt, 2003). Symbols can be defined as a type of social object used to represent whatever people agree they should represent (Charon, 2004) and are therefore intentionally used by individuals to communicate with one another (Blumer, 1969; Hewitt, 2007). As such, to be a symbol, an object must have meanings to not only the observer, but to the actor who uses it as well. By using symbols, we have the ability to transcend our immediate environments by interpreting stimuli according to images of our past, present, and future (Sandstrom et al.,

2003). We act within and toward a world that we ourselves have created. According to symbolic interactionists, it is through interaction, which involves the use of shared symbols, that we learn, create, and transmit culture. Symbols also allow us to remember, imagine, plan, and have vicarious experiences (O'Brien & Kollock, 2001). Clearly, without symbols, we could not give meaningful form to what is happening around us, nor could we fully understand our experiences (Charon, 2004; Hewitt, 2003).

Nature of the Self

For symbolic interactionists, the self is a symbol that represents the ideas and thoughts that individuals have about who they are (Blumer, 1969). It is through interacting with others that we adjust our views of the self based on how we interpret their actions and reactions (Blumer, 1969; Hewitt, 2007; Sandstrom et al., 2003). As such, we tend to act on the basis of how we believe other people behave toward us. More specifically, we take into account the unfolding intentions, behaviours, and expressions of those that surround us. According to Mead (1934), the self is composed of two aspects: 'I' and 'Me'. In his analysis, the 'I' represents the immediate, impulsive nature of conduct whereby individuals respond as acting subjects to objects (Hewitt, 2007). On the other hand, the 'Me' consists of the internalized other; individuals imagine themselves as objects in their situations (Hewitt, 2007). Considering the 'Me' often reflects the view of a generalized other, it guides an individual toward acts that more or less conform to social expectations. Hence, the 'I' becomes the active part of the self, whereas the 'Me' is more reflective in nature (Reynolds, 2003). Meltzer (1964) differentiated between the 'I' and 'Me' by stating that every act begins in the form of the 'I' and (usually) ends in recognizing the form of the 'Me', for the 'I' represents the initiation of the act prior to its coming under control of the definitions or

expectations of others (the ‘Me’). In the interplay between both the ‘I’ and the ‘Me’, experience arises, and social control, in some respect, becomes self-control. Our self-perceptions and feelings are therefore likely to be mediated by how we think others see and feel about us in the various situations we encounter.

Centrality of Mind

Mind is a central concept within the SI perspective (Meltzer, 2003) because human beings engage in continuous mind action in almost every situation (Charon, 2004). According to Mead (1934), human beings with minds and selves have the ability to create society, while society simultaneously creates unique human beings that possess a mind and self. Mead and Blumer believed that human beings are purposive agents (Schwandt, 2001) that do not simply ‘release’ behaviour in response to biological drives, psychological needs, or social expectations (Sandstrom et al., 2003). Rather, people act toward the situations they encounter by engaging in self-reflexive behaviour as they confront a world that they must continuously interpret before acting (Hewitt, 2007). Hence, symbolic interactionists view the mind as an active concept, a symbolic action toward the self. As human beings learn and use symbols and give meanings to the objects in their social contexts, they also develop a ‘mind’ that allows them to adjust to their environment (Mead, 1934). Through minded activity, we look at our world, identify social objects that are important while ignoring others, and define them according to their use for us at that time. It is also through minded activity that we figure out how to act in situations. By taking self into account as a factor in the situation, human beings are better able to control their own acts, anticipate the outcomes of alternative acts, and predict the reactions of others (Meltzer, 2003).

Social Interaction

Human beings engage in ongoing social interactions with one another, which influence what we do in situations (Charon, 2004). According to Blumer (1969), social interaction is a process that shapes human conduct and refers to the interaction between actors. When human beings interact with one another, they take into account what each other is doing or is about to do. For social life to emerge, meanings must be shared among members of a group; and communication, through both verbal and non-verbal behaviours, provides the mechanism for such group sharing. However, assigning meaning to our actions and those of other people is not as simplistic as portrayed. A successful interaction requires us to have an understanding of what our behaviours mean to others (Mead, 1934). We have the ability, as human beings, to imagine the likely effects of our actions on others, a notion Mead termed as “taking the role of the other”. In other words, we are able to predict meaning and anticipate the effects that our actions will have for others, because of the meaning they have for us (Blumer, 1969). This allows us to consider alternative choices of action, envision their consequences, and choose the most appropriate one (Charon, 2004). Evidently, social interaction forces individuals to influence one another as they create meaning about life, experiences, and themselves, which ultimately becomes the source of human society.

Society

Blumer (1969) defined society as the “interpretive process by means of which human beings, individually and collectively, act” (p. 89). Society is any instance of social interaction in which actors cooperate over time and develop culture, ultimately representing a consensual understanding about the world (Hewitt, 2007). Unlike other social psychology perspectives which argue that society is biologically determined or learned through reinforcement, SI

views society in a dynamic sense, whereby human beings are responsible for creating, developing, sustaining, and modifying it through interaction with one another (Charon, 2004). As stated by Shibutani (1961) society must be considered as an “ongoing process, a becoming, rather than a being” (p. 174). Goffman (1974) cautioned however that society is only possible when people of a group agree to cooperate, work together, respect each other, and act according to a generalized set of rules.

Symbolic Interactionism and Sport

Social psychologists have used SI in their analysis of socialization, culture, and society within numerous disciplines, such as communication studies, anthropology, cultural studies, feminism, as well as educational studies (Sandstrom et al., 2003). Through the lens of SI, sports are considered as a type of culture which has been created by individuals through ongoing interaction (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). As such, SI has contributed to sport research by seeking to understand how meaning and culture are created through social interaction as well as how people define the reality of their own experiences (Coakley, 2004). For example, symbolic interactionists would be interested in determining the characteristics of sport cultures in terms of how they are created by members, how they are defined by members, and how they influence the behaviours of these members both on and off the playing field (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009).

The purpose of using SI as a perspective allows sport researchers to reconstruct and describe the reality that exists in the minds of the athletes, coaches, parents, and spectators, in an attempt to call for changes that more fully represent the realities of those directly involved (Coakley, 2004). Through the use of observation, participant observation, and interviews (Donnelly, 2002), the objective of SI is to provide vivid and rich descriptions of sport

experiences and the social worlds in which they take place, from the perspective of the sport members themselves (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). According to Donnelly (2002), most studies within the sociology of sport that have used SI as a framework typically fall under two overlapping categories: socialization and subcultures. Within the area of socialization, symbolic interactionists believe that sport socialization is a dynamic, two-way ongoing process, rather than pre-determined stages, as was initially thought (e.g., socialization into sport, socialization through sport). In terms of the area of subcultures, research has focused on how meanings are continuously being constructed within various differing sectors of social life. Symbolic interactionists are therefore interested in how these subcultures, which encompass their own set of rules, norms, expectations, and so forth, are continuously produced and reproduced by participants.

Evidently, over the years, SI has become prominent in the sociology of sport (Stebbins, 2003). For example, studies in sport that have used SI as an approach include (but are not limited to): Snyder and Spreitzer (1979) on coaching and aligning actions, Kelly (1983) on identity and social interaction in leisure, Fine (1987) on the culture of Little League Baseball, Leonard and Schmitt (1987) on the meaning of sport, Armstrong (1999) on the advertising effectiveness in sport, Pedersen (2001) on sport careers of mothers, Collinson and Hockey (2007) on 'identity work' of distance runners, Baird and McGannon (2009) on aggression in sport, and Anderson (2009) on identity development in disability sport.

In sum, SI is a valuable perspective that can be applied to any situation where one seeks to understand human conduct, including that of parents in youth hockey. The competitive youth hockey environment represents a complex social system in which language is used by its members to create individual and collective meanings. In the present

study, using SI as a framework enabled me to take into account the complexity of human activity and the need to gain a better understanding of how parents involved in competitive youth hockey give meaning to the social objects in their environment and how they make sense of their experiences within this particular culture.

Purpose of the Study

In light of the gaps identified in the literature review, the purpose of this study was to investigate the involvement of parents in competitive youth hockey from a symbolic interactionist perspective. More specifically, the purpose was twofold: (a) to explore how parents create their role within the competitive youth hockey culture, and (b) to explore how parents perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the hockey environment.

Research Questions

The following two research questions have guided this investigation: (a) how do parents negotiate their role within the competitive youth hockey environment?, and (b) how do parents perceive and deal with aggression in youth hockey? From these preliminary research questions stem personal assumptions that were considered in order to help shape the interpretation of the data.

Assumptions of the Study

In line with the purpose of the study and research questions, personal assumptions were designed to encourage a balanced view and to emphasize the need to keep an open mind in understanding the world of participants through their eyes. These assumptions included: (a) parents believe that they are generally nurturing and caring individuals, (b) parents react and behave differently according to specific hockey-related situations, (c) parents have

personal standards for themselves as well as their children as to how one behaves in public, (d) parents believe that they are well-intended and supportive of their children's athletic achievements, (e) parents and players alike have different sport backgrounds and have lived different experiences, and (f) parents and players share different beliefs, expectations, and outlooks on the value they place on hockey.

Research Design

In qualitative research, 'context' plays a critical role in understanding the social world, whereby the meaning of a social event or behaviour depends highly on the context in which it appears (Neuman, 2003). This also implies that a same event or behaviour can have different meanings in different situations for different people (Neuman, 2003). According to Patton (2002), using a qualitative methodology enables an in-depth inquiry with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance. In the present study, narratives were the vehicle used to uncover the methods that underlie the typical involvement of parents within the youth hockey world. The narrative approach was chosen as the method to represent the findings in order to deepen the reader's comprehension of the interpretation of how parents create their roles and how they perceive and deal with issues of aggression within the competitive youth hockey environment. As such, two descriptive (single and multiple) case designs were used to investigate the topic in depth and detail (Yin, 2003): The single case of a competitive youth hockey team, combined with a closer look of three families within the team. The case study approach provided the flexibility and freedom to explore the overall involvement of parents within the world of competitive youth hockey using various data collection methods. It also enabled me, as the researcher, to draw from my personal experiences as they related to the phenomena under scrutiny.

A case study design can be broadly defined as a detailed, multifaceted investigation of a single social phenomenon (Orum, Feagin, & Sjoberg, 1991). It is suggested that qualitative researchers embrace a case study approach when a question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, “over which the investigator has little or no control” (Yin, 2003, p. 9). The multiple case study approach offers a balanced approach in the intensive examination and preservation of individual uniqueness (Yin, 2003), by systematically investigating a problem within a real-life context and answering questions of “how?” and “why?” (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). This design allows for the discovery of similar trajectories with the understanding that the study of several cases will “lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). By using a multiple case design, the analytic conclusions independently arising from each case may allow for more powerful findings than would typically occur in a single case (Yin, 2003). Through the use of a variety of methods, most often over an extended period of time (Gratton & Jones, 2004), the value of conducting case study research arises from the rich, thick, and extensive description of the phenomena under study, which facilitates the discovery of new insights (Tenenbaum & Driscoll, 2005) and generates greater knowledge of the particular (Schwandt, 2001).

Participants

The sample for this study consisted primarily of a ‘Pewee AA’ (11-12 years old) boys’ hockey team registered in a minor hockey association in a mid-size Canadian city. The ‘Pewee AA’ level was chosen based on the age of the children (11-12 years old), the level of competition (‘AA’ in this respective region is considered the highest level of competition for that age group), the involvement of parents (i.e., children need to be driven to the arenas),

as well as the rules of the game (i.e., body checking is allowed). For clarification purposes, the “team” consisted of 54 members (Table 1), including the players, parents, and coaching staff. More specifically, there were two male coaches, 17 male hockey players, and 35 parents (17 women and 18 men).

Table 1

Overview of the ‘Peewee AA’ Team

Family	Parents	Son
Allen	Sheryl and Todd	Zach
Barker	Linda and Don	Nick
Burke	Wayne	N/A
Chapman	Helen and Dale	Simon
Cohen	Joanne and Jeff	Tyler
Connelly	Gail and Fred	Matthew
Davis	Bill	N/A
Doyle	Liz and Ken	Trevor
Forsyth	Colleen and Bruce	Joel
Harrison	Judy and Larry	Kyle
McPhee	Betty* and John*	Patrick
Miller	Cathy and Rob	Corey
Nesbitt	Carol* and Darrell	Jacob
O’Neill	Shelley and Peter	Andrew
Peterson	Michelle, Tony, and Norm	Travis
Robinson	Cindy and Frank	Mitch
Smith	Alison and Tom	Dylan
Webster	Lisa and Grant	Scott
Whyte	Maria* and Gary	Kevin

Note. * = Individuals who did not participate in the study.

It should be noted that four parents chose not to participate in the study. As such, data were not collected directly from those four parents and no consent was ever obtained from them. Note that pseudonyms have been used and minor context details have been altered in order to protect the identity and ensure anonymity of all 50 participants.

The core coaching staff consisted of seven individuals, two of whom had no children on the team, making them “non-parent coaches”. The head coach was mainly responsible for the defence, while the assistant-coach focused on the forwards. The other five members of the coaching staff had sons playing on the team. Table 2 presents an overview of the core staff and their role within the team.

Table 2

Overview of the ‘Peewee AA’ Core Staff

Position	Staff member	Parental status on team
Head coach	Burke, Wayne	Non-parent
Assistant-coach	Davis, Bill	Non-parent
Assistant-coach	McPhee, John	Parent
Trainer	Harrison, Larry	Parent
Assistant-trainer	Barker, Don	Parent
Managers	O’Neill, Shelley and Peter	Parents

In addition, within the team, three families were recruited to serve as multiple cases from which in-depth and detailed accounts were collected. As advised by Creswell (2007, p.76), “the more cases an individual studies, the less the depth of any single case...typically, however, the researcher chooses no more than four or five cases.” Within each family, data were collected primarily from the parents, but also from the hockey player. The three families were selected through a “theory based” sampling process; I selected cases that may

potentially elaborate or provide new insights on theoretical constructs (Miles & Huberman, 1994), based on ongoing data collection and analysis from the team as a whole. More specifically, theory based sampling refers to “data gathering directed by emerging concepts: The researcher follows the trail of concepts looking for sites, persons, or events that enable further comparisons of data” (Corbin & Holt, 2005, p. 51). As such, families were selected according to their anticipated potential to contribute new insights (Flick, 2006) as well as their level of variation one from the other (Patton, 2002). According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), people who are in a position to have the knowledge you want may not always want to share that information openly. Although I had originally planned to recruit the three families in October, this proved to be too early in the season in terms of my rapport-building with the parents. Hence, I waited another month before making my decision and approaching the families. Also, I wanted to select families that exhibited different characteristics in terms of their family lifestyle. For example, one of the families I recruited had four children in competitive hockey. Another family included divorced parents, both of whom actively participated in their son’s hockey involvement. The third family had six children and both parents were heavily involved in their children’s hockey participation in some role or another (i.e., player, coach, administrator).

Gaining Entry

Symbolic interactionists believe that the purpose of scientific inquiry is to “lift the veils that cover the area of group life” one attempts to study (Blumer, 1969, p. 39), which suggests that researchers find ways to access and enter into the empirical social world being studied (Blumer, 1969; O’Brien & Kollock, 2001), allowing them to ‘get close’ to naturally occurring social phenomena (Huberman & Miles, 2002; Sandstrom et al., 2003). In a study

wherein the researcher hopes to be immersed in a group, gaining entry becomes a complicated process consisting of ongoing negotiations between the participants and researcher, which ultimately affects the research as a whole (Bailey, 1996; Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). From the onset of the study, I knew from which association I would attempt to recruit my team simply for convenience purposes. I selected an association that was in relatively close proximity to my home because most practices and home games would be held in nearby local arenas. With the level (age and ability) determined as well as the association, it was easy to narrow down the search for a team, as there is only one 'Peewee AA' team per association.

Through browsing the association website, I found the contact information for the head coach for the upcoming season. Via email, I briefly provided details on my proposed study and requested a meeting in order to further introduce and explain the purpose of my study. The meeting, which was held prior to the team selection training camps in late August, allowed me to introduce myself (i.e., my athletic experience and educational profile), as well as to further expand on the purpose of the study and the procedures that would be followed (Appendix A). At this time, I also clarified what my research responsibilities would entail throughout the season and the involvement and commitment of parents on the team. The head coach was very responsive to the study and agreed to support and help promote what he thought was a well-founded initiative.

Although I had anticipated that the association would not be informed of the study for confidentiality reasons, the head coach explained that this would be a requirement. Understandably, he was concerned that should an issue with regards to my study be presented to the association (and the association not had been informed), his role with the team could

be compromised. Having a good relationship with the President of the association, the head coach suggested that he contact the President in order to present him with the idea of my study. It should be noted that I was carbon-copied on all of the correspondence and I made myself available for any questions, concerns, or comments that the President may have had. Within a day, the team had been officially recruited, whereby permission to conduct the study was received from the head coach and the President of the association. Clearly, the head coach acted as a 'gatekeeper' for the study. Typically, gatekeepers are individuals who can either grant or deny initial access to participants and have the potential to make access more or less difficult (Bailey, 1996; Feldman et al., 2003).

Once the team was selected, I attended the team's first meeting with parents which was held the first week of September. It was during this meeting that the head coach briefly introduced me and explained the reason for my presence. He acknowledged the importance of the study and publicly supported my involvement with the team. As suggested by Feldman and colleagues (2003), it was important for me to display my intent as a researcher, which also meant showing my credentials and experience within the hockey world. Hence, I introduced myself by providing my background information and hockey experience, which helped build rapport with participants. During this meeting, I also had the opportunity to fully describe the inquiry.

All participants received an information sheet regarding the purpose of the study and their involvement (Appendix B), enabling them to make an informed decision as to whether or not to participate. It should be noted that for those who chose not to participate, they were not asked for interviews nor did I engage in conversations with them throughout the data collection period. For those who wished to participate, I requested that they sign a consent

form (Appendices C, D, E), which further explained that they had the option of withdrawing from the study at any point and that confidentiality would be respected by omitting any information that may identify them as participants in the research. In addition, once the three families were recruited, they were required to sign a second consent form (Appendices F, G) once they agreed to participate. Their participation remained anonymous within the overall team as well as amongst the other families recruited in order to allow for full confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Collection Procedures

Requiring the researcher to act as both an observer and a participant within the same social setting, symbolic interactionists advocate that in order to examine and understand social life, one must experience it as do the actors being investigated (Hewitt, 2007). In the present study, the data were collected throughout a full hockey season, from August to the beginning of March, and represented shared constructions between myself as the researcher and the participants. Following the team for a full season provided sufficient opportunities for observing games and practices, attending tournaments, team parties, and meetings, as well as engaging in numerous discussions with coaches and parents. I attended 76 events in total, which consisted mostly of games (both home and away) and practices (Table 3). Overall, those 76 events resulted in me spending approximately 167 hours with the team, excluding time between games during tournaments (Table 4). Of the three tournaments I attended, two of them were out of town and required a minimum two-night stay at a hotel. (For a detailed breakdown of the researcher's commitment, see Appendix H.)

Table 3

Season Overview of Researcher's Time Commitment

Type of event	# of events attended
Tryouts (selection camp)	7
Exhibition games	1
Practices	29
League games	27*
Meetings	2
Tournaments	3
Team parties	3
Dryland training	4
Total	76

Note. * = Of the 27 league games, 13 were “home” games, while 14 were “away” games.

Table 4

Monthly Breakdown of Researcher's Time Commitment

Month	# of events	Minutes	Hours
August	5	195	3.15
September	10	665	11.05
October	10	950	15.83
November	10	2215	36.92
December	12	1395	23.25
January	15	1720	28.67
February	13	2805	46.75
March	1	90	1.50
Total	76	10035	167.25

Advocates of SI argue that it is important for researchers to attempt to understand the world of participants through their eyes, therefore encouraging researchers to ‘take the role of the other’ (Blumer, 1969), while recognizing that researchers cannot see reality from all angles simultaneously (Charon, 2004). To curtail this limitation, however, numerous interpretive methodologies are typically used as means to view and capture the phenomenon under study from different angles. In the present study, I collected data using four different methods throughout the hockey season timeline: (a) direct observation, (b) participant observation, (c) informal semi-structured interviews, and (d) in-depth interviews.

Direct Observation

Direct observation, a frequently used technique in case study research (Yin, 2003) served as a means of witnessing firsthand everyday social action. Essentially, an advantage of conducting observations is that it enables the researcher to document the actions of members within their natural settings (Dingwall, 1997). During the team’s player selection camp (i.e., tryouts), I acted as an outsider looking in, by observing and mentally depicting what could be seen, such as the competitive setting, the group dynamics, and the various relationships that may have existed between parents, coaches, and athletes. At this time, my role as a researcher was not revealed to the participants, nor were there any interactions with them. With over 70 players trying out for 34 spots (on two teams, ‘A’ and ‘AA’), it was unknown which players and their parents would be involved at the ‘AA’ level. By not revealing my identity and research intentions at that time ensured confidentiality and anonymity of potential future participants.

Field notes were used to record my reflections on the overall parental hockey experiences. As stated by Taylor and Bogdan (1998), field notes “provide the researcher with

a medium to record emerging themes, interpretations, hunches, and striking gestures and non-verbal expressions essential to understanding the meaning of a person's world" (p. 115).

More specifically, during the selection camp, I jotted down key words in my cell phone to serve as reminder cues for future reference. After each event (within approximately 30 minutes of the event ending) I would type detailed field notes of what I had seen and/or heard, along with my own perceptions and/or comments. The technique I used and developed to help recall the event (from driving into the parking lot at the start of an event to driving away afterwards) was chronologically oriented. Hence, I would replay the event in my mind and type my field notes following a chronological order. Being able to replay the order of occurrences provided me with a blueprint of whom I had seen, whom I had stood beside, whom I had run into in the lobby, and so on. I created "mental notes" of my experiences (Bailey, 1996), which allowed me to avoid taking out a notepad while collecting data, and therefore to remain as anonymous as possible.

During the tryout period, I had wanted to remain 'unseen' and blend in with other parents; however, this proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. Being inconspicuous was hard to do. Although the arena (lobby and stands) was hectic, with players, parents, and coaches coming and going throughout the day, a person becomes more noticeable when they are unknown. I came to sense that during tryouts, parents are anxious and hopeful that their child will be selected, so any new person becomes somewhat of a threat. At times, I felt that people were staring and/or glancing over at me. They must have wondered who I was and which player on the ice belonged to me. Nonetheless, I attended seven tryout sessions, which allowed me to get a general sense of some of the stresses parents

experience at the onset of the season. Subsequent fieldwork suggests that my presence during the tryout period in no way compromised my later involvement with the team.

Participant Observation

Considering that symbolic interactionists believe in gathering data through observing people in their ‘real’ settings (Sandstrom et al., 2003), participant observation is one of the most common data collection techniques used in SI (Charon, 2004) because of its emphasis on understanding how people define situations and use those definitions to make choices about their behaviour (Coakley, 2004). More specifically, participant observation allows the researcher to acquire a rendering of the activities by primarily participating in the same activities as the research participants themselves (Orum et al., 1991).

Once the first parent meeting was held (after tryouts) and the research was explained, I began collecting data through participant observation during sanctioned hockey games, team practices, road trips, tournaments, parent meetings, and other hockey-related functions. More specifically, I observed parents in various settings (interacting with other parents, players, and/or coaches) within various locations (bleachers, lobbies, parking lots, gymnasiums). On a weekly basis, the team typically had one or two practices and one or two games. Although I had originally planned to attend one game a week and one practice every other week, early in my “exploration” phase (Blumer, 1969) I realized that my original plan was too limited; therefore I began attending as many practices as possible. More specifically, I quickly learned that games were much more observation-based, in that it was obviously difficult to engage in conversations with parents because they were watching the games. I did not want to distract them from the game, which in the end could have affected my relationship with them. Consequently, I mostly observed during games and then approached

parents at practices since they did not tend to be as focused on watching on-ice drills. I soon discovered that my time spent during practices was crucial to my data collection.

By using participant observation, I became partially socialized into the team, allowing me to understand the nature, purpose, and meaning of the social action that occurs (Jorgensen, 1989). Understandably, the first month or so was spent getting to know the parents and building a trusting rapport with them. As a researcher, I understood the need and time it would take to create trusting and respectful relationships with the participants (Bailey, 1996). I was also aware how the development of this trust was essential to establishing long-term, free-flowing partnerships with each participant (Feldman et al., 2003). Although many parents signed the consent form and jumped on board from day one, it was obvious that some parents tried to steer clear of me. But I overcame this by talking to them about their families, hockey involvement, and athletic backgrounds. This allowed me to better understand their family lifestyle and the impact hockey may have on it, while providing them with time to feel comfortable sharing information with me. As stated by Neuman (2004), people typically respond well to genuine concern and interest in them. This also enabled them to see that I was not there to judge them but rather to understand. In the end, through my observations and discussions, I strongly believe that for the most part, parents accepted and respected my presence and were behaving the same way as if I had not been there. Parents yelled, complained, cheered, cursed, as if I were simply another fan in the stands. Over time, I truly felt like a member of the team. I traveled with parents to and from games and tournaments, I was invited to team parties, I was given a 'gift' at the end of the year, and I was nicknamed "The Therapist" after they became aware of my sport psychology background.

Through participant-observation, data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations (Jorgensen, 1989; Schwandt, 2001). Participants were observed and/or selected using purposive sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in the sense that I looked for such behaviours as who came, who went, when, how, who did what with whom, routine activities, noticeable patterns, random behaviours, and unanticipated happenings (Bailey, 1996). In other words, there were no predetermined times or specific order when it came to gathering data from participants. Generally, I tried to approach different parents or different groups of parents at each event (i.e., practice, game). Considering there was a core group of parents who were at the rink on a more regular basis, I talked to them more frequently. However, I made a habit of scoping out the area to see who was at the rink, which enabled me to spread myself as much as possible within all groups of parents. As my research progressed and my understanding of the setting grew, my ability to focus on certain events and/or people expanded. The decisions about what to observe or who to approach were in part due to my ongoing reflections (Bailey, 1996).

Field notes were taken after each event and included daily logs and scratch notes with descriptions about specific events or occurrences (Sands, 2002). As I had done during the selection camp, I stayed away from writing notes directly in front of the participants. If I felt the need to write down a few items, I would use “jotted notes” which consist of a type of memory cue for a mental note, such as a key phrase, quote, or small detail (Bailey, 1996). To do so, I sent myself text messages from my cell phone or used a small notepad that I always carried in my purse. As such, my note taking was always very discreet. It became routine for me to start writing my field notes within 30 minutes of the event ending and as previously mentioned, I would replay the whole event from start to finish in my mind. I found this

strategy to be effective as being able to recall the order of occurrences provided me with a blueprint of who I saw, who I stood beside, who I ran into in the lobby, what I heard, what I saw, and so on. In keeping with Wolcott's advice (2005), my field notes for one event were always fully written up prior to attending the next event. In addition, throughout the season, I reflected on my experiences and included these reflections in my field notes.

Informal Semi-Structured Interviews

Near the end of the season, I emailed all of the parents to advise them that I was hoping to meet with each one of them in order to conduct brief informal semi-structured interviews. Hence, during the last three weeks of the season, I met with individual parents as opportunities arose. An interview guide was used (Appendix I), which consisted of six questions that primarily focused on their perceptions of their parental involvement and responsibilities as these relate to hockey and aggression within the sport. Each interview lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes. Although, I was not able to meet with each parent, of the 31 eligible parents (those who had signed the consent form at the onset of the season), I was able to meet with 25 of them. I should point out that the parents had been advised that for the purpose of these interviews, I would not use an audio-recording device in order to keep the interviews relatively informal. However, parents were aware that I would be writing down their answers in order to recall key points discussed. After each interview was conducted, I typed up their answers using my jotted notes as a guide.

In-Depth Interviews

From an SI perspective, I was interested in gaining a more profound understanding of participants' perceptions, past experiences, interpretations, decisions, and value judgements with regard to their overall competitive youth hockey participation. As such, I conducted in-

depth interviews with parents and players from each of the three recruited families, as well as with the two non-parent coaches. Within each family, three in-depth interviews were individually conducted with each parent over the course of the season. The primary focus of each interview consisted of, respectively: (1) initiation and involvement, (2) perceptions of aggression, and (3) reflections on the season. In addition, one interview was individually conducted with each hockey player of the three recruited families, whereby the focus strategically encompassed all three of the aforementioned topics. For the most part, all of the interviews with the families were held in December, January, and February, based on convenience and availability. As for the interviews with the coaches, although I had originally planned to interview only the head coach of the team, I wound up also interviewing the non-parent assistant-coach. Their interviews were held in late November and their purpose was to gain insight into their coaching philosophies, their parent-coach relationships, as well as their perceptions and experiences of aggression in youth hockey.

Interview guides were used in order to allow for flexibility and flow throughout interactions with interviewees (Appendices J, K, L) and each interview was audio-recorded. The location of the interviews varied from one participant to another. They were conducted in either a secluded room at the arena, their workplace, or their home. The interviews lasted anywhere between one to two hours, and enabled participants to share information regarding the research objectives. I began the interviews by asking broad, general questions to give the participants the opportunity to get acquainted with the process and to speak in a relaxed atmosphere (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). As the interviews evolved and salient information emerged, I used probes and/or direct cues to follow up promising leads or to return to earlier points that required further development. At the end of each interview, I reminded

participants that I would be emailing them their interview transcript for verification. The participants were also thanked for their cooperation and sent an acknowledgment email. After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed them verbatim. The only changes that I made to the transcripts were slight grammatical corrections that improved the flow of the text. Before proceeding to the analysis stage, I emailed a copy of the interview transcripts to all of the participants to authenticate that the information accurately reflected their perceptions. This process of member checking is considered an important step for establishing credibility (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participants were asked to provide their written comments directly on the transcripts, however, it should be noted that none of the participants made changes or omitted information.

Throughout the data collection, I followed the guidelines of organized interviewing, open communication, listening, and observing in order to collect as much information as possible (Ivey, 1994). Some of the data collected reflect participants' perspectives at the present time or over a time spectrum (e.g., season or career timelines), which allowed for "topical life stories" to be constructed (Plummer, 1995, p. 59). The case study design enables researchers to depict the life stories of participants by examining a number of people in order to capture the richness associated with the occupancy of a particular role (Orum et al., 1991).

Researcher as Instrument

According to McCracken (1988), "in qualitative research the investigator serves as a kind of instrument in the collection and analysis of data. Investigators must use their experience and imagination to find (or fashion) a match for the patterns evidenced by the data" (p. 18-19). Symbolic interactionists recognize the need for researchers to detach themselves from the outside-observer role in order to take a closer, more involved position

with research participants. At the same time, taking a more involved stance does not eliminate one's personal biases and stereotypes. Hence, I consciously tried to keep an open mind as I entered the world of my participants; my goal was to understand their interpretations and definitions of situations with hopes of reconstructing their view of reality (Hewitt, 2007).

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that my values, beliefs, experiences, and social identity are reflected in the study. In effect, the findings of the present study are my interpretations of parents' everyday accounts of the hockey environment, accounts which were created during the process of interaction between the participants and myself. Due to the fact that I am ever present throughout the text, it is important to include a section on my sport background, preparation, and presence in order to demonstrate my credibility as a researcher as well as to convey my position regarding the data collection and presentation. As Newman (1992) comments: "To establish the researcher's credibility as an effective instrument of inquiry, it is necessary to provide information regarding his or her background, qualifications, and training" (p.77). As such, my previous experience as a researcher and interviewer as well as my long-term involvement within the sporting community helped me carry out this study. A more detailed description of my sporting background is presented below.

Sport Background

Sport has always been part of our family life. As children themselves, both my parents were active and played in various organized sport programs, which is why they believed that both my older sister and I should be enrolled in some type of physical activity. My sister leaned towards dance while my parents had to forcibly convince me to play ringette

when I turned seven years old. For the first four or five years, I was a self-proclaimed 'recreational-oriented' player who enjoyed the camaraderie and singing team cheers, but had no real interest in winning. By the time I reached adolescence, however, I had found my competitive edge and desire to excel within the world of athletics. For over a decade, I played competitive soccer and ringette for local associations. Through my involvement in ringette, I was able to compete both at the provincial and national levels, while also getting a taste for coaching, an interest I shared with my father. After twelve ringette seasons, I made the decision to switch to women's hockey. Within two years, I had the opportunity to play on my university's team and was an assistant-captain both seasons. Eventually my passion for coaching intensified and became one of my priorities. From high school teams to local associations, my coaching journey eventually led me back to my university hockey roots as I was an assistant-coach for my university's women's hockey program for six consecutive seasons. Not only was I able to represent my university, I also had the opportunity to be an assistant-coach for the first ever Women's Team Canada competing at the FISU World University Games (in China).

Furthermore, after making the switch to hockey, I became an enthusiastic and avid ball-hockey player. Initially playing for fun and exercise, I developed a greater interest in the sport and was a member of the Women's National Ball Hockey Team and competed in two World Championships, winning silver and gold respectively. Finally, throughout the last seven years, I have also been a sport consultant for numerous athletes and teams, including the Women's National Under-18 Ice Hockey Program. During my consulting and coaching years with numerous youth hockey teams, I developed an awareness of key issues that lie within the youth sport environment. From a personal perspective, I was fortunate to have

parents who were involved throughout my sporting career. From watching in the stands to providing emotional support to volunteering in various roles, both my parents, to this day continue to be my number one fans. Needless to say, the experiences I gained through my sport endeavours have provided me with valuable insight regarding the research context of this study.

Researcher Presence

It is important to discuss my role as a researcher in order to highlight the influence I may or may not have had on participants. Realistically, it is fair to assume that my presence around the team had an impact on the parents; however, the degree to which this may have occurred varies from one individual to another and from one situation to another. During tryouts, my presence at the arena was unknown to all. People did not know who I was or why I was there. I tried to blend in as much as possible and avoided making eye contact with anyone for fear that they might approach me.

From the onset of the season, the coaching staff supported my involvement and my efforts, which played an important role in building rapport with the group. The parents were supportive of my research project, as evidenced by 16 signed consent forms once the first parent meeting ended. I was initially nervous about how receptive parents would be, but this proved to be a non-issue. It did not take long for parents to accept me into their groups and start to open up about their experiences and adventures in hockey. One parent eagerly admitted to “searching” me on the internet. By typing my name into the internet search engine, he was able to browse multiple sport websites. He had read stories on my coaching and athletic experiences, which in the end, must have implicitly helped build rapport with him, and perhaps others. He had also shared some of my success stories with a few of the

other fathers. Numerous times throughout the season, I felt as though parents were proud of and genuinely interested in my successes and personal achievements.

As my rapport grew with parents, they became more curious about my data collection. They slowly started to ask more questions about how my thesis was developing and what type of results I was gathering. My typical responses consisted of explaining the formal and lengthy process of the thesis (e.g., data collection, data analysis, writing), as well as reiterating the purpose of the study and that I was interested in parents' involvement in hockey. By mentioning the extensive commitment of parents, the focus turned back to them, rather than the thesis. It should be noted however that because they were aware of my background and experience in hockey, they also began to approach me with regards to questions about the team. On a few occasions, they sought feedback and reasoning as to why the team was not winning. Some parents also inquired about the conversations I shared with coaches. My rule of thumb was "the less I revealed, the better". I avoided and redirected such discussions, which proved easy for the simple reason that I believe parents respected my boundaries. They were simply testing the limits. For the most part, parents dealt with my involvement through the use of humour and as a comic relief. They often joked that I had picked the right team to work with and that I must be collecting a lot of great data. In the stands during games, I sometimes sensed parents glancing over in my direction to see my reactions (or lack of) about what was going on around us (e.g., parent yelling at the official). Strategically, I avoided making eye contact with parents when such situations occurred, while still discreetly glimpsing over. I also deliberately tried to sit in the higher rows (in the bleachers) with the group of parents because looking down was easier and more tactful than having to turn around and look up at them, which would have been more obvious on my part.

I also soon became known as “the Therapist”, a nickname that remained with me till the end of the season. This nickname was one which I found intriguing, and which evidently had underlying meanings. The parents were aware of my background in sport psychology, however, I never remotely hinted at or offered my consulting services. Although it was explained that my goal was to gain a better understanding of parents’ hockey involvement (possible through observing them), by referring to me as “the Therapist”, it was clear that they misinterpreted my research as a means to “analyze” and perhaps implicitly treat them. Yet, this did not seem to impact the rapport I developed with them. In contrast, for some parents, my knowledge in sport psychology became a potential advantage. After Christmas, I was approached on a couple of occasions by three mothers on the team. They suggested that I conduct team building sessions with the players, as they felt their sons were losing confidence and were no longer having fun. I explained that I was not willing to approach the coaches with the idea, as I did not want to step on anyone’s toes and I wanted to respect my researcher boundaries.

At the end of the season, I was enlightened and surprised by numerous parents expressing their gratitude towards me, when in fact it was I who was thankful to them. Parents revealed that having me around the team added a different component to their typical team make-up. They explained that they enjoyed our conversations and always felt comfortable around me. Additional feedback included my level of professionalism and ability to engage in respectful interactions with all members of the team. In sum, I admit that my presence as a researcher was one that most likely had an influence on the group and it would be unrealistic to think otherwise. However, I believe I was successful in developing rapport and establishing trust with the parents and coaches on the team. Clearly, some

individuals may have been more reserved and self-censored their thoughts and behaviours; however, I felt that parents were generally receptive, honest, and open-minded. As a result, I felt that my presence, and my level of integration within the group, did not heavily influence how parents behaved and/or expressed themselves. Rather, I believe that it was their experience and involvement in the sport itself that highly impacted how they chose to view and accept their trials and tribulations of being a parent within the hockey world.

Data Analysis

The data analysis occurred concurrently with the data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), so that emerging themes could subsequently be pursued (Gratton & Jones, 2004). As such, I personally transcribed the interviews and typed the field notes and reviewed them immediately thereafter. Throughout the collection and analysis period, data were continuously revisited, which allowed new insights to be explored (Barbour, 2008). In case study designs, analysis primarily consists of creating a detailed description of the case and its setting (Creswell, 2007). To do so, Côté, Salmela, Baria, and Russell's (1993) procedures for analyzing qualitative data were adapted and used in this study, which consisted of three main steps: (a) preparing the data, (b) developing meaning units, and (c) creating and conceptualizing categories. These steps are described below.

Preparing the Data

The objective of this step was to get familiar with the gathered information. This involved reading the field notes as well as transcribing and getting acquainted with the context of the interviews. As I read the text, I jotted down directly on the hard copy of the field notes and transcripts obvious categories that reflected the content (e.g., coaching decision). As such, the traditional pencil and paper method was used to organize and code the

data. Preparing the data was an important inductive process that served to facilitate subsequent work. It is also during this step that basic grammatical and spelling errors were corrected for clarification purposes.

Developing Meaning Units

The second step of the analysis involved dividing the text (data) from the field notes and interview transcripts into “meaning units” (MUs), whereby they are given a tag, that is, a name that reflected the content of the cue. MUs are small sections of text that contain an idea or piece of information that can be interpreted on their own. More inductive analysis of the data occurred at this level as well because as I read the transcripts to create and/or identify the meaning units, additional categories emerged and I noted them down as I progressed.

Creating and Conceptualizing Categories

This step consisted of coding the meaning units from the field notes and transcripts under specific categories that were inductively created. Coding is the process of classifying individual responses into categories that bring together similar ideas, concepts, or themes (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). An inductive and deductive method of data analysis was implemented to create general categories and sub-categories under which common themes and concepts were regrouped. Using Microsoft Word, the meaning units were coded and categories organized, which were then printed out. These printouts allowed for a greater view of potential (and perhaps overlooked) features, patterns, relationships, and other relevant categories to emerge (Jorgensen, 1989). Significant citations were also identified. Based on Tesch’s (1990) recommendations, the analytical process was flexible so that categories could be modified and refined until a satisfactory list was established and exhausted from all of the data.

Enhancing Trustworthiness

Several criteria have been outlined in the literature to verify the findings and conclusions derived in qualitative studies. The main measure that was taken to increase the trustworthiness of the present study included crystallization of data sources. Crystallization has said to complement traditional triangulation by providing another lens with which to view qualitative inquiries (Janesick, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods and data sources to enhance the validity of the research findings, allowing ‘the same phenomenon’ to be studied at different times and places and with different participants (Flick, 2006; Maxwell, 2005). It uses multiple perceptions to clarify and verify the repeatability of an observation or interpretation (Stake, 2000). The objective of triangulation is to look for consistency in the data gathered through various means as the limitations of one method could be compensated by the strengths of another.

Yet, by replacing the triangle with the crystal, the many facets of studying the social world as a fact of life are considered (Janesick, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). According to Richardson (1994), unlike a triangle which offers a rigid and fixed two-dimensional object, the crystal “combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionality, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, and alter, but are not amorphous” (p. 522). As such, the combination of facets and ways of observing yields a multiple-shaded picture. For example, as stated by Janesick (2000), what we see when we look at a crystal ultimately depends on how we view it and how we hold it towards light. For the purpose of the present study, extended time in the setting provided me with opportunities to capture and interpret the meaning individuals attribute to various situations, while approaching the study from numerous vantage points in

order to gain a better understanding of the parents' experiences and perceptions of their involvement in hockey. In the same manner, participant observation is also a technique that results in highly valid concepts because it seeks to reflect the identification and definition of the meaning and purpose of everyday life concepts (Yin, 2003). Hence, it provides a number of strategies for continually verifying for the accurate and reliable findings.

Another way to increase the accuracy of findings is to provide context-rich and meaningful thick descriptions in order to allow readers a greater understanding of shared experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 2009). As such, considerable time was invested into reading the field notes and transcripts as well as analyzing and presenting the findings of this study. As it will be seen in the chapters 4, 5, and 6, a thick description of the data along with numerous quotes from participants are provided in order to portray a full and revealing picture of the phenomenon being studied. Additionally, the study was conducted over a prolonged time period, starting in late August and continuing till the first week of March. Maxwell (2005) stated that repeated observations and interviews and a continuous presence of the researcher in the setting helps reduce spurious associations and premature claims. The fact that one researcher collected all of the data increased trustworthiness and allowed for more consistency within the data collection procedures as well as in the interpretation of the findings. I also personally transcribed all of the interviews and subsequently reviewed all of them with the sole purpose of immersing myself in the data in order to better grasp the participants' point of views.

It is important to note, however, that the researcher can never completely distance herself from the findings as it is her interpretation of the data that was used to construct the descriptions of the study. Due to the fact that the data were collected through interactions

between me and the participants, the descriptions are a co-construction making it impossible to completely separate myself from the findings, which is why I felt it was important to include a section on my sport background and research presence. Citations are also used to convey to the reader that what is being interpreted by the researcher is an accurate representation of the participants' personal perspectives.

Member checking, a term coined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), was also used as a method for verifying, revising, and/or extending information obtained from participants (Janesick, 2000; Schwandt, 2001). All of the in-depth interview transcripts were sent to each participant via e-mail for authentication and verification after they were transcribed and corrected for grammar and spelling. This also gave participants the opportunity to review and comment on the accuracy of the documents. All of the participants responded and indicated that no changes needed to be made.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the validity of an inquiry can also be increased by subjecting findings and interpretations to the evaluation of peers. As stated by Reason and Marshall (1987), there is great value in interacting with individuals: "friends willing to be enemies in order to reveal the blind spots and unarticulated assumptions inherent in any inquiry" (p. 124). Various informal debriefing meetings were held with the research supervisor, a fellow graduate student, and individuals within the related field. During these conversations, I discussed with my peers several issues related to the design, analysis, and interpretation of the findings. This also enabled my peers to ask questions and/or provide comments in order to clarify and/or verify my own understanding of these issues and to enhance my ability to articulate the findings of the study.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The current study generated several important findings regarding the involvement of parents in youth hockey; however, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. In terms of the sample, only one team (specific to age, gender, and calibre) was observed and studied, thus more research should be conducted with parents involved in hockey (various age groups, calibre levels, and gender) in order to gain a broader understanding of the larger population within the youth hockey environment. Sampling in this study was not driven by a concern with representativeness because the quest for conventional generalizability was not an issue or the objective of the study. Rather, the purpose was to provide a more in-depth understanding of how parents of one competitive youth hockey team create their role within the youth hockey environment, as well as how they perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the same environment.

As Creswell (2003) pointed out, a limitation in conducting qualitative studies is brought about by the mere fact that “qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive” (p. 182). That is, the findings are historically and situationally bound making it difficult to obtain the same findings if the researcher were to carry out the study again in the same way. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “transferability” is a key feature of qualitative research, in that it allows for readers to engage in reasonable yet modest speculation as to how the findings of one study are applicable in other areas. Consequently, I provided extensive information regarding the sample, procedures, and steps that were involved in conducting the present study and I also thoroughly described the findings to enable readers to judge whether or not they could be generalized to their own context.

Furthermore, researcher bias is typically viewed as a limitation in qualitative inquiries in which the researcher acts as the instrument (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Considering that participants were aware of my presence around the team, they may have modified their involvement, behaviours, and/or interactions accordingly. In fact, it is reasonable to assume that had I not been present, the frequency and intensity of questionable parental behaviours could have been more prevalent. However, as the season progressed, it became evident that parents became accustomed to having me around. Spending time in the field and developing a good rapport with participants helped potentially reduce the impact of my presence (Wolcott, 2005). To further reduce this potential effect, ongoing data collection, personal reflection, and peer debriefing helped me verify and clarify potentially confusing or misunderstood information. These techniques also simultaneously became “self-care” strategies (Rager, 2005): Keeping track of my interpretations and reflections of the experiences lived and the settings observed allowed me to take into account my own personal thoughts and emotions.

Chapter Summary

In sum, SI was the conceptual framework that guided the present study, whereby the focus was on how parents involved in competitive youth hockey define the world they live in and how these definitions ultimately influence and shape their actions within this environment (Charon, 2004). This qualitative inquiry consisted of two descriptive case study designs, which employed a combination of four methods: direct observation, participant observation, informal semi-structured interviews, and in-depth interviews, thereby allowing me to gather data through interviewing and observing parents in real situations. These data

collection methods generated extensive and comprehensive data regarding the involvement of parents in hockey and several procedures were undertaken to enhance trustworthiness.

I now turn to the findings of the study, which are presented in the following three chapters. More specifically, Chapter 4 presents an overview of the youth hockey season, from the initial tryout sessions till the year-end party, including time and financial commitments, group dynamics, coaching, volunteerism, and so forth. This chapter relies more heavily on field notes from participant observation and therefore uses fewer direct quotes from participants than is used in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 focuses on the perceptions of parents as they relate to their overall involvement within the competitive youth hockey culture, while Chapter 6 includes the perceptions of parents, players, and coaches on the prevailing issues of aggression and the reality of parental conduct within the hockey environment.

While it will be evident to the reader that SI is infused within the findings, these descriptive chapters create the basis upon which this qualitative study rests (Wolcott, 2009), whereby the focus is to provide a full and thorough description of the involvement of parents within the competitive youth hockey culture. According to Blumer (1969), one of the valuable features of exploratory research is its ability to develop comprehensive descriptive accounts of the area under study and highlight the problematic issues that exist “without the need of invoking any theory or proposing any analytical scheme” (p. 43). Similarly, the value in reporting case study findings is by bringing the readers into the setting through the use of vivid, rich, and detailed descriptions, which are not typically available in more analytical accounts (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In fact, researchers can be accused of being biased

when case studies fail to present a complete description (Yin, 2003). A characteristic of an exemplary case study is the judicious, neutral, and effective display of evidence, allowing readers to reach independent judgement about the interpretation of the findings (Yin, 2003). As such, the purpose of subsequent chapters is to present the findings as “comprehensive descriptions of the cases” (Merriam, 2002, p. 179), while further analysis and interpretation using SI will be discussed in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 4

OVERVIEW OF THE ‘PEEWEE AA’ TEAM AND SEASON

According to Patton (2002), it is essential that the findings of a study create an overall picture: “the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed” (p. 262). Throughout the hockey season, data were collected through various measures in an attempt to gain a better understanding of human behaviour, specifically within the competitive youth hockey culture. From an SI perspective, culture refers to a ‘consensus’ that exists within a group of individuals, whereby shared understandings, shared language, shared knowledge, and shared rules are supposed to govern human action (Charon, 2004). As such, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of everyday social action and experiences of parents, players, and coaches involved in competitive youth hockey, as it relates to parental involvement. Within the competitive youth hockey culture, many common features and demands characterize the typical hockey season. In order to portray the involvement of parents, the following themes will be further described: (a) team exposé, (b) tryouts, (c) hockey experience, (d) family ties, (e) boys’ club, (f) group dynamics, (g) parental jobs, (h) coaching volunteerism, (i) essence of time, and (j) financial pocket.

Team Exposé: “What Will Be, Will Be”

In order to fully appreciate the findings of the study, it is important to provide a quick overview of the team, including the roster, schedule, team rules, and results. This ‘Peewee AA’ team was officially selected by the first week of September. Comprised of two goaltenders, six defencemen, and nine forwards, the team (17 male players) showed a lot of

promise early in the season. In the previous two seasons, the team had struggled to compete against other teams in their league; however, with a new coaching staff in place, better results were anticipated and expectations increased. For the most part, the core of the team essentially remained the same from the previous year, with only three new players added to the roster. The three players had been playing at the ‘A’ level for the same association.

On a weekly average, the team had two practices and competed in one or two games. Once or twice a month, they also gathered at a local school gymnasium for dryland training. As a team rule, players were expected to be at the rink 45 minutes before practices and one hour before games, wearing appropriate attire for each event (e.g., team tracksuits for practices, team jacket and black dress pants for games, and team t-shirt and shorts for dryland training). Table 5 presents a detailed overview of the team’s schedule throughout the season.

Table 5

Overview of the Team’s Monthly Schedule

Month	Practices	Dryland training	Games		Total
			League	Tournament	
September	9	4	4	5	22
October	8	0	7	4	19
November	8	2	5	4	19
December	7	2	5	4	18
January	7	1	10	0	18
February	7	0	6	4	17
Total	46	9	37	21	113

The team attended five tournaments: September, October, November, December, and February (for confidentiality purposes, tournaments are identified by the month in which they occurred). Note that with the exception of the December tournament, the remaining four were

held out-of-town, which required a traveling distance (one-way) of minimally three hours, with the furthest one being eight hours away. The team captured the silver medal at the September tournament and suffered a heart-wrenching overtime loss in the semi-finals at the December tournament.

The team was registered in a local league, whereby they competed against nine other teams within a specific regional area. Based solely on game results, the team was not as successful as had been expected at the onset of the season. Of a total of 37 league games, the team was victorious in only five of them, with only two league wins between November and February. With such a limited number of victories, it is clear that the team went many games and weeks with little success. The team's longest losing streaks (excluding tournament games) were five consecutive games (three weeks in November), nine games (month of January), and six losses that ended the season. From a league standing perspective, the team was seeded in ninth place (out of 10) going into the playoffs, which meant a first round match-up against one of the top teams in the league. After a three-game series, the team was eliminated and the season came to an end.

Throughout the season, many realizations were made from both the coaching staff and the parents. Assistant coach Bill Davis admitted that two months into the season, he knew that parents had high expectations of the coaching staff: "They thought that we would come in here and be saviours. And we're on pace right now to have the worst year ever." Although outlooks may have differed, according to mother Michelle Peterson, parents had to learn to accept that "this team is what it is". By January, she expressed how "you can only expect so much". She had no complaints about anyone specifically (i.e., players and/or coaches), but realized that the team as a whole did not have as much pure talent and raw skill

as other teams in the league, which she was okay with and accepted. In the same manner, parent Todd Allen explained that his son Zach definitely found the season to be a challenging one, as did he. Todd revealed that he obviously wants to ensure that Zach is having fun, which usually involves winning. He added that for Zach, the team's lack of success was compensated by making the 'AA' team for the first time.

Tryouts: "When One Door Shuts, Another Opens"

Tryouts, also known as a team's selection camp, are typically the first nerve-wracking moments of the season, as young hopefuls compete for limited spots on a team's roster. For most, parents and players see this opportunity as a "do or die" situation.

Overview of Tryouts

The tryouts were held during the last two weeks of August and ran till the first week of September. With over 70 players trying out for the competitive program ('A' and 'AA' levels), the process is quite complex. From goaltending-specific sessions to predetermined intra-squad games, tryouts are an annual event for many young players and their families, so it was obvious that people knew the process well. This however did not make it any easier. For example, there were 23 goaltenders trying out for only four spots (two per team for the 'A' and 'AA' levels within the same association). Throughout the selection camp, the stands were deliberately divided into two sections. One section, near the far end of the rink, was reserved for evaluators, who sat sporadically throughout their section with their notepads and clipboards in hand, while the other section was for spectators (i.e., parents). For the duration of the camp, I never observed any interaction between the evaluators and parents.

From the very first sessions, it was apparent to me that the players' parents had not seen each other for some time. They were overheard chatting about their summer adventures,

weather conditions, and family outings, but conversations always eventually turned to hockey, as they asked each other what jersey number and colour their sons were wearing on the ice. In the same manner, it did not take long before gossip and presumptions started. Parents discussed who the players on the ice were, where they were from, who had been released (i.e., “cut from the team”), what type of player the coaches were looking for, how the team would do this year, and who would make the team. In the stands, some parents cheered for their sons, while others looked on in discontent. One mother, who did not seem pleased with her son’s performance, yelled out numerous times: “oh come on [boy’s name], pick it up”. Another time, after a player on the ice clumsily tripped and lost possession of the puck, one father shouted “ah geez [boy’s name]. What was that? What are you doing?” One lone woman watching the game was stepping side-to-side as she followed the play and at one point, she gestured something to a player on the ice, as she shook her head. Another father repeatedly yelled comments, such as, “let’s go”, “get your butt in gear”, and “get on your horse”. Finally, another father, whom I had previously seen in the stands, was later pacing back and forth outside the facility.

The last phase of the selection camp consisted of brief individual player meetings with the coaches, which parents were also invited to attend. Families were lined-up along the hallway, anxiously waiting for their turn. Upon entering the designated room, both the ‘A’ and ‘AA’ coaches were sitting side by side, which parents later said was rather intimidating. Once you walked in, you were handed one of two packages, or worse, nothing. As you walked out, people could speculate which team you had made by simply looking at the package you had received (the logos on the packages were different for the ‘A’ and ‘AA’

teams). Many young players were seen walking down the hallway obviously disappointed, some with tears rolling down their cheeks.

Tryout Decisions

Most of the players on the team had been playing at the 'AA' level for a few seasons. Some players, like Kyle Harrison and Dylan Smith for example, had played on the same team since the very beginning at the 'Initiation' level, over 5 years ago. This year's team had only three new players: Mitch Robinson, Nick Barker, and Zach Allen, all of whom had played at the 'A' level. When Mitch, a goaltender, was cut from the 'AA' program the previous season, uproar began within the association. Parents on the 'AA' team were upset at Mitch's release to the 'A' program because they believed that he was unfairly evaluated and that the poor coaching decisions were impacting the overall strength of the team. Yet, the association stood by the coaches' initial decision because it would have been unjust to make any changes to the roster once the team had been announced, so Mitch ended up playing at the 'A' level. According to his mother Cindy, there was not much they could do as the decision had been made. She also believed however that "things always happen for a reason".

Similarly, after being released from the 'AA' team last season, Nick Barker's father Don believed that his son had also been cut from the team for no valid reason. Although Nick was a defenceman, the coaches that year had moved him to forward for most of the tryouts, which Don hinted was completely unfair. He also added that both coaches on that team had sons who played defence. As a result of his son's previous tryout experiences, Don believes that Nick no longer shows much emotion when trying out for teams for fear of being disappointed.

As for Zach Allen, two years earlier, at 10 years old, he had tried out for the 'AA' team but was released, much to his disappointment. Most of his former teammates and friends had made the team, which left him playing for a new team all on his own. As it turned out, Zach had a really good year at the 'A' level and was able to further develop his confidence. His mother Sheryl explained how Zach, as a forward, scored a lot of goals and enjoyed himself on and off the ice. However, during summer hockey, the coaches switched him from forward to defence. Zach was upset because at that age, all players want to do is score goals. The following year, Zach tried out for a second time for the 'AA' team, but again was released. In retrospect however, his parents Sheryl and Todd both thought that it was a blessing in disguise. That year, Zach had the opportunity to develop his on-ice skills, while polishing his leadership skills as the team's captain. He was also affiliated with the 'AA' team, which meant that when the 'AA' team was short players, they could ask an 'A' player to substitute. This provided Zach with additional exposure, experience, and confidence. Although Sheryl was happy that her son made the 'AA' team this season, she would prefer that he play at a less competitive level, which would result in a lesser commitment and more overall enjoyment. She revealed that she does not understand what all the hype is about playing 'AA' hockey:

I'm fairly pragmatic. There are millions of hockey players and he's only one of them. You don't want to spoil their dreams and chances and desires to go as far as they can, but pragmatically, the chances are exceedingly slim. So, I think it's important to have fun along the way.

Two months into the season, parent Rob Miller revealed that this year's selection camp was one of the hardest things he had to deal with (as a parent in hockey) because it had been more stressful than any other year. He thought his son Corey had performed terribly throughout the camp and had not fully demonstrated his abilities. Rob knew that having a

new coach meant that there was no prior history and no one knew what types of players the new head coach Wayne Burke would be looking for. For example, if he was looking for size, Corey did not fare well considering he was one of the smaller players on the ice. Fortunately, Corey did impress the coaches and evaluators and was selected to the team. Although his motives were not clear, Rob revealed that had Corey not made the 'AA' team, he would not have let his son play hockey at the 'A' level. He would have taken a year off. For Corey and 16 other young hockey hopefuls, however, there was no need to worry. They had made the 'AA' team. The first team practice was held three days after the official announcement of the team roster, at which point parents attended their first parents' meeting, marking my formal debut with the team.

Hockey Experiences: "Live and Learn"

According to parents, having fun and loving the game were the main reasons why their children play hockey; they have a passion for the game. According to parent Dale Chapman, hockey has always been part of their lives and his son Simon loves playing the game because of the competition, the friendships, and the teamwork. Todd Allen stated that his son Zach loves everything about the sport, to the point where he identifies himself as a hockey player. As a kid he liked wearing his jersey because it had his name and number on it. Zach, himself, explained that his reason for playing hockey was simply because he loves the game. More specifically, he likes to shoot and pass, but even more, he likes that he can "fool and goof around on the outdoor rink". Zach stated that he has learned a lot through hockey, from displaying good sportspersonship to exercising leadership to overcoming obstacles.

I learned that if you're at the bottom and you're not getting a lot of ice time, if you work really hard at it, you'll get to play more. That's what happened this year. So I didn't get any time on power play but near the end of the season, I got a lot. So ya just work hard.

Player Scott Webster stated that he, too, has learned a lot through hockey, including the rules of the games and the importance of teamwork. He also proclaimed that everyone should try playing hockey because it is fun and they will like it. Although he played defence on one of his summer teams, his preference is playing forward because he enjoys scoring goals or helping his teammates score goals. As such, his favourite elements of the game include making plays, scoring goals, and body checking. Scott described his best hockey moment as the time he scored seven goals in one game, and the final score was 7-1. As for the lone goal scored against them, Scott added that he had actually mistakenly tipped the puck in his own net. Teammate Tyler Cohen explained that one of his best hockey moments was when he was in 'Novice' (as an eight year old) and scored five goals in one game:

It was the semi-finals in playoffs and we won in overtime. I got five goals and we won 6-5. I got the overtime winner. We used to switch captains and I got to be captain for the finals and we won that too. I got to hold a banner and everything.

Players could not recall a time where they did not want to play hockey. Scott Webster explained how his first year at the 'Atom AA' level was indeed a tough one because of the team's lack of success and the coaches. According to him, the "team was brutal and the coaches had no idea what they were doing". He explained though that "it's still hockey and you get to play, so you always have to look on the bright side". Scott revealed that his dreams for the future are as follows: "#1, get drafted (not get drafted to the NHL, but just get drafted somewhere and play competitive hockey), and #2, get a house, a big, big house. That's what I want. Other than that, nothing really." Scott revealed that he typically only gets four weeks off throughout the year, but he does not mind. Zach Allen stated that he is always itching to play, whether it is a practice, game, or even dryland training. Tyler Cohen said that he rarely gets tired of it, even after attending camps and clinics.

Hockey proved to be a game that was enjoyed by both children and adults. Most parents revealed that hockey had been an important part of their own childhood. Joanne Cohen explained that hockey was a family past-time throughout her upbringing. She recalled how on Saturday nights, it was a tradition to gather the family together to watch “Hockey Night in Canada” on television and you did not dare watch anything else. During a Sunday morning practice, the parents on the team reminisced about how it was when they were growing up. They agreed that when they were young, they played for complete and utter pleasure. It was for the love of the game. They would take the bus to get to venues because their parents were not nearly as involved in those days. Parents stated how it seems so different now. Some parents suggested that children no longer play because they want to. Rather, a lot of it has to do with parents pressuring and forcing their children to shine, which obviously takes a lot of the fun out of the game.

As a young player, parent Tom Smith had himself competed in the same February tournament that the team attended. For parent Peter O’Neill, however, he only started playing six years ago with a group of friends and family members. When his son Andrew was five or six years old, he asked his father if he played in the NHL. When Peter said no, Andrew asked “how come, aren’t you good enough?” There were a few fathers on the team who continued to play on a regular basis throughout their adulthood. In fact, two fathers, Grant Webster and Don Barker, were teammates on their local men’s team. Although she no longer played, parent Colleen Forsyth, an alumnus of a Canadian university, was also a member of the university’s women’s hockey team. Her husband Bruce revealed that his wife is the “hockey person” in their family.

Family Ties: “One for All, All for One”

Youth hockey ultimately becomes a family affair for all those involved. From the initial tryout sessions to practices and games, there were groups of fathers and mothers sporadically set up around the ice surface. There were numerous siblings, both younger and older, that occupied much of the open space. Older ones were seen sitting in the stands reading or listening to their personal music devices, while younger ones were running around or playing with toys brought from home. It definitely appeared that this was a typical part of coming to the rink.

Family Implications

Parent Joanne Cohen admitted that typically, by August, the boys, including her husband Jeff, are usually looking forward to getting started again. While they are excited about it, she typically finds September very overwhelming. She loves the summer and having her children around and out of school. They go to the cottage, participate in family activities, and even have time to enjoy meals together. Then comes September; school starts, as does the hockey routine, which together take up much of their family time for the next seven to eight months.

For other families, though, hockey could not come soon enough. Parent Rob Miller said that their family talks hockey all the time. For a family that was not going to be hockey-oriented, hockey has integrated itself well into their family lifestyle. However, hockey does not always come first, even for the Millers, who went on a family trip during the holidays, which was also at the same time as the December tournament. When asked if their son Corey had a choice of going on the trip or not, Rob said absolutely not. Had it been up to Corey, he would have stayed because he hates missing hockey. In the same manner, the Doyles also

chose to miss the November tournament due to a family obligation. With a family wedding planned, Ken stated that there are not many opportunities to get together and support family members, so “when something big happens, you make a point of being there”. Because of everyone’s commitment and with their children getting older, it was the first time in several years that all five of them were together. For him, being at a family wedding was more important than a hockey tournament. He admitted that throughout the weekend, however, he followed the team’s results through the tournament’s website. In contrast, the Websters experienced firsthand what it was like to go away to hockey tournaments, only to miss important family achievements. While parent Lisa was at the November tournament with sons Scott and Derek, and her husband Grant away with son James at another tournament, their remaining children were at home with the nanny. Upon their returns on Sunday evening, their youngest child had taken her first steps. Lisa said she could not help but get emotional after seeing her little girl walk towards her when she entered the front door. It was hard for her to accept that she missed such a great family milestone because of hockey.

Somehow, however, parents are able to manage the schedule and share the responsibilities between themselves. With their children being too young to drive, parents undoubtedly see to it that their son gets to the arena or gymnasium. Parent Fred Connelly explained how it is usually a last minute daily decision between him and his wife Gail in determining who will do what. For them, it depends on how they feel and whose turn it is, which is not on a rotational or fair basis. In other words, one of them could go to three events in a row simply because of scheduling conflicts or other reasons, but Fred clearly confided in me that they both put in their time. For the Forsyths, the decision of who will go to hockey is highly dependent on what is easier for either parent, such as if one needs to work late that

evening or get up early the next day. As for tournaments, it is often only a couple of days before the first scheduled game that one of them takes charge and makes the decision.

For the three families on the team with divorced parents, all sets of parents showed a lot of support and were often both at the arena during games. For example, parent Todd Allen confirmed that both he and Sheryl attend games, regardless of whose week it is with their son. He acknowledged that he tries to attend as many games as he can but he also tries to have a little bit of a social life, which hockey makes difficult to do. As for tournaments, they look to see whose weekend with the children the tournament falls on. This year for example, because all of the tournaments happened to fall on the same parent's weekends, they switched their custody schedule in order to allow both parents to take turns making the out-of-town trips. This also allowed the other parent to spend extra time with their daughter. According to Sheryl, being away at tournaments with Zach is one type of sacrifice that his sister Sarah makes.

Sacrifices of Siblings

Clearly, siblings play an important role within the hockey world. Whether or not they are players themselves, they are highly influenced by the environment. The hockey schedule can create a hectic lifestyle for them as well. Throughout the season, many opportunities presented themselves whereby siblings were forced into the environment one way or another. Although they may not attend many of their brother's games, the schedule at home changes regardless of their attendance. For example, parent Dale Chapman, who has shared custody of their children with his ex-wife Helen, explained how both his children get home from school around four o'clock. Generally, there is some type of hockey event, whether it is a game, practice, or dryland, which means that Dale and his son Simon have to rush off soon

after they arrive home from school and work. Hence, his daughter can either wait for them to have supper sometime after seven o'clock or she can go ahead and eat alone, which Dale admitted is not always fair to her. Parent Sheryl Allen agreed that her household is very similar, whereby her daughter Sarah sacrifices a lot for Zach's hockey. Fortunately for parents Judy and Larry Harrison, the fact that their two daughters were on the same hockey team made life a little less crazy for them. Considering that Larry travels quite a bit for business, having three children in hockey but only two hockey schedules was a blessing.

For the O'Neills, their youngest daughter Carrie is only 10 years old and can therefore not attend any of her older brother Andrew's late games, so she often stayed home with her grandmother. When Carrie did come to the arena, her mother Shelley would pack a bag full of colouring books and crayons, which kept her busy while her brother was on the ice. One sibling who was frequently in the stands cheering for his younger brother Nick was Ethan Barker. During games, Ethan and his mother Linda spent a lot of time chatting and laughing. On a few occasions, Ethan tried to talk to his father Don who was heavily focused on the game and consequently did not respond to him, but Linda eventually told Don to acknowledge Ethan. Marty Whyte, Kevin's younger brother, was also often seen around the arena, even during late games. Sometimes, Marty and his father Gary played hockey inside the arena, between hallways. Other times, Marty sat in the stands beside his father while he enjoyed a slice of pizza and an orange soda. One time, when Marty questioned his brother's on-ice decisions, Gary provided him with instructions and tactical insights. In addition, the Harrison's middle child was also very supportive of her younger brother Kyle. During games, she sat with her mother Judy and they whispered to one another. You could hear them say "watch out Kyle" when there was an opponent behind him or "nice pass" when he cleared the

puck out of the defensive zone. It was obvious that they were nervous for him and were trying to help him as much as they could from the stands.

Family Support

During tournaments, family support was very apparent. At the November tournament, there were quite a few families in attendance. Out of 16 families (excluding the Doyle family who did not attend), 15 families were represented. Furthermore, half of those 15 families had siblings there as well, with eight siblings making the trip. According to parent Gail Connelly, they normally like to go to tournaments as a family and their two boys are fine with that. They enjoy it. It is how they were brought up and it is part of their family values. Their elder son Jake was hoping to go to numerous tournaments with Matthew's team but it depended on his own hockey schedule. In the same manner, parent Dale Chapman, along with his daughter and son Simon, left for the November tournament on the Thursday night as this would give them time to do some shopping on Friday morning before the tournament was to start. Although Simon's sister typically does not go to any of his games, her father Dale had told her that she had to come to all of the games during the tournament. Finally, for the Smiths, mother Alison was unable to follow the team to any of the tournaments; however, she always made sure to send her husband Tom and son Dylan fully prepared. For one tournament, she had made lunch boxes filled with sandwiches, juice cans, and granola bars. She had also baked four dozen muffins for the team (unfortunately, they were forgotten in the garage when father and son packed their vehicle). Throughout the weekend, Alison called for updates between games to find out how the team and her son were doing.

Moreover, the family support sometimes included extended family members, who had the opportunity to see their grandsons, nephews, or cousins play at different times

throughout the season. Regularly at games were Tom Smith's sister and brother-in-law. They often sat all together and were always positive. During the December tournament, which was during the holidays, many aunts and uncles were in the stands showing their support. For the Connellys, an email had been sent out to the entire extended family to advise them that Matthew had been chosen to play in an all-star game. Gail stated that her son Matthew was well aware that he would have a lot of fans at the game and he had no objections. Also, hockey increased the chances for some extended families to visit during out of town tournaments. For example, during the October tournament, Bruce and son Joel stayed at his mother's place, instead of at the hotel. Joel spent time with the team during the day, but also spent time with his grandmother, whom he does not see often due to the hectic hockey schedule.

Notably, head coach Wayne Burke spent a lot of time at the arenas. In addition to his coaching, he also managed to attend most of his own son's hockey practices and games. Undoubtedly, it takes a huge commitment to be able to have a son in one hockey program while coaching another. After volunteering endless hours for practices, games, and tournaments, Wayne frequently rushed from one arena to the next in order to be able to support his son from the stands. Rarely missing any team events, he did skip one weekend in December. With only two practices (and no games) scheduled that weekend, Wayne chose to attend one of his son's out-of-town tournaments to spend time with him. Needless to say, as described by assistant-coach and non-parent Bill Davis, volunteer coaching is "like having a second fulltime job."

As suggested above, although competitive youth hockey is demanding and usually takes time away from families, it is also a way of bringing families together. Parent Grant

Webster said that even though it can be difficult at times to support everyone's endeavours, they do their best to see all of their children's activities. He explained that he tries to be actively involved with every child's team at least once in a 12-month calendar. For example, he was an assistant-coach with his eldest son James' team throughout the winter season and would be the head coach for both Derek and Scott's teams during the summer. His wife Lisa explained how hockey provides the family with interactions that may not exist otherwise:

In our family, those moments of one-on-one time are so precious and every child needs it. Hockey builds in those moments automatically. It forces those moments to be there, which is nice because they probably wouldn't happen otherwise. In our family, everybody kind of gets lost in noise because it's so big. So that time in the car when they can really communicate is great.

For some families, hockey was not limited to 'organized' practices and games with their respective teams. For the Cohens, they have built an outdoor rink at their home for as long as they can remember, so much so that Jeff has even built himself his own little homemade zamboni (ice resurfacers). Additionally, parent Lisa Webster said that, during the holidays, they went to a winter resort for the week with friends. With an outdoor rink nearby, the children played hockey on it everyday for no less than four hours at a time. Lisa said the children were going back to their roots of playing the game simply because they love it. It was all about playing for pure passion. She added that it is great because hockey is always something that her three older children can do together. It is what her boys have always done.

Boys' Club: "Boys Will Be Boys"

Although there were always numerous parents at the rink to support the players, it was easy to see that the fathers were there most often. While both mothers and fathers were at games to cheer on their sons, the same could not be said about practices. Frequently throughout the season, there were only men standing around the rink side while the team

practiced. As for out-of-town tournaments, in September and October, there were only fathers present. In November and February, however, there was a mixture of both mothers and fathers. Considering the location of the November tournament is known for its shopping outlets, this provided one special reason for the increase in attendance, including mothers and siblings. During the first game of the tournament, there were only fathers standing in the bleachers cheering. All of the mothers, along with some of their teenage daughters, were off shopping. On the way home from the tournament, parent Tom Smith commented on how it was so different because there were a lot of mothers present, unlike the previous two tournaments. He joked how having women in the hospitality room added an interesting component and admitted that it was fun listening to the women's stories.

Gendered Participation

In the stands during games, some of the fathers could typically be seen either sitting on the last row of the bleachers or standing behind the railing at the top of the bleachers. This type of formation provided opportunities for the fathers to discuss on-ice tactics and/or analyze the team's performance (or lack thereof). They could be heard talking about specific plays, criticizing certain players, expressing their discontent, and/or shouting coaching tactics from the stands. One simple play could easily get the discussion and debate rolling. For example, during one game, player Nick Barker had taken a great shot on net. One comment led to another, and while the game was being played, fathers argued about which player on the team had the hardest shot. On the other hand, mothers often gathered together between one or two rows, in front of the arena heaters if possible. Some of the mothers came prepared with a blanket, which was stretched and shared amongst as many women as possible. They could also be heard in the stands, although the topic and tones of their conversations were

rather different from those of their male counterparts. As I sat with one particular group of mothers, I heard continuous chatter about non-hockey related topics, followed by moments of giggling. Generally however, although the mothers chatted, they were still focused on the game; they always seemed to know what was going on out on the ice. Evidently, through many years spent at the rink, mothers were quite knowledgeable about the game. For example, during one game, mothers Linda Barker and Sheryl Allen were scrutinizing the weaknesses of the other team's goaltender. They noted that although he was quite tall, he did not appear to be very agile. They pointed out that he was falling down a lot and had a hard time recovering quickly.

On one occasion, parent Michelle Peterson mentioned that she had watched the game from a different angle; instead of sitting in the stands with her husband, she watched the game at one end of the rink while standing with fellow parents Frank Robinson and Rob Miller. She joked that she did so because she was trying to be "one of the boys". She then hinted that Colleen Forsyth (a former university hockey player) was "just like the fathers, but she probably actually knows more". In the same manner, it was interesting to also discover how knowledgeable some of the players' sisters were, such as Kyle Harrison's older sisters. Hockey players themselves, their knowledge and understanding of the game were impressive.

One of the Boys

Although the team I followed consisted of all male players, there was one girl, a defence(woman), who played on another team within the same league. According to parent Colleen Forsyth, people would not know that there was a female player on the ice if it were not for her ponytail. Colleen added that the female player was able to hold her own and did not get pushed around easily. Over the years, parents have become familiar with having girls

playing with or against their sons. (Those occurrences are decreasing however, now that there are more leagues dedicated to girls and women, at both recreational and competitive levels.) That said, regardless of their overall acceptance of the idea, fathers still made gendered types of jokes. For example, one time during a game, the female player beat Andrew O'Neill to the puck. His father Peter joked to other fathers in the stands that he would surely remind his son on the drive home that he "got beat by a girl". Another time, the female player was in the corner, battling hard for a loose puck. Some of the fathers were commenting that she must have had her eye on player Tyler Cohen, based on how "she was working it in the corner". Another father loudly stated that "she's one of those... she likes to get around". One last example was when parents believed that both Andrew and Corey Miller must have a crush on her because they kept chasing her in order to get closer to her.

Besides the one female player in the league, there were very few women involved in other areas. During the selection camp at the onset of the season, there were only male evaluators sitting in the stands with their clipboards. During the season, all of the coaches at this level in this league were male and there was only one game where one of the on-ice officials was a woman. In the stands, parents on the team often segregated themselves into two distinct groups, mothers and fathers. Throughout the season, it became clear how the hockey environment proved to be mostly male-dominated.

Group Dynamics: "It Takes All Sorts"

With only limited changes to the roster from season to season, the majority of the group (players and parents alike) had been together for a few years. When they walked into the arena, they greeted one another and chatted about various topics, from professional sports

to employment opportunities. It was clear that the some of the parents on this team had developed special bonds and lasting friendships.

Parental Cohesion

At the onset of the season and weather permitting, parents would sit outside around a picnic table while waiting for the practice or game to start. During practices, some parents (most often the fathers) watched from rink side as they stood together and watched the execution of each drill, while others sat in the lobby. During games, parents always gathered in the stands, although with whom they sat easily varied, yet also remained consistent, depending on who was at the game. According to parent Peter O'Neill, parents' perceptions of others tend to change as they become more involved and more in tune with the culture. He explained how when the boys were growing up, his son Andrew had played against Ken Doyle's son Trevor. As a result, Peter did not know Ken personally but he definitely knew of him, as did most people in the stands. Peter acknowledged that having their sons play on the same team has allowed them to become friends and respect each other. As a new member of the team, parent Don Barker revealed that this group of parents made it easy for him and his wife Linda to integrate themselves. Admittedly, they already knew a few of the families from previous hockey-related experiences (e.g., summer hockey). Parent Dale Chapman spoke highly of many families who have been with the team for a few seasons, suggesting that they have great values and similar beliefs.

Once the season started, it became obvious to me that some of the families on the team naturally became closer and developed more profound relationships. They started looking out for each other and their children. For example, during games at the November tournament, Frank Robinson's two younger sons were running back and forth throughout the

bleachers, while older brother Mitch was one of the two goaltenders on the team. With Frank focused on Mitch on the ice, other parents on the team implicitly kept an eye out on his children, who could have easily vanished from sight considering the size of the facility and the number of people occupying it. One time, the O'Neill's daughter ventured off with Joanne Cohen while her mother Shelley took pictures of the players on the ice.

Although parent Michelle Peterson believed that there were definitely "cliques" on the team, she felt she would not be able to specifically identify them. Aware that some families were closer to one another, she said they never imposed their relationships on others. She added that people were typically very inclusive. Parent Rob Miller expressed similar comments and said that he hangs out with whoever is there. Although he does not socialize with one specific group of parents, he confirmed to being closer to Ken Doyle, Don Barker, and Tom Smith. He also pointed out that he is somewhat closer to other parents who smoke, simply because they are often outside together having a cigarette.

It was evident however that some parents 'fit in', while others just seemed to be more of loners. Despite Michelle Peterson's comments, I sensed on numerous occasions that certain cliques did exist. One example of a clique was based on the boys' summer hockey teams. With two months remaining in the regular season, parents were heard planning and talking about their summer teams, which usually consist of close friends (since teams are handpicked and there are no tryouts). Parent Cathy Miller also selectively chose her groups. According to her husband Rob, Cathy was only interested in attending the games when the team played against one specific opponent because she knows the opposing team's parents. In fact, she made a point of sitting with them in the stands (instead of with the parents on her son's team).

At times, parents interacted and socialized outside of the hockey environment. Parent Gail Connelly confirmed that her family plans occasional dinner parties with the O'Neills at different times during the season. In contrast, parent Tom Smith explained that although he could see himself socializing with other families, he just does not have the time.

Interestingly, Colleen Forsyth explained how her husband Bruce and Tom Smith have been long-time football fans of opposing teams. Consequently, on a Sunday afternoon in November, their football teams were playing against each other. When Tom's team was up by several points, he called Bruce to jokingly harass him. But Bruce's team ended up winning the game, so Bruce drove over to Tom's house and rang the doorbell, holding a 'humble' pie.

Parental Social Interactions

Considering the amount of time they spend together, it was easy to understand how some families became such a close group, which was further demonstrated in the stands, when parents cheered on their son's teammates. They could be heard clapping after a nice play, cheering loudly after a goal (regardless of the goal scorer), and supporting a player who may have made a weak pass. Examples include cheering for Jacob Nesbitt after taking a hard shot on net from inside the offensive zone or whistling at Mitch Robinson after making a spectacular save. Another example occurred early in the season after the October tournament. Parent Michelle Peterson, who had been unable to attend, received a phone call late on Sunday evening from another parent on the team, who simply wanted to let her know how well her son Travis had played. She recalled feeling proud of her son but was even more touched that the parent took a few minutes out of his time to make the phone call.

On the other hand, it would be unrealistic to say that parents were consistently supportive and positive. In the heat of the moment during games, parents could be very competitive and intense. When the team started scrambling on the ice, the atmosphere in the stands also intensified. Tension rose quickly as parents yelled terms such as “get the puck out”, “move your feet”, or “freeze the puck” if and when the puck got stuck in the defensive zone for a long time. This also often led to negative whispers and/or complaints in the stands. There were endless examples where parents communicated negative thoughts to one another. For example, one time, as Dylan Smith skated towards an opponent to block a shot, he ended up jumping over the puck instead of blocking it with his shin pads. Quite a few parents reacted angrily by saying that he needed to commit and “take one for the team”. As people commented on Dylan’s play, his parents sat quietly only a few seats away. Parent Michelle Peterson revealed that it can be hard, as a parent, to hear something negative when it is about your son. Being a goaltender’s mom, she knows too well what it is like when your son does not play well. During a game shortly after Christmas, Michelle actually apologized to everyone in the stands after a weak goal was scored against her son. She repeated “I’m sorry” to other parents in the stands. Judy Harrison was the only person that acknowledged Michelle’s comment by leaning over to say that there was no need for her to apologize: “If parents apologized for every mistake their kids made during a game, no one would be able to watch the game. They would be too busy seeking forgiveness”. Other examples of parents engaging in negative talk included situations when: a player received a penalty, a weak goal was scored, a player did not pass, a player took a really long shift, and/or the coaches made a certain decision. Unmistakably, everyone had their own opinion and coaching insight.

With hockey being such an integral part of their lives, it is understandable that a lot of the common ground shared by parents is hockey itself. During practices, fathers routinely discussed the team's lack of success and/or analyzed the purpose of the drills that the team was executing on the ice. Parent Tom Smith stated that some of the fathers, especially Ken Doyle, get quite involved with league standings and player statistics. Other conversations also often revolved around player attributes (i.e., who has the strongest shot or who is the fastest skater) and performances (i.e., who played well the previous game or which line combinations worked well). Furthermore, as the team's losses continued to increase, the parents grew progressively more frustrated. Soon after Christmas, parents were complaining more frequently. This exemplified how the team's performance and level of play influenced the types of conversations at the rink, as well as the content (positive versus negative comments).

Early in the season, parent Michelle Peterson commented on how the perceptions of parents with regards to player performances are highly influenced by which position their son plays. More specifically, for her, she is aware that she tends to blame the defence and be much more critical of the team's defensive play because that is who she notices on the ice. The defencemen are responsible for protecting her son (a goaltender) and he counts on them to be there for him. For example, if a goal is scored, her first reaction is to think "well, he made the first three saves", implying that the defence had not worked hard enough to move the opponents out from in front of the net. Sometimes, when she hears comments like "the defence played really well last night", she cannot help but challenge the idea: If the goalie makes 30 or more saves, it means the defence were not doing their job very effectively, as there should never be that many shots to start with.

Needless to say, within the dynamics of a group exists many potential opportunities for gossip (Brennan, 2009). For example, in October, parents were visibly disappointed with the lack of players on the ice during a team practice. It was mentioned that player Joel Forsyth was out of town for Thanksgiving, while player Jacob Nesbitt was at a local NHL game. Parents Ken Doyle and Rob Miller expressed that it was unacceptable to miss a team practice for a NHL game. Another time, Michelle and Tony Peterson were unimpressed that Scott Webster was missing a game to go snowboarding. Furthermore, parents in the stands also whispered about other parents' behaviours. One incident that occurred that caused much discussion amongst the group involved Frank and Cindy Robinson. Upset by their son Mitch's poor performance, Frank and Cindy left the arena mid-game and asked Liz Doyle if she could drive Mitch home after the game. Apparently Frank was too distraught to stay and watch. Naturally, the mood of the mothers changed completely and chatter about the situation could be heard throughout the stands for the remainder of the game. In the lobby afterwards, Michelle Peterson was explaining the incident to Colleen Forsyth while the fathers were also learning about what had happened through Shelley O'Neill. Evidently, in order to grasp a better understanding of the situation, parents talked to different people, which allowed pieces of information (or misinformation) to be shared from one individual to another.

Parental Enjoyment and Entertainment

Even though parents may not always share the same opinion or outlook on a situation, parents do agree that the hockey life is an enjoyable one, not only for their sons, but for themselves as well. The consensus from numerous individuals was that this team had an overall great group of parents, which allowed for friendships to develop and grow. Considering numerous hours are spent at the rink waiting around, parents tend to not only

learn a lot about each other, but also have a lot of fun. In the lobby, parents were often seen standing in a circle, chatting and joking with one another. They reminisced about previous team parties, tournament adventures, as well as daily funny mishaps. Practices typically resulted in amusing moments because parents were not nearly as focused and/or intense as they were during games. For example, one time parent Don Barker, one of the trainers, decided to put a latex glove on his head. With the glove also over his nose, he was able to blow it up, which made him look like a rooster. The parents broke out in laughter, causing somewhat of a disturbance on the ice. According to one parent, Don had really come out of his shell. Remembering him as shy and quiet, Sheryl Allen spoke very highly of him.

The tournaments also proved to be fun-filled weekends whereby parents were able to spend time together away from the rink. The out of town tournaments require a lot of planning, but imply spending two or three days away from home, enjoying hockey games, and craving new competition. Being away for tournaments also included many hours spent at restaurants, sometimes as a team, sometimes in smaller groups. Tournament schedules can be rather hectic, but at day's end, parents always gathered together in either someone's room or a hospitality room provided by the hotel. The nights at the hotel allowed parents to get together in a non-hockey specific environment and enjoy each other's company. On the Saturday evening at the November tournament, the team decided to reunite at the hotel for supper. Pizzas were ordered, along with salad, and potato chips, all of which came out of the team's budget. At the February tournament, everyone knew by Saturday night that the team would not advance further. As such, the players spent a lot of time in the hotel's swimming pool and playing hockey with mini-sticks in the hallway. Simultaneously, parents gathered in Lisa Webster's room where everyone was welcomed.

Despite differences they may have shared, the group of parents often worked together to ensure a smooth-running organization. Such examples include, but are not limited to: taking turns car-pooling, buying another child a drink after the game, offering snacks to the hungry players, inviting each other over for supper, and keeping an eye out for younger siblings running around the bleachers. When the buzzer sounded in the arena after the last game of the season, it was obvious that the mood of the parents was different than usual. As the players shook hands, the parents stood up and clapped. They did this for quite a few minutes until the boys skated off the ice. It was a way for the parents to congratulate the players, express their support, and acknowledge that yet another season had come and gone. In the lobby, players and parents alike took the time to say goodbye to everyone before making their exit.

Parental Team Jobs: “Business before Pleasure”

A hockey team’s success is highly dependent on members working together and coordinating their efforts in order to achieve one main goal while completing numerous interdependent subtasks (Messner, 2009). The famous quote: “There is no ‘I’ in team” is one that applied not only to the players on the ice, but to the parents as well. Like any other sport organization, this team required the help of many individuals in various capacities. Many roles and responsibilities were assigned and accomplished by several parents on the team. These roles required different commitments, at different times in the season. For some, their duties were a one-time requirement, while others extended throughout the duration of the season.

Core Parental Staff

As a parent and assistant-coach on the team, John McPhee attended all of the team's events. During practices, he often worked with the goaltenders and helped set up the drills. During games, he was on the bench, working closely with the forwards. He also provided assistance during dryland training whereby he would demonstrate some of the exercises to the players. It was clear that John took his role seriously, as he showed up for team functions even when his son Patrick was unable to be there and he also flew home early from a Caribbean trip for the December tournament.

Another important position on a team that often goes unnoticed yet often deals with critical issues are the trainers. Larry Harrison was the team's trainer, while Don Barker replaced Larry when he was not available. As trainers on a youth hockey team, it was mandatory for them to attend hockey-specific educational training and to be fully certified in first aid. Although their duties may at times have seemed mind-numbing, such as filling and emptying water bottles as well as supplying Band-Aids and Kleenex, both Larry and Don also had a large amount of responsibility on their shoulders. Their primary responsibilities encompassed the well-being of the athletes, which included initial prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. For example, in early October, Larry approached parents to discuss their sons' mouth-guards. After taking the time to look at each one of them, he had noticed that quite a few of them were chewed up and in bad shape. He emphasized the need to have proper mouth-guards to not only protect their teeth, but also to minimize the risks of concussions.

Unfortunately, parents were not always appreciative of the trainers' commitment to 'protecting' their sons. Two incidents occurred this season whereby a parent thought Larry was crossing the line and imposing himself on the situations, the first incident happening

only a month into the season. After being injured during a game, Jacob Nesbitt went to a local medical clinic for an assessment, which resulted in him wearing a cast. A few weeks later, Jacob and his father Darrell showed up to a game with intentions that Jacob (no longer wearing a cast) would be playing. However, Larry requested a doctor's note that confirmed that Jacob was medically cleared to play, which Darrell did not have. The coaches supported Larry's judgment and Jacob was not allowed to play. This caused quite the raucous as Darrell thought it should be his decision, not theirs. The incident escalated with emails being sent to the association and more individuals getting involved, which seemed somewhat useless considering the game had already been played. Nonetheless, Darrell showed up to the next game with a doctor's note in hand.

The second incident happened in mid-February. After being hit hard during a Thursday evening game, Corey Miller had stayed down on the ice, barely moving. While Corey recovered on the bench, his father Rob anxiously waited for him to continue playing, which he eventually did. As they walked out of the arena, Rob was carrying his son's hockey bag and a glossy-eyed Corey was using his sticks for balance. Nevertheless, the following Saturday morning, Rob and Corey showed up for practice. Larry approached them and asked to see the doctor's note, which created yet again another reaction. Rob started yelling in the lobby and the men headed outside of the arena. It is unclear what took place outside, but Corey was on the ice for practice.

Two other individuals who accepted to take on a huge task were Shelley and Peter O'Neill. Apparently, when head coach Wayne Burke initially approached Shelley and offered her the team manager position, she had refused the offer. However, he persuaded her by limiting her responsibilities. According to her husband Peter, Wayne kept his word and

remained committed to what he had said he would do to relieve some of the managerial tasks. Peter acknowledged that Wayne did in fact do a lot, which was helpful to both Shelley and himself. While Shelley took care of the ‘behind-the-scenes’ management (i.e., registrations, league correspondence, emails, etc.), Peter was responsible for the tedious tasks at the rink, such as completing score-sheets and managing roster modifications; such a partnership proved to work well for them. Although Shelley had to work hard to recruit parents into specific team roles that had not been filled at the onset of the season, most parents were open to being of service in any way they could. Peter revealed that it makes a difference when parents step up and volunteer and added that he does not understand why some parents refuse to lend a hand when they are asked.

Additional Parental Duties

One group of parents that volunteered many hours consistently throughout the season included Ken Doyle, Todd Allen, Tom Smith, and Norm Peterson. Responsible for game-day operations, they were in charge of time-keeping, score-keeping, and manning the doors of the penalty boxes during home games. Taking the lead, Ken organized and created a schedule for the fathers, in order for them to know in advance which games they would be ‘working’. They were also required to attend a free mandatory four-hour course at the onset of the season. Undoubtedly, working the clock or scoresheet demands a lot of focus and attention to detail, which also implies that they do not get much opportunity to enjoy the game, as they normally would from the stands.

Other important roles within the team included equipment manager, treasurer, photographer, statistician, tournament coordinators, fundraising coordinator, and ice scheduler. The equipment manager, Colleen Forsyth, was responsible for ensuring that player

name bars and sponsor bars were ordered and sewn onto the jerseys. She also took care of supplying options for the team's attire (t-shirts and tracksuits), sizing the boys, and ordering the items. Rob Miller assisted with having name and sponsor bars sewn on the jerseys.

Apparently the previous season, Rob's teenage daughter was the seamstress and she was paid five dollars per jersey. Colleen was not certain if the same deal applied, but she would hope not. Since this was their family's only responsibility on the team, she felt they should not be compensated for their time and efforts. Her view was that if the Millers choose to pay their daughter as an allowance, then that was their decision, but it should not come from the team's budget.

Gail Connelly had been the team treasurer for many years. Working in a financial institution, Gail explained that it is easy and convenient for her to be responsible for organizing and maintaining the team's finances. Once a month, the team had to provide a copy of the team's financial statement to the association's executive committee. Although it demanded more work, Gail was grateful the process was in place for accountability purposes. She revealed that being the treasurer becomes a family affair. She signs the cheques and deposits the money, while her husband Fred takes care of the computer work. He does the charts and keeps track of the finances. In addition, Fred was also the team's photographer and videographer. Throughout the season during team events (e.g., practices, games, tournaments, dryland training, team meals), Fred took pictures of players, coaches, and parents. At the end of the season, he presented each player (as well as myself) with a copy of a video he created with the pictures and videos he had captured during the season, which turned out to be a great souvenir for all those involved.

The team's statisticians were the parents of both of the goaltenders. During games, Tony Peterson and Frank Robinson were responsible for keeping track of the number of shots on net opposing teams would have on the goalies (and from where on the ice surface). Amongst themselves, both families decided that when their son was the goalie playing, it was the other family's responsibility to take the statistics. This way, they could focus on their son's performance. Apparently, this seemed to cause some inconsistency, as Michelle explained how Tony was more generous while Frank was stricter with regards to the number of shots taken. This led some parents to question Tony's generosity and definition of a shot. Lisa Webster joked that just because the puck hits a goalie's pads, it does not mean that it is a shot on net.

The out-of-town tournament coordinators were Jeff Cohen (September), Helen Chapman (October), and Dale Chapman (November and February). Their main responsibilities included contacting the hotel to confirm reservations, organizing team meals, providing maps, obtaining the tournament schedule, and registering the team into the tournament. The fundraising coordinator was Darrell Nesbitt, who organized two successful fundraising events during the season: a bottle drive and raffle. Finally, Gary Whyte was the team's ice scheduler. In addition to the allocated ice times from the association, he was responsible for finding ice rental opportunities for the team to use for supplementary practice times.

Parent-Volunteer Expectations

Volunteering on teams was not a new concept for parents. Most have taken on roles within their children's sport participation for numerous years. For example: Gail Connelly has been the treasurer on both of her sons' hockey and soccer teams; Liz Doyle was the

manager last year; Sheryl Allen was a trainer on her daughter's ringette team; Rob Miller was a manager on his son's summer team; Dale Chapman, Darrell Nesbitt, Gary Whyte, and Grant Webster have all coached; Grant was also the vice-president for a local minor hockey association; Lisa Webster was a member of the executive. Evidently, parents are accustomed to having to participate in the team's countless responsibilities, as it is an implicit part of youth sport groups. Colleen Forsyth, a former member of the executive committee of her local minor hockey association, explained how she had to learn to say 'no' more often these past years. She used to be quite involved, especially when her three boys played hockey. It took up a lot of time, so she eventually stepped away.

Lisa Webster confided that an imperative yet often implicit responsibility for parents in youth hockey programs is to participate in the organization at one capacity or another. She explained that "in the hockey world, you have to really get involved and give of your time in order to make it work. It takes tons of volunteer hours to keep teams going." She likes to volunteer and does as much as she can, but she realizes that she has to be selective in what she commits to. For example, administrative tasks, such as coordinating a tournament, are better suited for her because she can accomplish them in front of the computer, while other volunteer duties could involve attending regularly scheduled meetings, and with six children at home, additional time commitments are impossible. On the other hand, Joanne Cohen acknowledged that her role has always only been as a parent, but she is very thankful to the ones who volunteer their time and energy.

Coaching Volunteerism: "Easier Said than Done"

The core coaching staff included head coach Wayne Burke and assistant-coaches Bill Davis and John McPhee. Wayne and Bill had no children on the team and volunteered to

coach after being offered the team in late spring. It should be noted however that this was not the initial team they had applied for; rather it was the association's request that they coach this team. Nonetheless, parents were grateful that they agreed to do so. Parents continuously expressed fascination with the amount of time these coaches dedicated to the team, considering they did not have any children on the team. According to parent Jeff Cohen, this truly represented their passion for coaching. As the manager of the team, Shelley O'Neill explained how easy it had been working for Wayne: "He obviously likes what he does and he does a good job with it". During the first few months, it was clear that parents thought the coaching staff was doing a great job. Generally, they were happy that the coaches' overall approach was very structured, in comparison to previous years.

Coaching Issues from Previous Seasons

For the past two years, a core group of players had been coached by fathers on the team, which appeared to cause numerous controversies. Typically, head coaches are on a two-year mandate, however, this had not been the case for parents Dale Chapman and Gary Whyte. Two years ago, Dale had coached the team, and there had apparently been issues stemming from tryouts alone. In fact, there was one parent who openly disagreed with the goalie selection after tryouts, and eventually a group of parents approached the association's executive committee to complain. Retrospectively, some parents wondered how people expected the association to rectify the situation. Unfortunately, a coach's decision was made and it was one they had to stick with for the remainder of the season. Parents recognize that there will always be discrepancies when it comes to team selection as it often depends on what the coaches are seeking. For example, you can have two very similar types of players in terms of overall skill set, yet one will be chosen over the other for one reason or another (i.e.,

intangibles, size, experience, parents, etc.), which is why parents always hope that the coach will notice their son's talent.

Then last year, it was Gary Whyte who was appointed head coach, along with parent Darrell Nesbitt as his assistant. According to some parents, the Whyte-Nesbitt combination was a bad one from the outset of the season. With both coaches having sons who play defence, many people questioned whether the strongest players were chosen to represent the 'AA' team. Hence, people thought the selection process was rather useless. Typically sharing a negative and intense outlook on the game, some parents explained that both men fed off each other even more, evidently to the detriment of most of the players. Parent Colleen Forsyth recalled an incident whereby her husband Bruce and son Joel came back from a game both furious. Apparently, Darrell had overstepped his boundaries as a coach when he yelled at Joel during the game. When Colleen found out about what had happened, she had called Gary immediately. She was not sure how the situation was dealt with, but it never happened again. There was no way Colleen would let such a situation happen without any consequences. Most parents felt the same way, which is why, towards the end of the season, parents conspired to ensure that Gary would not be coaching the following year. They agreed to be very explicit in their post-season evaluations because it was the only way for the association to learn the truth. One parent mentioned that her post-season coaching evaluation was 16 pages long. She had written about every incident, big or small, that she could remember. Parents stated that if you do not take the time to complete the evaluation, you technically throw away your right to complain the following season should things remain the same.

Optimism for New Coaches

Clearly, parents were excited to learn that Wayne and Bill would be taking the lead the following season. In fact, many parents agreed that having non-parent coaches Wayne and Bill coach this team was the best thing to happen to this group. Parent Dale Chapman was one of the first parents who expressed what a great job Wayne was doing and spoke very highly of him. Michelle Peterson echoed Dale's comments and mentioned that her son Travis was really enjoying himself. According to Peter O'Neill, the practices were always intense, high-tempo, and fun. He too complimented Wayne on how great his practices were. Gary Whyte was also visibly pleased with the coaching staff and hinted that he would love to get a copy of Wayne's practice plans at the end of the season as he thought the purpose of each of the on-ice sessions was always clear and progressive. He revealed that he had a lot of respect for Wayne and thought he was doing a great job with the players. Not only were they enjoying themselves, but they were also learning a lot. In one instance, during a skating drill, a defenceman, who was a fairly weak skater, was having some difficulty. Wayne could be heard saying "keep going, you can do this". Michelle Peterson was impressed with Wayne's comment. She explained how "that is what good teachers and coaches are supposed to do: You support and encourage the kids, rather than scream at them that they are doing it wrong". Another time, it was obvious that Wayne was frustrated with the execution of a drill. After firing a puck into the corner and making the players start over, he eventually stopped the drill and called the players into a semi-circle to demonstrate again what he was looking for. Parent Tom Smith, who was watching rink side, leaned over and said "now that's teaching". He explained that Wayne took the necessary time to stop the drill, bring the

players in, and explain what he wanted. Then, the players went back to the drill and had the opportunity to practice it.

Most often, it was head coach Wayne who took the lead on drills during practices, while his assistants, Bill and John, moved the pucks accordingly. As such, Wayne typically explained the drills at the coaching board and controlled the timing of each drill, while Bill only took the lead on a few occasions. During games, however, both Wayne and Bill played an active role on the bench. Wayne was in charge of the defencemen while Bill was responsible for the forwards. John McPhee (assistant coach) and Larry Harrison (trainer) were also on the bench (opening the doors), with the forwards and defence, respectively. Notably, Wayne frequently stepped off the bench in order to be at the same level as the players when he talked to them. This allowed him to look directly at his players, and not look down on them from above. When Wayne used the rink board (a coaching tool) to diagram a play, the players looked over attentively. When Wayne talked to a defenceman, the player turned around and listened.

A lot of parents stated that Wayne should have been there three years ago with this group because of his emphasis on skill development. Parent Ken Doyle stated that it would have made a big difference to have had such technical coaches the previous seasons. He explained that while other teams in the league were now working on more tactical team plays, this team was still spending a lot of time learning how to receive and make a pass. From a player development perspective, Ken retrospectively felt that the past two seasons had been somewhat of a “waste of time”.

Essence of Time: “There is No Time like the Present”

Throughout the season, it was clearly demonstrated how much time parents and families spend on hockey. Days become weeks, weeks become months, and months represent a season. It was also obvious to see how much parents are willing to contribute to hockey regardless of the constraints it creates. Not only does hockey demand an extensive time commitment, it also stipulates that people’s schedules be flexible. Although some ice times (hours and locations) may be predetermined, teams are always looking for extra practices and/or exhibition games. As such, parents must be ready to adjust their schedule, sometimes with only as little as one-day notice.

Overview of Time Commitment

Essentially, if parents attend practices and games, they can easily spend approximately 10 hours a week in the arena for the duration of the season. This average does not take into account travel to and from the arena or additional teams (i.e., other siblings’ commitments and schedules). For a typical hockey game, time is quickly increased by driving to the arena, dropping off the child an hour before the game, watching the game, waiting for the child to change out of his equipment, and then driving home. Considering league games may require travel time up to an hour, an afternoon or evening can easily simmer away. One weekend in September included a dryland training session on the Friday evening, an exhibition game on Saturday afternoon (an hour away), and a second exhibition game on Sunday morning (an hour away in the other direction).

Through years of experience, parents have found ways to use their time effectively and efficiently. Some parents dropped their sons off at the arena door and utilized the hour to run errands, such as grocery and/or Christmas shopping. It should be noted however that this

was not always possible, depending on the location of the arena. Some of the arenas were situated on the outskirts of the city, which limited shopping opportunities. As such, parents took advantage of the hour to catch up on world news, read a novel, and even go through personal mail. Some parents tried to make sure that other siblings also used their time productively at the arena. For example, before one game, Ethan Barker did his homework in the lobby, as his mother Linda watched on. Finally, some parents simply used the time at the rink as a social activity. Helen Chapman explained how during practices, she does not pay attention to the team on the ice. Rather, she is more interested in interacting with other parents.

One evening during practice, mothers Colleen Forsyth and Michelle Peterson mentioned how busy their lives were. Earlier that day, Colleen had asked a fellow co-worker “do you actually stay home for the evening when you get home after work?” Ever since Colleen’s four children have been involved in organized youth programs, her life has never been the same. She revealed that “it never ends”. A typical night in their household includes picking up one son from high school football, driving another son to Taekwondo, and then watching Joel’s hockey practice. Although Michelle agreed with her, Colleen replied “imagine how busy you are and you only have one son in hockey”. Ken Doyle expressed a similar sentiment. He explained that it can be very difficult at times to fit everything into the schedule. The calendar at home is color-coordinated for each of their children’s commitments. Although it keeps him very busy, he likes to attend all three of his children’s endeavours, from hockey to dancing to rugby.

For many families with two or more children registered in hockey, this ultimately means long evenings at the arena. For Gail and Fred Connelly, it was not uncommon for

them to wait anxiously for Matthew in the lobby after his game only to rush off to a different arena for their other son Jake's game. For the Websters, it was no different. Lisa and Grant Webster were rarely together at games due to the fact that with five children in hockey (three at the competitive level), chances were at least two of their children had conflicting schedules. When they were both able to be there, one was either arriving late or leaving early. Evidently, for many families, conflicts between two hockey schedules resulted in couples splitting up, with the father going to one tournament with one child, while the mother headed to another city with another child. Lisa revealed that every season in late November, she and Grant question their commitment. This year, being in two different cities at hockey tournaments, with the rest of their children at home with a nanny, they could not help but question why they spend so much time away from home and apart from the family.

Time Constraints and Challenges

In addition to a hectic schedule, the actual ice times also created concerns. An eight o'clock game implied that players were most likely not getting to bed much before 11pm. The Petersons expressed discontent about the lateness of some of their games and explained that by the time the game ends and they drive home, it is close to 11pm before they walk into their front door. She acknowledged however that the game times reflect the age group and that there is not much she can do about it: "As the kids get older, the later their games get". For the Connellys, late games are also troublesome. Both their sons start school at eight in the morning, which means that their alarm goes off at 6:30am. Hence, when they play late games, they do not get nearly as much sleep as they probably should. Although they are teenage boys, their father Fred stated that they have both become accustomed to having naps

after school either to compensate for the previous night's late game, or to be ready to perform later that evening.

Throughout the season, players and parents rushed to and from the rink, as though there was nothing more important to do. Parents walked in with take-out food platters, dressed up in their work attire, waited in the lobby for their sons to shower, and wondered when their children would be doing their homework. Surprisingly however, players rarely missed team functions, unless injured or ill. Even then, some parents still showed up to support the team despite their son's absence. On one occasion, parent Peter O'Neill sat in the stands and cheered on the team while his son Andrew was at home recovering from an injury. Another time, it was Bruce Forsyth who came to watch the game even though his son Joel was recuperating from the flu. He explained that he needed to get out of the house so he decided to come watch the game.

Needless to say, by the end of the season, most players and their parents were mentally exhausted and drained. Michelle Peterson explained how tiring the hockey schedule can be not only for the parents but for the young players as well. Admittedly, sometimes she wished her son Travis had more opportunities to sleep in and finish his homework without having to rush through it in order to get to hockey. Colleen Forsyth pointed out that considering how tired she is, she cannot imagine how twelve year old boys feel. They are still too young to know how to cope and prioritize with such a demanding hockey schedule. Grant Webster revealed how hockey can easily be a chore for some children. In early February, Gary Whyte admitted to having simply forgotten about a practice session; he had no excuse except that it had actually slipped his mind.

Parents also discussed how trying to manage a professional career around the hockey schedule can be difficult. Parents consistently had to leave work early in order to be able to get their sons to the rink on time. For example, while Tom Smith was away on business, his wife Alison explained that she took a week off work to be able to manage their son Dylan's schedule. Parents also needed to book time off from work for out-of-town tournaments. Jeff Cohen revealed that last year alone, between all of his sons' hockey teams, he must have spent four or five consecutive weekends away in order to attend tournaments, which resulted in numerous days off work. For other parents, hockey simply takes away from some of the things they would do if they had the time. For example, although Dale Chapman loves coaching, he stated that there is no possible way for him to coach a team while still supporting his son Simon's hockey participation. He explains that his interest in coaching will have to be postponed at least until Simon can drive himself to and from hockey practices and games, which is not for another four or five years. Not surprisingly, when there was free time available (i.e., no scheduled hockey), parents jumped on those opportunities. At one point in the season, Gail Connelly revealed that she was looking forward to one specific Wednesday because she had taken the day off from work and neither one of her two sons had hockey scheduled. Not only would she have time for herself, but with her family as well.

One way parents tried to buy some time though is through carpooling. Throughout the season, parents definitely took advantage of each others' offers to carpool, especially for practices. For parent Darrell Nesbitt, he does not know how he would be able to cope if he did not rely on other families to drive his son Jacob to or from numerous games and practices. There would be no way he could leave work early as often as he would need to in order to be able to get Jacob to the rink on time. Parents also learned new ways to taxi their

children around. For example, one evening, Larry Harrison dropped off his son Kyle but did not stay long as he had to pick up one of his daughters at work. He explained that his wife Judy would be coming to pick Kyle up after practice. Larry commented that it is unreal how much driving parents do in one day alone. With games being anywhere from 15 to 75 minutes away, a lot of time is spent in the car. According to the Connellys, hockey puts a lot of mileage on their vehicles and takes a lot of money out of their pockets. But in the end, they feel it is worth it.

Financial Pocket: “Another Day, Another Dollar”

Playing hockey is an expensive commitment. Parent Tom Smith explained that a couple of years ago, he calculated how much he spent on hockey-related expenses for both of his sons in one season alone. His expenses included travel, accommodations, registration fees, and equipment. Astoundingly, his estimated invoice ended up being over \$9000. He acknowledged that the worst part was that he had already spent over \$2000 before either one of his boys stepped on to the ice for tryouts.

Competitive Hockey Expenses

In competitive youth hockey, the financial process is a lengthy one. Before the season started, parents had already signed over hundreds of dollars, and their son had not even made the team yet. By July 1st, parents had to pay a \$370 fee towards their hometown minor hockey association. However, in order to be able to try out for the local competitive program (which branches off from their hometown association), parents were required to pay an additional \$75 in August. If their child makes the competitive team, parents then owe another \$530 to the association, which covers expenses for ice times (practices and home games), and officiating. Finally, once the association fees were paid off, the team set a \$500 fee per

family, in addition to finding a \$200 sponsorship. (The sponsor's name appeared on the back of the child's jerseys.) If parents were unable to find a sponsor, they had to write a personal cheque to cover the difference. Consequently, by October, only a month or so into the season, parents had already contributed almost \$1500 (excluding sponsor) towards their child's hockey season.

Unfortunately, the financial demands increase as the season progresses, as many implicit costs also come into play. For example, it was mandatory that every player wear a particular team jacket, which meant that even though some players may have had similar jackets from previous years, new jackets had to be purchased. As well, if last year's track-pants no longer fit, they had to be replaced. Not only does team attire require clothing replacement, so does equipment. Although some pieces can be purchased second-hand, most parents opted for new merchandise. As such, a new pair of skates (junior size) can easily cost approximately \$200 (if not more), which considering how quickly children's feet grow, may last for one season, maybe two. Furthermore, each player usually brought two or three sticks to games in case one of them broke, which depending on the type, can cost anywhere between \$40 and \$150.

Another financial cost was the tournaments, which included travel (i.e., gas), accommodations, food (i.e., restaurants), as well as access passes. Typically, you have to buy either day or weekend passes (respectively, approximately \$5 or \$15). Consequently weekend trips to out-of-town tournaments could easily add up to over \$500, and repeat itself on average four times in one season. This is why numerous families chose to pair-up and share costs; they drove together and shared a hotel room. Finally, one small but accumulating expense was the thirst-quenching sport drinks that players often asked their parents for after

practices and/or games. Although the drink was only two dollars, purchasing two drinks a week adds up quickly to approximately one hundred dollars over the course of a season.

Team Fundraising

To help cover some of the costs incurred throughout the season, fundraising opportunities were available. It was evident however from the initial parent meeting held in early September that parents shared different views on fundraising, and this, for many reasons. First, the type of activities was a debate, from selling chocolate bars to hosting a silent auction to picking pumpkins. Parents argued that the time required to organize and participate in fundraising activities can be extensive in an already limited schedule. Some families simply do not have that extra time, which is why they would rather write another cheque than add another item to their schedule. Secondly, for some parents, it was important that the players participate in the fundraising activities because they believe it teaches them that money does not grow on trees, while also demonstrating the financial commitment that their parents are making. Parent Darrell Nesbitt was disappointed that the team did not want to do more in terms of fundraising. He expressed that some parents make it so easy for their children, while he believes that fundraising can be used as an easy life lesson.

In the end, two team fundraisers were held. The first one was a bottle-drive, whereby the players went door-to-door in a residential area and collected empty glass bottles. In one afternoon, the team was able to raise one thousand dollars. In the same manner, it was also decided that the team would organize a raffle draw of two NHL autographed jerseys, along with other items. Two families on the team had connections with NHL players and they offered to each get a jersey signed. Raffle tickets were sold at \$0.99 each and every family was responsible for selling 375 tickets. Regardless of whether or not they sold their tickets,

families were instructed that they had to provide a cheque in that amount. Consequently, families could participate and sell their tickets or they could choose not to take part and were not obliged to do so (but had to contribute \$375 towards the fundraiser). Organizing this type of fundraiser did not require a lot of preparation or additional time commitment, and it allowed for the players to be involved (i.e., they could be responsible for selling tickets). As a result, parents were pleased with the decision. With over three months to sell their tickets, the draw was held in December, right before the Christmas break. Their fundraising efforts allowed for a total of close to \$7500 to be collected and put towards the team's budget, which in the end, helped every family.

Chapter Summary

Throughout the season and through participant observation, it was evident that the competitive youth hockey environment represents a social construction whereby parents, players, and coaches have an implicit understanding and acceptance of the culture. In fact, the competitive youth hockey culture is characterized by a shared understanding of rules, ideas, norms, and values amongst all those involved. Clearly, the youth hockey environment involves more than simply the game itself. Many important facets are typical reoccurrences from season to season and are considered integral to the competitive hockey lifestyle.

The commitment of youth hockey was exemplified throughout the season through numerous demands and sacrifices, which parents agree are worthwhile. From financial requirements to time constraints, parents acknowledge how difficult it can be at times to be involved in hockey. With practices, games, and dryland training sessions, parents not only spent endless hours on the road driving to and from facilities, but in arena lobbies waiting for their sons to step out onto the ice and/or change out of their equipment. Once the season

began, parents were expected to participate in the team's overall organization, from fundraising to score-keeping to coordinating out-of-town tournaments. Although each family shared a team responsibility, two of the coaches had no children on the team and volunteered their time throughout the season. Parents appreciated their efforts and energy and believed that their sons were fortunate to have such dedicated coaches lead their team. In the stands, mothers typically sat together while fathers stood behind the railings where they "talked hockey" (e.g., criticize officials, analyze performances, and question coaching decisions). Parents agreed that the friendships created in hockey are not solely between their sons and teammates, but within the group of parents as well. Considering some of the players had played together for four or more years, bonds between families were evident.

Having provided an overview of the team and season, the purpose of the subsequent chapters is to depict the findings of the study through rich, vivid, and neutral descriptions, while an intricate analysis will follow in Chapter 7. More specifically, the next chapter will discuss the findings of the study as they relate to the involvement of parents in youth hockey, including their roles, challenges, and expectations.

CHAPTER 5

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN COMPETITIVE YOUTH HOCKEY

Once the hockey season began, it was clear that families were aware of the underlying commitment it entailed. Each season, parents start the registration process in early July and within six weeks, their lives change for the next seven to eight months, or more. In fact, for some, their involvement in hockey is a cyclical process whereby when one season ends another begins. Throughout hockey seasons, various situations present themselves which influence parents' thoughts, reactions, and overall participation. From an SI perspective, as human beings, our days are filled with learning opportunities and expectations that are predisposed by cultural and social influences from the environment in which we are immersed (Charon, 2004). By interacting with others, the self is engaged in an ongoing process that encourages change and growth as individuals learn more about themselves and others throughout this interactive process (Blumer, 1969; Hewitt, 2007). As such, this chapter focuses on creating a more defined representation of the involvement of parents in youth hockey, and more specifically, how they negotiate their roles within this competitive sport environment. The perceptions of parents, players, and coaches were investigated in relation to the (a) introduction of hockey, (b) values instilled, (c) family commitment, (d) parent-child relationships, (e) parental roles and responsibilities, (f) coaching inferences, (g) reflections on the season, (h) challenges encountered, (i) hopes and expectations, and (j) plans for the near future.

Introduction to Hockey: "History Repeats Itself"

Parents admitted that hockey started playing a bigger role in their life once their children were born. According to Lisa Webster, her husband Grant was the driving force

behind bringing hockey into their world. The minute Grant held his eldest son James after he was born, the only thing he was thinking about was “I can’t wait till I put on your first pair of skates”. In their family, hockey initially started with James, which meant the other siblings were exposed to the sport. While it became a “taken for granted” part of their life, the children’s introduction to the game varied from one child to another. James, the eldest, had no real interest in the sport until he reached the Novice level (seven or eight years old). For a couple of years, Lisa and Grant registered him in the Initiation program (five and six years old), however, he would attend a few sessions but never had any desire to return: “although, he loved being on the outdoor rink, he was not fond of the organized stuff”. Once he tried goaltending, he found his niche and he has been playing ever since. In contrast, Scott revealed that he started playing at the age of five years old and has loved it ever since. He acknowledged that it is by far his favourite sport. Lisa and Grant have told him that when he was a child, they used to sit him in front of the television when there was a hockey game on, and he would sit quietly for hours on end without doing anything else. Admittedly, hockey happens easily in the Webster household, as there is always a lot of peer-pressure to participate in hockey-related activities from siblings. When Lisa and Grant tried to promote other activities, the emphasis would always turn back to hockey.

For the Cohen family, the introduction to hockey was somewhat different. Joanne revealed that she always had an inclination that her boys would play hockey and acknowledged that she never even questioned that they may not want to do so. With four children under the age of six, it is understandable that hockey may not have been a priority, even for the oldest child. Joanne revealed a turning point:

At five or six years old, I remember dressing up Jayden [the oldest] and taking him to the local pond. Jayden could not stand up on skates. I came home totally depressed

because my kid couldn't play with the kids that were at the pond. It was an outdoor rink. I said 'we have to do something'. I was really discouraged.

Joanne and husband Jeff registered both Jayden and Luke in a local skating program.

For Jeff, his love of the game would dictate the opportunities he was prepared to give his own sons. He admitted however that he did not understand how it all worked and underestimated the involvement required. He did not realize how serious and organized the youth hockey world could be. Jayden was eight years old when he actually joined a hockey team, which can be considered a late start by today's Canadian standards. Unlike his older brothers, Tyler was two and half years old when he started skating. He always wore his rollerblades inside the house and pretended to be a hockey player. At the age of three, Tyler was allowed to participate in the 'Initiation' program, even though he was a year too young, because of his older brothers' involvement. The next season, however, the age restrictions changed and only children between the ages of five and six were eligible. Fortunately, the association allowed Tyler to remain involved and be grandfathered into the program considering he had already played for one season. As a result, Tyler gained two years of hockey experience before other children his age even started. His father Jeff confided that he was ahead of everybody: "At that point, even though he was a year younger, he was probably the best kid on the team." Jeff believed that Tyler appeared to have had more desire than his siblings, which was likely in part due to his early start. Although Tyler does not remember how he started playing hockey, he assumed that it had a lot to do with having three older brothers, all of whom played hockey. He recalled numerous times when they would play hockey in the basement. Admittedly, he explained that they did not play as much this past season, now that his older brother was away at university.

For the Allens, Sheryl explained that from the moment her son Zach could walk, which was at 10 months old, he had a hockey stick in his hands. She recalled how it seemed so natural with him. Todd explained:

As a kid he would always gravitate towards stuff. If there was a ball, he would play with it. Like if someone gave him a stick, he would bat the ball around. He would grab my hockey gloves and put them on and wear them. So it was never something that we wanted him to play sports. It was more like he couldn't wait to play. And I believe that if you are going to live in Canada, you're going to have to skate. So Zach and Sarah [daughter] took skating lessons and by the age of four, Zach was in the Initiation program.

Michelle Petersen explained how it is ironic that her son Travis chose to play hockey because it is a sport that had never been part of the family. Although, they supported his decision to play, Michelle admitted that it would not bother her if ever he chose not to play because she feels “no attachment” to the sport. For the Millers, Rob admitted that it is their son Corey who brought hockey into their family. Rob and Cathy had never wanted their children to play hockey; but when Corey was four or five years old, they gave in to their son's constant requests. He was registered in a skating program, and it did not take long to see that Corey was very comfortable on the ice. Since then, Corey has always played for the top calibre teams at his level, which Rob believed has allowed his son to further develop his skills, while learning about himself.

Values Instilled: “Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained”

Parents strongly believed that hockey offers their children values and skills that will follow them throughout all of their future endeavours. Hockey, like in any other area of life, consists of both good and trying times. Hence, children learn to adapt and to overcome many obstacles throughout their hockey participation, all of which become valuable life lessons. Teamwork was the most predominant value identified by parents, which they viewed as an

essential quality. Within teamwork, parents discussed the importance of learning how to cooperate with peers and how to be a contributing member of a group. They felt that hockey gave their sons a sense of belonging, of feeling part of a group, one to which they are continually contributing. Player Tyler Cohen revealed that one of the things he has learned through hockey is working as a team: "Hockey is a team sport and you can't do it all on your own". Parents also believed that hockey gives children an opportunity to refine their social skills and forces them to learn to work with others, whether they like them or not. Jeff Cohen explained:

Hockey has definitely allowed our children to be a lot more socially involved with adults and kids. They're in the dressing rooms, playing with different kids year to year, they get to know them, and they talk. It's probably helped our kids mature a little quicker. And I've often heard that if you're looking for a job, it's a good thing to put down that you played on a hockey team or something because it's showing that you've had some team work and it's not all about yourself. You know how to work with people.

Respect was also identified by parents as an important value and implied different meanings for many of them. Joanne Cohen stated that her sons learn to respect, in all of its forms. They learn to respect their teammates and opponents. They learn to respect authority, including their coaches and the officials. They learn to respect and play by the rules of the game. Finally, they also learn self-respect of their abilities and potential through the game of hockey. Furthermore, competing at the elite level requires players to quickly discover the importance of commitment and discipline. A demanding schedule forces children to find the will and desire to give their best effort day in and day out. Parents explained that once their sons agree to play for the team, they are responsible for honouring their promise and they need to fulfill their pledge by remaining dedicated to their team, without complaining. Parents revealed that their sons are aware that they cannot skip hockey to hang out with

friends nor can they skip it because they simply do not want to go. From a time management perspective, committing to a team also suggests that players must prepare and manage their schedules accordingly.

That said, parents explained how hockey enables their sons to learn the value of hard work and appreciate that “nothing comes easy”. They need to give it their all and make sure they are contributing, both on and off the ice. Parents believed that hockey enabled their sons to learn how to set individual goals, as well as to stay motivated and to work hard to achieve these goals. According to most parents, developing a strong work ethic is essential in creating well-balanced individuals. It teaches them that working hard results in increased opportunities, which can be applied in all areas of life.

Finally, Lisa and Grant Webster felt that hockey teaches their children the concept of competition. For Lisa, it is the feeling that “we are here to do something when you step onto the ice”. But she also agreed that competition does get distorted within this culture because people are passionate about the game. She believed that there are mixed messages sent to children. Although she realizes that the game is supposed to be fun, she admits that it should only be the by-product. Instead, players should be working hard and competing. She added that “competing is simply the act of competing but it should not be defined by winning or losing”. She felt that it is important for young athletes to learn to compete in a healthy environment, which most of the time is out of their control. According to her, hockey provides that environment. Her husband Grant confided that he could have given hundreds of values that hockey instills in his children because he truly believes that hockey offers numerous positive attributes to his children’s individual development, all of which may change, based on the child’s need. For example, they learn how to win, they learn how to

lose, they learn how to focus, and they learn how to work to improve, which are all the reasons he feels fortunate that his children have an interest in hockey.

Family Commitment: “It Goes Without Saying”

Parents described the influence of hockey on their family lifestyle in one word: dominant. Although Joanne Cohen believes that hockey is a great sport, she also does not like it to be the only focus in their family's life. It consumes a lot of their time, which for Joanne, is one of its major disadvantages. She acknowledged though that she has no regrets in registering her children in hockey. If they did not have hockey, she wonders what they would be doing. They would most likely be involved in another type of activity. She feels that the key is to find balance, which is not easy to do with competitive hockey. Joanne admits though that her perspective has changed over the years, which has also influenced the impact hockey has on her family. She revealed that she took it more seriously at first and would get very emotionally involved in the games. Now, she finds pleasure in solely watching the game and interacting with other parents at the rink and she no longer feels the need to sit at the edge of her seat.

In the same manner, her husband Jeff Cohen's perception has also shifted. For example, his family along with other extended family members would always gather at the cottage on a specific weekend in July. They did this for many years, until one of his nephews, currently a NHL player, started playing summer hockey. Jeff remembers times when the two families wanted to get together, but plans always failed because his nephew had hockey. Jeff recalls thinking “oh come on, give it up. It's only hockey.” He did not understand the level of commitment until his own sons started playing the sport. In a sense, Jeff believes that it becomes such an obligation. He explains that there are not too many nights in a month when

there is no hockey on the schedule. He presumes that with all four children, the family accumulates well over a hundred hours a month with only practices and games, excluding tournaments. Jeff suspected that “some of my friends who don’t have kids in hockey must think we’re absolutely crazy”.

Lisa Webster echoed the Cohen’s perspective: “It’s a lifestyle in itself.” Nonetheless, she has no regrets, although she wishes that she would have more time for her and her family to participate in different activities and to ensure that her children have the opportunity to experience other interests. Similarly, Sheryl Allen explained how she finds it frustrating that hockey can take over so much of their lives. She explained how:

I had to give up my role with my daughter’s ringette team because I was driving all over the place for Zach’s hockey. I couldn’t manage it. I just couldn’t. I used to be on the ice and help out at practices but I realized that I couldn’t do it anymore. I’ve taken sort of a part-time trainer role now. Sometimes when I get home at 11:30pm after hockey and I’ve been on the road since 7:15am, I can’t help but think ‘what the heck am I doing?’

Nevertheless, Sheryl realizes that their hockey involvement as parents is short-lived. There is no guarantee that her son will continue to enjoy the game. Knowing that youth sport will eventually disappear from her life as a mother, she wants to be able to give her children the best possible life. At the same time, she believes it is important for them to know what their parents give up and to be appreciative of their efforts. She ensures that both of her children are aware of the sacrifices they make for them to be involved in hockey and/or other sports. Sheryl acknowledges however that hockey guarantees her time to spend with her son and it is time that they can share together. Although she would prefer sitting around the dinner table as a family, the one-on-one times during the car rides are priceless. Clearly, the time parents and young hockey hopefuls spend together driving to arenas, staying at hotels, and talking hockey, all allow for special bonds to be created between parents and children.

Parents also expressed how hockey provides them opportunities to spend time together at home. Grant Webster stated that as a family they watch a lot of hockey together. His wife Lisa explained:

Hockey provides a nice thing that the family can do together. We all get together to watch our NHL games. We cheer for our favourite NHL team and the kids love it. They help get the popcorn and the root-beer floats ready when it's game day. And it's not so much about watching the game but that they know that it's our family time. It's the one thing that our family does together, which for us is very important. It's huge.

Grant Webster also described how hockey gives his family common interests and gives them something to talk about. If the children are not playing hockey, they are outside shovelling the snow from the outdoor rink. In fact, hockey becomes so much more than just a game for the Websters. Grant does not necessarily value the game as much as he values the drives to and from games and practices because those opportunities allow him to better understand his children. He gets to know their feelings, their aspirations, and their fears. Grant revealed that his own father had never seen him play and had never even been to one of his games. He was dropped off at the door and picked at the same spot an hour later. His father never had the time. Hence, Grant realizes that there was a missed opportunity for a stronger father-son connection. Similarly, Jeff Cohen believes that the relationships he shares with his sons are in great part due to their participation in hockey. As a young hockey player himself, he recalls only ever going out of town for tournaments perhaps five times, and his father never attended any of them. He stated:

My Dad was more from the generation of 'work, work, work'. By no means am I criticizing my Dad, but I always told myself that I would invest more in my kids. I was going to make sure that I knew my kids. I want to go to their games and be able to be friends to their friends. Every time you go away for a weekend, you end up talking about things that you probably wouldn't have talked about otherwise. Hockey has allowed me to have a better relationship with all of my kids.

Parents questioned what they would do otherwise if hockey were not part of their lives. Todd Allen admitted that when the NHL went on strike, he experienced a void in his life. He explained how it is ironic that people, including himself, immerse themselves in the world of NHL hockey, which ultimately has absolutely no impact on them. Regardless, he predicts that he would feel lost if hockey were not a constant in his life. In the same manner, Jeff Cohen admitted that he is happy his four children play hockey. He said he would have a hard time should his children be interested in figure skating or bowling because he has no attachment to those sports, but hockey on the other hand is something that he is passionate about.

For Lisa Webster, her own perception has changed over the years. In the past, when one of her sons would say that he was not having fun or that the coach upset him, she felt the need to act on it. She used to think that “I’m your parent, so I’m going to fix this for you. I’m mighty powerful so I can take all of this away for you and make it better.” She now believes that her children are simply voicing their feelings and it does not suggest that she needs to fix their problems. Consequently, she focuses on supporting her children and empowering them to overcome the obstacles they encounter. She added that these types of revelations are important not only in terms of teaching great life skills but also in strengthening her mother and child relationships.

Parent-Child Relationships: “A Good Example is the Best Sermon”

Throughout the season, it was easy to see that children’s participation in hockey implies a commitment by both players and their parents. Hockey becomes not only a child’s activity but a parent’s emotional commitment as well. In general, the behaviours exhibited by parents towards their sons were easily anticipated as the season progressed. While some

parents applauded nice plays, rooted for players, and attempted to motivate the team by singing cheers, others found reason to analyze performances and criticize players' on-ice decisions.

Parent-Child Interactions

As a goaltender's mother, Michelle Peterson admitted that every time a shot is taken on net, it is like a shot is also being taken against her. Sitting beside her husband Tony allows her to nervously squeeze his arm when a shot is taken. She revealed that the hardest part is when her son is pulled from the net in a game (and replaced by the other goalie). She would be lying if she said there is not an initial angry feeling when it happens, as you obviously want your child to play and play well.

Joanne Cohen acknowledged that as a parent, you have a tendency to specifically focus in on your child as he competes. Unfortunately, she explained, when you do, you are more likely to be more critical of his performance and his abilities. For example, the Barkers only ever complained about their son's performance (e.g., bad pass or missed opportunity to hit), rarely saying anything about other players. They were heard sighing in disbelief with comments such as "oh Nick" or "let's go Nick", which were often barely audible unless one was sitting beside them. While parents may have been critical of their sons' performances, many also showed continued support. Examples include Tom and Alison Smith cheering for their son Dylan consistently throughout games. They yelled comments like: "go Smith" or "let's go D-man". One of Tom's favourite sayings was "go, go, go", which almost mechanically, Dylan responded to by quickly moving his feet and skating hard, just as if a switch had been turned on. Michelle Peterson also frequently yelled out inspirational cues to her son Travis, such as "at a boy", "good job", or "keep it up". Even though she did not

attend many games, Cindy Robinson was also very encouraging of her son Mitch. She clapped her hands at every save and yelled “way to go Mitch”. Although she sighed at some of his mistakes, she continually cheered for him. I sensed that a parent’s support is often related to their son’s enjoyment as well. During practice one evening, player Nick Barker scored on a breakaway. He pumped his fists and did a little dance, while looking directly at his father, who was standing by the glass. Both father and son chuckled at the situation.

Parents admitted to looking at the players’ bench during games, but that they do so discreetly. Unlike some of the other parents on the team, Joanne Cohen never does it as a means to communicate with her son. She recalled how some players continuously and automatically look up at Mom or Dad in the stands after every play, which Sheryl Allen described as “horrible”. For Todd Allen, he stated that he never yells or waves at his son Zach during games. He does not see the point in doing so. He explained that hockey is not like a game of chess. You cannot predict each move, from one to the next. Rather it is a quick reaction to a series of movements, which by the time a parent is done yelling, the player is already on to the next play. In the same manner, players also confessed that they tend to glance up to their parents in the stands during games. Although they try to stay focused on the game, when things are not going so well, that is when they look for support from either Mom or Dad. Yet, player Zach Allen acknowledged that it can also be a distraction when they are there because it increases the pressure to perform: “I like it when they’re there but I don’t feel as restricted when they’re not.”

Evidently, parents tried to keep control over situations involving their sons. Jeff Cohen explained how it can be easy as parents to jump to conclusions without being fully aware of the situation. He admits that it is easier to think the worst and get excited for

nothing. As an example, he described an incident where his initial thought was to be upset because of the interpretation he attributed to it. Jeff explained:

Yesterday I thought at the beginning of the third period that Tyler [son] got benched. And I thought ‘oh what happened there?’ So I was just thinking in my mind, okay is his skate broken or did he get hurt. And he’s kind of in the middle of the bench which is where you would be if you’re told not to go out. So I assumed that he got benched the first shift of the third period. As it turns out, what happened was that the last minute of the second period, Tyler had gone out with another line. It was actually Joel [Forsyth] who ended up missing a shift. So at the beginning of the third period, they [coaches] had Joel get back out to make up for that shift. It was that simple.

Clearly, parents also impulsively reacted when their child went down after a big hit or a hard battle along the boards. Helen Chapman admitted that she does not usually get nervous when her son Simon is involved in the physical part of the game; she is more scared of the puck than the hit. Her rationale is that players have learned how to give and take hits, which she is convinced is within Simon’s comfort zone. She said that Simon usually bounces up quickly, so she knows he is fine. Simon never stays down, so if he does or if he hesitates, it is easy to assume the worse. Yet, parents judged situations differently. During one game, Nick Barker went down pretty hard, which left most parents in the stands concerned because he never stays down. But his father Don was quick to react by saying “ah, come on, get up”. Although, Tom Smith replied “he’s hurting”, as Nick got up slowly and had a hard time picking up his stick from the ice surface, Don did not seem too concerned. In contrast, Darrell Nesbitt often feared that his son may be injured. If Jacob was hit by a player or blocked a shot, Darrell stared at the bench endlessly, shift after shift, to ensure his son was okay. One time, he even yelled from the stands to Larry Harrison (trainer), who was on the bench, to check on his son Jacob.

Over time, parents expected specific individuals to behave in questionable ways. Frank Robinson was one father who put a lot of pressure on his son Mitch, one of the team’s

goaltenders. Although Frank rarely watched games with the core group of parents, his disgruntlement when Mitch was not performing up to his standards was apparent through his demeanour and actions. Typically, at the beginning of games, Frank often cheered for Mitch and sometimes provided specific instructions from the sidelines, which Mitch acknowledged by looking up and nodding at him. However, when weak goals were scored, Frank was visibly upset. He would shake his head and comment “come on Mitch. Not on a wraparound. That just shouldn’t happen”. During a game in early January, after Mitch (unintentionally) let in two weak goals, Frank commented that “he’s walking home”. Perhaps seeking attention, he repeated it numerous times throughout the game, every time making the other fathers laugh. In the lobby after the game, Ken Doyle even jokingly asked Mitch if he had warm mitts for his walk home. Two games later, Frank actually did leave the arena while Mitch was still playing. Upset by his son’s performance in the second period, he marched over to his wife Cindy and told her to pack up their two other children (which she did) because they were going home. On their way out, Frank asked Liz Doyle if she could drop Mitch off at their neighbours or keep him for the day.

For Corey Miller, being a hard worker, skilled athlete, and fearless hitter despite his small stature, were not enough, according to his father Rob. Even though Rob had never played hockey and did not even skate himself, he placed a lot of pressure on his son. When Corey made a mistake, Rob kicked his foot on the boards. When Corey fell to the ice, he yelled for him to get up faster. When Corey missed an open net, Rob turned his back to the ice. Unlike other parents (e.g., Darrell Nesbitt, Gary Whyte) who yelled at the referees, Rob directed his comments towards his son. It was not uncommon for Rob to call Corey an “idiot” or a “chicken”. Unfortunately, it was evident that Corey heard him. He nodded back

at him or looked at him before face-offs. Although Rob once stated that Corey is too focused to look up at him in the stands, it was extremely obvious that he did. One specific time, Corey was skating toward the face-off circle, and he was glancing directly up at his father. Additionally, when Corey received an open-ice hit and was knocked down rather hard during a game near the end of the season, he got up slowly. On the bench, trainer Larry Harrison tended to Corey, while Rob questioned “what is taking him so long”. Corey eventually made it back out onto the ice for the last few shifts of the game. But after the game, as Corey walked through the lobby, it was obvious that he was not well. Using his sticks to walk, he looked dazed. Colleen Forsyth assumes that Rob likely tells Corey never to admit that he is hurt because it might affect his playing time, a perspective she disagrees with completely and finds unacceptable. Rob’s philosophy is “you got to do, what you got to do”. He said that if a player does not want to sacrifice his body for his team, then he should be playing house league. If he is playing at the ‘AA’ level, then hockey comes first.

Parental Coaching on the Side

Without a doubt, however, much of the hockey relationships between parent and child often involved some degree of coaching, especially from the fathers. One day, Larry Harrison commented that he wished that his son Kyle would stand his ground more as a defenceman. He wanted Kyle to step-up to attack the blue line, which is a defensive strategy. Conversely, he acknowledged that NHL players are paid a lot of money and even they do not always play every concept well, and that is their job. Another time, Don Barker tried to push his son to work harder. After a drill, head coach Wayne Burke blew the whistle, which meant that the players skated two laps. As such, Don was yelling and banging on the glass for Nick to pick it up: “Get going Barker”. Another time, when Nick was struggling with his passing, and

Wayne was yelling at him to do it right, Don was at rink side mumbling “ah come on Nick, do it right”.

Rob Miller, in addition to often being heard criticizing his son’s performance, was very ‘hands-on’ when it came to coaching his son. Two years ago, Rob apparently videotaped every game so that he and Corey could analyze his performance frame by frame. Rob said that Corey liked watching game tapes and analyzing his decision making during games. Rob also admitted to being very honest with his son: If his son does not play well, he will never hesitate to tell him. After one game, Corey was proudly talking about the shot he took on net, which hit the crossbar and made a loud ‘ting’ noise. Rob refuted that he should not be happy with that because he should have scored instead: “A ‘ting’ noise does not get you on the scoreboard either.” Rob then told Corey he should shoot lower next time. On another occasion in the lobby after a game, I witnessed Ken Doyle explaining to his son Trevor that he should not try to do “one-timers” because he is not strong enough yet. Trevor tried to deny that he had done so on the ice, but Ken quickly convinced him otherwise. He mockingly took Trevor’s stick and demonstrated how to stop the puck and then shoot. Trevor did not say much; he simply looked up at him.

Even during dryland training sessions, parents (mostly fathers) felt the need to ‘help’ their sons. Training took place in an elementary school gym, which provided parents an opportunity to be close to the action by sitting alongside the gymnasium walls. One evening in January, the parents’ desire to be ‘involved’ was obvious. John McPhee instructed his son Patrick on how to properly execute the exercise, while Don Barker laughed at his son Nick trying to accomplish an agility exercise, and Larry Harrison told his son Kyle to slow down and do it properly. Throughout an intense game of “Tag”, it was interesting to see how many

players looked at their parents. If they had been tagged, they looked at their parents with disappointment; when they made it through, they would look at them with a smile of relief.

The coaching and “hockey talks” did not end in the stands or in the lobby. The parents confided that they do tend to “talk hockey” in the car either before or after games and practices. They discuss the team’s performances, individual plays, and game outcomes, which usually then leads to a specific discussion about their son’s performance. Throughout the season, it was interesting to observe how different families dealt with the losing streak, game after game. According to many parents, one common theme was that hockey was most often a topic of discussion on the drive home or shortly thereafter. During my road trips with the Smiths to numerous games throughout the season, the discussion often revolved around the team in general. A few comments about Dylan’s performance were sometimes made as well. Yet, on two different occasions, Dylan remarked that he would likely not get “the chat” on the way home because I was in the car with them. According to Dale Chapman, he tries not to say too much after games so they usually chat about it a bit and then listen to music. Although often tempted, Dale wants to leave it up to the coaches to analyze his son Simon’s play and motivate him to be a better player. It is their job to constructively criticize the players. He also knows however that not all parents share the same perspective. He presumed that some rides home must include a lot of analyzing, debriefing, and negativity.

Parents admitted that sometimes it is their sons who request feedback, while other times, their sons would rather not talk about it, especially after a blow-out loss. Most often, parents revealed that the topic revolved around their son’s effort ethic and/or behaviour (i.e., demeanour, body language) on the ice. Lisa Webster explained that it is easy to figure out how her son Scott is feeling when he is playing. She does not like it when his frustration is so

easily read on the ice, so they often discuss the need for him to work on coping with those feelings in order to be able to perform at his potential. Sheryl Allen will also usually inquire about her son's thoughts: "what did you think of the game?" or "how do you think you played?" In the same manner, if Joanne Cohen misses a game, she will ask "how was the game?", but does not expect a long play by play recap, simply because of the type of season the team was having. Other years, however, there seemed to be more excitement. It was more like "did you have a good game?" or "did you score a goal?" But she hesitates asking now because she does not want her son Tyler to be embarrassed. Joanne also revealed how she finds it important to talk to Tyler about his hockey participation in order to challenge, what she believes, are misperceptions. According to her, young players do not always see the game as parents do from the stands. She explained:

Sometimes I'll say 'Tyler, I don't think you can blame it on that'. He'd feel kind of down and he'd say 'the coach doesn't like me'. So I'd have him explain why. Then I would say that Wayne will do that to all of the kids. That's what he's there for. If he didn't correct you, he wouldn't care. So he's correcting you because he cares. So we tried to encourage him. His perception is just off a little.

After losing a really bad game against a team that they should have potentially beat, the reactions from both players and parents were interesting. For the Harrisons, Larry said that his son Kyle was quite upset when he got in the car after the game. Kyle asked his father what he thought of the game, at which point Larry wondered if his son wanted feedback as a father or a coach. Larry said that he never yells or gets mad at Kyle but he tells him as he sees it while remaining constructive. He always tries to find at least one positive thing to say about his son's performance. Similarly, Peter O'Neill said that his son Andrew was really upset after the game. When he got in the car, he was pouting. Peter asked him what was wrong and he said "What do you think is wrong Dad? We just lost 6-0." Peter acknowledged

that Andrew does not like talking about hockey in the car. When Peter tries to give him feedback, his son typically gets mad. As such, the O'Neill drive home is usually a quiet one. Meanwhile, Don Barker said that after the game, his son Nick sat at the very back of their vehicle and did not say a word all the way home. However, his older brother Ethan, who was sitting in the front seat, was making jokes. He teased him by saying "did you see that guy stickhandle? Oh wait, you probably did because he did it around you all game long". Apparently, Don thought it was funny and laughed. Even when they got home, Ethan was still picking on his brother. The next morning, Nick was still angry.

Finally, Michelle Peterson expressed that she and her husband rarely talk hockey afterwards, unless it is their son Travis who brings it up. Because of their lack of knowledge on the technical part of the game, it is difficult for them to provide him with any constructive feedback. Michelle explained that after a tough game, she will typically do the "Mom thing" and try to comfort him. She will remind him not to worry, as everyone has bad days. Ex-husband Norm said that when Travis travels with him after a bad game, it is usually a very quiet ride home. He explained that they may talk hockey, but they would not focus on the goals that were scored against him. He usually emphasizes the positives; he explained that Travis knows what he did wrong so why rehash it again and bring him down even more. There is no point. Besides, it is just a game. In contrast, Bruce Forsyth was one father who often voiced his opinion about the team and negatively commented on his son Joel's performance, even though he was one of the most consistent players on the team. Yet Bruce found reason to disagree with all of Joel's on-ice decisions and was very critical of his ability. Even after strong performances, Bruce easily shrugged him off. One time, upset by the team's lack of scoring, he told Joel that he did not care whether the team won or lost, but

he wanted him to score some goals. In fact, he loudly insisted that the team “score more fucking goals”. As the season progressed, coaches worried about how losing so many games could potentially impact the overall team, including parents. In fact, by November, head coach Wayne Burke commented:

So far so good, as long as they [parents] can stay on board. I do worry about losing so many hockey games because it only takes one or two parents to crack and to then translate losing to lack of development or lack of leadership. It only takes one or two. One can do it. One can derail a group real soon.

In contrast, although the ongoing losing streak was disappointing and discouraging, parents discussed how essential it was for them to remain supportive. They explained how they made an effort to provide positive reinforcement and use goal-setting as a means to keep their child motivated. Grant Webster stated that he and his son Scott have a great hockey father-son relationship. He confessed though that Scott does not always like to talk too much about hockey, which Grant assumes is because the team was not successful. Due to the fact that both he and his wife Lisa are very competitive individuals, Grant cannot help but wonder if their son feels pressured to compete and win as a result of their ambitious natures.

Parental Pride and Disappointment

Parents were quick to reveal that hockey does not always bring the best out of their relationship as they described times when they were disappointed in their sons. For Todd Allen, there were times throughout his son Zach’s hockey career when Todd felt that Zach was not pushing himself to be a better player. Todd explained it as “he was just sort of out there, taking his shift and just kind of showing up, but not doing anything either.” Although Todd did not talk directly to Zach about it, he did approach the coaches to say that they could get a lot more out of his son. In the same manner, Lisa Webster stated that she gets frustrated when her son Scott is lazy and lackadaisical on the ice. She understands that there will

always be mistakes, which she thinks are a crucial part of personal development and ongoing learning; however, it infuriates her when he is not giving his best effort. She admitted that she tries not to make any assumption (for example, that he is simply being lazy) because it is hard to determine from the outset what is going on in the mind of a 12 year old. Conversely, Joanne and Jeff Cohen both strongly believe that their son Tyler is always fully committed to working hard and playing with intensity. Their disappointment comes in a different form. As a young child, Tyler had become an impressive skater and talented player. He scored a lot of goals and was often the “go to guy” on the ice. In the past few seasons however, other players seem to have caught up, even surpassed Tyler. Jeff explained how Tyler’s development is not progressing nearly as much as it did when he was younger:

He always gives a great effort but he’s just not improving as much as I would’ve thought. I’ve seen a lot of kids play hockey. And I hope that in two years from now, I’ll look back and wonder ‘why was I so worried in Peewee’. Not that he’s going to make the NHL but all of a sudden it’ll all come together. I’m sure Tyler will grow out of it. But I’ve always been impressed and pleased with Tyler’s effort. We’re happy that way.

Joanne confirmed that it is somewhat disappointing that Tyler may no longer be the little star on the ice, but he has never disappointed them either. She has no desire for her children to make the NHL and is aware that there are so few players who do. She added that the disappointment comes from a mere fictional situation rather than reality, which can lead to skewed parental perspectives. Consequently, for the most part, parents revealed that they are very proud of their sons’ accomplishments, both on and off the ice. Joanne explained how there are always a lot of proud moments for her. The types of moments have changed over the years, but they exist nonetheless. Previously, those moments revolved mainly around goal scoring, whereas nowadays, the focus is on passing, winning the battles along the boards, and

working hard. Jeff agreed that Tyler was the player on a team who could dominate a game, which is no longer the case. He explained:

He was a little star. The types of comments we used to have. I can remember this one time, one of the coaches said that Tyler was probably one of the best eight year old hockey players in the city. Although I didn't agree with it, it was still a nice compliment. I couldn't help but think 'wow, if he's doing this now, imagine what he's going to be like in Major Peewee'. I think sometimes as a parent, you're critical of your own kid. You notice the little things wrong. So when somebody says something about your kid, it kind of helps or encourages you. It's a good feeling.

As for the Websters, they were proud of their son Scott's leadership role on the team. As an assistant-captain on the team, Scott admitted taking his role seriously. According to him, his primary responsibility is to lead by example on and off the ice. As a result, when he is frustrated with the officiating, he will bite his tongue rather than speak out. He explained that "when I'm wearing a letter on my jersey, I take it kind of seriously". Hence, Lisa and Grant felt that their son stepped up on a few occasions, so they know it is in him, whereas in the past, he would most likely have shied away from potential leadership opportunities. Lisa thinks that Scott was probably less frustrated this season because of it: "He no longer felt powerless and he knew he could do something about it".

Finally, Zach Allen's overall growth impressed his parents Sheryl and Todd. On the ice, Todd was pleased with Zach's demeanour and performance. He thought Zach played aggressively without getting too many penalties, which Todd thinks can sometimes be difficult to do at his age. Although generally proud of his son, Todd confessed that he did not have any "oh that's my boy" moments. Off the ice, Sheryl enjoyed listening to Zach's thought processes. For example, at the onset of the season, he struggled with the lack of positive feedback from the coaches. In previous years, he always had very positive and helpful coaches, so this year came as a bit of a shock for him. As the season progressed

however, Sheryl repeatedly reminded him that “no praise is a good thing. If the coaches aren’t talking to you, then you’re probably doing something right”. So teaching him to find praise within himself instead of depending on others was a big part of her discussions with him. She realizes now that it is not an easy thing for any individual to comprehend, which is why it is so great that Zach has learned to value himself, without always looking for reinforcement from his coaches.

Parental Roles and Responsibilities: “All in a Day’s Work”

Aside from their “jobs” on the team (i.e., trainer, treasurer, manager, and so on), parents were asked to describe their roles and responsibilities as a hockey parent. They mentioned that their primary roles included being a chauffeur, finance broker, cheerleader, and even a coach. Not surprisingly, the most dominant answers included logistical facets, such as being the taxi driver and banker. A lot of time is spent on the road driving to and from facilities, which also implied parents rearranging work and family schedules accordingly to ensure that their sons arrived on time. Joanne Cohen explained that it requires a lot of scheduling and planning, and the driving alone can be quite the sacrifice for parents. As stated by parent Peter O’Neill, their family shares the philosophy that “we’re all in it together”. It has to be a family affair or it would not work.

Another responsibility includes financing the expenses for the season. From equipment to registration fees to tournaments, the funding can be extensive and endless. For Jeff Cohen however, the cost is over-shadowed by the benefits:

I’ve said to other people, if you took all the hockey dollars out of your life and said that you were going to do something else, whatever that may be, it would not be a zero cost. Whether it would be skating or another activity, it wouldn’t be free. And I’m a big believer that it should be something athletic. Every year at tryouts I say to Peter [O’Neill], when we see the kids with tattoos and stuff, I tell him that’s why were going to the rink.

Parents also felt responsible in providing support and encouragement, while maintaining a positive attitude even in the most difficult times (i.e., poor performance, losing streak). Michelle Peterson tries to help her son Travis learn how to focus on the positives, such as improving in one area or reaching a personal goal. Some revealed that their sons also internalize a lot of the emotions that they experience in hockey, so it is important for them to feel comfortable to discuss it and deal with those emotions. As such, mothers especially, explained how they need to be there to give them emotional support and try to protect them. According to Norm Peterson, his role also consists of teaching his son how to reflect on potential life lessons and learn how to put situations into perspective. For example, a few years ago, an opposing player dumped the puck on Travis (a goaltender) from the other end of the ice. Unfortunately, the puck ended up bouncing off his stick and going into the net. Norm remembers telling him on the way home that even NHL hockey players, who “make the big bucks”, make mistakes, some worse than that. Hence, parents feel they are responsible for ensuring that their sons continue to build their confidence and giving them the boost they sometimes need. One time, because Sheryl Allen thought that players did not seem to be receiving a lot of feedback from the coaches, she thought it was essential that she provide her son Zach with positive reinforcement. When Zach would tell her that he did not feel like he was doing anything right, it broke her heart. He was discouraged by the lack of feedback but thrilled at the coaching instructions. Sheryl envisioned her role as being a listening ear, providing Zach with a different perspective to help him cope. She explained:

You’re going to have coaches like that. The higher the levels you play, you’re going to get guys that are out there making a career out of coaching. And they’re not going to congratulate you for anything. Just know in your heart and in your head that you’re making the right decisions. And follow the instructions, but you still have to be happy with what you’re doing.

Although only one third of the parents had actual coaching experience, more than half of them, especially the fathers, felt that one of their responsibilities included offering their sons coaching instructions. Most had informally coached their sons throughout their hockey career, either through lectures in the car or tactical strategies from the stands. Ken Doyle was quite explicit that he is his son Trevor's first line coach. In other words, when Trevor is in the car before and after ice sessions, Ken will take those times to coach him. He stated that he has been and always will be Trevor's most consistent coach. In the same manner, Fred Connelly admitted that after games on the drive home, he is always honest with his son Matthew: "If he sucked, I'll tell him". Fred does not want Matthew to become complacent, so honesty is the best way to prevent it from happening.

Some fathers revealed that they try to help their sons learn the mental aspect of the game. For example, Frank Robinson believes he knows what it takes to compete and therefore how important the mental game truly is. As such, he thinks of himself as a mental stabilizer for his son Mitch, by helping him control his thoughts and stay focused. Frank finds Mitch to be lazy, which drives him crazy because he was the opposite as an athlete. In contrast, a few parents revealed that although they may discuss hockey from a broad perspective, they do not try to coach them from the sidelines or during car rides to and from arenas. Some mothers explained that although they may be part of a conversation between father and son, they rarely provide coaching feedback. Some expressed that they may ask questions but they never criticize their son's performance.

A few fathers admitted that although they had all had brief coaching stints, they were also fully aware of their limitations, which impact the type of instructions they provide their sons. For example, Jeff Cohen acknowledged that his passion for the game cannot substitute

for his lack of in-depth knowledge of the game. He explained that he understands the fundamentals, but he would never be able to coach at this level. Even though he will sometimes point out obvious instructions to his son Tyler, he typically prefers leaving it to the coaches. Todd Allen shared the same perspective:

I think everybody in Canada is a hockey expert. Right? And so it's your right as an expert to give your opinion. I'm saying this sarcastically. But you do end up coaching a little bit, like you should've done this or you should've done that. And at this level this year, I have pretty much taken a vow of silence ... I'm not doing any coaching. Because I think the coaches at this level are better hockey people than me. I can spot the odd thing but not to coach. If Zach talks about a play, I can say I think that would've been a better choice. That type of thing. But that's pretty much it.

Moreover, parents believe that they have the responsibility of teaching the young hockey hopefuls how to properly and effectively manage their busy schedules. The child quickly learns how significant time management becomes, which is a skill most parents are happy to emphasize since it will most likely follow him through life. Joanne Cohen explained:

Kids learn to be disciplined because they have a schedule. Tyler comes home from school, does his homework, gets ready for hockey, and never complains about it. He's always willing to go. And he's very organized with his school work. So I think it kind of pushes kids. They don't waste their time. He doesn't have any time to waste.

Finally, parents acknowledged that hockey is only one part of their children's lives. As such, it is essential that they help the child balance a healthy lifestyle, one that includes, in addition to hockey, school, friends, and other interests. Rob Miller said that he ensures that his son Corey is excelling in school, completing his homework, and carrying out his paper route as required. Similarly, Linda Barker explained that she makes sure that her son Nick is eating well, getting sufficient sleep, following curfew, doing well in school, and staying disciplined at home. She believes that it is about teaching accountability and responsibility to all of his commitments.

Responsibilities of Mothers and Fathers

Player Tyler Cohen is thankful that his parents are supportive and resourceful. He described how their willingness to help him get ready for the 'AAA' level (next season) pushes him to work harder. He is happy that they take him to power skating sessions, even when he sometimes does not want to go. When asked if he had the choice whether or not to attend these sessions, he admitted that "they usually make me do it". He explained, however, that while they typically tend to force him to go, he may not appreciate it at first but once the session is done, he is grateful they brought him.

According to the players, their mothers play an important role in their hockey participation. Tyler Cohen revealed that his mother Joanne often tries to get him ready before games, by making sure that he eats well and sleeps sufficiently, and also reminding him what he has recently learned at practice. Scott Webster explained that his mother Lisa helps out a lot and makes sure that he gets to the rink on time. More importantly, Scott stated that his mother supports him, encourages him, and is always there for him. He explained how even when she is not there, she will ask him "how did it go?" or "how did you do?" Although he usually talks hockey with his father, Scott said that he is proud of his mother's knowledge: "She knows what an offside is. When I asked my friend's Mom, she didn't know". As for Zach Allen, he hinted that he likes that his mother Sheryl plays hockey herself. Although Zach thinks his father may be a little more into it, she is still quite involved. Zach revealed that his mother is a great cook, which he likes to take advantage of for his pre-game meals. He also stated that his mother is a good "pump up" person because they listen to music in the car on the way to games, which is a good motivator.

As for their fathers, the players revealed that they talk a lot more hockey with their fathers than they do with their mothers. Zach Allen clarified that his father's comments are not negative but more goal-oriented. Hence, they talk a lot about what he needs to work on and what he should focus on. Zach pointed out that his father Todd knows that he is not the coach, so "he's just giving tips", but Zach said that sometimes it can be too much: "sometimes, he might go a little far, but that's a very rare thing. He's just really involved and it really helps." Scott Webster also stated that his father Grant likes to give him a speech before every game. He confessed though that there are times when he ignores it because he has heard it so many times before. As for Tyler Cohen, he expressed how lucky he is that his father Jeff likes hockey so much. He stated that his father helps him get ready for games but said that they do not often talk hockey in the car. Tyler said that "sometimes if it's late, I'm tired so I don't really want to talk".

While some parents admitted that their roles differed from those of their spouses, others stated that they did not. For the Websters, they assume different roles based on their own experiences and backgrounds. Grant's role is probably more geared towards the children's technical and tactical skill development, while Lisa typically focuses more on their development in terms of self-awareness and goal-setting. Grant defined his wife Lisa's role as a protector:

It's her boys. It's her babies and she likes to protect them. So it's different. It's Mom and Dad. It's just totally different, at least from what I see. She also tends to get more involved in the politics because she is opposed to them. They really bother her. Yet to me, I know the way hockey works because I was surrounded by it my whole life. So I don't get as bothered by it, whereas she gets a little more attached to injustice, if there is some. It can be tough for her.

For the most part, the Allens agree that their roles are similar but that their outlooks may differ from one another's in certain areas. For example, Sheryl Allen is opposed to her

son Zach playing summer hockey. The first year he did play, it was her ex-husband Todd who thought that he should because it would provide their son with further opportunities to develop his on-ice skills. But Sheryl finds that hockey seasons are already long enough, that adding another two months during the summer is not necessary. She believes that children need to be participating in different activities. She emphasized the fact that Wayne Gretzky never played on a summer hockey team and he had a very successful hockey career. Sheryl would also prefer that Zach play for a less competitive program, but she supports him playing at the level that he should be playing at. Todd stated that it is important for them to co-parent even though they are no longer living together. Sheryl agrees that they “share the same parenting philosophies, which allows them to be on the same page”.

Likewise, Joanne and Jeff Cohen also envision their roles as being quite similar. Jeff explained that the only difference with some of the responsibilities simply reflect “that she’s the mother and I’m the father”. Jeff expressed how blessed he is to have such a great wife. He knows that if she were not on board, their involvement in competitive hockey would not be possible. He admits that he understands how hockey could potentially drive a couple apart. Luckily, the Cohens are on the same page, although they both thought of the other as the sensitive one. Joanne explained that Jeff does a fair deal of encouragement when she would sometimes hope he would criticize their sons a little more in order to help them learn. Joanne realizes however that he is very sensitive to how their sons feel. In contrast, Jeff revealed that Joanne may be a little more sensitive when it comes to their sons’ enjoyment, encouragement, and emotions. She always wants to ensure that her boys are having fun. “It is what every parent wants for their kid.”

Coaching Inferences: “Knowledge is Power”

From a general perspective, players and parents were pleased with the coaching staff. Simply put, players thought Wayne Burke and Bill Davis were the best coaches the team has had within this association. Player Scott Webster stated that “they [coaches] actually know what they’re talking about”, while teammate Zach Allen echoed Scott’s comments by explaining that he learned so much throughout the season. He thought that Bill and Wayne had great ideas, which allowed him to expand his knowledge.

Coaching Strengths

From their intentions to their competence, parents believed that Wayne and Bill were the best coaches to have taken the lead with this team. For one, parents felt that the coaches were very organized. Sheryl Allen revealed that committing so much time made it worthwhile due to the coaching staff’s overall organization. She stated that she does not mind driving her son Zach an hour before games for example because the time will be well spent. In other words, it would be difficult to demand that people be there an hour prior to the game if they were disorganized. Furthermore, parents spoke highly of the practices. They thought they were all excellent. There was never any wasted time and were high tempo in nature. Todd Allen added:

Wayne knows what he’s going to do and he gets the players to do it. Too many coaches think ‘oh I’ve got to get these two or three drills in’, when they’ve got 15 minutes for each and one of them is running poorly. Well, Wayne doesn’t do that. He’ll stop the drill and make them do it right. To me, if you’re not practicing it right, you’re only reinforcing the wrong thing.

Secondly, parents believed that the coaches were very knowledgeable and felt that they knew the game, which is more than they have had in previous years. Jeff Cohen was impressed with the coaches’ technical instructions. He thought they were always well

prepared and had specific rituals for the boys to go through. For example, from pre-game routines to off-ice training, the coaches implemented various components into the program, which allowed the players to further expand their knowledge of the game and all of its dimensions. Sheryl Allen explained that:

Certainly Zach has never been coached so much. It was nice that Wayne, being the head coach, focused on the defencemen. Now, his approach was a little different, but even Zach said 'finally, I'm coached'. He's learned a lot. It's what he's taken out of this year.

Finally, parents applauded the coaches' overall commitment to the team and their efforts in trying to create a competitive program. Parents were astounded by the professional approach Wayne and Bill demonstrated throughout the year. With no children of their own on the team, they certainly gave a lot of their time and energy, and rarely missed team functions. Parents agreed that their level of competitiveness seemed to be the right level. They wanted to win and they were competitive. Moreover, a few parents mentioned how the coaches seemed to have created great rapport with the players. In contrast to the relationship the coaches shared with parents, one of Wayne and Bill's strength was the ability to connect with the team. Lisa Webster revealed that "at the restaurant at the February tournament, the kids gravitated to them. Scott has never said a bad word about either one of them, ever. So they like them. They're likeable." Both Joanne Cohen and Lisa admitted however that their sons seemed to be closer to Bill than Wayne. In fact, according to Lisa, Scott referred to Bill "as the softer side of Wayne".

From a managerial perspective, Shelley O'Neill enjoyed working for Wayne. She joked that having non-parent coaches made her job a lot easier, as parents do not want to cross any line so they agree with all of the coaches' decisions. In other words, because Wayne and Bill were not parents, there appeared to be fewer conflicts between parents. Yet

she admitted that there was definitely some ‘brown nosing’ happening because everyone wanted to stay on the coaches’ good side. Shelley explained how she received emails from parents asking her questions in hopes that she was going to present them to the coaching staff but she adamantly refrained from getting involved when it was none of her business. Instead she told parents that Wayne was open to suggestions, so it was up to them to approach him directly with their concerns. Typically, the parents then responded “oh no, that’s okay – it’s not important”. In the same manner, during a mandatory off-ice training session conducted by a particular external company, Colleen Forsyth explained that it was an expense in the budget that perhaps was not necessarily needed. But she said it was something the coaches wanted and as parents, they do not make any of the decisions; rather, they do as they are told by Wayne.

Parents’ acceptance of the coaches, however, varied throughout the season. From the onset, it was evident that most of the parents had jumped on board with the staff and were looking forward to one of their best seasons yet. Tom Smith was one parent who thought the coaches had a clear plan of what they were trying to achieve with this team. He was confident that Wayne knew exactly what he was doing. For example, during a game in early October, Tom explained how well the players were incorporating the elements (i.e., defensive zone play) they were learning in practice into that night’s game. One of Wayne’s biggest supporters was Larry Harrison. He respected what Wayne did and said throughout the entire season. Not once did he ever say something negative about him. Larry thought that his son Kyle was really learning a lot from Wayne, probably learning more about the position in two months than he had in two years. Similarly, Todd Allen explained that his son Zach was

also enjoying the season and the coaching instructions, but was obviously having a hard time losing all their games.

Losing proved to be hard not only on the players, but on coaches and parents as well. Understandably, the losing streak surprised most parents as it can be assumed that they expected that two great coaches, such as Wayne and Bill, would be able to turn this team around. Jeff Cohen confessed that it took him some time to come to terms with reality. He thought that having new coaches was going to have a huge impact on the team. Wayne and Bill seemed serious and professional, which allowed Jeff to suspect that the team was going to do really well. He added that when they were not winning as much as they had anticipated, he still thought the team would end up fourth or fifth in the league. Never did he think they would end up in ninth place. On the other hand, as stated by Shelley O'Neill, the team's lack of success can be related to the fact that this team has had three different head coaches in three consecutive years. In other words, Colleen Forsyth explained that having a variety of coaches in such a short time period implies that the players have had to play under different coaching philosophies and strategies, forcing young players to have to adapt quickly to coaching environments.

Coaching Behaviours

On the bench, both Wayne and Bill appeared calm and composed. Rarely did the coaches publicly react to their players' mishaps or poor execution. Only once did Wayne lose his cool at his own players: After a bad play, he lifted his hands in the air and shook his head as he paced on the bench. This type of reaction seemed quite tame though compared to some of the opponents' coaches that I observed. For example, during the November tournament, parents could not believe the behaviours of one of the other teams' coaches. During the

team's first game of the tournament, the coach spent his time yelling and shouting not only at the referees but at his own players as well. When one of his players came to the bench, the coach stepped right in front of him. He was pointing his finger right up close to his face and yelling. Even more shocking to me was that the parents on the other team did not even seem concerned. It definitely gave the impression that this was a 'normal' occurrence. It should be noted that the players on this team were never treated in such a manner.

It became routine and expected for Wayne to call the referee over to the bench, which he (mostly) did while remaining professional and composed. On one occasion, early in the first period, the referee made a call that Wayne did not agree with. Shortly after, he tried to get the referee's attention so that he could question the reasoning. From the other side of the rink, he appeared very calm, as usual. However, suddenly, the referee threw him out of the game, which meant he had to leave the bench and watch the game from the stands. One of the parents on the team jokingly yelled out that he should have made more of a scene if he was going to be kicked out. It seemed likely that although his demeanour was calm, perhaps his words may have crossed the line. Nevertheless, when a coach is kicked out of a game, he also automatically receives a one-game suspension. As a result, there were three or four games in the season where Wayne sat up in the stands. Another time, all within five minutes, Wayne received a bench-penalty for yelling at the referee, which resulted in a player serving the penalty for him. Shortly after, the team's assistant-coach Bill was kicked out, although everyone in the stands wondered why as Bill typically did not deal with the referees. For the remainder of the game, it was obvious that Wayne had completely lost his cool. Standing at ice-level on the team's bench, Wayne was continually chatting in the linesmen's ears as they

would skate in front of the bench. His demeanour, visible from the other side of the rink, seemed arrogant and childlike.

Coaching Weaknesses

As the team's number of losses increased, so did the frustration from parents, which made it easy for them to point their fingers towards the coaching staff. Evidently, Wayne took a lot of the blame. In mid-November, Colleen revealed that she did not think the team was improving as much as she had anticipated earlier this season. She did not see the team working through obstacles and becoming stronger overall. Parent Gary Whyte, who had initially spoken so highly of Wayne, admitted that although he respected Wayne as a person, he was not overly impressed with him as a coach. Although he thought Wayne is very knowledgeable about the game, Gary did not understand what he was trying to do and questioned much of his actions.

While parents expressed that although the coaches did a great job of bringing structure and order, which was something the boys had never experienced before, they also believed that it was almost too much all at once. Parent Grant Webster stated that "it became too much of one specific style or system. At the Peewee level, it should be about fun whereas for them, it was more of a job." Parent Jeff Cohen added that it may have been too technical for a group of players that had never experienced such advanced coaching. Jeff assumed that Wayne must have had everything planned on paper coming into the season but did not change it based on the reality of the group, leaving him to wonder if Wayne would have been more effective with an older age group, where players have a better understanding of the game. He stated:

I liked the coaches but I'm wondering if maybe they were a little too technical for 12 year old kids. I'm not trying to blame them because I really do like them. But

sometimes I think maybe they were trying to teach them too much on how to play the game, where to stand, and not letting them just go out and play either. Maybe they lacked a little motivation. The 'rah rah' wasn't there.

Although Grant Webster hinted that the coaches did their best, he explained that he would have hoped that they would have been more open to changing things when they were not working. Consequently, although parents were generally pleased with the coaching staff, they were able to identify some areas that would have required improvement. One of the most common themes revealed by parents was that they felt there was no emotional and/or motivational connection between the players and coaches. For Joanne Cohen, she revealed that there was lack of interpersonal interaction between players and coaches. As a result, it appeared that even though the players may have liked Wayne and Bill, there was no inspiration to play for them. Lisa Webster explained how "they weren't inspiring the kids to play for them and you need that. You need that passion. The lack of emotion was a void in the environment."

Clearly, parents frequently looked at the bench during games to see if there was any interaction between the coaches and their son. Discouraged with the lack of positive reinforcement her son was receiving from the coaches, Linda Barker carefully watched her son Nick skate to the bench after scoring a goal during one particular game. Much to her disappointment, she commented that "you would think the coach could at least give him a pat on the back after scoring a goal". Grant Webster believed that the coaches took the fun out of the game. According to Sheryl Allen, there was no positive feedback. She thought there were some very harsh statements for players, which is why she agreed that the coaches may have been better off with an older group or a higher level. They were very critical for 12 year old children. According to Todd Allen, he revealed:

Given the age of the kids, a balance between constructive criticism and catching someone doing something right is really important to kids at this age. If you see somebody make a good play or they did something special, let them know that you saw it. Now, Wayne in particular is not an 'atta boy' kind of coach. He's task-driven and he's direct. It was a real contrast for Zach because his coach last year was entirely the opposite. But you know, in sports and at work and in life, you're going to see all kinds, and there's no right or wrong way. It's how you react.

Player Tyler Cohen also explained how he wished Wayne could have tried to be more understanding of the players' perspective because not everyone sees the same thing. He thought players are sometimes punished for behaviours or actions that are simply misinterpreted or misunderstood. Tyler revealed that he was benched by Wayne at one point in the season, even though he did not agree with the reason. According to Tyler, it was at the end of a game and the team was down a goal. The puck came to him, but he did not have much time to do anything with it because an opponent hit him. When he got to the bench, Wayne told him that he had taken too much time with the puck and was trying to do it himself. Tyler recalled how Wayne said that he was trying to be a star on the ice. He added that he did not think he had done anything wrong: "I had just gotten the puck from looking back, and then looked forward and the guy hit me. I didn't do anything wrong I thought. I was upset." He also added that there was not enough feedback provided to players, especially coming from Wayne. He acknowledged that assistant-coach "John [McPhee] does a pretty good job at doing that". Similarly, for the most part, his teammate Zach Allen explained that he knows he had a good game if he gets a compliment from Wayne. He stated that he wished Wayne would have provided him with more encouragement and positive feedback:

Wayne is probably one of the most intimidating people I've met, so I don't say anything. It's just that a compliment every once in a while would go such a long way. Like if he said 'nice shift' every now and then. My parents told me though not to get too discouraged because Wayne is trying to get us ready for the next year. So I should just let it go and know that if he isn't saying anything, I'm probably doing something right.

One parent who openly disagreed with the coaching approach from day one was Bruce Forsyth. He did not agree with the coaches' game plans, tactics, player relations, pep talks, and so on. Everything the coaches did was in conflict with Bruce's perspective. For example, after talking to his son Joel on the way home from a game one night, Bruce explained to me how the players were looking for some type of guidance from the coaches on the bench. The boys were feeling useless and lost, yet the coaches were not stepping up to give them a game plan. Another time, Bruce questioned Joel about his "stick-swinging" technique in the defensive zone. Joel replied that it was what the coach wanted them to do. After explaining why this was a terrible idea, Bruce loudly repeated numerous times that he had never seen such a useless technique in all of his years of hockey. Another example when Bruce was upset with the coaches came after a game in December. Apparently, the message Wayne had given the players in the dressing room was that "no one showed up to play". According to Bruce, the message was ridiculous and it was not a fair message to give to these young players. He said that his son Joel was actually confused about the comment, since everyone was in fact at the game. Bruce also thought Wayne's words were too harsh for 12 year old players to understand. He explained that they do not play poorly on purpose; rather, each child comes to the rink hoping to win. Nobody ever wants to have bad games; it is never their intention to not "show up to play". Furthermore, Bruce did not understand why Wayne was trying to fix things that were not broken. For example, Wayne had wanted Joel to hold his stick a certain way for face-offs. However, if Joel was successful on face-offs and winning the majority of them, then why change it? Bruce told Joel not to change his face-off technique. Joel explained that he had to or he would be benched. Bruce quickly told his son that if he were to get benched, he would take care of it with Wayne.

Finally according to Grant Webster, discipline was a team weakness, from players to coaches. There was never any accountability and people were never reprimanded. Grant further explained however that it must come from the top. Hence, coaches need to take responsibility not only for the team's actions, but their own as well. Grant admitted that as a coach, he has been tossed from a game now and then, but never three or four times within the same season. He understands firsthand how coaches become frustrated, but to lose your temper numerous times throughout a season is unacceptable. His wife Lisa revealed how she would have liked to have had the opportunity to sit down with Wayne to debrief the season. She would ask him "how did it work out for ya?" She suggested that trying to control everything does not work, especially with children. Considering how much the team had been through the past few seasons, Lisa thought there was a lot of work in store for Wayne in terms of increasing their self-esteem. As such, Lisa believed that the players needed to play, by following their instincts and having fun. More importantly, Lisa advocated that "kids need to feel safe to learn", which she believed was not promoted sufficiently. Rather, it was left to the parents to create a positive environment.

Parent-Coach Relationships

Parents described their parent-coach relationships as non-existent because it appeared that there was no desire on the part of the coaches to interact with the group, and this was visible from the onset of the season, as both Wayne and Bill steered clear of parents. Jeff Cohen respected both Bill and Wayne but wished he could have had the opportunity to get to know them a little more. Jeff was in fact surprised by the lack of communication between parents and coaches. He provided the following example:

A couple of weeks ago, Tyler couldn't go to practice. So I emailed Wayne and I just added a little blurb about how I thought the kids played really well last night. It was

only a couple of lines. Wayne replied back and said ‘thanks for the heads up’. There was nothing more. He could’ve said ‘ya they did play well’. But there was nothing. I know he’s busy and that’s fine. But I also think he could’ve used that opportunity for a quick exchange. It’s not that you’re looking for him to say ‘oh Tyler had a great game’. It’s not even about Tyler but about the team. So there’s been very little interaction that way.

Grant Webster explained that he got the sense that the coaches wanted their space from the very beginning, which does not bother him. He does not need to have a relationship with the coaches. He does not need to chat with them nor does he need them to say “hello” to him in the lobby. As long as he is comfortable with the coaches’ plan and philosophy, then he will entrust his son to them and hope for the best. He added though, that if there is a plan, Grant will also hold them accountable to it. His wife Lisa explained how Wayne seemed in his own world most of the time. She sensed that he did not want any feedback from parents, which she admitted, “could you blame him?” Coming into the season, he must have heard rumours and learned about the team’s reputation. He knew he was potentially walking into a labelled “problem team”, so Lisa can understand why Wayne chose to distance himself from the parents. Yet, she could not help but express how she wished the coaches had been more open to discussing or listening to the parents. They could have weeded out the parents who can contribute from the ones who do not: “There are just some people who have nothing good to share with others”. Similarly, Joanne Cohen stated that the coaches decided to put up their guard in order to avoid problems with parents since this team has had this reputation. Especially in that first year, there were a lot of coach-parents problems. She assumed that maybe he had heard of the team’s history and wanted to stay away and focus solely on coaching.

Assistant coach Bill Davis explained to me that he purposefully limits his interactions with parents, whether on the phone, emails, or in person. He added: “I go to the rinks for the

kids. I'm not there for the parents. I know they're part of the team and they're obviously an important part, but I'm not there to coach the parents." Similarly, head coach Wayne Burke explained that he has learned to avoid building relationships with parents and his reasoning to do so is quite simple:

If you give them an inch, they'll take the whole yard. They'll be sending you game reviews, emailing you lesson ideas, talking about line combinations. And once that door opens, you can't close it. You can't suddenly stop those people and say 'I don't want to hear from you anymore'. That's why I choose to be the way I am. I don't share with parents. I avoid getting myself into situations where I will have to tell a parent 'stop telling me what to do'. We are interviewed and hired to do that job. It doesn't become a job for parents too.

Although no one could blame the coaches for wanting to keep their distance, parents still wished that there would have been more follow-up with regards to their son. According to Sheryl Allen, she would have liked some interaction with the coaches in order to discuss her son Zach's development or if there were any problems. She assumed that if she did not hear from them, then everything was fine. Regardless, she would have liked some type of feedback or performance evaluation to determine what they think Zach contributes as a player and/or what he needs to work on. Joanne Cohen echoed Sheryl's comment:

I don't find we've gotten any feedback from the coaches this year. No indication to us about how they feel Tyler is doing. As parents, you like to know that but they don't give you any indication. Even a little email would've been great. All that you really want to know is that he's pleased with his play. As a parent, you're kept wondering.

Near the end of the season, both the players and their parents were asked to fill out a coaches' evaluation. The players were asked to complete them in the dressing room before they were distributed amongst the parents. Parent Peter O'Neill explained it is recommended that children fill out the evaluations on their own before parents received theirs so that parents cannot "pre-plan" and tell their sons what to write. It more accurately reflects what the players themselves think and how they feel, at least to some degree. Unfortunately, Peter

did not think that the coaches would have the opportunity to read through the evaluations before the end of the season. Both Jeff Cohen and Peter assumed that the association would only intervene if there was a major consensus on the evaluations and if it was an extreme case.

Overall, however, Todd Allen revealed how most of the parents he had talked to were pleased with the coaching staff, as was he. He hinted that the ones that were not, three or four of them, were typically also the ones who have illusions of grandeur that are entirely misplaced: “So if things weren’t going well, they looked for reasons. Of course, the coaches become the obvious token blamed ones.” As a result, Sheryl Allen described it as somewhat of a dichotomy. There are two sets of rules to every situation, depending on whether or not it involves your child. One example is if your child is a strong player, you support the coaches’ decisions of shortening the bench and giving him extra ice time. However, if your son is the one who has to sit at another player’s expense, then the perspective changes completely. Sheryl further added that it is a tough situation because everyone is paying the same amount of money, yet, at the ‘AA’ level, the philosophy is to win. Nonetheless, even though Grant Webster thought the team underachieved, it was not from a lack of effort on behalf of the coaches. Joanne Cohen suggested that it must have been just as discouraging for the coaches as it was for the players. Her husband Jeff stated that Wayne seemed really keen at the beginning as he probably also thought he was going to take these players to the next level:

Maybe we’ll get the fruits of what he taught this year, two years from now. It’s a hard thing sometimes. I’m sure he expected more. I’m sure deep down he’s probably thinking ‘oh, I didn’t do a very good job there’. You know because he didn’t see any of the fruits of his labour really.

Similarly, Jeff Cohen revealed that overall, he was happy with the season. He thought that both coaches, Bill and Wayne had done a fantastic job. There were obviously some

things that he would do differently but he admitted that they were the best coaches this team has had in a few years. Michelle Peterson also said that even though her son Travis was a little shy and scared of Wayne, he respected him. Some parents even hinted that they would love for their sons to have the opportunity to be coached by Wayne again.

Reflections on the Season: “All is Well that Ends Well”

The overall impression of parents on the season as a whole was that it was much less than they had desired. Lisa Webster described the season as “hitting the gutter”, while Sheryl Allen was sad at how the season unfolded. They admitted however that most of them had established unrealistic expectations at the onset of the season. Having new non-parent coaches created an exciting anticipation for the core of the team who had been at the ‘AA’ level for a few seasons. Parents predicted the coaching staff would have the ability to turn the team around. Unfortunately, after strong performances in two early tournaments, the team’s league play began to suffer, much to most parents’ surprise. Finishing ninth (out of ten teams) resulted in parents learning quickly that their initial expectations were over-rated. Todd Allen explained that: “From a win-loss perspective, I’m disappointed. But if you look at what minor hockey is about, it’s about developing, and Zach has definitely improved.” He added:

The realities are that this collection of kids just isn’t as strong as other teams. At this level, it happens. If you ranked our players one to 15 and compared them to other teams, the bottom few kids on this team aren’t as strong as the bottom kids of other teams.

According to Joanne Cohen, the team did not perform anywhere near their potential. She stated that after a great start, the team reached a plateau and never recovered. In fact, there was a decline whereby everyone involved gave up. For the Cohens, the season was an eye-opener from start to finish. They revealed that during tryouts, it was the first time they

had been concerned with whether or not their son Tyler would make the 'AA' team. In the past, Tyler had always been one of the strongest players on the ice, so being selected for a team had never been an issue, until then. After the first tryout session, they noticed that Tyler was struggling. Jeff said that it seemed like Tyler could not even skate. Consequently, between ice sessions, they paid for a couple of private sessions with a skating professional in order to quickly help Tyler as they feared he would not make the team. Jeff explained:

The first couple of years at 'AA', he was pretty much guaranteed to be on the team. I didn't sweat about it. This year, I thought 'he may not make this'. If the coach has no idea and has no history, if he's picking them for just what he sees on the ice, he may not make it. So, out of desperation, we took him to a hockey clinic. It cost a little bit of money but it was good. It gave him a little bit of confidence. He may or may not have made the team regardless, but we were just so frustrated with something going wrong.

Fortunately, Tyler did make the team. The Cohens thought that Tyler's skating problems could be attributed to a summer growth spurt and lack of physical fitness. Jeff admitted however that if Tyler wants to take it to the next level, he will have to work a lot harder to make things work in his favour. Jeff explained that "Tyler's a good little hockey player but now, kids have caught up to him. If anything, he's regressed a little bit or the other kids are just passing him now. But I'm realistic. I'm okay with it." Although the team was not as successful on the ice, both Joanne and Jeff were happy with their son's effort, regardless of the game outcomes. Similarly, both the Websters and the Allens expressed that their sons remained excited about going to the games. For Scott Webster, his father Grant believed that this season was less of an emotional rollercoaster ride than in past years. Apparently last season, Scott had no interest in going to either practices or games. His mother Lisa explained that he has matured and now experiences a more appropriate balance when it comes to hockey. In other words, he is not as wrapped up around hockey performances and

results, both individually and collectively. Lisa explained that for Scott it used to be “when hockey is bad, life is bad”. Now, the outcome of a game does not reflect how he feels about himself. Lisa added that he has realized that even when the team performs poorly it does not define who he is as a hockey player. In the same manner, the Allens were also pleased with their son Zach’s performance and overall growth. Zach was disappointed with the team’s number of losses but was still enthusiastic about playing and learning. His mother Sheryl pointed out how hockey, with its ups and downs, can be tough lessons for young boys, but they are great lessons too. She believes that it helps children develop and mature: “And the experiences are so rewarding, for both the players and the parents”.

Challenges Encountered: “When it Rains, it Pours”

Hockey seasons typically imply enjoyment, development, as well as challenges, for both players and parents. According to parent Michelle Peterson, the losing streak was definitely a low part of the season, but the reality was that this team has always lost. Parents wondered why their sons still wanted to go to hockey and questioned how they remained so passionate about the game.

Challenges Faced by Players

According to Todd Allen, some of his son Zach’s challenges included playing at a higher calibre level, which meant that the game was a little bit faster and he was no longer the biggest player on the ice. Todd stated that Zach’s strength was not nearly as noticeable as it had been in previous years, and therefore he struggled the first few months of the season. Being new on the team and being coached in a way that was different from all of his previous experiences resulted in an adjustment period for Zach. As for the Cohens, they explained how their son Tyler was seeking more from the coaches. Joanne stated that Tyler is a child

with a great work ethic, who always wants to be the best that he can be, and not only in school but hockey as well. She revealed how his self-motivation tends to lead him to push himself too hard, sometimes unrealistically. Hence, Jeff said that without feedback from the coaches, he doubts his abilities. Jeff added that Tyler needs to hear from authority figures that he is doing well or that they are proud of him; otherwise, he tends to second-guess himself. According to Tyler, he believed that more could or should have been done in order to ensure more victories. For example, he thought that the coaches could have pulled the goalie in more situations. Tyler acknowledged that one of their goalies may have been stronger than the other, so he should have played more games. Although the coaches did make such changes during playoffs, Tyler felt that it was too late. It should have been done earlier in the season.

For the Websters, Scott was baffled how the team overall was stronger than last year's team, despite the number of victories not accurately reflecting that. He explained that last year's team won 11 games, while this year's team only won five, and added: "Last year, we won more games and we were not a better team. I don't understand. The math just doesn't work. I still don't get it." Throughout the season, Lisa and Grant ensured that their son Scott did not blame himself and remained confident. Essentially, Grant explained that he did not want Scott to feel embarrassed because his son attends school with some of his opponents.

Lisa revealed:

It's heartbreaking as a mother because you go through what they go through. It's very hard to keep my emotions in check when my kids are hurting. It would be easy to go up to Wayne and say that my kid is not having fun, so fix it. But Wayne's not having fun either and he's doing the best that he can. So it's a great opportunity if you want to learn how to communicate with your kids. I love those opportunities. I love those rides to the rink when they're feeling down, because it's a chance for them to open up. Ironically, those rides to the rink are fantastic to get an idea of what's going on in his life.

Challenges Faced by Parents

The types of challenges parents encountered included coaching decisions, team performances, as well as parental dynamics. It must be noted that some of the parents were quick to express that they did not recall any challenges presenting themselves. Peter O'Neill acknowledged that every team always has its highs and lows, but nothing too serious. Gail Connelly explained that she does not get worked up about hockey, so she does not take it very seriously. There are a few times she hoped that they would have won a game or two, but she was never disappointed. Her philosophy is more of "whatever happens, happens". She joked that she obviously does not share the same view as other people on the team. When Rob Miller was asked the question, his answer was "where do I start?" He believed that there were a lot of challenges this season.

One challenge revolved around players' on-ice performances. As a parent, Todd Allen explained how you end up cheering for a team and wanting them to win, so it was frustrating watching them lose. He stated that eventually, although you are angry, you become resigned to it. Joanne and Jeff Cohen stated that it was hard to stay motivated to watch the team and be supportive when the team was losing every game. Similarly, Tony Peterson revealed that it was difficult to come to the rink this season and try to be positive and excited about it. He forced himself however for his step-son Travis's sake. He also obviously found it difficult when Travis was pulled during games, and admitted that as a parent, it is a feeling you never get used to. Norm Peterson admitted that because he is not a very competitive person, he would actually prefer that his son Travis play at a lower level where there is less stress and more ice time.

For Frank Robinson, it upsets him that his son Mitch needs to be forced to compete. Frank knows he is very demanding of his son, but that is how he, himself, was brought up. He only knows the philosophy “if you’re going to play, you’re going to play hard”, so he finds it frustrating that Mitch does not automatically want to compete, which is why he pushes him so hard. Likewise, Darrell Nesbitt thought that his son Jacob showed very little passion for hockey. He thinks that some children have it, while others may not. He obviously would love for Jacob to have it. For the Forsyths, one of their biggest challenges was that Colleen and Bruce had completely different viewpoints on the season, and more specifically on the coaching. When they discussed hockey, they never saw eye-to-eye. Colleen said that she would eventually give up and stop talking about it. Although she may not have always agreed with the coaches’ approach, she felt it was essential for her son Joel’s sake that they showed support and respect for Wayne.

For some parents, the challenges they faced were on a more personal level. For example, Lisa Webster discussed how she felt the need to detach herself from the team at the onset of the season because Shelley O’Neill was the manager and the two have had problems in the past. She revealed that over the years, they had run into personality conflicts. Lisa finds Shelley is the type of person who always wants the attention to be on her son. According to Lisa, a couple of years ago, they had an altercation, which they have since resolved. But Lisa admitted that she was apprehensive when she found out that Shelley was appointed as the team’s manager. Todd Allen also revealed that being a new family on the team required a transition period for both he and his son Zach, and presumably his ex-wife Sheryl as well. Having been at the ‘A’ level for the last few seasons meant that he had developed friendships

with numerous parents. So as much as Zach had to find a way to fit in with his teammates,

Todd expressed that he too had to find his spot amongst the group. Sheryl added how:

I feel like this year has kind of just gone by. I guess it's because I haven't been to a lot of the tournaments. So I have felt a little removed from this group and maybe I've chosen that. I don't know. I guess sometimes it's best just to be an observer. I don't want to overstep my boundaries, because I do have opinions. But yeah, I felt removed from the team. It was a very 'clicky' group.

Michelle Peterson revealed how not having such a competitive attitude helped her deal with the obstacles that occurred. She explained that this was her best hockey season as a parent because she was able to evaluate her commitment to the sport. She realized that she also needs a mental break at times. Hence, this was the first year where she was okay with taking a step back and not going to every single game. Especially when she was stressed about other things, the last thing she needed was to be at the rink: "Why add more stress?" This season allowed her to change her perspective, and it is one that she thinks is much better and healthier. She believes that some parents should also re-evaluate their outlook on hockey.

Another frustration that was felt by some of the parents revolved around a select group of adults who were loud and obnoxious throughout the season. Although parents were generally friendly with one another, they did not always agree with the behaviours others exhibited from the stands. Parents believed that not only did they set terrible examples for the players on the ice, but they were embarrassing to have in the stands as well. Sheryl Allen's main frustration stemmed from a few parents' constant complaining, yelling, and shouting, which made many games unpleasant to watch. Likewise, Lisa Webster explained how numerous times, she walked away from the stands to go watch the game from the lobby:

I couldn't stay and watch the game. I was going to kill Gary [Whyte] or Darrell [Nesbitt]. One of them was dead. I didn't have the patience to deal with them. I wanted to enjoy the game and you can't with them there.

For Tom Smith, his biggest challenge was related to coaching. Admittedly, he quickly learned that he needed to manage and lower the expectations he had established prior to the onset of the season. When the head coach was announced, he had searched the internet for information on Wayne Burke. He had looked up his resume, coaching experience, and hockey background. As a result, his expectations grew as he assumed that Wayne would be the ideal person to turn this team around and bring them to the next level. But Tom had to accept that there is simply a lack of talent within this age bracket within this association. It was a mental adjustment Tom realized he had to make. Rob Miller, however, adamantly stated that he could have done a better job of picking the best 17 players at tryouts. He felt he knew the players better coming into the season, and could therefore have made better choices than the ones Wayne and Bill made. According to him, one disadvantage of having new coaches is that they do not know the players or their abilities.

Tom Smith also explained that there was definitely a lack of shared decision making and communication between the coaches and parents. Colleen Forsyth argued that parents pay a lot of money for this commitment and should therefore have opportunities to voice their opinion. She strongly believed that more parental contribution should have been encouraged. Due to the fact that the coaches did not interact with parents, there was no avenue for parents to openly talk and vent. Colleen revealed that the coaches seemed to have too much control over the group, preventing parents from participating in the team's development. In the same manner, parents also felt that the coaches did not provide much positive feedback to the players. Disappointed with the lack of positive reinforcement and high-fives, Linda Barker mentioned that she never approached the coaches about her concerns. She thought of emailing Wayne, but decided not to. Instead, she made sure that her

son Nick was getting sufficient support from her and her husband. Similarly, her husband Don said that he was pleased with Wayne up until about Christmas. Although he admitted to enjoying his practices and respecting his hockey knowledge, he thought Wayne seemed to forget that the players were only 12 years old. According to Don, Wayne needed to let go of his “tough guy image” and provide the players with encouragement and confidence. Conversely, Rob Miller thought the players were never held accountable and the coaches were not demanding enough.

Grant Webster revealed that he was definitely frustrated at times throughout the season and admitted that it is a vicious circle. The parents in the stands can lead to frustration, which was also a likely outcome of being a “losing team”. Everybody likes to win, as does he. So when the team experiences continuous losing streaks, it becomes a frustration as well. He was also upset with the lack of effort on the ice and the lack of discipline on the bench. He explained that it was tough to watch the players giving up on the ice, while you know they have the potential to do so much more. Similarly, Grant admitted to leaving the stands once or twice because he was upset with the bench management. He thought the coaches started giving up, which was not fair to the players. He believed that the team still needed to compete. Grant explained that when there is an opportunity to make a difference for the betterment of the team, it has to be done, even if it means some players may lose a few minutes of ice time. In other words, he thought the coaches, at times, could have done more in order to allow the boys to be successful.

Hopes and Expectations: “The Best is Yet to Come”

Although parents know that it is not realistic, understandably, they always hope that their child will consistently have strong performances, leaving them feeling somewhat

disappointed. Both Joanne Cohen and Grant Webster claimed that to them, their sons never play poorly. They trust that their son is giving his best effort, so there is nothing else that they could ask for. Grant expressed how it is crucial for parents to realize what it is like to be an athlete: “knowing how things can go wrong for no reason or how hard work does not always pay off”. On the other hand, although Sheryl Allen expects her son Zach to have poor showings at games, it does not bother her. She says to herself: “Oh well! At least he was able to play. He was here. He showed up for the game.” She further explained that there is no need for her to be bothered by it: “He knows when he has not played well, so why dwell on it?” In the same manner, Lisa Webster also shared a similar outlook:

I go through all these emotions. But by the end of the game, I’ve got them in check and get my feet back on the ground. You want the best for your kids and you want them to be the best for themselves. I don’t need him to be the best of the group, but I need him to know his full potential and to discover it. So when I get in touch with my needs as a parent, then I can keep them in check. I find myself saying, over and over again, at any of my kids’ games: ‘this is their game’. This has nothing to do with me. Nothing. Zero. This is not my life. This is their game. As soon as I say that, then it’s so easy to let it go. It just puts it into perspective.

Most parents seemed realistic with their definitions of what a successful hockey career would entail. For the purpose of this question, the term ‘career’ referred to the quest towards progressive achievement as a hockey player. Many families highlighted the fact that their sons have dreams of being drafted and playing in the NHL. Lisa Webster was quick to add that she was not going to be the one to tell her son otherwise. In fact, she is all about keeping the dream alive because she believes that “we are all responsible for creating our reality”. She feels that if her son Scott wants to work towards making it to the “big leagues”, she will not throw any statistics in his face, even though the chances are close to nil. The Websters’ oldest daughter, at five years of age had dreams of her own of making the NHL and Lisa could not bear to tell her that girls do not play in the NHL. For Cindy Robinson, she

has no big dreams but if her son was to eventually become a university prospect, then that would be an added bonus. She knows however that Mitch's dream would obviously be to play in the NHL. As long as Mitch has the opportunity to play and make friends, she thinks the hockey commitment has been worthwhile.

For the most part, parents expressed how their expectations revolved around wanting their child to play and to have fun doing so. For Grant Webster, a successful hockey career would consist of being able to play an outdoor game as a family, playing into their adulthood, or even getting involved in coaching. Some parents also mentioned that a scholarship or an opportunity to play while pursuing post-secondary education would be a bonus. Many parents would like their sons to continue playing hockey while attending university or college, while some even hoped that their sons' hockey skills would lead to a full or partial scholarship. Gail Connelly revealed that she highly doubts her son will make it to the NHL but she admitted that a hockey scholarship could possibly be within reach. Although Tom Smith hopes that his son Dylan will continue to play hockey at the 'Junior' age group (regardless of the calibre level), he ultimately would love for his son to proudly represent his university as a student-athlete. Similarly, Rob Miller stated that if his son Corey was able to receive a scholarship, it would imply that all these years invested in hockey were well spent. For Jeff Cohen, from a realistic viewpoint, he hopes that his son Tyler will continue playing throughout his teenage years. Should his career lead him further, he would evidently be happy, but there are absolutely no expectations in that respect.

Todd Allen explained that although he knows that his son Zach will not make the NHL and has doubts that he will make the 'AAA' team next year, he would never tell Zach. He stated however that the one thing he does worry about is the reaction of a person when

one recognizes in himself that he will not be going anywhere: “What happens when we realize we aren’t going to make it? I worry about if and when it happens. How will he react to that news? It’s not so much the news, but the recognition that you weren’t good enough.”

Lisa Webster believed that one’s self-awareness is simply part of the process, and one that she feels is worth every risk. According to her, the potential to become great is worth the risk of learning to recognize one’s personal limits. Lisa would like to see her children play hockey throughout their teenage years. She strongly believes that hockey plays such an important role in the lives of young teenagers as it helps keep them on the right track. She explained:

Those friendships make a difference. They do. The kids don’t get into trouble, and there’s more discipline because they have to go to bed early because they have a game. They have to eat well because they have a game. It’s huge to get through those teenage years and keep them away from drugs and alcohol. So that’s why we’re in it. That’s why we do this ridiculous thing. That’s why hockey plays such an important role in our family.

Evidently, parents also wished that their sons continue to play hockey simply for the passion of competing. For example, Larry Harrison and Dale Chapman shared similar views. Larry would love for his son Kyle to play at the highest level of competition within his ability level and to do so while having fun and continuing to improve. Dale considers hockey a sport for life and he hopes that his son Simon will continue to enjoy the game just like he does now. It is hard to predict how far Simon will go because it all depends on how far he will want to and/or can take it. Peter O’Neill would be happy if his son Andrew had the opportunity to play Midget ‘AA’ or ‘AAA’, as he feels it is an attainable level for his son, but does not expect hockey to be a long term commitment. He was happy when Andrew made the school team because it was a different team and it was a tough one to make. He admitted

that it can be hard sometimes because as a parent, you do not know if you are supporting your son or if you are setting him up for heartbreak and disappointment.

For Norm Peterson, he wants his son Travis to continue to work as hard as he can and learn from his hockey experiences, which can only help him grow as a player and a person. For Michelle Peterson, she would love for Travis to continue playing hockey for as long as he can. In reality however, if it happens that he no longer enjoys it, then he needs to find something else. She explained how he used to define himself as a hockey player and by the team he played for; but this year, it had slowly changed. Being at a new school, he has made new friends who have interests other than hockey. Travis' step-father Tony echoed Michelle's words by explaining that playing hockey is always and will always be Travis' choice. Tony has also recently noticed that Travis seems to be developing interests in addition to hockey, such as music, basketball and wrestling, which Tony thinks is ideal. According to him, there is more to life than hockey.

Plans for the Near Future: "Where There is a Will, There is a Way"

Many players on the team played in spring/summer hockey leagues, which generally run from the end of March to the first week of July. Typically, during this time, they have weekly practices (two on average) and play in numerous weekend tournaments. Evidently it is easy to see how one season can lead directly into another, leaving only a few weeks completely away from hockey in a single calendar year. Fortunately for this team, losing in the first round of playoffs allowed them an extra three to four weeks off before the start of the summer season.

Parents admitted to having some expectations with regards to their sons' plans for the near future. For the Cohens, Jeff explained that his sons have never done much off-season

training during the summer months but this year may prove to be different. With 'AAA' hockey being an option in September, the Cohens have decided that they will provide their son Tyler with every opportunity to refine his skills, improve his overall fitness level, and increase his confidence; hockey camps, fitness sessions, and private lessons are options they are willing to consider. However, Jeff stressed that this will only be possible if it is something that Tyler wants. Consequently, Jeff is willing to provide him with the opportunities, but only if Tyler has the desire to pursue them, as he will not force his son. As long as Tyler shows him that he wants to improve, Jeff will try his best to provide him with those opportunities. If Tyler hopes to make it to the next level, he will have to work hard: "We will put effort into it because he has a goal and he has something to work towards." Should he not make the 'AAA' level, Jeff assumed that they would be back playing for the 'AA' team, unless perhaps he is discouraged and would rather play for a local 'rep' team (less competitive league).

As for the Websters, the spring/summer season is rather hectic with both Scott and Derek playing on different teams and Grant being the head coach for both teams. According to Lisa, spring hockey is a lot more fun. The teams are hand-picked specifically by Grant and his staff, which means that they can select which players (and parents) they want. She described the summer league as being "no problems, no politics, and no stress". Grant revealed that it does in fact go by quickly, and it still allows his sons to be off skates for almost six weeks before tryouts. Lisa stated that she believes that it is crucial for her family to take a break from hockey. The children need a break as do the parents. The older boys used to play competitive soccer but they have decided to only join recreational leagues, which should allow more down-time at home. Although Scott is an active child, Grant stated

that his natural athletic ability will not be enough to get him ready for tryouts. He has to be self-driven to “do the little things”. Every summer before tryouts, Grant always suggests that his sons shoot a hundred pucks a day so that they get a feel for the puck on their stick. Grant does not want Scott and Derek though to be doing weight training because they are still too young. Instead, he provides them with different types of equipment (i.e., agility ladder, medicine balls) that can help build strength, balance, and speed. He revealed however that he never forces his children to engage in those activities. It is always their decision.

Finally, for the Allens, Zach typically attends one hockey camp every summer, in addition to playing summer hockey. Yet, according to Todd, the ‘AAA’ tryouts next year will be a true test for Zach, so he will have to work hard throughout the summer to ensure that he is fully ready to hit the ice come August: “I’ve told him that if you want to keep going, and if your expressed desire is to advance and keep going, at some point in time, there’s a bigger commitment outside of the rink than in the rink”, referring to components of fitness, nutrition, and mental training. Sheryl added that his summer activities are baseball and softball, which implies very little aerobic training. Every year, Zach says he wants to do the work, but he never fully commits. Hence, next year may be an eye opener for him. He has to decide if this is something that he really wants or he may face some harder decisions in August. Sheryl further advocated that she does not believe in ‘AAA’ hockey to start with, so he knows that she is not willing to invest in it if he is not fully committed. She has told him: “It’s up to him. Show your Dad and me why we are doing this. I could be putting money away for a trip or your education. So you’re going to have to figure it out. Is this something you want?”

Chapter Summary

In sum, hockey was an integral part of most families' lives before their sons even started playing. Some of the parents had been hockey players themselves, while others had been long-time spectators of the game. Only a handful of parents had no previous attachment to the sport until their sons showed interest. Parents believed that the skills their children learned through hockey were lifelong values that would prove useful in other areas of life, outside of sport. From teamwork to respect and commitment to hard work, the hockey environment enabled their children to learn more than simply the game itself and its on-ice strategies. The values instilled and the parent-child relationships that hockey provided often outweighed the demanding and time-consuming schedule. Hockey created numerous opportunities for parents and children to spend time together, whether in the car on the way to facilities or during out-of-town tournaments.

From an SI perspective, reality is reflective of previous, present, and on-going encounters individuals have with one another (Charon, 2004). The competitive youth hockey experience consisted of endless, ever-changing constructions of reality as parents, players, and coaches encountered new or altering situations. Through each of their interactions, the meanings of their exchanges were continuously constructed based on how they chose to define situations, which then influenced how they chose to behave. In the present study, it became apparent that parents' responsibilities changed according to the situations that presented themselves throughout the season: praise strong performances, support emotional breakdowns, encourage perseverance, teach management skills, or offer coaching instructions. Through many of the team's trials and tribulations, the perceptions of parents varied from coaching expectations to personal challenges. For example, some parents had set

high expectations for the new coaching staff, only to face disappointment as the number of team losses increased early in the season. For other parents, the challenges they encountered were primarily on a personal level, such as dealing with particular individuals and/or integrating themselves into a new group. Although parents admitted that the chances their sons made the NHL were unlikely, there were still hopes that hockey would be part of their sons' lives for many years to come. Knowing the potential barriers that exist within hockey, parents remained optimistic yet realistic.

Through in-depth and comprehensive descriptions, the next chapter will discuss the culture of hockey and the integration of aggression in youth hockey, as perceived by parents, players, and coaches.

CHAPTER 6

AGGRESSION AND PARENTAL CONDUCT IN YOUTH HOCKEY

Hockey is one of the most widely studied sports with regard to aggression and aggressive behaviours (Kirker, Tenenbaum, & Mattson, 2000; Young, 2000), yet little research has focused on the involvement of parents in relation to these topics. Although there are codes of conduct of what is appropriate within the world of youth sports, the problem lies in the fact that they are also left to be interpreted. For symbolic interactionists, people are perceived as acting toward things and other individuals on the basis of the meaning they have for the actors (Blumer, 1969). Those meanings are derived and modified through interaction, where symbols are used for communication purposes, ultimately shaping the behaviours of the actors (Charon, 2004). The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the prevailing issues of aggression and the reality of parental conduct within the youth hockey environment, as perceived by parents, coaches, and players. More specifically, the following themes will be discussed: (a) competitive youth hockey culture, (b) views on body checking, (c) layers of aggression, (d) officiating nightmares, (e) perceptions of aggression in hockey, (f) perceptions of violence in hockey, (g) parental conduct in youth hockey, (h) perceptions of parental misconduct, and (i) parental roles in promoting sportspersonship.

Competitive Youth Hockey Culture: “Rome Was Not Built in a Day”

Parents on the team viewed hockey as a “lifestyle” rather than simply an extracurricular activity largely because of its time-consuming schedule and its unspoken flexibility. Should the coach call to advise that there is a team practice added to the schedule the following evening, players are expected to be there. Lisa Webster does not know of any other sport where this occurs. People are expected to drop everything because ice has become

available, which at the competitive level can be quite intense. This led some parents, mostly mothers, to question the need for additional ice times and off-ice training sessions. While the association allots a specific number of ice times for each of its teams for practices and games, the team's ice scheduler was continuously looking for additional practice times at local arenas, which according to my own experiences is a typical occurrence in youth hockey. Consequently, parents shared different views on whether those extra ice times were necessary; some parents questioned the need for so much ice time, while other parents believed they were beneficial to their son's skill development.

Value of Competition

Parents acknowledged that any competitive environment, in sport or other areas, can either be healthy or distorted. From the onset, the competitive youth hockey culture is an open avenue for problems to arise simply because of the large number of people involved. Parents explained that different goals, different personalities, and different opinions result in an unstable perspective as to what youth hockey should entail. Parent Grant Webster asserts that hockey is no longer fun for young players because of the nature of competition; the game always has the potential to become too competitive. He also believes that the driving force behind taking the fun out of the game is undeniably the parents themselves, which he sees as completely unfair to the children. He explains that "the lesser the level of competition [house-league], the better we do at just letting the kids play. But the more competitive it gets, we seem to take the fun out of it. We lose sight." Conversely, head coach Wayne Burke shares a different perspective. He believes that:

You can't play 'AA' hockey because it's fun. You have to play 'AA' hockey because you have a passion and a thrill for competition. And from that you get your fun. I think that kids at this level play for the fun and social aspect of the game. If that's the

case, you're not ready to go to that competitive level of desire and passion. So why are you there then? And I know they're 12 [years old], I keep that in perspective.

Joanne Cohen suggested that one possible reason why the more competitive programs can be problematic is because teams are made up of players who were once the all-stars on previous teams. When their children are no longer the strongest players, parents have a difficult time swallowing the reality. According to parent Todd Allen, one of the major differences between the 'A' and 'AA' levels is parents' perceptions of their son's talent. More specifically, at the 'AA' level, he believes that parents seem to view their sons' ability level as hopes for the future. There is more concern about what their son is learning, how much playing time he is receiving, and which additional hockey camps he will attend. Todd noticed that 'AA' parents tend to care more about the outcome of games, whereas last year, at the 'A' level, parents were more easily ready to "turn the page, win or lose". Todd noted, however, that competitiveness also has its benefits. He explained that hockey is like any other sport in that if the emphasis is not on winning, then the game loses its edge. He argues that when the consequences of winning and losing are eliminated, then a part of the game also deteriorates. For him, playing golf is a good example:

If I play with people who play twice a year, slap the ball around, and are out there for a few drinks, I don't enjoy that. I still want to play and compete. Now, I'm not going to go out there and throw my clubs around either. But if you're not trying to accomplish something, you lose something. So I think that if you take away the competitive in trying to win, you lose the essence of the game. In kids' hockey, it's important to have that drive to win. But the consequences of not winning can't be so much that they can't or don't enjoy themselves. There needs to be balance.

Parent Jeff Cohen revealed that he finds the youth hockey culture to be acceptable. If particular parents did not want their child to be involved in competitive hockey, then there is house-league. He does say, however, that some coaches can be too competitive and too serious, as are some parents as well. Jeff explained that he does not have much tolerance for

people who cross those lines or who “lose their cool” during games. He tries to always look at the big picture: “They’re kids playing a game”. He pointed out that in the game of life there are a lot of other things that are more important. But you try as hard as you can to teach them to do their best, which is what he believes youth hockey emphasizes. He confirmed that he has no intentions of pulling his son Tyler out of hockey because it is too competitive: “I’m okay with it”. Not everyone agreed though that the culture of hockey reflects the purpose of what the game was intended to be. Assistant coach Bill Davis admits that the problem lies within the importance Canada places on hockey:

It’s on television, on the radio, in the newspapers. Parents, especially fathers, get all wired up when they’re kids are playing, especially at the higher levels, because the guys in the NHL weren’t playing house league when they were kids. They were playing at the ‘AA’ and ‘AAA’ levels. So I think it’s in part due to the level, and the other is the impact hockey has on our society, like the prestige it’s given. I think it’s the nature of the sport.

Sheryl Allen argued that organized youth hockey does not have children’s best interest in mind, which is why she adamantly described the culture as “crazy”. She contends that hockey is one of the few sports that most Canadian families grew up with, which is most likely the reason why “everybody professes to be an expert of the game”. Sheryl also attributes this to the evolution within the game which has led to the creation of this over-competitive culture. Whether the evolution was caused by parents or coaches, she guarantees that it was most likely not the players. She argues however that the media does not accurately represent the youth hockey world, but rather, it tends to solely seek negative incidents. She believes that the number of incidents in youth hockey is quite small: “If you look at how many hockey games are played all over this country in a winter, it’s probably a very small percentage of negative incidents compared to the number of people that are involved.” Similarly, Todd Allen believes that unfortunately the stories that do make the news are

always the ones that should not. They are incidents which receive a lot of attention, and for all the wrong reasons. Finally, Jeff Cohen explained that he disagrees completely with the way the media takes advantage of negative incidents in youth hockey. He explained:

I shake my head. It does give the hockey people a black eye. Media really likes dirty laundry. If you think of all the hockey games that go on, it still is a minority. It's still unacceptable but not all hockey parents are like that. It's unfair really that we have been labelled in such a way.

Joanne Cohen explained that she has learned to accept the hockey environment, and now believes that the competitive nature of the game would be similar in any other sport. Hence, if you want to play at a higher level, it has to and will be more competitive. She acknowledges however that there are definitely some people who take hockey too seriously. For her, it is simply a game and only one tiny piece of her family's puzzle. It is not a main focus in their life. As long as her children are having fun, yet competing within the rules of the game, she will continue to support the culture.

Views on Body Checking: "There Are Two Sides to Every Story"

Under provincial regulations, the 'Peewee AA' team competed in a league in which body checking is permitted. Jeff Cohen characterized body checking as "a skill when executed within the rules of the game". Both the December and February tournaments enforced a "no hitting" rule, which meant that although there is body contact (i.e., players can battle hard and physically), there is no body checking (i.e., no hitting allowed). Tom Smith suggested that it must be difficult for the players to switch from one style of play to another, but Ken Doyle explained that there is not much difference between the two styles of play. He said that it is all about "angling and pinning your opponents" because players can still rub off against each other. In fact, he told his son Trevor that he needs to be looking at the puck yet keeping an eye on the opponent's body as the key is to hit him but make it look unintentional.

His reasoning was that “if it looked like you were trying to go for the puck but you ran into someone, then it will be okay”.

Numerous mothers expressed however how pleasant it was to watch hockey without the body checking during those tournaments. Both Joanne Cohen and Sheryl Allen believe that the pleasure of hitting is highly influenced by the parents and the coaches, rather than the players. Joanne stated:

I don't really think it's the kids. It's instilled in them through parents' pressure and coaching instructions. For example, you can see that this team is not a hitting team. These kids hate it. They're ducking away from hits, which isn't safe. But it proves the theory that they're scared of it. But can you blame them? There are some kids that are a foot taller than the other ones. Some are 30 to 40 pounds heavier than Tyler. It's dangerous. But they don't have much choice. It's part of the game.

Playing with Body Checking

Generally, these players were first introduced to body checking at the ‘Atom’ (nine and 10 years old) level at which point every player had to go through a mandatory clinic which taught them how to give and receive hits. Ken Doyle remembers how they tried to teach as much as they could within the hour. Player Scott Webster recalled how he learned to body check by attending a specialized body checking clinic. He explained how once you attended the clinic, “you just go out there and get the hang of it. You go out there and clobber guys. At first, people were just like ‘boom’ and just pushing each other around. They didn’t even know what they were doing.” Zach Allen explained how in his first year of body checking, he was penalized on a few occasions for “hitting from behind”, which had also resulted in injuring some of his opponents. He stated that it is fun to throw a big hit every now and then, as long as it is never to purposely hurt someone. Unfortunately for Zach, his first experience with body checking was during a game whereby he delivered a hit on an

opponent who ended breaking his arm as a result of the hit. He admitted that he wondered if “this was what body checking is about?” He added:

I’ve broken a kid’s arm. I’ve given three kids concussions. I’ve broken a kid’s leg. I never meant to and I feel terrible after. I’ve never done anything stupid to hurt somebody on purpose. I like the competitive part of hockey and the hitting, but something like when Zednik [NHL player] got cut by a skate in his neck, that’s when you realize that hockey is just a game and that life is a lot more important.

When the Cohen’s eldest son Jayden reached the age group where body checking was introduced, Joanne remembers telling her husband Jeff “I don’t like hockey”. She recalls thinking that she did not know if she would still be able to sit and enjoy the game if young boys were throwing their bodies around. This feature of the game turned her off and she seemed to lose interest. She revealed that Jayden was not a physical player. He was very timid and he would try to avoid the hits. She was very afraid that a player, perhaps even her son, could get seriously injured. Over time, Joanne has realized that there is no need to panic until there is reason to panic. She no longer worries about possible injuries. Having no choice but to learn to accept that body checking is a fundamental feature of hockey, she understands that players are supposed to get hit.

Ironically, despite the fact that body checking is considered an integral skill, it is rarely, if ever, incorporated into team practices for fear of someone getting injured. An unwritten assumption that many youth hockey coaches live by is that implementing body checking in practice drills could potentially result in injuries of teammates. Although some drills incorporate body contact (i.e., making physical contact with another player), there is no hitting involved. According to parent Ken Doyle, teams should integrate a lot more physical play into their on-ice drills. Simple drills along the boards would help show the players how to toughen up in the corners. He strongly believes that it is a skill that players need to practice

in order to feel comfortable and safe with it. He further explained that instead of spending money on power skating clinics, the team should attend a body checking clinic. This would allow them to continue to refine the skill, as they do for other skills (e.g., skating). Gary Whyte stated that unlike head coach Wayne Burke, who never includes body checking in his practices, he did last year when he was coaching. He believes it is important to include some physical drills during practices in order for the players to overcome their fears.

Body Checking Preferences

Parents agreed that the team lacked size and physical strength. The players were scared to get hit and were always very hesitant. They did not like receiving hits nor did they like trying to initiate them. Parent Larry Harrison confided that even head coach Wayne was disappointed with the team's overall physical play. After one game, his pep-talk was quite blunt. Wayne told the team that they could not continue playing such a "soft" game; they needed to stand up to their opponents and hold their ground. Clearly, size impacted the players' decisions to body check or not, as players would prefer hitting an opponent smaller than them. Dylan Smith was one player who admitted to me to being scared about getting hit. Astonished, when his mother questioned his response, he quickly contested that "it's not really scared, but more like, it makes you hesitate for a second. But that's it." He then explained that the trick to getting hit is to stay low and tense your core to help absorb the hit. He added that you need to stay close to the boards and keep your feet moving: "If you keep moving, you'll actually get momentum out of the hit. But if you try to take the hit by stopping, you'll absorb 100% of the hit, which will hurt more than if you had kept skating". Yet, although players stated that they preferred playing with body checking, some observations offered a different viewpoint. During the no-hitting tournaments, it appeared as

though the team played with more poise and patience. The players seemed more confident with the puck, which may be attributable to the fact that they did not fear getting hit.

Parent Colleen Forsyth confided that she much prefers the no-hitting style of hockey because she believes that hockey at this level should focus on puck skills. Too many players have not yet developed their puck skills when body checking is introduced, which changes everything. She explained that players tend to give the puck away simply because they are too scared to get hit, which does nothing to enhance the game. Furthermore, she enjoys watching the game without worrying about whether or not her son will get hit and be injured. Working in a hospital, she is fully aware of the risks and that such incidents do happen. She recalled an incident that happened 10 years ago or so, when a young boy was brought in to the emergency room. He had been playing hockey and was hit into the boards. Unfortunately, he ended up being a quadriplegic, in a wheelchair, and needing a fulltime nurse as a result of the hit. A few months after the incident, he died of complications. Hence, Colleen fully understands how quickly life can change. She alleged that it had apparently been an innocent hit into the boards.

Conversely, Dale Chapman revealed that he does not mind the game with body checking because it adds another level of intensity. Dale agrees with introducing body checking at the younger age group because it teaches them how to play safely and to understand the boundaries. He also thinks that it forces players to learn to take hits and keep their head up. He holds this view despite the fact that his son is one of the smallest players on the ice, as much as 20 pounds lighter than some of the opposing players. According to Peter O'Neill, Simon Chapman is one of the smallest players on the team but he is still very feisty despite his small stature. He gets involved regardless of his size and does not back down. In

my own personal experience, a player's size determines a lot of what he can and cannot do when there is body checking. It was obvious that in this age group, size differences of the players on the ice are quite extensive. There are some big strong players in the league who have the ability to push the little ones around. Assistant coach Bill Davis describes the differences as: "We're physically small. Some games, we're playing against guys literally going through puberty, almost shaving, while our boys are still talking about Pokémon [kids' video game]. We have physically immature kids. They get dominated out there."

Nonetheless, players preferred playing with body checking, even hinting that hockey is supposed to include hitting. Scott Webster stated that "hockey is hockey with hitting. It's part of it." He admitted how he actually plays better when he is allowed to hit. He specified that he would rather receive a hit along the wall because on open ice you have nothing to support yourself against, yet, the good thing about open ice hits is that you cannot hit your head on anything. Considering he was one of the bigger players on the ice, Scott felt that hitting is to his advantage. In the same manner, Zach Allen revealed that his size and strength are an advantage on the ice, especially with regards to body checking. He stated that it is a part of the game that he loves because it can motivate the team and can change the game's momentum around. Zach bluntly explained however "some kids just seem like they're mental out there. It's like they're football players out there and all they do is hit." He suggested however that the manner in which body checking is introduced could be modified for the betterment of the players: "Maybe they should teach us and then give us the year to learn it so that we're ready for next year." As for teammate Tyler Cohen, he hesitated before revealing that he also prefers hockey with body checking: "I'm not much of a hitter but I've improved. So it's not that bad. I try to hit hard but I just can't. Sometimes I do."

Sheryl Allen recalled a time when one of her son Zach's on-ice strengths as a player was to deliver big hits. As such, a couple of years ago, it was expected that Zach be one of the team's hard-hitters. Although he was not forced to do it, it was highly promoted. Sheryl argued: which child does not want to please their coaches? Moreover, she was upset when Zach tried to comfort her by saying: "it's okay Mom, that's what I do". According to Sheryl, although he may have liked hitting back then, his perception may be changing somewhat now that there are players bigger than him. She admitted though that Zach has not always considered hitting as "fun". During one game, he ended up breaking his opponent's leg by body checking him into the boards. In tears, he was devastated after being thrown out of the game for a "hit from behind" penalty. Obviously unintentional, she admitted that she has seen him do certain things that she does not like. According to Sheryl though, players do not like to be hit so they try to turn away from it but that is when there is more danger for injury. It apparently took a long time for Zach to start hitting again after that incident.

Admittedly, Sheryl explained that in terms of body checking, she is of two minds. She enjoys it in the NHL but not at the youth levels. She understands that players have to learn it at some point, which is why she would prefer it started at an older age, such as when the players are 15 or 16. She believes that at 10 or 12 years old, there are simply too many physical differences and mental discrepancies. It is hard for children that young to be able to make such a quick decision. Having watched women's hockey and ringette, she believes that without body checking, there would still be sufficient physical contact (i.e., rubbing people off the puck, forcing them towards the boards) in the game. She stated that hockey could still be "pretty aggressive without it being dangerous". She believes that it would in fact be the best thing for the sport.

Layers of Aggression: “The End Justifies the Means”

Within the first month of the season, in the parking lot after a game, shouting could be heard from a distance. It was coming from two small groups of people (with two or three men each) that had gathered in the parking lot. They must have just played a game, as they had their hockey bags and sticks beside them. A few threats were heard, such as “why don’t you come here”, “you want to go?”, and “don’t be surprised if you see me later.” Evidently, the on-ice intensity had transferred to the asphalt. Other people walked on, either oblivious to the situation or choosing to remain uninvolved. Regardless, the incident occurred in a public area where children, adults, and families witnessed a verbal altercation between adult (recreational) hockey players.

Examples of On-Ice Incidents

It did not take long into the season for an unfortunate situation to arise within the team. During an exhibition game in tryouts, Matthew Connelly hit another player. Unfortunately, the player was injured as a result of the hit, and he lay on the ice for quite some time. According to his father Fred, it was undoubtedly an accident; Matthew was not known to take “cheap shots”. He explained that it was simply bad timing, as when he went to deliver the body check, the player had lowered himself along the boards. Matthew was assessed a major penalty for “hit to the head” and kicked out of the game. Opposing parents were yelling at Matthew from the stands, which Fred revealed was astounding considering many of them knew him from summer hockey and knew it was not something he would purposely do. Nonetheless, a few days after the incident, the other team’s coach was claiming that Matthew should have been suspended and some of the opposing players were taunting him at school. They talked about revenge and getting back at him. Needless to say, one body

check led to a complicated situation for a 12 year old boy to handle. Fred added that seeing the player motionless on the ice as well as the sounds of the ambulance sirens appeared to have had an impact on Matthew. A power forward who was usually a physical and strong player, Matthew did not hit another player for many months, and even then, he was always hesitant and cautious about delivering body checks.

Throughout the season, during games, there were always the typical on-ice melees after the whistle, scuffles in front of the net, as well as intimidating shoves. Some of these actions resulted in penalties, while others did not. Helen Chapman mentioned that over the years, you get to know the players and their temperament. For example, you know something is wrong if a player like Trevor Doyle stays down. She has seen him play both hockey and soccer and pretty much run through cement walls, and still come out laughing. Another time, after Trevor was body checked into the boards, Linda Barker whispered, “he’s upset but he better keep his cool”. In the same manner, Sheryl Allen stated that her son Zach should not be on the ice the last few minutes of a game because he has a little bit of a temper. She said that when things are not going well, he can be a “ticking time bomb”.

It is arguable that most of the team’s penalties were not accidental (e.g., tripping) but rather fully intentional (e.g., retaliation). Player Dylan Smith confided in me that he does certain things during games to frustrate the other team. For example, he will trash-talk his opponents, purposely slash an opponent behind the play, or even butt-end an opponent with his stick. It was Nick Barker however who spent a lot of time in the penalty box. During one game, he was called for a dirty hit on an opponent, for which he had to serve a two-minute penalty as well as a 10-minute misconduct penalty. However, as soon as he was done serving his penalties, he stepped out onto the ice (from the penalty box) only to retaliate and hit

another player (on the same shift). From the stands, his father Don joked that his son “obviously enjoys spending time in the penalty box”. Assistant coach Bill Davis admitted however that he wishes the players were more intense and aggressive on the ice:

I think hockey is and always will be an aggressive game. I mean you’re going full speed, there’s body checking, and you’re wearing equipment. For our guys, I would like more. Hockey, especially at the body checking level, is about beating the guy you’re against, physically and mentally. It’s okay to get a penalty sometimes because it shows that you care.

The reactions of parents varied from one person to another and from one situation to another. When players retaliated or took cheap shots, parents as a whole seemed somewhat disappointed yet relieved depending on if it was their child. Comments such as Gary Whyte’s could be heard in the stands: “Now that’s unacceptable. That shouldn’t happen and it shouldn’t be allowed.” But, for the most part, people cheered for big hits and applauded physical play. The vocabulary in the stands mainly revolved around body checking. In fact, head coach Wayne Burke stated that it is typical for youth hockey coaches to refer to the word ‘hit’ as means to convey the importance of body checking. He explained:

Coaches don’t use words like angle, control, contain, or separate from the puck. They don’t use those kinds of words. They use ‘hit’. That’s the aggression that kids are taught. So when you have a group of adults, who are in charge of a group of kids, and those kids listen to every word you say, and they do exactly what you say, and you’re the one teaching them, all they ever know is hit. All a 12 year old knows is to hit. But what is a hit? That’s a hit, that’s a hit, that’s a hit. But it’s also elbowing, roughing, hitting to the head. Kids hear the screaming and shouting, ‘hit him’, and it trickles down to the ice. Kids will do what they hear, every time. They’re learning it somewhere. Someone is teaching them.

Endorsement of Aggression

At the beginning of the season, parents would yell “hit him”, however the team’s cue eventually became “pop him”, which Gary Whyte used frequently. For example, if an opposing player was stick-handling the puck, parents would yell “pop him”, implying that

someone from the team knock down the puck-carrier, which is within the boundaries of the game. “Pop him” became the team’s most commonly used words: it was the “thing to say”. In one game, even Linda Barker yelled out “pop him! ...Is that what Gary says?” Ironically, she used the lingo freely without fully knowing its implication and purpose. I doubt that she would have yelled “hit him”, but the euphemism somehow seemed acceptable to her.

The majority of parents encouraged aggressive plays: “oh good hit” or “good job boys”. For example, defenceman Nick Barker was known for being able to deliver some big hits on the ice. When he did, his father Don grinned while others cheered. One time Tom Smith said “who cares about the puck if he’s going to hit like that”. Another time, after a really hard hit, Peter O’Neill commented “now that’s good old hockey”. I was shocked to hear Peter reveal to Fred Connelly one time that his favourite part is when a hit is delivered and the player’s eyes roll back. Fred simply looked at him with no response. It remained unclear whether Peter’s comment was sarcastic or not. However, it was the parents of one of the affiliate players who were the most surprising to me. (An affiliated ‘A’ level player can substitute on the ‘AA’ team when they are short players.) Considering these parents were “outsiders” within this group, they were very talkative in the stands. The father was extremely loud and he used very aggressive terms like: “make him pay” or “take it to him”. At one point, he even yelled “hurt him”, after which he chuckled.

Grant Webster admitted that there is definitely a problem when 40-year old people are supporting 12-year old boys hitting each other. He added that it is scary to see some parents applaud big hits, whether within the boundaries or not. Some of the behaviours exhibited by parents in the stands, as they relate to aggression, were less than ideal. By far the most aggressive parental reaction took place during the February tournament, when one of the

parents on the team reacted impulsively and showed no remorse after the fact. Being registered in a non-contact tournament, body checking was prohibited. In the team's fourth game of the weekend, having already been eliminated from a playoff spot, defenceman Jacob Nesbitt lost his composure with less than 10 minutes to go in third period. After deliberately hitting two different players within the same shift, he was assessed a major penalty and was kicked out of the game. Surprisingly, his father Darrell took it upon himself to stand at the glass, mockingly applaud the referee, and shout disgraceful comments, which was shocking to me considering that his son had blatantly body checked two players in a no-hitting tournament. After the game, Darrell who was still visibly fuming over the situation, headed to the referee's dressing room, while Fred Connelly caught the encounter on videotape. Although Darrell never actually took a swing at the referee, he was right up in his face, pointing his finger intensely and yelling, as he stood inside the officials' dressing room. In the footage, another official is seen stepping between the two men while Todd Allen and Dale Chapman tried to intervene by pulling Darrell back and redirecting him. However, when Dale tried to pull Darrell's arm towards him (away from the room), Darrell tried to get his arm loose, which made it look like Dale was nearly hit by the restrained arm. Finally, Dale and Todd managed to pull Darrell away. Although the incident may only have lasted twenty to thirty seconds, it was considered serious enough that policemen soon made their way into the arena. The situation soon dissolved and there were no further repercussions. Parents were left gossiping about what could have erupted had other parents not intervened. Considering Darrell's large stature, parents suspected that the officials must have been quite scared when he charged towards them. Parents wondered how handling angry parents became part of a referee's job.

Officiating Nightmares: “Enough is Enough”

For league play, a three-person officiating format was employed. Hence, for every game, there was one head referee accompanied by two linesmen. In some tournaments, the format consisted of only two officials, which meant that they can both call penalties. Early in the season, after the September tournament, parents complained that while they understood using a two-person system for round-robin play helps reduce costs, when the stakes are high and teams are competing in the medal-round games, there absolutely needs to be three officials working the game. Regardless of the number of officials, this seemed to have no bearing on the amount of abuse the officials may encounter. Presumably, a striped black and white shirt on the ice automatically becomes a target for parents in the stands.

Evidently, not many of the officials have intentions of making a career out of their job, but it is a job nonetheless. For most, it is a part-time employment opportunity that allows them to continue to be involved in the game. Most of the officials were typically under the age of 30, with the youngest looking no older than 17. Sheryl Allen revealed how her father had been a hockey referee as well when she was growing up. She had gone to see him referee two games but vowed never to return once she had. She said that spectators had been so aggressive and disrespectful by constantly hollering and yelling at him. He could not do anything right. She felt so bad for him and her feelings had been hurt. She did not understand why he would want to torture himself that way. His response had been that it is always about the players, not the spectators.

In a conversation at the end of January during a dryland training session, parent Gary Whyte expressed that the way the officials are treated in the NHL is shameful. He continued to comment that the players should not be allowed to disrespect the officials the way they do.

He pointed out how people watching a game on the television are able to depict exactly what it is the players mumble to the referees after a call. If you can somewhat read lips, he maintained that you can identify the message the players are sending back, which should not be tolerated. It is a matter of respecting authority. Both Gary and Peter O'Neill compared it to how citizens would refrain from talking to a police officer in that way. They acknowledged that the two situations are very similar: A person of authority trying to make people abide by the rules and conform to the boundaries. The only difference is the setting itself. Gary commented that there is a lack of self-control on behalf of the athletes towards referees in the NHL. As paid professionals, he expected them to be held accountable for their actions.

Reactions to Officials

Often during games, the voices of numerous parents resonated throughout the stands. Evidently, people's perspectives and knowledge of the rules highly influenced their interpretation of the referee's decisions. Parents released their frustration by voicing comments, such as "come on ref", sometimes as low as a whisper between each other. More frequently, however, parents' shouts and yells revolved around missed icing calls, blatant off-side plays, and perceived mistaken penalties. In smaller arenas, when parents were shouting, it was as though they were witnessing a life-altering situation. Because parents' voices echoed throughout the stands, it was as though they were yelling at the top of their lungs. For example, during one game, Ken Doyle was yelling at the referee after each of his calls. After one particular play, he started shouting "that's bullshit". His voice carried throughout the whole arena. His wife Liz eventually told him to be quiet and after exchanging a few heated glances, Ken calmed down and eventually walked away.

Gary was one parent (of a few) who consistently voiced his opinion about his discontent towards the referees. He repeatedly yelled comments such as, “you’re missing a good game ref”, “come on ref, open your eyes”, or “there are two teams out there ref”. After one tournament game, Gary said that he disagreed completely with the referee’s call. According to him, the opposing player turned at the last minute, which resulted in his son Kevin making contact. Kevin received an automatic one-game suspension for what the referee identified as a “hit from behind”. Gary stated that the referee could have assessed any other type of penalty (i.e., boarding, cross check), which would have resulted in a two-minute penalty rather than a suspension. Gary felt sorry that Kevin would have to sit-out the team’s home opener. When asked if Kevin had indeed hit the player from behind, Gary replied he had but it was not intentional. He did not think the call was fair.

Michelle Peterson admitted that when parents start yelling at the referees from the stands, she has an initial temptation to join in as well, but she never does. She explained that she quickly realizes that she has no idea what exactly she would be yelling as she does not know enough about the rules of the game. She would simply be yelling to feel part of the crowd, which she stated, would soon turn to embarrassment. When such shouting matches occur, she cannot help but roll her eyes. She explained that acting out never helps the team: “Why would any official try to ‘help out’ a team that has crazy parents yelling at him?” She said that although she may not know much about hockey, she is confident that having parents heckle a referee will ultimately influence the types of calls he or she will make in the game. She admitted however that she does not feel like it is her place to tell other parents to be quiet.

Not only was it the coaches and the parents who confronted the officials, but some of the players as well. At 12 years old, they already lacked respect towards the officials, who are the authority figures on the ice. Early in the season, it became apparent to me that an acceptable level of discipline amongst the players was non-existent. At the very first tournament, Trevor Doyle received a game misconduct after apparently swearing at the referee, which resulted in him getting kicked out of the game. After the fact, his father Ken explained that he knew his son would have to sit out the first league game because his actions resulted in a one-game suspension. During the game when Trevor had to sit in the stands with the parents, his behaviour was less than stellar, making it easy to understand why he received a game misconduct. While sitting beside his father, he did not hesitate to voice his opinion towards the referees and he questioned every penalty call. No one, including his father, said anything.

During a game in mid-January, it was obvious the game got out of control and the behaviours of players and parents alike reflected it well. At every whistle, parents complained loudly and criticized sarcastically. The referee, who looked no older than 25 years of age, took “a beating from the parents”. At one point, the referee had skated to the other team’s bench to talk to their coach, at which point Frank Robinson yelled “did he not pay you enough before the game?” At one point, Sheryl Allen even whispered “I don’t like this”. She explained that it makes her feel uncomfortable when parents in the stands act out. She explained that it does not help, but rather, it makes it worse. She said that the tension in the stands directly affected how the players reacted on the ice. According to her, the boys were no longer playing hockey but were out there “head-hunting” and trying to be physical. Along the boards, players were pushing and shoving without any intention of gaining

possession of the puck. It was clear the atmosphere had changed. Each time the referee blew the whistle, the two linesmen were quickly separating the players from both teams. The players' body language, demeanour, and reactions seemed completely out of character for them. Players, who were normally cool and collected on the ice, were now talking back to the referee and shooting the puck after the whistle. Parent Gary Whyte shouted: "good work ref. You created this. You did this." Near the end of the game, even Judy Harrison, who rarely said anything, commented "is there a back door to this rink if we need it?" In the lobby afterwards, Michelle Peterson said that parents always look to blame something or someone when the team does not win. She explained that people would surely blame poor officiating for the outcome of this game. She quickly refuted: "...but let's be honest. It wasn't the referee's fault that we lost the game, nor that we completely lost focus."

At the following practice, Dale Chapman argued that the officiating had been "less than desired" but they had learned to expect this when they go there because it is the same issue time after time. Tom Smith rationalized the parents' behaviours by saying that he was not sure what happened but he suggested that the blame should be on the arena: "It's just something about that rink that gets everyone riled up". According to him, it is an annual occurrence against this team at that facility. (Yet, the team had played a game there earlier in the season and nothing of the sort had happened.) Ironically, a few days after this game, I noted that an article was published in the local newspaper about current issues of aggressive behaviours towards officials in minor hockey. Unfortunately, abuse of on-ice officials is only one type of aggression that exists in minor hockey.

Perceptions of Aggression in Hockey: “A Little Knowledge is a Dangerous Thing”

Parents agreed that there is undeniably aggression in hockey. They acknowledged that it is everywhere from the professional level to youth leagues. For parent Todd Allen, aggression is an essential aspect of the sport. He believes that there is such a thing as “good aggression”, which is when a player is ultimately playing hard, focusing on the puck at all times, and colliding with opponents for those purposes. He admitted that “when you see a hockey game without a little distaste between the two teams, it can take a great game and make it a little dull”. He believes that because hockey consists of such a combination of high tempo, speed, and energy, aggressiveness is bound to occur. Players and spectators alike feed off of it. Even though he was a little apprehensive the first time his son started playing with body checking, he now thinks hockey needs a little of it in order to make the game interesting: “if you take that contact stuff out of the game, it loses the essence of what it is.”

Parental Definitions of Aggression

Sheryl Allen stated how aggression always seems to have a negative connotation because people are not able to properly define it. She explained the primary issue is people’s lack of knowledge between aggression and assertion, and how people should strive towards being assertive. As an example, Sheryl explains that when Wayne, the head coach, argues a referee’s call, he is being assertive. He is standing up for what he believes in and asking for reasoning. However, this type of conversation can easily include aggression if Wayne becomes belligerent about it. She added that players on the ice or parents in the stands often cross the line when they criticize and/or harass officials.

Lisa Webster revealed that hockey has an unfortunate reputation for its aggressive nature, which may be a little unfair. According to her, “good aggression” can be defined as

an extension of frustration. For example, good aggression could be exhibited when a team rallies together and bangs their sticks against their boards. It is a positive spin on aggression and it is used as a means to get each other excited. She added that it is a technique that can change the momentum of the game. She argued, however, that this viewpoint can also be misleading because players use body checking as means to “get the team going”, and if done properly, falls under the rules of the game. Hence, good and bad aggression can be difficult to accurately differentiate, which she hints is a reflection of the culture and what is accepted. She revealed how “it is an inner conflict for me. Even a clean hit is subjective to the referee, isn’t it? Some are clean hits, while others aren’t. But who ultimately decides? Who is right? Who is wrong? Everyone sees it differently.” Consequently, parents explained how the problem arises when players use emotions to drive their actions. When body checking is properly executed, within the boundaries of the game, Lisa believes that it is a great skill. The only difference is that it has to be used in the right context, for the right reasons. It has to be without the emotional attachment. Lisa further explained that “when it is no longer about gaining possession of the puck, there’s a problem. It should be used solely to get possession of the puck. That’s the point of it. That’s the only reason it should be used.” Her husband Grant echoed her words by saying that a certain amount of aggression is required in order to be successful in hockey; however, the dilemma is when players use aggression as means to hurt their opponents in any way, shape, or form.

Joanne Cohen also believes that aggression, in terms of physical play, is an essential feature of the game. For her, “good aggression” can be defined in the sense of making use of the body checking rules. She admitted that she actually wished her sons were more aggressive than they are. Similarly, her husband Jeff enjoys watching how competitive their

son Tyler can be to gain possession of the puck, but he also wished Tyler would be more aggressive in terms of body checking and pushing opposing players off the puck. In other words, he would like for Tyler to play with more of an edge, more of a “get in there, get your face dirty, and fight back a bit” attitude. Then again, he noted that his son is only turning 13 years old. Jeff differentiated between playing with an edge and taking it too far. He does not like watching hockey when players whack opponents’ shin pads with their sticks or give cheap shots when the officials are not looking. For him, it is pure stupidity: “Losing your cool and retaliating is not right. It isn’t about you dummy! It’s a team sport”. Jeff further explained that if Tyler ever did something like that, he would definitely have a problem with it, especially if it was blatant. “If someone came in and gave Tyler a shot and he acted briefly out of reaction, that’s one thing. But if he skated 10 yards over to give him a cheap shot in retaliation, I would not be happy.”

Personal Experiences with Aggression

When Tyler first started playing hockey, parent Joanne Cohen thought he was going to be out there like a bull because he was such a strong-willed child. In his younger years, he always wanted to cross that line of “right and wrong”; if you said you can only go this far, he wanted to go a little further. She thought they were going to have a hard time containing him: “okay when he gets older, he’s going to be out there and he’s going to be hitting”. She remembers thinking that he would be the type of player that would retaliate, but she knows now that he is not and never was. He has grown out of that phase, and probably because of the influence of his older brothers. They have learned to work out their frustration without having to be physical. She realizes though that it has made him a little meeker and mild, which is why she wishes he would be more aggressive on the ice: “Sometimes Tyler will

skate towards the guy and almost slow down. Why does he slow down? Hit him. It's part of the game. Knock him down. That'll free up a lane for somebody else and away he goes".

Nevertheless, Joanne stated that she does not like seeing players out of control and/or frequently retaliating. Although she understands that sometimes players need to take penalties to protect their goalie or deliver big hits, she does not support players who are always penalized for doing "unacceptable, even stupid things". When an action is performed out of pure anger, then there is an issue.

The Websters revealed how they are currently experiencing some difficulty with their oldest son James (14 years old) because of his aggressive tendencies. As a goaltender, he tends to take his role a little too seriously. He is very protective of his crease area so he likes to let his opponents know that he means business. Lisa expressed how when she sees an opposing player accidentally skate through his crease, she cannot help but think "get out of there kid". She thinks that James does indeed push the limits and sometimes goes overboard as he tries to intimidate his opponents. Of their three boys in competitive hockey, Grant said that it is James who gets the most penalties. Although Lisa does not support James' on-ice behaviours, she also realizes that he is a teenage boy going through puberty and testosterone is running high. Nonetheless, in Lisa's world, such aggressive behaviours are unacceptable and unsportsmanlike. She explained:

You can defend your crease but you don't go looking for it [trouble]. Defending means that someone's attacking you and you need to defend yourself against something. While for James, he's more on the attacking side when he does that. It's not acceptable. That's something that I'm not comfortable with. It's not okay. To top it off, you're putting your team down and somebody has to serve your penalties. It's not fair.

Second oldest, Scott Webster revealed that he does retaliate on occasion when he is upset at other teams who run the score, even though they are up by numerous goals. He

thinks it is unsportsmanlike to do so, as is continuing to hit when your team has a big lead. When he does retaliate, he typically looks to see if the referee is watching first, so that he does not get caught. He explained how during a game the previous season, he was really angry at some of the coaching decisions, but knew he could not do anything about it. As such, when he went on the ice for his next shift, he “ploughed some kid on the other team”. This created a little melee with shoves and pushes, and Scott receiving a penalty. As he skated to the penalty box, he slammed his stick on the ice, which Scott remembers: “my Dad was so mad”. After the game, Scott revealed that his father Grant was really disappointed and told him that “you don’t do that. It’s not sportsmanlike and it’s stupid. It’s a lack of class.” As for Tyler Cohen, he revealed that his parents would be highly disappointed in him if he was ever to act in an inappropriate manner on the ice. Similarly, Zach Allen stated that his parents would undoubtedly be very upset with him. He added however that “I just know better than to act that way”. Although he admitted that he rarely retaliates, he does sometimes trash-talk opponents:

It’s part of the game. There are some potty mouths out there. There are some kids that just won’t shut up. But sometimes, I’ll let them know that I’m there. I’ll talk to them and try to distract them. Like one time, I told this guy that his skate was untied, so he looked down and missed the puck. So sometimes it works. You have to let them know that you’re there, especially at this level.

Rationalizing Aggression

Parents believe that aggression on the ice can be attributed to various factors, all of which are psychological, physiological, and/or sociological in nature. For one, some parents believe that as a natural part of living, everyone experiences “just having a bad day”. Lisa Webster explained that the aggression some players demonstrate can easily be linked to their unrelated-hockey emotions, moods, and hormones. Additionally, Sheryl Allen thinks that a

team's on-ice performance and team rivalries can create frustration for players. As an example, the team's losing streak may have provoked some aggressive tendencies in some of the players. It should be noted however that this was not the case with every player. In retrospect, Sheryl wishes it would have made more of the boys "angry" or "mad". Sheryl felt that some players started giving up as the season progressed and the number of losses increased. Conversely, she was hoping that the continuous losses would have motivated the players to work harder and play with more aggression:

Make them a bit more mad out there. Assert yourself. Get mad at the losing streak. It's the passion. Sometimes you'll see a good game, and then all of a sudden the bodies start flying because they're mad. But sometimes that's good because it seems to make them play better. So it's kind of a contradiction at the same time.

Joanne Cohen explained that the aggressive behaviours of players could also be as a result of a lack of discipline and control by the coaching staff. She strongly believes that the coach has a responsibility of being in control of his players. For example, she does not like it when a coach will put a player out on the ice near the end of a game who you know is going to fight when you are losing. She wonders "why put him even out there?" Instead of getting more ice time for his poor choices and uncontrolled temper, he should be benched. She thinks such players should be kept off the ice surface for fear of starting brawls or drawing suspensions.

You know he's out there to get some blood. So it's up to the coach. They need to have control of them. Coaches tend to be very lenient when it comes to this. It really annoys me when kids do things that they shouldn't do and they're still allowed to go and play on their next shift. You know they're going to get another penalty because you can tell that they were trying to fight and you can see it coming.

Finally, the most prevailing factor that parents attribute to aggressive behaviours of players is the message that is given within the family home. Jeff Cohen stated that it has a lot to do with the player's upbringing, parental coaching, and perhaps even hereditary

dispositions. According to Grant Webster, the problem arises through the messages from parents. The emphasis is too frequently placed on hitting and playing aggressively. In the stands, parents are often heard cheering for big hits and aggressive pushes:

It's the encouragement we give to it. Like the other night when Scott hit #7 and put him on his butt and #7 is huge. There was more noise created there then when Dylan [Smith] scored a goal. We should have been excited that we scored a goal. Considering we don't score many goals, we should have celebrated like we had just won the Stanley Cup. But instead, people cheered when #7 was knocked down.

Parents believed that the aggression seen on the ice is most likely a learned behaviour. Lisa Webster stated that most of the aggression in hockey is in large part due to the fact that the passion for the game is infused and omnipresent in society. Sheryl Allen stated that parents' views on youth hockey are simply distorted. Yelling obscenities, publicly criticizing, and/or cheering for unruly tactics, are consistent with aggressive and over the top behaviours, all of which are unacceptable. She feels that regardless of toward whom the messages are geared (e.g., coaches, officials, players, or other parents), such behaviours are poor examples to young players on the ice. Both Sheryl and Lisa stated that it is easy for aggression to integrate itself into the game, simply because of the emphasis placed on it from parents and coaches. They acknowledged how parents get excited when a body check is delivered. For Lisa, seeing parents on their feet, clapping and howling after a big hit is mind-boggling:

When a nine year old kid hits another nine year old kid and the kid goes down, it's like 'yeah'. There's like this feeling of pride attached to that somehow. Well, there's something screwed up in there. And I don't know how it happens or how it got to be that way, but there's a very barbaric element to it.

For Grant Webster, it is easy to see how "bad aggression" can unlawfully integrate itself into hockey. He explained that it is such a grey area for adults, let alone young athletes who are victims of society's mixed messages. He questioned how "if as adults we have a hard time establishing the boundaries, how can we expect children to do so?" He added: "it's

very difficult for children who are eight, 10 or 12 years old to define or to understand what's right and what's wrong".

Perceptions of Violence in Hockey: "Do As You Would Be Done By"

Generally, parents believed that aggression is acceptable, while violence is not; and they agreed that both exist within the hockey culture. According to Sheryl Allen, violence could be any of the following examples: parents in the stands getting out of control with each other, players pounding each other on the ice, or brawls erupting in older age groups.

Although she is fortunate that such incidents have not occurred around her, she acknowledges that it is definitely prominent at local arenas across the country based on media publications. Nonetheless, she understands how it can happen because she has felt those emotions at one time or another. She explains that hockey is a game with constant adrenaline rushes for both players and parents alike. Joanne Cohen revealed that she has in fact witnessed fights in the stands during a youth hockey game; A few years ago, she recalls how it had started with parents yelling at each other and further escalated. She is flabbergasted as to how such incidents could ever happen. It is taking the game to a whole new level and way too far. She stated:

This is just for kids. It's a hockey game. What kind of example are we setting for our kids? What do they see? How do they see us react to things? Besides, I can't see how any of that could be justified.

Integration of Violence in Hockey

Todd Allen argued that violence tends to be a catch-all for everything bad that occurs in the world. In hockey for example, a really hard slap-shot going at speeds of 120kph can have a violent connotation to it. But for him, a violent act is when "it crosses the line", which is where the problems stem from because "everyone has a different line, a different

perspective”. He certainly does not like body checks from behind or dirty hits and cheap shots with either sticks or skates, but he does appreciate a clean body check. Over the years, he has taught his son Zach the importance of delivering “healthy” and clean body checks and Todd truly believes that Zach would never have it in him to carry out a violent act. The first season when Zach was initially introduced to body checking, he was thrown out of a few games for checking from behind. Todd honestly revealed that although some were weak calls on the referee’s part, some of the penalties were well-deserved. Todd expressed how he was worried at times about his son actually hurting somebody with a body check. Even though it would never have been done maliciously, one bad decision can have terrible repercussions. Todd acknowledges that if the roles had been reversed, and Zach were hit from behind, he would have been furious (and scared) as a parent watching from the stands. Consequently, he clarified and questioned Zach on when and why a body check is acceptable in order for his son to fully understand how some of his hits were borderline dangerous. Similarly, Jeff Cohen stated that, as a father, he has very little tolerance for stupidity or violence. If ever any one of his sons swung his stick at somebody, there would be serious consequences:

I swear the coach wouldn’t have to suspend him. There wouldn’t be a need because he wouldn’t be playing. He’d be sitting at home. I’ve had visions, where I’ve seen some kids do things that I swear if it was my kid, I’d go right over to the bench in the middle of the game. And I’d say ‘coach, he’s coming with me’. I don’t care what you say, he’s coming with me.

The Websters unfortunately experienced an incident early in the season which lead to their younger son Derek (who plays on another team) being suspended for an inappropriate on-ice action. At a no-hitting tournament, his ‘Atom AA’ team (nine and 10 years old) was losing badly in the final game. The opposing team had one player who was very talented, but the team was unable to stop him because there was no hitting allowed. Typically, opposing

players would have body checked him in order to gain possession of the puck, but they could not do so in this tournament. Half way through the second period, the team was already down 11-0 and the opposing team was not letting up. As such, the frustration was escalating as was parents' disappointment from the stands. Between periods, their team's head coach, Joe, as means of trying to motivate his players, said to them: "come on guys. Let's play the way we play back home, let's play hockey the Canadian way". The players questioned him and asked if that implied that they could body check. Unfortunately, Joe replied that he was not going to answer that and walked away from the pep-talk. Hence, Derek understandably interpreted his coach's response as a "yes". On his first shift in the third period, an opponent told Derek to "go to hell", so he checked him into the boards. The player went down like a rock. His mother Lisa remembers how it was one of those hits that looked like the child was severely injured. As soon as it happened, Lisa explained how "the other team's coach jumped over the boards onto the ice and he is freaking out, as are their parents". In the stands, Lisa expressed how it had intensified to the point of ridiculousness and now the other team's coaches and parents were extremely shaken up by the incident. The coach even appeared to be coming after Derek. Lisa stated that "it was really one of those could-be incidents on the news". The referee threw Derek out of the game so Lisa went to the dressing room, where she found her 10 year old son crying. He was very upset. Disappointed in his actions, Lisa asked him what had happened. He explained that Joe said they were allowed to hit, so he did. When Joe came to the dressing room to check up on them, Lisa told him that Derek had misunderstood his message of playing Canadian hockey. Lisa stayed calm and did not push the issue further with Joe, because at that point she was more concerned with getting out of there. She told Joe that she was scared of possible repercussions, so she and Derek were going to start driving

home: “It was just time to go”. Lisa explained that she was extremely disappointed in the fact that the coach’s message created a potentially dangerous situation and ended up costing her son a one-game suspension. She argued that the coach should have said “no”:

I need to know that my kid is safe in the coach’s hands. Because he didn’t say no to that question, my kid was suspended. The other kid could’ve been seriously injured, in which case, we could’ve been sued by the other kid’s parents. We’re in a non-contact tournament. If the coach doesn’t like it, then don’t play there. It’s unfair to go in those situations and hit kids that don’t know how to take it or who aren’t expecting it. It seems really simple to me and it’s not grey at all. The answer to the question is ‘no’. It shouldn’t have happened. It wasn’t right and it wasn’t safe. They’re only kids. A 10-year old cannot process that. I don’t know that coaches always understand the power that they have.

Although they are volunteers, Joanne Cohen stated that she has limited patience for coaches who lose their temper on the bench. She recalled a time when one of her sons’ coaches lost his focus during a game. He was upset at the referees and the opposing coaches. He realized after the game that his behaviour was unacceptable and therefore apologized to both the team and the parents. Even though she understands how a coach can get so wrapped up in the game, it was an appalling example for the players. She revealed that:

If he had been that type of coach, I don’t think I could’ve handled it. If I had to watch that behaviour at every game, then that’s no fun. I would pull my kid out of hockey because you want your kid to learn good things from hockey, not bad things. I mean there’s good and bad everywhere but you try and set a good example. I do think there’s violence in hockey, but luckily for my boys, they’ve been around well controlled environments.

Violence within the Environment

Parent Grant Webster personally believes that hockey does in fact condone violence: “It’s a big part of the game”. He explained that when he played ‘Junior C’ (18 to 20 years old), his role was to be the tough player: “I wouldn’t say I was a fighter, but I was a shit-disturber and I did it well. I think there is a place for that type of hockey. I just think you don’t give it as much power.” Coming from a small community, Grant revealed how school

yard fights were common for children, as they were on the ice. He believes that hockey is played differently in certain regions. It can be embedded in the environment. He admits he was an aggressive player and that it was part of his upbringing. If the coach tapped him on the shoulder, he knew exactly what he had to do on his next shift. He stated that his children are aware of his former role as a hockey player, but that they do not think “it’s cool to be the team’s enforcer”. They realize that he was probably not as skilled as other players, so that was the only way for him to fit in. Grant expressed the need for society to face reality and acknowledge that violence is present in hockey because only then will people learn how to deal with it. The issue however is where the line should be drawn. He explained that when there is a fight in a NHL game, his children are the first to be excited about which player will “win” the fight. Although he is aware that his children also watch other sports that consist of fighting, like boxing and wrestling, he argues that the objective of hockey is to score more goals than the opposing team, not to fight. He believes that fighting occurs simply to increase ratings on television or the enjoyment of fans in the stands at local arenas.

Fighting was one topic that seemed to provide conflicting views amongst parents. Parent Todd Allen fully admitted that he enjoys watching a fight erupt during NHL games. What he does not like however is that some fights are premeditated, in some cases, weeks in advance. For example, the media often reports anticipated fights between two specific players when the two teams meet at a later date, implying the fights serve as a means for revenge and retribution. Lisa Webster describes hockey as a “game filled with underlying soap opera storylines”. She confessed that she is as guilty as others. When a fight breaks out during a NHL game, she is one of the first on her feet looking to see what happened, which players are involved, and what history exists between the two players. She doubts aggression

and violence in hockey will ever disappear. She believes that as long as it is acceptable, even endorsed, in the NHL, it will unfortunately always be at the youth level as well: “As long as society says it’s okay, it will be there”. Consequently, she added that if parents want their children to play in that environment, then children need to learn how to play in that environment. It is unethical to send them out onto the ice and say “everyone else around you is going to be hitting, but you’re not allowed”. It is simply unsafe and there is potential danger in playing that way.

Grant Webster thinks that minor hockey players should suffer tougher consequences when they do engage in an on-ice fight. As of now, most often, players receive a five-minute penalty only to be back on the ice within less than a period. Jeff Cohen revealed that he does not support “goon hockey”, a term that he referred to for ‘Midget’ players (15 to 17 years of age) where the main purpose seems to be to win and fight. He acknowledged that this is more frequently the case at lower-skilled leagues. He assumes that the goon is typically not the fastest skater, so he tries to make up for his lack of skill and/or finesse. He would rather see a player “dipsy-doodle” with the puck than see a player intentionally hook opponents, give cheap shots, and thrown punches. Todd Allen questioned however “at which stage does it become okay?” Is it only in the NHL? He explained that he does not have a problem with two 16 year olds instigating a fight. Sheryl Allen however provides a different perspective:

Why is fighting [in hockey] any different than fighting on the streets? You wouldn’t fight someone on the streets so why is it different on the ice? Is it because people have equipment on? I don’t get it. I know tempers fly, and adrenaline and hormones and everything kicks in. But if it’s not allowed, it shouldn’t happen. Technically, fighting is not allowed.

Lisa Webster stated that hockey can create unhealthy environments, yet she feels it is unfair to solely identify hockey as the problem. She explains that violence occurs in many

sports, including but not limited to hockey, because it is an extension of who we are as human beings. She stated:

Until we stop enjoying watching blood drawn, it will exist. That's just the reality. You can jump on the bandwagon and be an advocate to take violence out of all sports, when in fact it needs to be taken out of humanity. As a human race, we're fighting in wars in combat situations. It's still very much part of how we deal with issues. We resort to violence. That's how it's done. And everything comes down to fighting for territory and fighting for who's the head honcho. That's exactly what we're seeing, except that now people make money off of it [in NHL hockey], which in turn implies that the people making money off of it don't want it [fighting] to go away because it sells tickets.

Lisa strongly believes that violence will forever be part of the game. She assumed that it would take an increase in the number of serious injuries or for a famous hockey player to become severely injured for potential change to be considered. As an example, she stated that "if Sydney Crosby becomes a quadriplegic, then I guarantee you that it'll come to the NHL's attention. But it'll take a high profile player to be hurt due to violence for everyone to look at it". For this reason, parents believe that a change needs to occur within the professional game for it to effectively impact the youth levels. They revealed that unfortunately people look up to professional leagues and/or the highest level of competition for guidance and direction, making it difficult for youth sports to compete against such strong and primary influences.

In the same manner, many young hockey hopefuls also use NHL players as role models, which some parents revealed can be an issue, depending on the type of players they choose to follow. Are they choosing to idolize a strong defenceman, a top goal scorer, or an enforcer whose main responsibility is to instigate fights? Considering that some children have NHL "goons" (players that are known as on-ice enforcers and/or fighters) as role models, Grant Webster wonders if parents realize the potential impact it may have on their son's behaviours. He believes that parents have a responsibility to guide their children in the

right direction, which also implies influencing who their role models are. According to Lisa Webster, “hockey is such a big part of our national culture. It’s our identity. It’s what Canadian hockey is all about. The heroes of the sport are what society adheres to, whether it’s appropriate for young hopefuls or not.” Nevertheless, Lisa feels that too much emphasis is placed on the NHL and the dreams of becoming a NHL player, which is why youth hockey seems to have become an arena for frequent disruptive, sometimes even violent, behaviours both on and off the ice.

Parental Conduct in Youth Hockey: “Look Before You Leap.”

Parents adamantly expressed their disappointment with regards to the issue of parental misconduct in the youth hockey world. Bluntly, Sheryl Allen revealed that she is disgusted by how some parents have chosen to behave when within the arena walls. She cannot help but think “my God, get a life”. Lisa Webster rationalizes it by explaining that “hockey is our national sport, so it makes people go insane. It really does.” Sheryl further elaborated by explaining how the behaviours of the parents can be partly blamed on the fact that when there is violence or a certain amount of aggression in the game, it will bring out the worst in everybody: “It breeds. People feed off of that energy. It’s not like you’ll get a brawl in competitive swimming or jazz class.” Parent Grant Webster believes that when it comes to sports, parents are crazy in nature. According to him, people are naturally competitive. He says he has convinced himself to believe that because otherwise, the alternative would be that parents are completely crazy.

Defining Parental Misconduct

Parent Jeff Cohen would not want to bring his Mom and Dad to some hockey games. If he did, he would make sure to choose his seats and/or spectatorship companions wisely.

There would be certain seats that he would try to avoid. As for himself, he typically sits with friends and admits that he carefully analyzes his seat selection. He acknowledges however that it is not always their parents creating chaos; sometimes, it is the other team's parents. His wife Joanne revealed how much of an eye-opener it would be if people could see themselves. Moreover, she stated that what bothers her most about some parents' behaviours is that it is a reflection of everyone on the team, whether they like it or not. As a group of parents, they are representative of the team and the association. Hence, the behaviours of a few parents make an overall statement about all of them. She explains that hockey truly has the ability to bring out the worst in people. As an example, she knows people who play hockey who are the nicest guys off the ice but as soon as they put skates on, they become "idiots". She stated:

It's ridiculous. Like how can parents get so caught up with the game that it makes such a big difference to them that they'd be willing to hurt somebody? I think you've got to be able to watch the game and walk away without making it so personal. They make it as if it's a big personal attack on them and they've got to get even or they've got to have the last word. I don't understand. I enjoy hockey but I don't take it personal.

Parent Tom Smith concisely defined misconduct as any type of behaviour that makes him feel uncomfortable and/or embarrassed. It is when people lose sight that it is only hockey, that it is only a game, and that they are only children. He explained that he gets embarrassed when a parent loses his cool in the stands and he does not like being near them when that happens. His wife Alison agreed. She tries to ignore it but it is obviously not easy. However, Tom confided that sometimes he does think it is humorous as well. For his family, he explained that hockey is simply a social outlet; he personally likes coming to the rink, socializing with other parents, while seeing his son play a game that he loves. So when he sees behaviours that would not be tolerated in real life situations, he finds it entertaining to a certain extent.

In contrast, parent Darrell Nesbitt explained how everyone will define and view misconduct in different ways because it is different for everyone. Whether certain behaviours are right or wrong, he believes that they help the players develop thicker skin. Ken Doyle openly shared that although he thinks that the police should never have to be called in, he strongly believes that he has the right to act the way he wants. It is his son, his money, and his time. He said that it would be no different in any other sport. He also explained that the parents who act that way most likely have children who act similarly on the ice, because they are characteristics that are passed down in families. According to Ken, it is also these types of players, most often than not, who will advance and become the elite athletes. Heart, intensity, and guts are all they know; it is simply in their blood. Peter O'Neill agreed that everyone sees things differently so it becomes difficult to agree on how things should be. Who has the right to ask people to be quiet? Who has the right to make those decisions? Who is right? Larry Harrison expressed that parents are generally "good people", but unfortunately, there are always a few that tarnish everything for the rest of the team. He added that they are also the ones that get the attention and make headlines in the media, for all the wrong reasons.

Lisa Webster admitted how she loved and supported the Hockey Canada campaigns (media commercials from 2002 to 2004), which attempted to highlight inappropriate parental behaviours in minor hockey. According to her, the average person was affected by them. Most likely, after viewing those ads, people wondered if they ever looked so ridiculous: "It was a wake-up call for sure". For her, the theme that stuck with her was "it's their game". Hence, every time she feels herself getting caught up in the moment, she reminds herself that it is in fact their game. Being passionate about hockey, it is easy to get "sucked into the

action”. She explained that it can be confusing to know where spectatorship ends and where unacceptable starts. Retrospectively however, Lisa does not believe that the ads necessarily helped the individual they were ultimately directed towards. In other words, the ones who should be reflecting on the message and content of the ads probably do not think that the ads are geared towards them. She added: “It’s like they feel completely justified in their behaviour, which is lunacy. That’s what it is. They feel justified. And their kids are like the best thing since slice bread when really you just want to sit them down.” In a similar view, although Sheryl Allen thought the messages designed by Hockey Canada were eye-opening, they were not received by the people for whom they were initially designed. She explained that the people who behave inappropriately will always behave in such a manner:

They’re that type of individual. They’re probably like that in various situations, in every situation. Whether it’s hockey or whether it’s fighting for something with the school, that’s who they are. They’re just not my type of people to begin with. I love people that are passionate about something and I don’t mind a little anger if you’re fighting for something. But when it’s distorted, I don’t get it. Like I would want somebody to sit down with me and say ‘get a grip here Sheryl’. So I don’t know what their causes are but there’s definitely something deeper than what we see. It always goes back to the kids though. They pay the price and some parents don’t get it.

Parent Jeff Cohen also revealed that he has little tolerance for parents who are always losing their tempers and/or complaining about something (i.e., officials, line-mates, coaches). He added that:

It’s amazing how parents have such tunnel vision for their son or their team. Some parents actually think that little Johnny is going to the NHL. They may not admit it but that’s kind of the way they approach it. So, if he doesn’t get this ice time, it could possibly affect his career. Maybe I’m a little older now and I’ve been through it with the four kids but I realize that the chances of making it to the big leagues are unbelievable. It’s really, really small. When you think of all of the kids that we’ve played against over the years, year after year, and none of them are good enough to make it. So you learn with time to look at the big picture.

Todd Allen wonders where the notion of “letting kids play” disappeared to. Jeff Cohen agreed that some parents are much too tough on their children, and in retrospect, noted that he does not socialize with those types of people. They obviously share different outlooks, some of which definitely clash with his personal views. He knows of some parents who are constantly coaching and criticizing their sons, even away from the arena. He assumes that if they behave in such manners at the rink, then they are probably like that in other areas as well. In order to describe parental misconduct, parents provided examples of behaviours and/or typical incidents that they consider as inappropriate within the youth hockey environment, which are further discussed.

Abusing Officials

One of the examples of parental misconduct echoed by most parents consisted of referee abuse. Parents explained how crazy behaviour towards the referees, including shouting, yelling, swearing, and taunting are all considered abuse. Gail Connelly understands that it is easy to get caught up in the moment when a bad call is made, but she realizes that officials would never change their initial decision: “It is what it is”. Lisa Webster pointed out how when a call is made, it should be accepted. She has little tolerance for parents who “trash-talk” officials when they are unhappy with the on-ice decisions. She revealed how it becomes “open season” for the poor officials and it is for those reasons that she feels there is such a turnover and shortage of certified officials. Although she thinks that officiating could be a potential part-time employment for many teenagers, it would never be one that she would promote to her 14 year old son:

Would I ever recommend it? Not a chance. People who heckle the officials should be tossed out immediately. As a parent, I couldn't imagine being told that I'm no longer allowed to watch my child play hockey because I can't behave myself. It's essentially what needs to be said. It's completely unacceptable. We would be appalled if we

looked at ourselves or watched how we are in that area. We would never be that way anywhere else. It's fascinating to me. It really is. It's so sad and kind of tragic at the same time too. In hockey it's allowed and it's okay. But it's not okay. But not enough people are saying it's not okay.

Todd Allen stated that it is natural for people to react to some of the referee's calls or on-ice mishaps. He believes that it is one thing to shout "go" or groan "come on" but he draws the line when the shouting turns to criticism such as "why did you do that?" or "what were you thinking?" Sheryl Allen added:

I don't like it when parents yell at the refs. Again, some of it is part of hockey. But when the kids hear it, they become a little nuts. They feed off the parents in the stands. Why would you want to be a ref? The referees are not paid big bucks. And if you don't have a ref, you don't have a game.

When providing examples of referee abuse, many parents hinted at the incident that happened with Darrell Nesbitt at the February tournament when he confronted the officials after a game in which his son was thrown out. Most people agreed that he crossed the line and should never have done what he did. Even though there was no physical contact, parents wondered what he was trying to do. Some emphasized how the situation could have taken a turn for the worse had bystanders not intervened. Todd Allen wonders what would have happened had he and Dale not intervened, and he suspects the outcome would have made national headlines. Moreover, some parents highlighted that the situation also gave the team a bad name and it is not a reputation you want to be known for. Although this incident may have slotted itself alone on one extreme of the continuum of parental behaviours, a few fathers were known to constantly voice their opinions in the stands. Unless the call was in favour of the team, often the usual suspects would react.

Todd Allen recalled a game in the February tournament when Ken Doyle, who had enjoyed a few alcoholic beverages throughout the day, was repeatedly yelling "hit him" from

the stands even though it was a no-hitting tournament. Todd admitted that the first time he shouted, the fathers surrounding Ken initially laughed it off. Eventually however, the fathers no longer thought it was humorous and Wayne, the head coach, even turned to them from the bench with a look that Todd described as “keep quiet”. Finally, Peter O’Neill told Ken “to cool it”. Another time, during a game midway through the season, Shelley O’Neill sat with her 10 year old daughter in the stands. Unfortunately, Ken, who was standing behind them, spent a lot of energy cursing and swearing at the referees. Shelley said that Ken was “using the word ‘fuck’ every second or third word”, so she eventually turned to him and told him to be quiet because there were small children nearby. He was apparently angry at her comment and moved further down, but did not stop. Michelle Peterson explained that his behaviour was deplorable, especially when there were children who could hear him. Her outlook is: “Would you do that at your dinner table? If it’s not acceptable there, it isn’t at the rink either”.

Player Zach Allen admitted that when he hears parents yelling in the stands, it can affect his performance on the ice. Even though it is never his own mother or father, it bothers him to listen to the other parents yell at the referees, for example. Although he tries not to pay attention to them, it is hard to ignore them. He explained that most often the parents in the stands are yelling at their own son because they think that he is superior to everyone else. Hence, Zach finds that parents can be selfish and he wished that he could tell them to “shut up”. Teammate Scott Webster added that he can hear parents yell “oh come on ref”, which he finds to be annoying: “I never hear my parents but I hear Gary and Darrell. They won’t shut up. Get a life and close your mouth. I think they’re nutcases. I don’t know if they can ever stop.” Player Tyler Cohen also revealed how he can definitely hear the parents in the stands,

even though he wished he could not. Like his teammates, Tyler does not know why parents feel the need to yell so much during games. He admitted that when he hears it, he rolls his eyes and tries to refocus on the game. Zach stated that if he could change one thing in hockey, it would be to prohibit shouting and yelling from the stands. He suggested that parents could get one warning but would be asked to leave after a second offence.

As stated by parent Cindy Robinson, the referees are part of the game, so parents need to deal with it. Yet, to a certain extent, she believes that yelling is an integral part of the game so that referees know you disagree with some of their calls. Michelle Peterson however refuted that it is not the one or two calls against your team that will make a difference whether your child makes the NHL or not. As a parent, you should think of yourself as a role model. Otherwise, the wrong image is sent to the young players on the ice. Although parent Rob Miller does not think waiting for referees at the arena doors is necessary (referring to the Nesbitt incident), he does believe in “public hanging”. Hence, if the referee did a terrible job, why not let him know? He does not agree with the notion of “referee abuse” and that parents are driving officials away from the sport. In fact, he finds it very difficult to say “poor referees”. He wonders how and when referees are ever held accountable for their actions or lack thereof. According to parent Norm Peterson however, yelling at the officials has become an acceptable part of the game, but one that he does not necessarily agree with. Yet he admits that a discrepancy does in fact exist. Hockey Canada along with other provincial organizations have implemented a “no tolerance” policy on referee abuse as well as codes of conduct for parents, but he says there is nothing in place to evaluate or ensure the effectiveness of such policies.

Overstepping Coaching Boundaries

Evidently, the fact that both coaches, Wayne and Bill, are donating hours and hours to ensure that young children get a chance to play hockey, this commitment should provide them a safe haven from rude and demanding parents. Joanne Cohen stated that she has little tolerance for parents who try to coach from the stands or who curse the coaches' decisions. Parents also believe that showing disrespect towards the coaches is completely unacceptable and rather absurd, considering they are volunteering their time. Sheryl Allen explained:

These guys are giving up their time. They don't even have kids on the team. Look at how much time they're giving to our children. It's amazing. I don't want that job. But, they have taken on the roles and I think it's wonderful. It's volunteer and it's for the good of the kids.

Frank Robinson discussed discontent when parents step over the boundaries of the coach. The coaches were chosen for a reason and parents need to let coaches be coaches. For example, there is no need for parents to approach coaches in the lobby or continuously seek reassurance from them. He explained that he respected the staff this season because they established those strict boundaries from day one. In contrast, Frank also thinks that he has the right to provide his son Mitch with coaching feedback. It is one of his responsibilities as a father. Other parents thought that coaching and providing negative comments from the stands were inappropriate and considered misconduct. Shelley O'Neill believes that parents are especially critical when their own sons are not strong or skilled enough, so they try to compensate for them. It becomes difficult when you have parents who have previously coached or think that they can coach. Cindy Robinson explained that parents need to be supportive but not critical from the sidelines.

Pressuring Young Players

For some parents, parental misconduct in hockey also includes the amount of pressure parents put on their sons. Larry Harrison revealed that he dislikes it when children put undue pressure on themselves because that is when you have to wonder who it is that the child is playing for. Parents included the following scenarios as examples of pressuring their sons: Disrupting your child's development, being overcritical of your child's performance, and/or publicly humiliating your child. Sadly, Michelle Peterson recalled the incident when Frank Robinson walked out of the arena while his son Mitch was still playing. She was at a loss for words as to how a parent could ever feel so attached to a game that he could leave his own son behind. It sets a very low bar of moral conduct.

For Colleen Forsyth, hockey is a recreational game regardless of the level or the age group. Jeff Cohen revealed how some parents may say "come on Johnny, you should've had that", when little Johnny's parents are sitting right there. This in turn creates tension within the group of parents. Typically, Jeff argued, his or her own child is not any better than any of the other players, and may actually be one of the weakest. He admitted that he is probably guilty of perhaps thinking or saying it to the person next to him, when he probably should not have. Sheryl Allen thinks that there is one parent on the team who is constantly complaining about other players on the team: "[Ken] will rip your kid apart if you ask him his opinion. [He] is crude and wild but he makes me laugh though. I'll tell him 'you're out of line there buddy'." She also stated that Gary Whyte is another parent who always seems to have something negative to say, which is why she avoids engaging in conversations with him. She also purposely looks to sit as far as possible from him in the stands: "if he's too close, I'll move".

Todd Allen mentioned how a couple years ago, one parent was really loud and was yelling all the time. When he asked his son if he could hear the yelling from the ice surface, Zach said “it just becomes background noise”, that he tunes out because it was so continuous. Zach has told his father that he is thankful that he does not yell in the stands. Todd further explained that through his coaching experience, he knows that when people are yelling instructions, 90% of the time the players cannot hear you. It would be like yelling at the television when you are watching it at home: “It has the same effect. It doesn’t do anything.” Rob Miller however could not disagree more. He explained that if you are yelling at your own child, it is not as bad. You have the right to hold him accountable, especially if it is at the ‘AA’ level. For reasons such as this, Colleen Forsyth thinks Rob could be the “poster boy” for misconduct. She explained that when someone does not put their child’s best interest and safety first, only for their own stupidity, it can be considered parental negligence. Don Barker also revealed that Rob takes it too far. He is confident that Rob must go at it hard with his son Corey when he gets in the car. Don admitted not doing anything however to rectify the situation. He has made comments to him, more jokingly than anything, but with hopes that his point registers with Rob. Tom Smith explained that it can be easy to add pressure on your child, simply because you focus on him during games. But he explained that parents need to face reality. According to him, a lot of parents choose not to for fear of being disappointed that their child is not as strong as they had perceived and/or that they are not going to make it into the big leagues. He believes that many parents are looking at their son’s potential through rose-colored glasses.

Comparing and Competing

According to Lisa Webster, the issue of parental misconduct goes beyond and deeper than that because of the implicit competition within the team. In fact, Lisa believes that there is a whole other layer, because essentially all of the players on the team are competing against each other for a spot, and they have from the very start of the season. Parents, who may not even like each other, play nice. She feels that the whole situation is very hypocritical. In the car, parents will tell their sons that “you have to knock little Johnny out of that spot because you’re the only other right winger and that’s your spot. You have to claim it”. That is the message that Lisa believes parents ultimately send their children: “We are nice on the surface but in the end, we don’t like each other”. She adds that the whole environment can create some sort of disillusion.

Her husband Grant recalled another example earlier this season on his son Derek’s team (‘Atom AA’). During the December tournament, Derek’s team was also competing (within a lower age division). Typically a defenceman, Derek was moved to the forward position and ended up being the top scorer of the team. Needless to say, he had a really successful weekend, which caused some tension among the parents. As a result, some parents were quite upset that Derek had played so well. Grant revealed how parents were obviously jealous because it was as though Derek stole somebody else’s fame. “It was odd. I couldn’t get over it. One parent in particular avoided me. In reality, I was delightfully surprised that Derek was getting all of this attention. I didn’t expect it.” The Websters consider themselves fortunate to have made some real solid friendships at all levels within their children’s teams. They expressed that as they get more experience, they are able to weed out the parents who are there for the wrong reasons. They also acknowledged that parents mistreat each other.

Lisa explained that the difficulty lies in the fact that you get attached to the team and its players, so things are vocalized when they should remain silent:

When people drink and there's that little voice that says 'don't say that out loud'. Well, when you walk into the arena it's like it shuts off those little voices. The ones that say 'that should be your inside voice'. It's like people's inhibitions no longer exist for some reason.

Perceptions of Parental Misconduct: "Old Habits Die Hard"

At the onset of the season, parents were required to sign a code of conduct, as were the players. Although a great initiative, Lisa Webster cannot help but wonder what the purpose is considering there is no enforcement. She questioned whose responsibility it is to follow-up: the local association, the provincial organization, or Hockey Canada. As such, Lisa expressed that she does not know how the hockey environment will ever change or if possible solutions even exist. In fact, she believes that it may simply be up to the parents to stand up together in a game and say "you need to be quiet now". It would almost be necessary that a group of people jump on the bandwagon to target particular individuals and/or inappropriate behaviours. Sheryl Allen revealed that out-of-control parents should simply be banned from arenas. It would be unfortunate not to be able to watch your own child compete, but it would be a good start at weeding out inappropriate behaviours. Todd Allen explained how the Darrell Nesbitt incident during the February tournament was probably the most extreme incident that he has faced within the hockey environment, in all of his years. He described the situation as being in the right place, at the right time, in terms of being able to help calm Darrell down. Sheryl reflected how:

The cops came in. A kids' game could've resulted in having a criminal record. How would that have affected his job? Darrell is a big, big man. [Todd] said Darrell almost looked possessed. His eyes were huge. It was a little bit of a blur to Todd because adrenaline kicked in and everything happened so fast. Apparently Todd wasn't even really sure what caused him to become so aggressive. What could anger him so

much? He couldn't figure that out. What scared him though were the ramifications if anything would've happened.

Parental Behaviours within the Team

Parents agreed that they have an overall great group of parents; however, the parents questioned the behaviours of a handful parents on the team: Ken Doyle, Gary Whyte, Darrell Nesbitt, Rob Miller, and Bruce Forsyth. Ken's behaviour was described as poor, even though he has apparently calmed down in recent years. Grant Webster explained how his first encounter with Ken involved standing up to him and telling him to leave: "I kicked him out of the [dressing] room during tryouts. [Ken's son] Trevor was hurt and Ken was telling him to suck it up. He was saying: 'if you want to make this team, you suck it up'. Poor Trevor was bawling." Grant explained that he was shocked that a parent could care more about his son making a team than his son crying because he was hurt, which is why Grant told Ken to leave. He admits however that they now get along great and there was never another incident. Grant believes that Ken has learned to walk away and give himself space.

Two of the most vocal parents were the team's coaches from the previous year. Gary Whyte and Darrell Nesbitt always stood near each other during games and their voices carried throughout the arena. Although Gary was, at times, very positive and attempted to start team cheers, parents considered these two as a "tag team", whereby when one starts, the other follows. Hence, Gary and Darrell had a reputation for constantly yelling and shouting, whether it was to complain about an officiating call or to coach from the sidelines. Joanne Cohen confided that when they start being obnoxious, she automatically rolls her eyes. She does not understand how they can think that other parents in the stands want to listen to them all game long. She cannot help but wonder "why do they have so much to say?" She also

expressed that Gary's comments are unfair and selfish considering that his own son is one of the weakest players on the ice.

Rob Miller was also identified as being too intense and competitive. Although he was not known to publicly criticize the referees or coaching staff, he seemed to place a tremendous amount of pressure on his son Corey. According to Grant Webster, Rob is ruining Corey's overall development as a player. He provides him with incorrect instructions, coaches him from the sidelines, and intimidates him from up in the stands. With no experience as a player himself, Rob has set high expectations for his son, which Grant believes are unrealistic. Despite Corey being one of the smallest players on the ice, Rob expected him to "play big", much to his detriment. Grant explained that a small player cannot play like everyone else, but can definitely adjust his game to focus on his other strengths. He confided that Corey's (and Rob's) style of play could get him killed; He is going to get hit repeatedly and his opponents know how to counterattack his predictability.

Bruce Forsyth, Joel's father, tended to go unnoticed as he rarely yelled at the referee or overtly created any scenes, however, his outlook on youth hockey and his son's ability was consistently negative. Sheryl Allen admitted that she refrains from telling Bruce how well Joel played because he will refute it. If the team scores a goal, Bruce wanted five. If Joel made a nice pass, it should have been harder. If Joel is the hardest working player on the team, then there should be more results to prove it. As such, parents believe that Bruce's negative influence on Joel is not healthy.

The parents were realistic about the presence of these fathers on the team; they agreed that there will always be incidences that occur within the world of hockey simply because every team has their select few individuals who make the experience a little less enjoyable.

Over the years, parents have been on teams where some parents take the game to a new yet undesirable level by yelling, cursing, criticizing, and humiliating those involved in the game. According to Lisa Webster, every single team is composed of the same type of people. She explained:

Every parent group has the same type of people. You've got your hockey Moms who are there just for their kids and they really have no idea about the game, which can be worse because they just get caught up in the culture and they start behaving the way they see it. Then, you've got the hockey Dads who have never played hockey and they're the most critical. They have all the opinions in the world but they're also the most insecure. They know nothing about the game, they've never played it, but they want their kid to be in there. This is their time to shine, so it becomes so important. Finally, you have, what I call, the 'real hockey people'. They've either played at some meaningful hockey in their life or they have more than one child in hockey. So their perspective is greater. They're usually quieter, stay out of trouble, and they usually find each other. There's always a small group of Dads and they'll be the quiet ones conferring in the lobby about what they thought of the game.

Jeff Cohen also expressed that the same issues usually arise on every team, so it becomes an expected part of the game. For the most part, he believes that through all of his four boys' hockey involvement, he and his wife Joanne have been fortunate to have been part of great groups of parents but recalled a time when two mothers got into a fight. He explained it as being very surreal because the mother on his team was a kind and quiet woman, but she appeared to "lose it" for a few minutes. Her son had hit another player and was getting a penalty. The parents on the other team were visibly upset and were threatening her son. As a result, she got up and yelled something at them, which is when another woman from the opposing team became involved. Jeff remembers how the two mothers ended up being right up in each other's faces. This leads Jeff to believe that all of the arenas should have separate bleachers, on opposite sides in order to avoid such situations.

Making Sense of Parental Misconduct

Parents each shared their own reasoning as to why some parents behave the way they do. For some, it may be due to pure frustration. Joanne Cohen views it as being (or becoming) frustrated over situations that they cannot control (i.e., coaching philosophies or referees' decisions). Similarly, parental misconduct may be a result of high levels of stress in their life, or people may simply be tired and/or having a bad day. As an example, Lisa Webster said that after a hard day at work, it can be tiring to drive for an hour and a half to the "middle of nowhere" only for your son to be "dogging it out on the ice" and then head back home. She explained that it is easy for parents to question why they bother to stay committed when their son's effort and intensity are deplorable. In addition, Lisa further suggested that some parents may simply be bored and have no interests of their own, so their focus is fully dedicated to their son's hockey, which might also imply that emotions and energies become pent up with no release outlet.

Jeff Cohen revealed that parents may also be living vicariously through their child's athletic achievements, and so they become even more attached to the game and its outcome. Lisa Webster suspects that some parents have a tendency to somehow link their child's achievements to their own identity; parents wrongfully connect their son's performance to their personal parenting competencies. Most parents agreed that it is easy to see how people tend to try to "fit" within the group based on the skill level of their child. Most believe that having an "all-star" child allows the parents to be more confident within the social circle. In other words, parents will usually gravitate towards the mother and/or father of team's superstar and top scorer, just like children in a playground tend to gravitate towards the "popular" ones. Finally, some parents believe that individual traits can account for personal

behaviour; parents may act in an inappropriate manner simply because of the type of person they are. Or, as Jeff Cohen said, some people are “simply like that”. He argues that some people find fault with everything, from referees to coaches to their children. Consequently, he presumes that these people also frequently encounter negative experiences with colleagues, family members, or other drivers on the road. Todd Allen adamantly believes that these people would be the ones who could potentially make daily newspaper headlines for road-rage incidents. He speculates that these people may share a negative outlook, rather than looking at the bigger picture. They tend to be narrow-minded in the sense that their child can do no wrong. Jeff revealed how:

All they see is little Johnny out there and what’s surrounding him. If someone touches Johnny, then it should’ve been a penalty. But if Johnny trips somebody, then it’s ‘oh come on ref’. I am totally amazed at how blind people are sometimes. It’s incredible. Give your head a shake. A lot of times, I wish I had it on video. Little Johnny yanked him down but they didn’t see it that way. It’s really weird how parents can be that way. And I’m probably guilty of it too to a point but I try to look at it rationally.

Sheryl Allen explained however that it is unfair to assume that those personalities are only found in hockey. Rather, there are, and always will be, “yahoos” in every walk of life. She estimates that those people represent only about 30% of the population but unfortunately, it is those 30% that society hears about. Although parents are in disbelief with some of the other parents’ behaviours, such as yelling at the players or cursing the referees, very few of them ever stand up for their right to enjoy a peaceful hockey game. Jeff Cohen explained how he has been very tempted on some occasions to do “something about it” but admits that he does not think he would have the guts to follow through. Every now and again he has witnessed situations where parents have spoken up and told other people to “lighten up” or “knock it off”. Joanne Cohen thinks that people have become accustomed to such behaviours, which unjustifiably gives the impression that it is “allowed”. People choose to behave in

certain ways because there is nothing to prevent them from doing so. In retrospect, she noted that except for unacceptable behaviours towards the referees, there is not much that can be done and she questions “what type of consequences can be imposed for poor parenting?”

Parents’ Reflections on their Behaviours

Parents reflected on their own behaviours and revealed times when they felt that they had behaved inappropriately. For the most part, their answers seemed honest and upfront, based on my observations made throughout the season. Michelle Peterson explained she has obviously grown over the years as a hockey parent. She is definitely more conscious of her words and her behaviours and she no longer takes it as seriously as she sees no point in doing so. Gail Connelly too admitted that over the years, she has realized and learned how to keep her foot out of her mouth. Hockey for her is only her sons’ passions, which she supports. As such, she does not feel attached by any means to the results of the games or the number of goals her son scores. Her expectations are quite low which therefore influences her outlook on the game. Likewise, Linda Barker also believed that she has always been well-behaved and has no regrets about any of her behaviours throughout the season. As a first timer at the ‘AA’ level, Linda agreed that the higher the level of hockey, the more politics are involved, which then leads to more people finding issues to complain about, from coaching to officiating to performing. Additionally, Alison Smith did not recall any times where she thought she may have crossed the line. Due to the fact that she finds it embarrassing when other parents act inappropriately, it is always a personal reminder for her on how she wants to be portrayed.

Other parents acknowledged times where they may have criticized other teammates, disrespected the referees, and/or taunted opponents. For example, Norm Peterson admitted

that he probably yelled comments when he should have remained silent. He realizes that it always hurts more than it helps, which is why he always questions his actions by pondering “who are you doing this for?” Norm said that after yelling during a recent game, he immediately noticed that he was reacting with childish anger in an inappropriate manner. Peter O’Neill admitted that he has never been one to yell things like “piece of shit” to anyone (either a referee or player), but he did his share of cheering for big hits or “boo’ing” bad calls. He believes it is part of the game and said that he would act the same way at a NHL game. Peter stated that he will always be the first one up cheering when there is a fight. “How can he not?” On the other hand, Dale Chapman revealed that he found himself frustrated throughout the season for different reasons, which is not ideal considering it is only a game. Fred Connelly recalled acting inappropriately, but said he had been a little hard on his son Matthew once or twice about his performances. Fred says that he gets upset that Matthew does not work harder off the ice to improve his stick-handling.

For Bruce Forsyth, he questioned whether “speaking the truth” was considered inappropriate behaviour. If it was, then he had crossed the line many times. He often “trash-talked” the coaching staff and criticized his son’s abilities, but he does not see anything wrong with doing so. When Ken Doyle reflected on his own behaviour this season, his response was that he did not think he crossed the line in any way. His reasoning was that he did not have to apologize to anyone this year, which is better than previous seasons. He said that, in the past, he has gone back to people to say he was sorry. He explained however that the issue is never about what was said (i.e., the content) because he meant what he said. But, he has had to apologize for “just being stupid”.

For three fathers on the team, there were discrepancies between their personal reflections on their behaviours and the ones that were observed. Rob Miller was one father who was constantly criticized for publicly humiliating his son and pressuring him to always work harder. When asked if he thought he had perhaps crossed the line this season, he revealed that he yelled at the referees a few times when he probably should not have. He realized that it is not up to him to hold the referees accountable because the players have more impact and more weight than parents do. Nonetheless, he expects his son Corey to be respectful of the referees, especially when he is the team's captain. For Rob, that was the extent of inappropriate. He did not mention the times he called his son "an idiot" or "stupid" in the stands, coached his son from the sidelines, and/or pressured his son to cover up injuries and continue to play in unhealthy situations.

Parents Darrell Nesbitt and Frank Robinson also failed to mention situations where they may not have made the best decisions. Frank recalled two specific occasions where he acted inappropriately. Both times he had yelled out to his son Mitch really loudly during a game. After the games, he did apologize to his son and they apparently talked about it. He acknowledged that Mitch had worked hard and had tried his best, so he should not have yelled at him. When asked to comment about the time he left Mitch at the rink, he stated that he was frustrated but was not feeling well either. As for Darrell, the extent of his inappropriate actions was that he had not followed the proper procedures when his son Jacob had been injured (early in the season) and had therefore not properly handled the situation. As a result of not being aware of the requirements, he acted in a way that he probably should not have, acknowledging that he created a bigger situation out of his own misunderstanding. However, not once did he hint towards the referee incident during the February tournament.

When questioned, he said that people had made a bigger deal out of the situation and that nothing had happened.

Lisa Webster admitted that she has personally crossed the line at times. Throughout the last 10 years, she has become not only older but wiser. She explained how it was different when they first got involved in the hockey world, especially in “summer hockey”, which consists of teams comprised of ‘AA’ players from around the region who travel to tournaments to compete against other teams throughout the spring and summer seasons. Teams are handpicked by the coaches, there are no tryouts, and association boundaries are non-existent. Their son Scott was only eight years old when coaches started calling them at home attempting to recruit Scott for their summer teams. Without knowing much about summer hockey, Lisa eventually became somewhat wrapped up in the culture, due to the fact that people were specifically choosing her son, rather than him having to go through a routine tryout selection process. Lisa remembers thinking that it was pure insanity, yet she also became very competitive and panicked about which team her son should play on. She realizes now that when she becomes attached to what is happening, then that is when her emotions start fluttering. She confesses to respectfully confronting coaches and mistreating referees. She knows that she has gotten caught up in the crowd action and has said things that she probably should not have said. She explained:

It can be an automatic response. The times where I’m more of a pain is when I’m challenging. If there’s something in the system that’s not right, they’ll hear about it from me. I think that even though we are volunteers, we are accountable. If for example during the tryout process decisions are made for political reasons, I’ll be in the Association’s face saying ‘you’re accountable for this’. You’re sentencing a whole team to an entire year of misery because you want so-and-so to be on the team because you want his Dad to be the coach, yet he’s rated as a weak goalie. It’s not right and it’s not fair to the kids.

In the same manner, Todd Allen remembered a time this season when he was sarcastically encouraging the officials. During a game in the September tournament, the team was being inundated with penalties. He recalled how at one point, the team had three players in the penalty box and the referee was now calling an additional one. So Todd stood up to cheer and applaud the referee. It was only after the game when his son Zach told him that “it wasn’t cool” that he realized how it was completely inappropriate. For her part, Sheryl Allen does not recall a time where she misbehaved. She described an incident where Zach was hurt and she ran over to see if he was alright. Todd had also been watching the game and she noticed the fear in his eyes. Retrospectively, she admits that she may have overreacted but she blames it on being somewhat shaken up. That was the only time she thought “why did I do that?” For the most part, Sheryl considers herself to be typically calm in the stands. She has turned around and told other parents to be quiet. She has for example told Ken Doyle to “give it a rest” when she was annoyed with his constant negativity. She was also embarrassed this year with the parents at the game in January, when the team was losing terribly and their group of parents completely lost their cool at the referees, which is a part of hockey Sheryl cannot tolerate. She stated:

Our parents were all over the referees. It was constant, every call. Kids need to have some faith in those leaders out there, but they start to think that they can blame the refs for their bad performances. Everybody always wants to blame the refs when things don’t go right. Nobody ever wants to take ownership.

Additionally, Joanne Cohen confided that her inappropriate behaviours would consist of her own personal thoughts. It is the ideas that go through her mind that she believes are unnecessary. For example, during a game a few years ago, there was a woman on the other team who would not stop yelling. Joanne was annoyed and frustrated and recalled how she had become all worked up and was focusing on the woman rather than on her son’s hockey

game. But Joanne does not think her behaviour has ever crossed any respectable boundary. Similarly, her husband Jeff believes that he has never misbehaved, but admits that he has said things to some people when he should have bit his tongue. As an example, he has talked about another player or a coach to other parents on the team. Although very innocent in nature, he acknowledges the old rule of thumb is that “if you wouldn’t say it in front of them, you shouldn’t say it behind their back either”. He also explained that he has yelled at coaches and referees, but never to the point where he would lose it or have any intention of engaging in a physical altercation. He is aware that his initial feelings are somewhat biased and impulsive, which is why he is always able to quickly collect his composure and take the matter more lightly. Jeff did explain how he learned his lesson early on about sportspersonship and perception. He was playing baseball and he over-reacted. It is a story that still haunts him to this day and admittedly a point in his athletic career that he is the least proud of:

I remember one time, I was playing baseball and I was the back-catcher. It was playoffs and it was a really close game, so I was really tensed. Our guy was rounding third and he was coming to the home plate. I was thinking ‘is he going to make it?’ There was a throw to the plate and our guy slid in. Soon after, the umpire made the call and I went crazy. He called him ‘safe’ and I went ballistic. I was just so wound-up. I couldn’t believe it. Someone said ‘Jeff, Jeff, it’s okay. He said safe’.

Jeff admitted that it did not take long for him to be embarrassed by his actions. He had simply lost it, which is something he had never done before. As such, he questioned his motives and the possible reasons for behaving like he had. He figures he was completely invested in the game and probably had a mental break for about 30 seconds: “Why did I do that? It’s out of my nature. As an athlete, I can be pretty intense. I’m competitive and I want to win but I don’t ever remember losing it like that. I was so overcome by it.” Jeff further explains however that he can honestly say he has never lost his cool with any of his children

and their sports. As for Grant Webster, he does not feel that he has ever crossed the line and he has no regrets when it comes to his actions. He revealed that there was not one time this season where he became so attached to the game that he acted out of line. In contrast, he explained that it is simply not in him: “It just doesn’t mean enough to me. I’m probably more passionate about the game than anybody else there. I just love this game. But bottom line is that I love my kids more. It’s just hockey. Get a grip.” His wife Lisa explained that over the years, parents become attuned to such negative behaviours and tend to find ways to cope with them. Lisa revealed that hockey has taught her a lot about herself: “It’s easy to see how you can become crazy. For some reason, hockey gives good people a license to turn into insane people. Yelling at the refs, tearing down volunteers, or complaining or criticizing, all exist within me.” She added that although hockey can bring out the best in people, it also has the potential to bring out the worst. She understands “crazy hockey parents”:

It lives inside of me, so I can’t judge them. It’s inside of me as well. I could easily be pulled over to that side. If my hormones were out of whack or God knows what, I could very easily cross over. But I just don’t think that’s acceptable, so I don’t. I bite my tongue and hold myself back. But I can definitely understand it. We’re just passionate about hockey. It’s in our culture. So what can you do?

Parental Roles in Promoting Sportspersonship: “Practice What You Preach”

According to parents, they believe that they play a major role in developing sportspersonship and fair-play attitudes in their children. Simply put, Lisa Webster said “I have a huge role”. She believes that fair play and sportspersonship are values that will allow her children to be successful in life. Yet, children can only learn these values if they are displayed by their parents:

Kids do what they see and not what we say. They’ll imitate what they see in us. So we have to keep ourselves in check and behave in ways that are sportsmanlike. So it’s to be their primary advocate. Parents should be the main influence, which isn’t always a good thing for kids.

Todd Allen recalled an expression one of his uncles always said: “Say little when you lose and less when you win”. Hence, he has always tried his best to instil that in his children. In reality, he believes it is all about keeping things in perspective: Confidence is a fine line and it is important to be humble about it. He added:

I am not a fan when players score goals and showboat all the way back to their bench. So, when Zach was playing forward and scoring goals, I always said ‘act professionally and responsibly’. It’s funny to say act professionally when they’re kids, but when you score a goal or something good happens, don’t carry on like a meathead. There’s no need for it.

Sheryl Allen attributes her son Zach’s sportspersonship to early initiatives but it was not always easy. She remembered one situation that happened in one of Zach’s first seasons in hockey. Although Sheryl did not see it, a coach on the other team told her that Zach had kicked another player on the ice. As such, she discussed the incident with Zach immediately after in order for him to understand that his action was completely out of bounds. She revealed that Zach does indeed have a temper, when it is unleashed. In the past, he lost his cool on the ice, which resulted in numerous penalties. Evidently, she knows that penalties are part of the game; however, they were happening too frequently for her. Fortunately the coaches dealt with the situation, which allowed Sheryl to simply reinforce it: “Hockey is an aggressive game and if you play aggressively, you’ll get some penalties. But you have to monitor that.” Lisa Webster explained how if there is a situation that she feels is unacceptable, as parents it is their responsibility to address it. If she sees one of her sons doing something on the ice where she thought they crossed the line, it will be communicated to them. They need to know that it is utterly unacceptable to act in particular ways. She stated that her children know that when unacceptable behaviours continue to repeat themselves once they have been addressed, then there are definitely consequences.

Joanne Cohen also believes that parents need to teach their children the rules and ensure that they are obeyed. They also need to demonstrate exemplary behaviours, not only within the world of hockey but in life in general. By no means does Joanne consider herself perfect but she does think she has self-control. She bluntly expressed how she cannot help but judge parents who constantly create inappropriate scenes. For example, although she is aware that certain people may be the nicest people away from the rink, when they start yelling in the stands, she thinks they are “idiots”. According to her husband Jeff, he would feel terrible if ever he was to “lose it” at the rink.

I don't know what kind of reputation I have, but I think I do have a good reputation. I hope I don't blow that. I'm sure that throughout my kids' careers or games, I'm sure there's been the odd time where I've said something stupid and I shouldn't have. If I could pull it back, I would. So maybe I've been a bad influence that way but I think the best way for us to teach sportsmanship is to simply be a decent influence on people.

Essentially, Joanne Cohen feels that children learn how to behave from the people they see. For example, she believes that her son Tyler has learned a lot about sportspersonship from the time he spent at the arena watching his older brothers. Even though Jeff may have taken Hockey Canada's “Speak Out” program¹, which Joanne thinks is a great initiative, the message still needs to be coming from home. As far as sportspersonship, it was something her children were brought up with; “Being a good sport” was emphasized throughout their childhood. She added that she would never want her son to be responsible for intentionally hurting an opponent. She expressed how proud (and thankful) she is that her children know the difference. Her husband Jeff revealed however that he

¹ The “Speak Out” program was designed to increase awareness and prevent harassment, bullying, and abuse in minor hockey across Canada.

would have no problem with his sons using force to protect their teammates, should there be a need for them to do so. He explained:

I definitely would want Tyler or any one of my kids to stand up for their teammates if someone was going after one of their fellow teammates. If Scott [Webster] or Andrew [O'Neill] got a cheap shot, Tyler should definitely step in. Do what you've got to do within reason. Don't hit him over the head with your stick but get in between them. Break it up somehow. Be concerned.

In terms of integrating aggression and/or violence into discussions with their sons, parents clarified that they have never endorsed it. Although most promote having a strong work ethic, none of them have ever suggested that their sons integrate "bad aggression" into their game plan. Some admitted however that they support and promote "good aggression" when it is within the boundaries of the game. For example, Grant Webster will make comments such as "finish your checks" or "you should've taken him at the blue line". He will explain the importance of body checking and ensuring that his sons finish their checks in order to be able to separate their opponent from the puck. He will also instruct them to be right there in their opponent's face. In the same manner, Todd Allen stated that he will tell his son Zach if he made a nice clean hit during the game. Todd reinforces the purpose of the body check and not to focus only on hitting. He explained his approach:

If you get too focused on taking the body and playing the man, you start running around. You then become ineffective. He's finding that he gets into the game a little bit more if he's using his strength, which is one of his best weapons and using it effectively. So I'll encourage him to do it but try to discourage going overboard with it. If the hit is there take it, but don't go looking for it.

Evidently, Todd knows that to be an effective player, Zach must use his body positioning and strength to his advantage. As long as he is not out there chasing opponents and trying to be a monster, Todd hopes that Zach continues to use body checking as a skill of the game. In contrast, both Joanne Cohen and Sheryl Allen stated that they never talk about

the physical aspect of the game. Joanne said that they might say something like “you’ve got to get out there and work hard and make the right hits because that’s part of hockey”. She explained that it would be hard to integrate aggression into their discussions because it is not, or should not be, a planned event. It should not be predictable because if it is, then that is where the concern lies. For Lisa Webster, she finds her role can sometimes be rather difficult as she is often counter-attacking her husband’s vision on aggression:

He’s the Dad. He’s the guy. He’s the ‘yeah Buddy’ and they high-five each other. Then, he’ll say that was a really good hit. You really rocked that guy. So if I find there’s too much emphasis put on it, I’ll get in there and be like ‘okay, except that’s not the point of the game’. You gained possession of the puck right? And they’ll say ‘yes Mom, it’s all about getting the puck...we know’.

Consequently, Lisa explained that her role is then to ensure that father and son do not over-feed the idea of body checking, for fear that potential situations arise. She is responsible for bringing back the perspective of aggression and the purpose of body checking. Similarly, Sheryl Allen revealed that she finds it hard to support her son Zach’s ability to deliver strong body checks. She understands that it is a skill, one that he does well. As a mother however, she does not think she would ever be able to cheer him on. She thinks it is ridiculous that parents in the stands actually cheer and clap when young boys throw their bodies around the ice. For her, there is more to hockey than hitting. She added:

I made that body. So you’ve got to take care of it. I have some ownership on that body. Willingly or not, there are accidents on the ice and people do get hurt. It doesn’t take much. He’s out there because he loves the game. Then play the game. Play what it’s supposed to be.

Nevertheless, Grant Webster explained how people share different opinions about aggression, about what is accepted and what is not. For most, body checking is a great skill that should be used at every opportunity, within the boundaries of the game. Yet, for some parents, protecting your teammates is an unwritten rule that should also be enforced. Hence,

these differing views result in difficult decisions for 12 year old boys. Grant stated that it is the underlying meanings that tend to create grey areas, inner conflicts, and societal pride.

Chapter Summary

In sum, according to parents, the youth hockey culture is one where competition often precedes development and/or enjoyment, yet parents agree this is how it should be at the 'AA' level. Within this culture and as their sons become older, expectations also exist with regards to how the game should be played. Parents, players, and coaches alike believe that aggression and body checking are essential elements of the game. Although it appeared that players on the ice were uneasy about giving and receiving hits, there also appeared to be a common belief that the only way to play hockey is through encouraging, endorsing, and exhibiting a "rough and tough" kind of game. For the most part, fathers applauded big hits, while mothers cringed. Without a doubt however, reactions to aggression were in the eye of the beholder. As such, when the players on this team were the ones instigating, parents often cheered and praised the behaviours, but when the players were the victims, parents believed that the opponents were dirty, other team's coaches unethical, and officials biased. Shouting, criticizing, and belittling officials were frequent occurrences at games, which most parents believe is inappropriate. While parents acknowledged that initial reactions to officials' missed calls are natural, even understandable, constant criticism and/or swearing is not. For these reasons, parents recognize the importance of leading by example and role modeling proper behaviours in order to promote sportspersonship.

In order to understand how parents perceive and deal with aggression in youth hockey, it was important to take into account how parents themselves attribute to, and construct meanings of their situations within the competitive youth hockey environment. It is

through understanding symbols and their meanings that we begin to understand human behaviour (Blumer, 1969). Now that the findings of this study have been discussed, the focus will be shifted to the discussion. Chapter 7 will outline the findings by comparing and contrasting them with previous research in the field of parental involvement and the culture of hockey from a symbolic interactionist perspective.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Hockey is traditionally known as Canadians' favourite pastime (Arnold, 2002; Robinson, 1998), yet somehow, over time, the youth hockey environment has been transformed into a culture that highly imitates a professional business, which Whitson and Gruneau (2006) refer to as a "professionalization of attitudes" (p. 7). According to Robinson (1998), arenas are places where children potentially have the opportunity to learn sport-specific skills, social skills, and life skills. But is this really all they learn? Or do arenas also represent a place where children are pushed to their limits and are required to perform day in and day out? Clearly, the competitive youth hockey environment represents a world where triumphs are celebrated, challenges are overcome, and trying times are omnipresent. It is a culture that has been produced and continuously reproduced by all those involved (e.g., players, parents, coaches, administrators, spectators, officials). In turn, this culture ultimately has the potential to create, embrace, and/or oppose ideologies that exist within it (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the involvement of parents in competitive youth hockey, from a symbolic interactionist perspective. More specifically, the purpose was twofold: to explore how parents create their role within the competitive youth hockey culture, and, to explore how parents perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the hockey environment. The two research questions that helped guide the present study were: "how do parents negotiate their role within the competitive youth hockey environment?" and "how do parents perceive and deal with aggression in youth hockey?" Although much research has focused on the ups and downs that athletes and coaches face during their

seasons, little attention has focused on the complexity of situations that parents encounter within their child's sporting career (Harwood & Knight, 2009a).

In the present study, while parents acknowledged the issues of parental involvement and conduct within the competitive youth hockey culture, they somehow did not recognize themselves as complicitly contributing to its existence. Rather, they projected blame on the conflicting yet prevailing beliefs embedded in the culture of hockey, which often tended to overshadow the fundamentals of youth sport (e.g., enjoyment, physical health, skill development, positive experiences, and so forth). Throughout a season timeline, I was able to immerse myself into the setting in order to shed light on the involvement of parents within the competitive youth hockey environment. By doing so, I observed firsthand the demands and pressures of the sport, relationships and group dynamics, expectations and behaviours, as well as the challenges and tensions. Essentially, I became an "inside observer" of the competitive youth hockey organization.

In order to gain a better understanding of the social construction of hockey, hegemonic ideologies must be considered separately despite their overlapping tendencies (Robidoux, 2001). As such, the overall findings of the present study as they relate to how parents negotiate their role and how they perceive aggression are discussed through four main themes that emerged from the data, which are used to guide and organize this chapter: (a) competitive youth hockey, (b) value of on-ice aggression, (c) gendered representations, and (d) paradoxes of parental involvement. While the previous three chapters presented comprehensive and detailed descriptions, the aim of the current chapter is to acknowledge, uncover, and question specific issues and ideologies rooted within the competitive youth hockey culture from the lens of SI.

Competitive Youth Hockey

The evolution of youth sport programs, including hockey, has resulted in the creation of adult-controlled organizations (Duncan 1997; Fiore, 2003), whereby children, along with their parents, are the product of an entire social system of youth hockey, one that is largely created, organized, and run by adults (Robinson, 1998). According to the Coaching Association of Canada (1997), the impression that youth sport is a miniature version of adult sport is an easy and honest mistake to make: Young athletes, wearing hundreds of dollars worth of equipment, frequently attempt to play a game, created by adult rules, and under the supervision of coaches, officials, and parents. In fact, Gould (2009) contends that the constant attempt to mimic a ‘professional model’ is the most prevalent problem within the youth sport world.

Over a quarter of a century ago, Smith (1975) identified four dominant assumptions that had infiltrated the world of youth sport (as cited in Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 115):

- “Children play sports to entertain adults
- Games and sports for kids must be organized and controlled by adults if they are to be of real value
- Kids are miniature adults
- The real value in sports lies in learning to be a winner, people can be divided into winners and losers, and sport[s are vehicles] to make sure you (or your kids) end up in the right group.”

Based on the findings of the present study, despite our knowledge of child development, it is shocking that Smith’s (1975) assumptions are still dominating the youth hockey culture today, as the demands of youth hockey are remarkably comparable to that of a professional endeavour. Not only were players expected to be at every team function (e.g., practices, games, dryland trainings), they had to arrive by a specific time, typically 45 minutes to an hour before practices and/or games. Team attire was precise and differed based

on the type of function. All of this occurred numerous times a week, much resembling the demands of a fulltime job. This raises the question as to why professional standards have been infused in a league primarily intended for children. In this respect, the following sub-themes are discussed: (a) exclusive commitment, (b) explicit demands, and (c) 'AA' hockey inferences.

Exclusive Commitment

Supporting previous research (Ericsson et al., 1993; Smoll, 1998), most of the young hockey players on the team were initiated to the sport between the ages of five and eight mostly due to their parents' personal interests. By the time they had reached the age of 12, they had been playing hockey for at least four to five seasons, and were now playing at the most competitive level within their age group ('AA'). According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2000), children who tend to solely participate in one sport may be limiting the range of benefits they could gain from playing in a variety of activities, while also facing additional psychological and physical risks from intense training and competition. In one study, Carlson (1993) examined the development of 162 national level athletes and 164 younger talented athletes participating in seven different sports. Through the use of questionnaires and supplementary interviews with the 326 athletes (115 women and 211 men), it was found that several of the athletes were involved in informal sport activities on a regular basis before they were introduced to organized sport. Moreover, a large number of the national-level hockey players in that study had participated in various activities before they enrolled in an organized hockey sport team. Likewise, hockey legend Wayne Gretzky has acknowledged that playing lacrosse as a young child helped him develop into a stronger and physically conscious hockey player (Gretzky, 2001). Rolling out of body checks and

using his upper body to outplay his opponents in lacrosse, became useful skills on the ice for hockey. Finally, Côté and colleagues emphasized the importance for children to engage in a variety of sports and activities during childhood (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2003). The researchers also suggest that early specialization in one specific sport may not necessarily be a prerequisite to becoming an expert athlete in that sport. In fact, they suggest that it may be worthwhile to delay early specialization in order to increase child autonomy and refine a range of motor skills that can eventually be used within the chosen sport.

Although previous research has shown that a diversification of activities is beneficial in the development of talent (Côté & Hay, 2002a; Ericsson et al., 1993), why and how has the competitive youth hockey commitment become such a priority in many children's lives? Findings of the present study contradict the notion that "less is more". After spending a full season with the team, it was obvious that there was little time allotted for players to participate in other activities outside of hockey. Throughout the season, few players managed to taste other interests. For example, one youngster played competitive indoor soccer year-round, another played basketball for his school team, and another attended school wrestling tournaments. As though the competitive hockey involvement was not enough, a handful of players also participated in their school's hockey program, in addition to their already-crammed 'AA' team schedule. Most of the players were also registered in various hockey related activities, including summer leagues, specialized camps, and skill-specific clinics, some of which occurred concurrently throughout the season. Due to the fact that children attend camps and clinics and remain on the ice practically year round, speculation arises as to why parents feel the need for their sons to incessantly engage in hockey-related activities. While some players admitted to me that they wanted to play summer hockey, others revealed

that their parents sometimes forced them to attend clinics or camps, even when they would rather not go. As one player explained: “they [parents] usually make me do it”.

According to Donnelly and Petherick (2004), youth sport can, at times, be considered a type of ‘child labour’. Too often, talented young athletes are encouraged to participate, compete, and specialize in high-performance sport, which implicitly resembles ‘work-like’ environments. For example, young athletes are often obliged, sometimes coerced, into intensive athletic training (David, 2005). Côté and colleagues (e.g., Côté, 1999; Côté & Hay, 2002a; Côté et al., 2003) have proposed that ‘deliberate play’ may be an important factor in the development of talent in sport. Typically, between the ages of six and 13, deliberate play consists of intrinsically motivating developmental physical activities that provide immediate gratification and maximize enjoyment. Examples of such activities include neighbourhood pickup games (e.g., park football, street basketball, pond hockey). While these activities may not foster increased performance, they are a contributing factor to developing expertise (Berry, Abernethy, & Côté, 2008). Ironically, the competitive youth hockey environment, which parents contend is the stepping stone to a potentially successful hockey career, does not coincide with deliberate play. If anything, it opposes it. In the present study, the hockey commitment (as controlled by adults) consumed a greater part of players and parents’ lives and allotted minimal time for “kids to be kids”.

Clearly, this finding implies that the extensive commitment of youth hockey may no longer be simply for the children and their interests, but rather perhaps, to fulfill the desires of this adult-centered culture. According to Redfield (1941), the concept of culture is defined as a shared perspective amongst a specific group of people, whereby “conventional understandings, manifest in act and artefact, characterize societies” (as cited in Manis &

Meltzer, 1978, p. 110). For symbolic interactionists, culture is viewed as a complex, ever-changing, symbolic human environment (Charon, 2004). As stated by Blumer (1969), culture is composed of tangible and abstract objects that are completely dependent on our continuing to take them into account. It is a source of meaning that encompasses values, norms, ideas, knowledge, and so forth, that are mutually reaffirmed and accepted amongst individuals who participate in a particular culture. As such, through socialization, people learn the shared understandings, common knowledge, and prevailing patterns of behaviour of the groups to which they belong (Reynolds, 2003).

Within the competitive youth hockey culture, it is as though an underlying pressure exists whereby young hockey players need to be continually improving their skills and developing their on-ice play in order to remain a competitive threat to opponents as well as teammates. But is this truly what young players want or need? Or is it simply a matter of what they know? Arguably, young hockey players accept the hockey world because they have learned to take into account certain social objects within this culture. Playing at the highest level of calibre within their age groups, presumably in hopes of bigger and better dreams, hockey players and their parents have created this all-consuming notion of what competitive hockey entails. Expectations and traditions of the culture have identified and defined 'hockey success' through means of winning and competition. This has led to the belief that competitive hockey requires an undivided attention, focused commitment, exemplary work ethic, and disciplined attendance. Parents, coaches, and administrators have come to view the youth hockey experience as "it's all or nothing", whereby the implicit focus is about winning games, beating opponents, and creating (doubtful) opportunities for the future. Yet, we continue to insist that this is for the kids.

Considering research suggests that early specialization may not be beneficial to developing sport expertise, at which point, if ever, does competitive youth hockey become too much? Goffman (1961) used the concept of ‘total institution’ to refer to an isolated, enclosed social system, in which individuals spend their time either permanently or temporarily, and whose primary purpose is to control its members by restricting their physical and social contact with the outside world. Examples of such organizations include prisons, mental institutions, military training camps, and boarding schools. In the present study, the competitive season and its extensive commitment suggest a modified-version of ‘total institution’. While players and parents on the team were not ‘taken away’ and moved to a same residence, under a same single authority, the competitive youth hockey environment implicitly maintained a hold on families, forcing them to adapt to the limitations imposed. More specifically, this hockey culture consisted of carefully structured activities, explicit team rules, limited choice and/or voice of members, delineated roles, hierarchical group dynamics, controlled decision making by members, as well as constraints of family life, all of which are common within ‘total institutions’ (Goffman, 1961).

By highlighting the above similarities, I assert that my objective is not to propose that the competitive youth hockey environment be recognized as a type of total institution, but rather to shed light on how the hockey culture is commonly dictated by hegemony and hierarchy. For example, in terms of its extensive commitment, monthly calendars become fully booked as coaches register the team in numerous tournaments, ice schedulers seek additional ice times, league administrators create hectic game schedules, parents disburse money for any hockey-related expenses, and players are forced to compete day after day. While there was no “all embracing conception of the member” (Goffman, 1961, p. 158), at

times, the hockey season showed glimpses of such a social arrangement. This finding raises an important question as to whether or not nationwide restrictions (based on age groups and levels of calibre) should be imposed in order to limit the amount of ice times teams are allowed in one season and/or how many tournaments teams are allowed to attend. Currently no boundaries are in place to reduce and/or limit the extent of the youth hockey commitment; and as long as parents continue to be willing to pay for the ice time, young hockey players will continue to be pushed to specialize in this sport as well as be forced into an exclusive and demanding participation.

Explicit Demands

Kulikov (2005) conducted a qualitative study with five families in order to gain a better understanding of the impact competitive youth sport participation, specifically swimming, has on the family system. Her results showed that swimming clearly influenced the life of each of the families in her study. Examples of disruptions within the family life included financial burdens, scheduling conflicts, as well as disengaged spousal and sibling relationships. In a similar study, Harwood and Knight (2009a, 2009b) found that tennis parents typically encounter numerous stressors related to competition, coaching, financial and time commitments, siblings, organization (external to the family, i.e., sport association) and development (i.e., child's education, opportunities, and future possibilities). The stressors that parents in their study frequently faced were related to their child's behaviour, the amount of time required for competition and training, the extensive financial demands, as well as the impact on their family.

In the present study, a similar, perhaps even more pronounced pattern was also observed in relation to the extensive time and financial commitments of competitive youth

hockey. When parents register their sons for another hockey season, they are implicitly giving rights for the sport to consume their lives for the next seven to eight months. They sign the registration form, no questions asked. In fact, parents often suggested that hockey is more than simply an extracurricular activity within their family. Rather, they defined their involvement as “a lifestyle”. Throughout the season, it was clear that youth hockey took precedence in most of the families’ households. From a financial standpoint, expenses climbed well over \$1500 in registration fees alone, and another \$2500, if not more, could easily be accounted for through equipment, camps and clinics, travel, and tournament costs. From a time perspective, three to five hockey-related events per week was the norm, with each of those weekly events (e.g., practice, game, or dryland training), lasting anywhere from two to five hours (from the time they left their house to the time they arrived home afterwards). Excluding the time actually watching their sons perform, parents inevitably spent countless hours on the road driving to and from facilities and waiting patiently in facility lobbies before and after team events. Moreover, parents were often seen rushing into the arena still dressed in their work clothes and/or uniforms, complaining that there had simply been no time for supper. From a personal perspective, the demanding schedule proved difficult not only for the families on the team, but for me as well, as I too was able to experience the relentless demands that the competitive youth hockey commitment implicitly creates in people’s daily lives. In fact, it dominated many people’s schedules, including my own.

Yet, while it appeared that the competitive youth hockey setting took precedence in many of the families’ lifestyles, it also influenced parent-child relationships by creating opportunities to spend time together. Parents admitted to cherishing the moments that hockey

enabled them to share with their sons. They believed that hockey provided them “one-on-one times” that they may not have otherwise. Although parents, mothers especially, hinted that they would prefer sitting around the dinner table, their times in the car were just as memorable. The hours spent on the road no longer seemed as tiresome when looking at the bigger picture. Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009) reported similar findings, whereby competitive adolescent swimmers believed that their athletic involvement allowed them to create special relationships with their parents. The athletes in their study spoke highly of the relationships they shared with their parents, which they believed was as a result of their swimming endeavours. Some attributed their special bonds with their parents to their time spent on the road, while others thought it was due to the emotional highs and lows implicit to the world of athletics.

In a similar vein, Lally and Kerr’s (2008) study on the effects of athlete retirement on parents, found that children’s disengagement from sport had a tremendous impact on parents. Through in-depth interviews, parents of former elite gymnasts (retired for three to five years) reported missing the one-on-one times gymnastics provided them with their daughters and felt more distant from their children once their sporting careers ended. The parents in their study had assumed that without the travel, volunteer hours, and other related tasks that characterized their lives as gymnastic parents, there would be more opportunities for quality time. Yet, once gymnastics was no longer there to hold the parent-child relationship together, parents openly admitted to missing their time driving to the gymnasiums. In the present study, parents acknowledged that their heavy involvement in hockey was a temporary situation. Aware that the life of a parent in hockey is short-lived, they felt that it was important to make the best of it while it lasted. In addition, parents advocated that if they

were not spending their time in arenas for hockey, then they would likely be at a different type of facility for a different type of activity. These findings were consistent with Weiss and Hayashi (1995), who examined the perceptions of parents on their child's participation in competitive gymnastics and found that 72% of parents believed that they would spend the same amount of time on their children's alternative activities if gymnastics did not exist.

Nevertheless, parents in the present study explained that as their sons competed at higher levels, the demands intensified beyond what most of them had anticipated, which in turn competed against their families' other commitments. Numerous times, some parents (especially mothers) hinted that hockey can obsessively take over their family life. For example, parents wished they had more free time to participate in other activities or that their weekly evenings were not nearly as hectic as they tend to be during the hockey season. Despite parents' frequent complaints, they still managed to oversee the impact hockey seemed to create in the lives of their sons. In fact, the priority no longer appears to be about the wellbeing of young hockey players. Implicitly, lives change to accommodate the competitive environment, and ultimately, it is questionable as to whether these changes essentially benefit young athletes. Repeatedly, parents admitted that their sons stayed up late the previous night because they had homework to finish once practice ended or that their sons had less than seven hours of sleep by the time they got home after the game and had to wake up for school. For some families, it became routine for their sons to nap after school in order to be rejuvenated in time for their eight o'clock hockey game. Throughout the season, parents often admitted to being physically tired and mentally drained, which leads to the belief that the players may have been as well. Between school, homework, and all of hockey's

requirements (e.g., practices, games, dryland training), children's lives seemed to be balancing on a tight rope.

The demands of the youth hockey commitment generated differing perspectives from parents. While some parents questioned the need for excessive ice times (on average three to five times a week), others believed it was necessary for their child's development. While some parents hoped their sons could share the responsibility in fundraising activities, others simply wanted to sign another cheque. While some parents managed to car pool with other families, others had to repeatedly ask for time off work. Essentially, the primary tensions that parents frequently needed to manage were associated with the endless expenses incurred as a result of their son's hockey participation as well as the hectic schedule that accompanies it. In fact, parents hinted that it was ironic to dedicate so much of their lives to the sport, when they are aware that the chances are slim that their sons will ever make it to the big leagues. Consistent with results from Harwood and Knight (2009a), which found that parents learn to adjust their expectations through time in the setting, parents in the present study also expressed how their experiences have helped them cope with the pressures and realities of the youth hockey environment.

Symbolic interactionists maintain that "human group life is activity-based" (Prus, 1996, p. 16). According to Mead (1934), a 'social act' is a process that involves two or more people who are mutually focused and working together on the completion of a social object. In fact, every social group is made up of individuals who take each other into account, and who act back and forth in relation to each other's acts. This process involves interpreting and defining each other's lines of conduct within the broader social context (Mead, 1934), in order to attain common shared meanings. Blumer (1969), who referred to this process as

‘joint action’, presents three important implications. First, he acknowledged that most social conduct is typically repetitive and stable, and “exists in the form of recurrent patterns of joint action” (p. 17). Common and pre-established shared meanings underlie human behaviour, while recurring patterns imply the function of culture and consensus of the group (Katovich & Maines, 2003). Second, Blumer recognized the extended connection of actions that comprise human group life, whereby diverse individuals within a regularized operation, engage in their actions by using conventional sets of meanings. Therefore, society includes “large complex networks of action involving an interlinkage and interdependency of diverse actions and diverse people” (p. 19). Finally, the third implication of joint action revolves around the notion of continuity and implies that conduct is in one way or another related to previous experiences and forms of conduct (Katovich & Maines, 2003). Blumer explained that “any instance of joint action, whether newly formed or long established, has necessarily arisen out of a background of previous actions of participants” (p. 20), suggesting that continuity and/or change must be considered in ongoing joint action.

Within the youth hockey world, parents and players enter the environment with preconceived ideas of what the social system entails, how it works, and for what purposes. Whether they agree or not with its operation, they have developed a consensual understanding of the setting, reframed their conduct accordingly, and therefore jointly support it. Although the group of parents were cognizant of the consequences such a hectic schedule incurs, including sacrifices other siblings are forced into, as well as time away from the family household, the pull of the hockey lifestyle made it somehow more acceptable. It appeared as though parents have become accustomed to the commitment and accept it as is, no longer as concerned about the extensive demands for themselves, their families, their

sons. They even rationalized the abundance of ‘hockey time’ as “it is what it is”, implicitly continuing to conform to the joint actions that exist not only within the team itself, but within the overall culture as well.

‘AA’ Hockey Inferences

According to researchers, youth sport has the potential to provide children with opportunities to develop and refine many psychosocial and emotional life skills, such as cooperation, teamwork, responsibility, and leadership (Danish, 2002; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Papacharisis et al., 2005). In the present study, parents believed that hockey promotes numerous lifelong skills such as teamwork, respect, work ethic, commitment, and discipline, all of which would continue to serve them later in life. Parents highly praised the positive values their sons were learning from their involvement in hockey, which was one way they seemed to rationalize their extensive dedication to the sport. In fact, parents believed that the sport offered many positive benefits, all of which they perceived outweighed potential negative aspects of the game.

Research has also shown that positive youth sport experiences are largely due to quality coaching, parental involvement, program philosophy, and personal experiences and resources, more so than actually playing the sport itself (Smith & Smoll, 2002). In effect, the structure of the environment and the type of adult supervision are the most important factors in determining positive outcomes for children in youth sport (Smith & Smoll, 1997). In the present study, it appeared as though the ‘AA’ status (unfortunately) embedded an implicit structure which then dictated the involvement of adults, creating various conflicting assumptions within the game. Throughout the season, parents frequently and genuinely suggested that this was simply “the way it is at the ‘AA’ level”, which tends to reflect their

disposition that there is nothing they can do about it. Some parents, who fully defended the 'AA' level, believed that "if you can't handle it, go play house league", insinuating that there are recreational levels in place for parents who do not support the commitment and implications of the competitive programs.

With limited spots on the 'AA' team, players and their parents are consistently competing with one another. Parents in the present study agreed that competitive programs are faced with the duality between competition and player development, a cultural tension where the objectives of youth sport are lost and the enjoyment of the game eliminated presumably if competition predominates. From the onset of the season, during tryouts, it was clear that many players and most parents wanted to be part of the 'AA' program, the highest level of calibre within this age group. Without knowing the new coaches' intentions, many parents felt that these tryouts were the most difficult ones they had yet encountered, leaving most parents wondering about the possibilities and assuming the worse (i.e., their son not making the team). One family on the team admitted to paying for private lessons between tryout sessions in order to increase their son's chance of making the 'AA' team. Due to the fact that they felt their son was having difficulty skating, they were worried that he may not make the team, and thus rushed him off to a one-hour private session in hopes that it would help him for the remainder of the tryouts. While their son did make the 'AA' team, one can only speculate as to why such an importance is placed on the 'AA' program. As an example, one father blatantly expressed that his son would not have played hockey had he not made the 'AA' team, raising many questions about his claim. Did he think his son was too good to play at the 'A' level? Or was it as a means to 'punish' his son for not making the 'AA' level? Or perhaps, would playing at the 'A' level be too humiliating for a parent with such

expectations? Either way, it is difficult to understand how such an emphasis can be placed on the level of calibre of youth sport teams, when their primary objective is to “promote positive hockey experiences” (Hockey Canada, 2010).

In his ethnographic study, Bernard (2003) followed a Bantam (13 and 14 years old) ‘AAA’ team for a season in order to identify the values instilled through participation in hockey and whether these values were being applied in players’ daily lives outside of hockey. Bernard found that hockey can serve as a means to teach moral education and life skills (e.g., teamwork, discipline, work ethic). However it can also, especially at the competitive levels, support the notions of “winning at all costs” and “do what you have to do to win”, implying that players and coaches do what is necessary to ensure victory. In the present study, although it appeared that winning was a precursor to defining success by parents and players, presumably, the team’s losing streak influenced the type of environment that was created by and within the team. The focus was not, and admittedly could not be, as intensely placed on game outcomes and league standings. Nonetheless, parents were consistently disappointed by either the team’s or their son’s performances, even though it was clear that the team was not quite as strong as other teams in the league.

As suggested by Smith and Smoll (1997), ‘winning’ does not need to solely be represented by the number of wins and losses a team experiences, but rather on the positive development of young athletes through maximum effort and continuous improvement. Unfortunately, some of the parents in the present study ultimately neglected to view their son’s progress or the team’s efforts. For example, parents focused on goal scoring rather than on other on-ice individual tactics (e.g., winning the battles along the boards, pressuring the puck carrier, creating turnovers or scoring opportunities). In fact, one parent, who was upset

by the team's lack of scoring, shamelessly admitted that he adamantly told his son before a game to "score some fucking goals" even though the team was rarely an offensive threat or high-scoring in nature. Another time, a father was explicitly heard telling his son that hitting the post was "not good enough" because it is not a goal. The father even told his son that the 'ting' noise was not something to be proud of because it was not recognized on the scoreboard.

Within competitive youth hockey programs, there is a common belief that the higher the level of calibre (regardless of the age group), the 'less fun' hockey is supposed to be. This notion of 'AA' hockey was commonly and explicitly shared by the coaches as well as some parents in the present study. One of coaches adamantly believed that "you can't play 'AA' hockey because it's fun. You have to play 'AA' hockey because you have a passion and a thrill for competition". Similarly, one mother stated that the emphasis at this level should be about competing and working hard, while "fun should only be the by-product". Another father admitted that the competitive nature of youth hockey is within reason: "If the emphasis is not on winning, then the game loses its edge". On the other hand, as one father revealed, youth hockey is no longer fun for children because of the misrouted significance placed on competition making it seem more like "a job" than a game. When parents discussed their hopes and expectations for their sons, many of them maintained that all they really wanted was for their sons to continue playing the game they love and have fun doing so. But does this statement truly reflect young hockey players' realities? While parents wanted their sons to compete and play hard, coaches were simultaneously being criticized by parents for taking the fun out of the game.

Supporting Robidoux and Trudel's (2006) statement that youth hockey has become a highly competitive environment, parents in the present study acknowledged that issues essentially arise as the competition increases, which tend to stem from various "flawed assumptions" (Gould, 2009, p. 81). In fact, these assumptions can be defined as 'conventional signs' (or symbols) because their meanings are social public conventions which can be communicated from one person to another (Hewitt, 2007). Their meanings are thus established by an implicit agreement among individuals in a particular environment. In other words, these signs designate what they designate because members of a community use them more or less consistently in the same manner (Mead, 1934). While they are learned through experience, their meaning is entirely arbitrary (Hewitt, 2007). In the present study, it was evident that the competitive youth hockey world is saturated with assumptions or conventional signs if you will, that highly influence parents' views on their involvement in the sport. For example, while Hockey Canada supports calibre tiers ('AA' to 'C') in order to create competitive and recreational levels, there is no specification about what each level entails and how each should differentiate itself from the other (aside from the actual calibre levels of players). Yet somehow, over time, the 'AA' level has assumed many conflicting implications, such as competition vs. development, labour vs. activity, past-time vs. career-orientation, winning vs. progress, seriousness vs. enjoyment, and so forth. Clearly, the notion of 'AA' hockey represents much more than simply the level of calibre for most members of the hockey culture. Undoubtedly, it is a conventional status which ultimately shapes how parents view and define competitive youth hockey.

Value of On-Ice Aggression

In sport, including hockey, overly aggressive behaviours have been excused because they occur within a contact sport (Eitzen, 2006). Klein and Sorenson (2002) argue that if such aggressive behaviours happened on the street, they would be punishable by law. Yet, if they happen in the arena, they become acceptable within the broad spectrum of normative expectations of the sport. Through experience and reinforcement as their participation in sport increases, young athletes learn to integrate aggression into their style of play (Loughead & Leith, 2001). As suggested by Robinson (1998) and Theberge (1997), players' toughness and willingness to "pay the price" are often expected and praised within the world of hockey. Although these unwritten rules are not formulated into an explicit code that can be read from start to finish, they are still part of an informal set of understandings that are used not only by players but also often appear to be promoted and emphasized by coaches and parents. In the present study, these unwritten rules, norms if you will, were not only part of the game but were also continuously celebrated by parents in the stands. As stated by Hughes and Coakley (1991), understanding how social norms emerge, powerful and multifaceted forms of social relations in sports and society in general must be acknowledged. In order to showcase the key findings of the present study related to aggression in youth hockey, the following sub-themes are discussed: (a) body checking exposed, (b) unwritten rules, and (c) prevailing influences.

Body Checking Exposed

An ongoing debate exists as to when and at which age group body checking should be taught and integrated into the game (see Robidoux & Trudel, 2006). According to Hockey Canada (2010), body checking is a critical skill to the game of hockey that when properly executed can create turnovers (and regain possession of the puck) or lead to quality scoring

opportunities. Well-known underlying benefits, which are not stated by Hockey Canada, include increasing a team's intensity, setting the tone of the game, intimidating opponents, and even endorsing revenge. Although body checking is a skill with clearly defined boundaries, the act itself and the perceptions of the audience (e.g., officials, players, coaches, and parents/spectators) remain rather subjective. For many of the parents in the present study, the introduction of body checking into their sons' repertoire of skills was a reality that they quickly had to accept. Attempting to ensure their child's safety by discussing the breakdown of the skill (i.e., how to properly give and receive a hit) as well as clarifying its objective (i.e., gaining possession of the puck), parents, especially mothers, sat on the edge of their seats biting their tongues the first season it was introduced. Now, it is as though parents, mothers included, had become immune to the bumps, shoves, and hits that have made their way into their sons' games.

In the present study, body checking was one symbol that inferred various meanings, depending on the situation, the audience, as well as the purpose. According to Fine (1987), "even a finely attuned set of rules requires interpretation, and this process of interpretation allows negotiation" (p. 23). From an SI perspective, meanings are constantly created and recreated as we engage in symbolic interaction (Charon, 2004). The construction of meanings is an ongoing process that is itself a significant type of response. As individuals engage in symbolic interaction, situations are continuously defined and redefined, accounts and explanations are created, and motives are acknowledged (Hewitt, 2003). As such, regardless of the symbol, meanings change from one person to the next, from one environment to another. Despite their ambiguities, meanings are not only emergent in what people do, but also in people's reflections of what they have done, are doing, or will do. They are also

always part of the process of “becoming” rather than “being” (Hewitt, 2003) as they continue to evolve and change throughout our interactions and over time within a culture. In the present study, the perceptions of parents on body checking were continuously being modified and negotiated based on the situation in which it presented itself.

Hockey Canada (2010) states that when correctly taught, body checking can enhance a player’s enjoyment of the game. Yet the findings of the present study are inconsistent with the aforementioned statement. Based on my observations and conversations with players, I question whether or not body checking does in fact enhance enjoyment of the game. Off the ice, the players with whom I discussed the notion of body checking were quick to boast that “hockey is hockey with hitting”, insinuating that when body checking is eliminated from the game (as it was in two of the tournaments the team attended), they are not actually playing ‘real hockey’. They convincingly attempted to portray body checking as an integral part of the game, one that they thoroughly enjoy. Yet, their in-game behaviours offered a different perspective. On the ice, they hesitated to hit, avoided making contact, and ducked out of the way from oncoming checks. This apprehension seemed all the more acute due to the size range of players at this age. Within the same age group, at 12 years old, the disparities in height and weight of players are extensive (Robidoux & Trudel, 2006), which was apparent within the team as well as with opponents. During the two tournaments which prohibited body checking, players on the ice seemed more relaxed as the fear of being hit was no longer a factor. The team seemed to play with more poise, patience, and confidence; but many parents, especially the fathers, still somehow found reason to prefer watching a game with body checking.

Consequently, the concerns shared by some of the young boys were nonchalantly disregarded by coaches and parents. For example, admitting to occasionally being scared on the ice, one player revealed that it can be daunting at times as a puck carrier knowing and anticipating a lingering possibility for a body check from an opposing player. As the player continued to express himself, his mother quickly (and questionably) interrogated her son's comment. Without hesitation, he clarified that he is not scared but that at times, he may simply hesitate for a second before delivering or receiving a body check. Remarkably, an undeniable common belief seemed to suggest that the players simply had to get over and/or deal with their fears in order to be successful on the ice. One mother admitted that she understands why players are scared of being hit (considering the size differences) and realizes that it essentially creates dangerous situations. Seeing that players were ducking and turning away from body checks, they were often no longer in a position to safely receive a hit, consequentially running the risk of serious injuries. She then acknowledged, however, that the players do not have a choice – "it's part of the game", a statement difficult to comprehend. As adults, we acknowledge the dangerous situations players are encountering, yet we feel completely justified in criticizing (flawed) assumptions that we, ourselves, have created for children, within a children's game.

Notably, even though the players feared being hit during games, body checking was not a skill that was integrated into team practices. Based on my personal experiences, teams typically, yet ironically, do not include body checking into their drills for fear of a player being injured. In other words, players are expected to throw their bodies around the ice during games, but do not get to practice the skill because of the potential risks of injury. As such, one can not help but question: If it is deemed too dangerous to practice when performed

in a safe and controlled environment (i.e., coaching supervision, drill design, teaching techniques), why are players forced to use it during high-tempo, adrenaline-rushing, competitive game situations? To much contradiction, Hockey Canada (2010) indicates on their website that research has shown that it is during practice times that young athletes develop their skills, more so than during games. Hence, this leads us to believe that skating, shooting, and passing are all skills worthy enough to be continuously practised and further developed during practice sessions but body checking is not. Even though one wrong move during a game (e.g., bad timing, miscalculated angle, incorrect technique, misread speed, poor decision making, or lack of emotional control) can essentially result in a life changing situation for both young hitters and receivers, rarely are adequate learning opportunities through game-like situations provided during practices.

While body checking is banned in women's hockey, it would be erroneous to assume that there is no physical play and aggressive behaviours within the game. With no body checking allowed, female players learn to create turnovers and regain possession of the puck through the use of other physical tactics that do not require hitting other players. Although Hockey Canada (2010) suggests a four-step progression breakdown to body checking (positioning and angling, stick checks, body contact, body checking), the three initial tactics are no longer perceived as important once body checking is introduced, even though their outcomes are potentially as beneficial. For example, if a player can effectively use body positioning to force and angle the puck carrier towards the boards, therefore taking away options and potentially creating turnovers, why are we teaching young players to believe that body checking is the only way to be physical on the ice, and apparently, the only way to play hockey? Despite Hockey Canada's intent to ensure that players, coaches, officials, and

parents share positive attitudes toward the use and objectives of body checking, the reality offers a completely different outlook.

In a study conducted by Meân and Kassing (2007) that examined parental communication at youth sporting events, the researchers reported that fathers produced and utilized talk related to aggression and winning more frequently than mothers. The researchers reported that some of the content of parents' messages instructed players to be aggressive. In the present study, as observed throughout the season, parents frequently discussed physical and aggressive play with their sons. Parents encouraged "winning the battles", "using your body", and "being in the opponent's face" to convey the combative nature of the sport. Although these statements may easily be interpreted within the rules of the game, they also offer a certain amount of aggressive energy, which may lead to potentially undesirable behaviours on the ice. The parents' famous motto in the stands during games became "pop him", implying that the player body check the puck carrier. When the team lost possession of the puck, parents, especially fathers, reverted to yelling out the motto, as though they expected players to robotically carry out their commands. It should be noted, however, that such comments could also potentially lead to dangerous and injurious situations. Considering that the opportunity for a 'legally clean' body check lasts only a second or two (once the puck carrier is within hitting range of a defending opponent), by the time parents start yelling "pop him", the window of opportunity may no longer actually be available, but young players may respond or/and react instinctively in order to please the yelling voices from the stands.

Nevertheless, for the most part, fathers encouraged, promoted, and sought body checking from the players, leaving them outwardly disappointed when the game was not as

“hard hitting” as they desired. While I cringed at some of the hits, even turning away from the action, fathers proudly commended players. An assumption that ‘the bigger the hit, the better the game’ echoed within the stands, questioning whether it is the execution (e.g., speed, intensity, power) of a body check or the outcome that defines its success. While the ultimate purpose of body checking is to separate the puck carrier from the puck, if other defensive tactics can effectively achieve the same result, why is such emphasis placed on “big hits”? In an era where schools, for example, are pouring many resources into programs aimed at reducing incidences of bullying and violence (Smith, Cousins, & Stewart, 2005), it appears as though adults’ endorsement of body checking and aggression in youth hockey conflicts with other societal currents. For example, hitting in hockey is considered an essential skill and part of the game, while hitting in the school yard is considered unacceptable and potentially an act of bullying.

When individuals find themselves in a situation, the interpretive process is more than a simple reflex-like application of a meaning (Fine & Sandstrom, 2005). William and Dorothy Thomas’ (1928) famous quote “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (p. 572) implies that we do not sense our environment directly, but rather, we define and make decisions about it as actions unfold within it (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2004). Each social situation in which we are engaged implies a new interpretation, one which will shape our behaviours. Hence, meanings are continuously being established, interpreted, and reinterpreted according to the situations in which they occur (Thomas, 1928), ultimately guiding behaviour, shaping action, and constructing perceived realities (Blumer, 1969). In the same manner, the greater extent to which we share with others a common definition of the situation, the more consistent the patterns of social interaction will be (Hewitt, 2007). As

applied in the present study and consistent with Robidoux and Bocksnick (2010), the parents cheered, applauded, and congratulated big hits on the ice, so long as it was their team doing the hitting. In contrast, when the players were at the receiving end of body checks, parents found reason to protest about the inequality of the referee's calls, the excessive aggressiveness preached by the other teams' coaches, or the opponents' intent to injure. This example is one of many infused within the findings that denotes the relationship between reality and tentative meanings attributed to situations.

Considering the speed and intensity of the game, young players, some of whom may be terrified, have only a split second to make a decision (i.e., to body check or not), while taking into account various factors, including proper technique, game strategy, personal fear, parental expectations, team pressures, and so forth. In fact, such a dichotomy creates a complicated situation for a 12 year old child to fully comprehend, thereby placing him in a conflicted position. May (2001) referred to this position as a "sticky situation" (p. 382), one which forces players to contemplate competitive notions of winning and appropriate definitions of sportpersonship. In fact, researchers have cautioned that it is inappropriate to place young athletes in situations whereby decisions and responsibilities extend beyond their cognitive and moral stages of development (Weiss & Smith, 2002; Wiese-Bjornstall et al., 2009).

Unwritten Rules

In addition to learning on-ice skills, hockey players also learn a variety of traditional behaviours and roles integrated within the game (Robidoux, 2001). Within the high-performance sport culture, 'sport ethic' has been defined as a "set of norms accepted as the dominant criteria for defining what it means, in their social worlds, to be defined and

accepted as an athlete in power and performance sports” (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 155). Within the culture of hockey, such norms persist regardless that they often lead us to question their acceptance and our compliance towards them. While Coakley and Donnelly emphasize the role of the athletes and the coaches in creating ‘sport ethic’, the present study clearly demonstrates how parents are often an influential and active stakeholder in the emphasis and promotion of problematic norms within the youth hockey culture.

One common norm that characterizes ‘sport ethic’ and unceasingly emerges within sport, including hockey, is the expectation that athletes accept the potential risks and continue to play through pain (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). In a study by Lally and Kerr (2008) on the effects of gymnasts’ retirement on parents, results showed that parents recalled frequently denying the extent of their daughters’ injuries as well as supporting coaches’ pressuring behaviours of training through pain. In hockey, players who do not or will not put themselves at risk are typically viewed as weak and ineffective by Canadian hockey standards (Vaz, 1982).

In the present study, on numerous occasions, there were glimpses of parents believing in the notion “taking one for the team” or “no pain, no gain”. Some parents expected their sons to get up quickly after being knocked down and to continue to play through physical pain. A handful of parents would whisper “get up” and “ah come on” when their sons lay on the ice after a scuffle or physical play; and these parents seemed to sense no wrongdoing in their beliefs and/or actions. Consequently, it appeared that at least some of the parents were under the impression that great hockey players need to overcome being bruised and battered because it is part of the game, or more so the culture. This potentially dangerous notion implied that their sons block shots from opponents, give and take big hits, and battle hard

along the boards. Some parents, especially fathers, were often disappointed when players hesitated or backed away from “do what you have to do” opportunities. For example, when a player avoided blocking a shot, parents shook their head in disbelief, as if fear or apprehension was not tolerable in youth sport. Moreover, although much focus has been placed on the possibility of being physically injured, potential psychological concerns must also be raised. As one player mentioned, his first experience with body checking resulted in breaking his opponent’s arm. It was a clean hit, with no intention of injury, but unfortunately, this led the young player to question if “this was what body checking is about”.

Unfortunately for another player, he too experienced firsthand what it is like to suffer the consequences of accidental on-ice actions. After being kicked out of a game for an unintentional “hit to the head”, he was yelled at from the stands from the opposing team’s parents, taunted and threatened by opponents during school hours, and stopped body checking on the ice. Arguably, the psychological impact of aggressive play cannot be understated.

According to Vaz (1980), young hockey players are continuously learning and dealing with the expectations and obligations of the hockey culture. By exploring the world of organized youth hockey through a naturalistic approach in an attempt to demonstrate how the violation of normative rules is an outcome of the very system that promulgates them and how violent behaviours have become institutionalized, Vaz (1982) found that players and coaches supported behaviours if they were executed as a means to win hockey games. In fact, Vaz found that young hockey players were aware of and followed the ‘unwritten rules’, even though these differed dramatically from the actual written rules of the game. In other words, within the culture of hockey, there is an unwritten code that suggests players may break the

rules of the game under certain circumstances. For example, if an opponent is on a breakaway (an offensive player breaks free of the defenders and rushes toward the goal), a defending player can purposely trip him or her in an attempt to prevent a goal from being scored. Another example of an unwritten rule is that defenders must protect their goaltender at all costs. This at times may simply require players to stand between the opponent and their goaltender; however, at other times, this requires players to push, shove, hit, and ultimately intimidate their opponents.

The findings of the present study are consistent with results of Vaz's (1982) study. Clearly outside the boundaries of the game, some of the players engaged in behaviours that support the notion of winning at all cost, even though it meant that they were bluntly breaking the rules. Not only were these behaviours observed by the players on the ice, they were also accepted, even promoted by some of the parents. For example, during one of the 'no-hitting' tournaments, one father proudly admitted that he instructed his son to "hit them [the opponents] but make it look unintentional". These behaviours were viewed as "part of the game", regardless of their consequences (e.g., penalties, potential for injury), which is an ideology that has been ingrained in the culture of hockey for decades (Robinson, 1998; Vaz 1982) and that adults continue to use as an excuse.

Although the team was not known for its hard hitting body checks, the players definitely had their fair share of retaliation penalties. For example, such penalties included purposely slashing, hooking, or hitting another player when the objective was no longer about gaining possession of the puck. Parents acknowledged that these types of behaviours were inappropriate yet their reoccurrence suggested otherwise. Most often, it was the same few players who were penalized for such offences. When players retaliated on the ice,

reactions in the stands varied from parent to parent and from situation to situation. As such, findings of the present study suggest that under certain conditions, formal rules can be broken and be replaced by more lenient norms, even more so when they go undetected by the officials. Although parents did not support retaliation, if and when it happened, they rationalized their son's behaviour as frustration, blamed it on the referees, or justified the behaviour as a means of "taking one for the team" in terms of standing up for the team and/or teammates (e.g., intentionally hitting an opponent for bumping their goaltender). One has to wonder, however, why frustration over a missed call, for example, could excuse the possibility of injuring an opponent by delivering an illegal body check. To some of the mothers' dismay, there were a few fathers on the team who strongly believed that playing at the 'AA' level includes making on-ice sacrifices for your team, implicitly suggesting that hockey comes before safety, an underlying assumption that stems directly from the professional leagues and infiltrates the youth hockey environment.

As part of a larger study on the wives of professional baseball athletes, Ortiz (1997) explored the formation and enforcement of a code of conduct and its impact on a group of wives from an SI perspective. More specifically, he discussed the code of conduct as it applies to various situations, such as team travel, hotel bars and public settings, as well as its implications for gender relations. Ortiz found that when wives accompanied their husbands on road trips, an unwritten code of conduct dictated how the women were to behave on the bus, on the plane, in restaurants, and in other public places. This socially constructed code, which is enforced by men, stipulates how and when the wives can interact with other members of the group, including their husbands. Aware that such a code subsists, the women conform to it by acknowledging the rules and managing their behaviours accordingly. In his

concluding remarks, Ortiz states how the code has a powerful impact on the ritualized interactions between wives and others (i.e., ballplayers, husbands) in various micro-situations within the world of professional baseball.

In the present study, a distinct code of conduct exists, which influences how players should compete, when breaking the rules is permitted, as well as why pain is ignored. This code of conduct, consisting of numerous unwritten rules as to how the game should be played, is continuously reinforced by parents and coaches alike and faithfully abided by hockey players. According to Coakley and Donnelly (2009), the problem with social norms is that people tend to follow them, without critically analyzing them, and accepting them without limits and boundaries. In youth hockey, these norms or unwritten rules evidently create a fine line for young players. Some parents admitted that they hoped their son would ‘step in’ to help a teammate in trouble (on the ice), as they would hope their son has the integrity to protect their goalie as best as he can, two beliefs that are commonly publicized in professional leagues. In contrast, parents also emphasized that they would not tolerate behaviours in which their sons “take it too far”. For example, if the player is involved in a situation and impulsively reacts, it is understandable; but if he goes around looking for trouble, then it is considered “too much”. Consequently, the message being sent to young hockey players is that rules can be broken, as long as it is within reason. This raises the question as to whether young hockey players have the maturity, knowledge, and experience to make split-second decisions for such difficult predicaments (i.e., break the rules, conform to norms, remain within limits). Evidently, the misconception between what is wrong and right, as well as what is part of the game and what is not, represents a grey area, one that is often misconstrued by the influences that prevail.

Prevailing Influences

In professional sports, such as the NHL, athletes are recognized and idolized for their aggressive nature while sport broadcasters and commentators endorse violent behaviours. In one of his earlier studies, Vaz (1979) found that the so-called desirable rough and tough style of play in hockey had integrated itself into most leagues, including that of young boys, in part because of the informal socialization that occurs through the television, newspapers, and professional leagues (Loughead & Leith, 2001). Undoubtedly, the media coverage in sport, particularly on the television, has helped shape the subcultures that exist in sport (Meân & Kassing, 2007) by constructing and reinforcing the “common-sense” ways the game should be played (Allain, 2008, p. 464), while emphasizing that hitting and pushing are the skills that characterize hockey. In her article focusing on the issues related to masculinity within the Canadian Hockey League (premier level of ‘Junior’ hockey in Canada, boys aged 18 to 20), Allain stated that the media serve as a means for people to engage in hockey and expand their knowledge as to how the game should be played.

In the present study, parents and players revealed how NHL hockey played an important role in their families. They attended live games and/or watched games on television. Throughout the season, fathers’ conversations often revolved around issues and recent developments within the NHL. They discussed upcoming games, predicted results, highlighted player statistics, defended specific in-game controversies (e.g., fights, dirty hits, suspensions), as well as used the NHL as a guideline on how hockey ‘should’ be played. Fathers admitted referring to the NHL as a means to teach their sons tactical plays and/or moves, which essentially implies that young players learn the rules of the game as well as what is acceptable from the professional levels. These types of behaviours beg the question:

Is using the NHL as an implicit role model and teaching guide for young hockey hopefuls in the best interest of youth hockey?

According to Coakley (2004), children who watch aggressive and/or violent types of media coverage are more likely to imitate athletes when they are themselves engaged in informal games and/or organized youth sports. Hence, viewing aggressive and violent acts performed by professional athletes appears to have systematic long-term impacts on the behaviours of amateur players of various ages, because young athletes learn behaviours through modeling and reinforcement, both of which are part of their socialization into the milieu (Vissek & Watson, 2005). In a study conducted by Bernthal (2003) on the effects viewing professional wrestling has on children's aggression, 370 teachers (grades two to eight) were surveyed in order to examine children's behaviours in relation to aggressive tendencies. It was reported that 28% of teachers had observed children imitating a type of 'body slam' (a common physical manoeuvre in wrestling), while nearly 24% of teachers had seen children kicking or hitting. Additionally, 21% of teachers also reported observing children engaging in imitative wrestling behaviours involving the neck (e.g., 'clothesline', 'chokehold', 'pile-driver') in a context of physical aggression. Consequently, this led the researchers to suggest that regular viewing of professional wrestling can produce negative effects in children through physical, verbal, and attitudinal imitation.

Kerr (2005) cautions however against oversimplifying the situation. He argues that attempting to explain increased levels of violence in sport due to its representation by the media is a not "a simple cause and effect relationship" (p. 128). As stated by Coakley and Donnelly (2009), sports are not shaped primarily by the media, and this common belief is inaccurate, even unrealistic. People interpret messages differently and the meanings they

draw from them ultimately influence people differently as well. In fact, many of the situations that occur within the sport world are highly dependent on how they are perceived by the audience watching (Coakley, 2004). Unfortunately, however, the media serves as a reference point to countless individuals as they try to make sense of how sport should be (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009).

Therefore, the objective here is not to blame the NHL or the media. Rather, the findings of the present study suggest that parents have built an inaccurate conception about the game of hockey and its inherent values based on the NHL and its professional athletes. Through their professionalization of attitudes, some parents frequently idealized and compared youth hockey to the NHL, even though it has little to do with organized youth hockey. Despite the fact that norms and expectations within professional hockey are made explicit through the media, the responsibility seems to lie in the hands of parents. For example, while parents acknowledged that the NHL is an environment that endorses unacceptable behaviours in front of their children, parents confessed to standing up and cheering on fights when attending or watching games with their sons. Russell (2008) reported that as human beings, we have expectations of other people's behaviours. Hence, children are learning aggressive behaviours and unwritten codes of conduct, as seen in the NHL, through the acceptance and endorsement of their parents.

According to Shibutani (1955), a reference group consists of the "society whose perspective the individual uses" to view reality and make sense of his or her world (as cited in Charon, 2004, p. 37). Similarly, for Mead (1934), while using the terms of 'significant others' and 'generalized others', taking the role of the other consists of human beings seeing the world through a perspective other than one's own in order to construct and shape their

actions within a situation (Hewitt, 2007). Human beings use this imaginative process to learn and reflect, and ultimately to direct future behaviours (Mead, 1934), thereby allowing the ‘self’ to develop a sense of “who one is” through the responses of others. Taking the role of the other is not simply imagining the perspectives of others, but is also a process by which we come to a collective understanding of the meaning of our acts (Charon, 2004). As children grow and mature, they learn right from wrong, good from bad, pretty from ugly according to how their reference groups define the situation. In the present study, reference groups played an important role in guiding and directing the conduct of players.

By taking the role of significant others, children learn patterns of behaviours and public conduct; and it is through interaction with these significant others that children develop the ability to regulate their own behaviours (Charon, 2004), according to groupings of meanings, definitions, situations, expectations, and so forth from the perspectives of those individuals (Reynolds, 2003). Although significant others typically consist of one’s family members (e.g., mothers, fathers, guardians, grandparents), they could also be specific influential individuals for whom one has developed great respect (Hewitt, 2007). Parents in the present study clearly influenced their sons’ behaviours in terms of promoting body checking and valuing a rough and tough style of play. Without a doubt, young hockey players wanted to impress and seek acceptance from their significant others (i.e., parents), as they unwillingly attempted to play physical (despite their noticeable fears on the ice) and portray the image (through their language, both verbal and non-verbal) that hockey was meant to be hard-hitting. As such, some of the parents in the present study neglected to consider the potential they have in modelling and displaying sportspersonship behaviours, and supporting their sons for the athletes they are, rather than what they hoped they would be.

In the same manner, as an individual's social group enlarges and experiences expand, the generalized other (i.e., whole society, community, group of people) provides an imagined perspective of expectations, values, beliefs, and standards that permeate the group to which one belongs, and which ultimately mould one's conduct (Hewitt, 2007). Evidently, within the larger, more complex society, an individual has more than one generalized other. Hence, it is from these groups that individuals come to understand society and conventionally conform to its rules and expectations. It is also from these groups, or generalized others, that individuals learn how to act within various situations (Charon, 2004). In order to further explain the generalized other, Mead (1925) provides an example of a baseball player:

If he plays first base, it is as the one to whom the ball will be thrown from the field and from the catcher. Their organized reactions to him he has embedded in his own playing of the different positions, and this organized reaction becomes what I have called the 'generalized other' that accompanies and controls his conduct (p. 269).

In the present study, while parents were influential in shaping players' behaviours, the media and the NHL also played an important role as reference groups. In fact, the NHL represented a generalized other for both players and their parents. For example, when watching NHL hockey games on the television and/or attending live games, people learn and accept the professional-version of the game, which at times includes fighting opponents, disobeying rules, standing up for teammates, using violence, conforming to unwritten rules, and so forth. As such, the media and renowned hockey celebrities (e.g., professional athletes, commentators, spokespersons) impact how we see and act within the hockey culture precisely because their views within this environment are important to us. Nevertheless, young hockey hopefuls obviously took on many perspectives simultaneously in order to make sense of their world, and know how to behave within it (Charon, 2004). Not only were they influenced by the larger society of hockey and the expectations that are infused within it,

but they were also highly predisposed by their significant others' reactions to the same generalized others, which in this case included the overall Canadian tradition of hockey and its implications at both the youth and professional levels.

According to May (2001), athletes are frequently confronted with situations where physical play is dictated by the rules of the game, the interpretations of the audience, as well as the expectations of the culture, all of which vary from game to game. Clearly, the findings of the present study highlight the difficult predicament that athletes and parents continually need to manage within the youth hockey environment: Play by the written rules, push the limits of unwritten rules, or do what it takes to compete, as they do in the NHL. Hence, parents are faced with the dilemma of emphasizing competition, encouraging aggressive behaviours within the rules of the game, yet maintaining a clear perspective on what hockey, at least at the youth level, should represent. The findings of this study showed that parents agree that this tension lives inside them and that finding a balance proves difficult to do. Questionably, it is perhaps not whether young hockey players can differentiate between right and wrong, but more so if they can make sense of the endless mixed messages they are faced with. As suggested by Fields, Collins, and Comstock (2007), aggression in sport is often disregarded because of the assumptions that it is part of the game or it is just boys being boys. But where do we draw line?

Gendered Representations

Messner (1992) argues that the way in which people make sense of their sport experiences is not primarily as athletes, but as "spectators of a mediated public spectacle" (p. 164). In the present study, throughout the season, it was clear that the youth hockey world implied that hockey is primarily a man's game (Robinson, 1998; Weinstein et al., 1995).

According to Theberge (1997), the competitive sport world is one where the production and expression of gender continue to prevail and where young male athletes are predisposed to masculine values, rituals, and ideologies (Messner, 1992). Yet, somehow, the overall existing gender order in hockey is made to appear ‘natural’, rather than something that has been socially and historically constructed (Theberge, 2000). Allain (2008) examined issues related to desirable hockey masculinity within the Canadian Hockey League (players 18 to 20 years old), by exploring how gender is performed by players, supported by hockey institutions, and presented by the media. Her findings demonstrated how masculine practices within the Canadian hockey culture are shaped in various ways, including male players’ behaviours, structure of the game, as well as cultural representations by the media.

SI has contributed immensely to the area of gender precisely because of its emphasis on the ongoing mutual interaction between self and society as well as its recognition that self is a process rather than an entity (Stewart, 2003). Although the role of gender was not specifically examined in the present study, it was apparent that it plays a multifaceted role within the youth hockey environment. The following key sub-themes are discussed: (a) gendered nature of sport organizations, (b) parental division of labour, and (c) hegemonic masculinity.

Gendered Nature of Sport Organizations

The success of youth programs depends primarily on the quality and control of adult involvement (Messner, 2009). With such a high number of youth participants competing in hockey, minor hockey associations rely heavily on volunteers, without whom there could be no teams and/or leagues. In hockey, parents represent most of these much-needed volunteers (Arnold, 2002). According to Messner (2009), youth sport environments create a certain

gendered division of labour when it comes to appointing many of the various roles required for the successful management of a team. Clearly, within sport organizations, structures, decisions, power relations, beliefs, and common practices are typically fortified by preconceived gender ideologies (Shaw & Hoeber, 2007).

In order to gain a better understanding of the discourses that influence management roles within sport organizations, Shaw and Hoeber (2003) interviewed 35 employees from three different national sport organizations in England and found that senior management roles were heavily influenced by dominant discourses of masculinity. In contrast, the researchers reported that employment roles related to women and/or discourses of femininity were often undervalued within their organizations. Similarly, Theberge (2002) asserts that hockey arenas represent environments that celebrate masculinity and where women and girls undertake many supportive roles: They watch their sons, husbands, or brothers' games, and they routinely perform behind-the-scenes duties. According to Chafetz and Kotarba (1995), within the world of volunteerism in youth sport, men typically take on roles that allow for reward and recognition. Finally, Messner (2009) states that while fathers tend to have the "on-field" leadership roles, mothers are responsible for organizing team parties and collecting money for apparel and year-end gifts. He further explains that people's beliefs and understandings of this division of labour can be attributed to the "go with the flow" attitudes parents have on the patterns of organization within youth sports (p. 39).

In the present study, from on-ice officials to coaching staffs, these roles were held by men. Findings of the present study supported Messner's (2009) statement that boys' sport teams are almost always exclusively coached by men, which was the case for all of the ten teams in the league. My own experience as a coach suggests one explanation for this trend.

As a female hockey coach, my preference is to coach either girls or young women because of the type of game that is played. In women's hockey, intentional body checking is prohibited, which obviously changes on-ice strategies. Experienced within the boundaries of the women's game and having no experience with body checking, my coaching preference in terms of comfort, (perceived) competence, and confidence is to remain with the female version of the game. As such, this may offer one explanation as to why there were no women involved in coaching and/or officiating roles in the present study. Moreover, seeing that there was only one mother who had played hockey, it is likely that many of the other mothers did not have the in-depth knowledge (or available time commitment) required for coaching a competitive team.

By recognizing the fluidity of the self, symbolic interactionists view gender as a contextual, ever-changing, and ongoing construction. They also acknowledge the processes through which gender becomes a lived reality and the interactional nuances that create, sustain, and reinforce it (Stewart, 2003). Hence, displays of gender represent individuals' cultural competence, which Howard and Hollander (1997) refer to as individuals' "ability to perform the culturally prescribed roles believed appropriate for males and females" (p. 109). According to Goffman (1976), who was interested in the ways in which people manage their presentations of gendered selves in social environments, individuals position themselves within the social hierarchy of that culture.

In the present study, the core positions such as coaches, trainers, timekeepers, and scorekeepers were held by men. Other roles (e.g., photographer, equipment manager, tournament coordinator, fundraiser, and so forth) were divided amongst both mothers and fathers. This could be explained, at least in part, by the fact that fathers may have felt more

comfortable in certain roles because of their experience and background in the sport. Mothers, for their part, appear to have (unfortunately) tacitly assumed that certain tasks (e.g., timekeeping and scorekeeping) required a thorough understanding of the rules of the game (e.g., types and consequences of penalties), and were therefore best left to “the men”, despite these tasks being relatively straightforward. As the number of female hockey players continues to increase (Hockey Canada, 2010), more female-specific leagues are becoming available to young girls and more mothers will have grown up as “hockey players” themselves, perhaps leading to various volunteer opportunities, including the core positions on teams. Nevertheless, Shaw and Hoeber (2003) advocate that for change to occur, within the youth hockey setting for example, the organizational culture that fosters and protects dominant discourses of gendered roles must be held accountable. Yet, it is perhaps difficult to expect change within the sport organization, when within families alone, gendered discourses continue to prevail.

Parental Division of Labour

Within the family setting, traditional divisions of labour lead people, including children, to develop gender stereotypes, which then ultimately become a prescription for social norms and accepted behaviours (Burn, 1996). These norms are continually communicated by our culture through social interactions and power relations, therefore creating and supporting preconceived notions of gendered roles. Evidently, the roles and responsibilities of parents in hockey also appeared to be gender-defined, as they often are in family settings. Craig (2006) investigated whether the experiences of providing care were different between mothers and fathers, and if women provide more child care than men. By using large-scale quantitative data from the 1997 Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use

Survey (N > 4000 households), it was reported that compared to fathering, mothering involves a greater time commitment, increased multitasking, more physical labour, more rigid schedule, more alone time with children, and an overall greater responsibility for managing children's care. Results also showed that mothers tended to be responsible for transporting children to and from child-related activities.

According to Thompson (1999), a woman's domestic labour in relation to youth sport involvement consists of the "work that women do that facilitates and services the participation in sport of others, particularly the members of their immediate family" (p. 2). In her qualitative study, Thompson explored the forms of labour required of mothers of junior tennis players, whereby she investigated the ways in which the sport was organized and the impact it had on the women's lives. It was found that mothers' contribution to their child's sport extended beyond their many child care responsibilities. In fact, not only was their child's sport participation a demanding commitment; it also became a family priority. Many of their duties as a "tennis Mom" included: taxiing to facilities, shopping for equipment, preparing meals, talking to administrators, laundering uniforms, and so on.

The pattern that developed in the present study reflected the gendered divisions of labour demonstrated in previous research. While parents confirmed that their roles may differ in part from their spouses, most admitted that their involvement in youth hockey is a "family affair". The findings of the present study highlight the importance of parents in establishing complementary roles in order to enable the integration of hockey into their family lifestyle. Parents' responsibilities were, to an extent, therefore defined and assigned based on each family's personal welfare. For example, parents described their responsibilities based on spouses' schedules and potential family conflicts (e.g., mother drove son to practice because

father was working late). Even though both mothers and fathers attended games, most lobbies and/or rink sides were often solely occupied by fathers during practices.

Hence, the findings of this study also suggest that, based on my observations, fathers were more actively engaged in their son's hockey, in terms of attendance, direct involvement (i.e., providing feedback, personal coaching, promoting the value of competition), and overall interest in the game. On the other hand, it appeared as though mothers' roles revolved around managing and ensuring the overall commitment and balance of family, school, and hockey. In fact, fathers seemed to support the hockey lifestyle with more ease, while mothers questioned the overloaded schedule. Seeing that mothers often complained about the hectic hockey commitment, the time it took away from the family household, and the relentless demands it created in their lives, the findings of the present suggest that mothers' roles revolve much more heavily around child care and family responsibilities. For example, one reason that may explain why practices appeared to be mostly attended by men is that mothers used the practice time efficiently by multitasking. In other words, while fathers tended to watch practice and socialize, mothers typically dropped off their sons at the facility door and used the ice time to run various errands (e.g., groceries).

Hewitt (2007) defines 'conventional roles' as "standardized, widely known, labelled perspectives from which people act in a wide range of situations" (p. 175). Over time and through interaction, these roles have developed a common definition, a shared understanding, and an established set of behaviours and expectations. These roles shape our view of reality and our location within it as we proceed to interact with others. From a gendered perspective, conventional roles thereby constrain us because they pose an implicit set of obligations and implicitly provide us with a sense of structure (Shibutani, 1961). As suggested by Wuerth

and colleagues (2004), it is possible that mothers continue to feel responsible for family life and child care, therefore taking on many of the ‘mothering’ duties that allow for the family’s involvement in youth sport. In the same manner, men are typically viewed as having fewer family responsibilities, allowing them to allocate more time to other activities (Hovden, 2000), such as participating in their son’s hockey involvement.

In another study, Dixon and colleagues (2008) found that athletes identified their fathers as the observable administrators or coaches while their mothers were viewed as the often undetected providers of support and transportation. Through interviews with 17 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division-I female head coaches, the researchers examined the influence parents had on their daughter’s enduring involvement in sport. Results demonstrated that fathers were often referenced as coaches, while mothers were the chauffeurs. However, it should be noted that the participants in their study expressed that both of their parents played an important role and continually provided support and encouragement throughout their athletic involvement. Finally, Wuerth and colleagues (2004) examined the pattern of parental involvement in youth sports across careers. It was found that the influence of mothers and fathers was perceived as generally problem-free by both athletes and parents. Mothers typically considered themselves as being more supportive and involved in the child’s sporting activity than fathers did. While mothers believed they are the primary source of praise and understanding, fathers engaged in more directive behaviours (e.g., providing sport-specific feedback or offering constructive criticism).

In the present study, from the players’ perspectives, their parents’ responsibilities differed. They described their mother’s role as a nurturing one: they prepare their meals,

drive them to the rink on time, encourage them, and help them through tough times; while they viewed their fathers as more knowledgeable about the game: they talk about hockey, analyze their performances, and provide motivational speeches. Evidently, mothers and fathers on the team also acknowledged how their responsibilities differ from one another based on the types of situations they encounter. For example, as the team's losing streak continued, mothers expressed the need to do the "Mom thing" and provide emotional support to their sons, regardless of the game outcomes and performances. Their focus was no longer on hockey but on ensuring the emotional well-being of their sons. In contrast, even though very few of the fathers on the team had formal coaching qualifications and/or experience, most felt that part of their responsibility as a father is to provide their sons with coaching instructions. It is also during these "coaching moments" where fathers encouraged their sons to have an aggressive presence on the ice, deliver strong hits to opponents, as well as compete hard, all of which fathers (and sons) believe are integral elements of (male) hockey.

Hegemonic Masculinity

In a study conducted by Gilenstam, Karp, and Henriksson-Larsén (2008), the purpose was to investigate how six Swedish female university hockey players described and explained their experiences within and outside hockey. The participants of their study revealed that playing hockey allows them to exert power and force, which they believed challenges traditional views of women and men. In the present study, although female players would have been eligible to play, there were none on this specific team. There was however one girl playing for an opposing team in the league from the outskirts of the city. A solid defence(wo)man, she held her ground very well against her male opponents. If it were not for her ponytail dangling from her helmet, she could easily have been mistaken for a boy.

Parents' reactions to the opposing female player in the league support the findings from Gilenstam and colleagues' study. The mothers on the team, as well as myself, proudly supported the young girl and complimented her physical presence on the ice, while the fathers found reason to tease their sons about "being beat by a girl". Even though it is common for players to lose possession of the puck after a battle with an opponent, the significance of losing it to a female opponent received much greater attention. By doing so, an implicit connotation that male hockey players should be stronger than their female opponents lingers. In these situations, the messages parents, fathers especially, sent their sons were that boys are stronger than girls, men better than women. In fact, such statements reveal how the assumption that hockey is a man's game is deep-rooted within the culture.

According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity is defined as the "configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p. 77). In the present study, throughout the season, hegemonic masculinity presented itself through cultural assumptions and human behaviours of all those involved. Although it was never stated as such, the outlooks and perspectives that mothers and fathers shared in relation to their son's hockey participation were replete with hegemonic influences. For example, mothers felt powerless when it came to the use of body checking, despite their fears and concerns for the child's safety. Many of them acknowledged that there was "nothing they could do about it", so they simply learned to accept it. In the same manner, much to their dismay, mothers admitted that their spouses encouraged aggression and promoted body checking during conversations with their sons, a frequent occurrence they disagreed with. Yet, again, they rationalized these behaviours as part of

“boys being boys” and as “father-son” bonding opportunities. In these ways, mothers provided at least tacit support of this hegemonic masculinity.

The concept of ‘hegemony’ refers to dynamics and processes by which a culture or a group maintains its dominant position within social life (Connell, 1995). Consequently, through the process of socialization, young boys and girls learn how to behave, think, feel, and talk according to gender meanings that exist within a culture (Kimmel, 2004). Hence, some cultures encourage young boys and men to continually exhibit their masculinity through stoicism, dominance, and strength (Kimmel, 2004), such as is the case in hockey. When young male hockey players enter the world of hockey, they learn various gender roles and expectations. In the present study, throughout the season, numerous situations and common practices demonstrated how the competitive youth hockey environment embeds ‘manly’ values of dominance, force, intimidation, as well as aggression and violence (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009).

Essentially, sports provide opportunities for boys and men to demonstrate their power and strength, leading them to be idolized and considered heroes, whereas as weaker or more passive male athletes are relegated as powerless and unimportant (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). This status that is given to sport, and more specifically male athletes, is in no way ‘natural’. Rather, it has been historically constructed through social interactions, power relations, as well as universal practices (Connell, 1995). Hockey, a sport renowned for its hard-hitting style of play and aggression, is (always has been) regarded as masculine (Koivula, 2001). In fact, the conception of toughness is often significantly characterized by the rules of the game, especially those specific to body contact (Theberge, 2002).

The notion that hockey players must compete in aggressive play, even though some would prefer not to and/or are scared to, highlights how cultural collective expectations precede individual feelings and characteristics. In fact, the reality of the youth hockey environment is that 12 year old children are forced and pressured into situations where apprehension and passiveness are essentially forbidden whereas competitiveness and desire to triumph (i.e., “whatever it takes” attitude) are highly praised. With respect to gender differences, symbolic interactionists are interested in how we are socialized, how we come to take on particular identities, and how we know what we are supposed to do (Charon, 2004). In other words, Coakley and Donnelly (2009) define ‘identity’ as a “sense of who we are and how we are connected to the social world” (p. 41), which emerges out of the interaction between self and others (Mead, 1934). According to Cahill (1986), through interactions with others, children learn who they are and how they are supposed to conduct themselves based in part on their identities as males or females:

Children apparently learn that in order to gain recognition as full-fledged persons they must avoid appearing and behaving in ways that contradict, in the eyes of others, their socially bestowed sex identity. Because of children’s desire to be recognized as such persons, most children become increasingly concerned with doing so (p. 300).

In the present study, although this was never personally shared with me, players conformed to cultural expectations in fear of possible consequences, such as being teased for being ‘a wimp’ by teammates or being told by the coach that they are ‘playing soft’. Similarly, while it was evident that the players on the ice were reluctant to body check, parents wanted them to do so. For example, it was as though the mother who implicitly contradicted her son’s candour about being scared on the ice was disappointed that her son was not representing the masculine toughness and roughness of hockey, as he should be. This leads us to the following question: Would a 5'8" adult want to fight someone who is six

inches taller or 25lbs heavier? Under normal circumstances, presumably not. Yet, is this not what is requested of young prepubescent hockey players on the ice, whereby body checking favours growth spurts and muscle mass? Regardless of the height and weight differences of 12 year old boys, the expectations that hockey is an aggressive, hard-hitting, body-crashing game remain unchallenged.

As stated by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), hegemonic patterns of masculinity are not always realistic because the ideals and fantasies are ultimately difficult for boys and men to achieve. In other words, the assumptions of hegemonic masculinity produced and reproduced within a culture are often at times unachievable (Light, 2007). In his study, Light investigated the ways in which variation, diversity, and resistance play a role within hegemonic masculinity in high school rugby. The findings of his study suggested that a powerful dominant discourse of hard and tough masculinity existed within the school and which young male students feel obliged to live up to. Light further explained that exemplars of hegemonic masculinity, such as professional athletes and media representations, are influential in the maintenance of dominant discourses.

In the same manner, Messner (2002) stated that the media is a cultural environment that portrays sport as male-oriented and reinforces traditional masculinity. More specifically, Messner and colleagues reported that media coverage in mainstream professional sports, such as the NHL, commonly convey messages that aggression and playing through pain are integral elements of success and power (Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000). In the present study, fathers often talked about recent NHL games, including goals, fights, and big hits; and parents admitted that they are the first ones on their feet to cheer when a fight erupts, even when in the presence of their children. While the NHL and/or media may be one way in

which people learn that aggressive sport behaviours are an integral element of both sports and therefore masculinity, researchers caution against establishing a cause-and-effect relationship until further empirically validated (Coakley, 2004; Young, 2000). In fact, many parents tended to blame the NHL for accepting aggressive and violent behaviours on the ice, without acknowledging their own endorsement within the family home. As one mother stated, “as long as society says it’s okay, it will be there”. Clearly, members of the hockey social system (e.g., players, coaches, parents, spectators) are all complicit in contributing to this state of affairs.

Messner (2007) advocated that organized youth sport represents an environment where athletic success results in recognition from adult males (e.g., coaches, father, older brothers, uncles) and where dominant values of winning and performance are celebrated. As such, in the present study, parents and coaches alike reinforced behaviours that conformed to hegemonic masculinity, as was found in Goig’s (2008) study on the social construction of masculinity in football. In his study, coaches and fathers dictated messages that promoted competitive attitudes and aggressive behaviours, such as pushing opponents and playing physical. According to these researchers, coaches and parents are the primary exponents of hegemonic masculinity to children and adolescents.

In the present study, while fathers congratulated physical play and applauded big hits, they also complained about the team’s lack of competitiveness, bowed in disbelief at missed body checking opportunities, and communicated their disappointment in players’ aggressive-less styles of play. For example, one father blatantly called his son a “chicken” after he avoided an open-ice hit, while another father told his crying son to “suck it up” after being injured. Another time, despite other parents’ concerns, a father complained about his son

lying (motionless) on the ice after being knocked down. Moreover, statements that some fathers expressed, such as “who cares about the puck if he’s going to hit like that” and “now that’s good old hockey” highlight the pressure that is placed on young boys to demonstrate their toughness on the ice, more so than on competing and playing the game itself. As one father admitted, during one game, parents were more enthusiastic about an opponent being body checked than they were about the team scoring a goal, which was a seldom occurrence.

According to Coakley and Donnelly (2009), additional and alternative ideologies of masculinity need to be developed in order to shun the common belief that “boys will be boys”, which tend to lead to problems within various cultures, including hockey. Notions such as “taking one for the team” and “no pain, no gain”, as previously discussed in relation to aggression, remain common ideologies that promote men to use their bodies as well-oiled machines fuelled by power and domination (Messner, 1992). Yet, these ‘masculine’ values and practices infiltrated the competitive youth hockey environment at no fault of the players themselves. Rather, these cultural transmissions are projected and fostered by adults. Hence, there is a need for members of the youth hockey system, including parents, to re-evaluate the image of what it means to be a successful male hockey player, one that excludes aggression, domination, intimidation, and power, and focuses on assertion, work ethic, and sportpersonship. In other words, an alternative way of viewing masculinity in hockey must be developed and supported.

Paradoxes of Parental Involvement

The involvement of children in youth sport is highly dependent on the participation of their parents (Coakley, 2004; Côté, 1999; Durand-Bush, 2000). Yet, parents’ behaviours at practices, during games, and along the sidelines have gained increased attention and have

been labelled as problematic (Duncan, 1997). The findings of this study highlight the need to determine the boundaries of what is right and wrong, as well as what is acceptable and unacceptable of not only the players on the ice, but of the parents in the stands. Even though parents argued that the media does not accurately represent the competitive youth hockey environment, findings herein prove contrary. While it is true that the media has portrayed “hockey parents” as outrageous and out of control by reporting negative incidents, typically on the extreme, there were endless situations that I encountered throughout the season that were shocking, absurd, even shameful, and which consistently avoid public scrutiny. The fact that parents felt comfortable and confident in behaving in such ways in front of me, fully aware of the purpose of the study and that I was observing them, raises important concerns, such as the justification, denial, and motives of their behaviours. In order to further explore this issue, the following sub-themes are presented: (a) parental approaches and practices, (b) conflicting parental behaviours, (c) parental versus coaching rights, and (d) implementation of parental codes of conduct.

Parental Approaches and Practices

Although the process of socialization in sport has been the subject of considerable research over the years, the focus has mostly been on the athletes (see Greendorfer, 2002 for a review). Yet, in a study conducted by Wiersma and Fifer (2008), who explored parental involvement in youth sport by conducting 10 focus groups with 55 parents, it was found that meeting new people and being part of a common group through their children’s sport participation were important for parents. As a youth sport parent, these parents recognized that their child’s involvement in sport enabled them to meet people that they may not have otherwise met.

In the present study, it was evident from the onset and throughout the season that the parents on the team had created strong bonds and lasting friendships with some of the other parents on the team. Many of the families had been together for nearly five years, some for even longer. At the arena, stories and laughs could be heard from various groups of parents as they reminisced about old times and chatted about random topics. In the same manner, parents managed to put aside their personal differences in order to carry out their assigned team responsibilities (e.g., timekeeper, ice scheduler, tournament coordinator), ensuring a smooth-running organization within the team. It should be noted however that the team's parental dynamics were not always positive and supportive. In fact, there were obvious cliques as parents gravitated towards their friends, at times leaving others excluded. For example, "summer hockey" parents often migrated toward each other and chatted about their upcoming season. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the parents' dynamics were typical for group settings (e.g., workplace), whereby not everyone will always get along or share similar outlooks. From an SI perspective, all societies require cooperative actions from their members (Charon, 2004). According to Blumer (1969), the concept of 'cooperative action' implies that individuals work collectively to "fit together lines of action" and therefore perform joint action (p. 5). As such, individuals engage in cooperative efforts as they work together despite their personal goals and/or interests, which was evident in the present study within the group dynamics of the team. Parents may not have always agreed with one another and/or liked each other's company, yet they managed to put their differences aside in order to make the hockey society operate efficiently and effectively. Hence, despite their differences, the social circle was found to be an important part of parents' involvement in hockey.

According to Gould and colleagues (2008), for the most part, parents are essentially a positive influence on their child's sport participation (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2008). Examining the parents' role in youth tennis as perceived by coaches, their results indicated that parental commitment and child-parent interactions were generally positive. The coaches in their study believed that parents adopted an appropriate perspective of their child's tennis participation, emphasized child development, and were generally compliant and compassionate. Consistent with previous research, in the present study, numerous positive and supportive parental behaviours were observed throughout the season. These included but were not limited to: singing cheers in the stands, applauding nice plays and strong efforts, giving high-fives or hugs after games, inquiring about feelings, and setting goals. Conversely, there were also frequent parental behaviours exhibiting negative actions. Frequent scenarios included: criticizing performances, demanding explanations, bad-mouthing teammates or coaches, name-calling, displaying poor body language, constant coaching, and harassing officials, most of which were typically carried out by fathers.

In the present study, although parents often shouted positive comments to praise hard work and encourage persistence (e.g., "good job", "way to go", and "keep it up"), negative comments directed towards poor performances, lack of intensity, coaching decisions, officials' calls, and so forth were also frequently heard (e.g., "ah come on", "what are you doing?", "come on ref", "that's bullshit"). While no official recording was taken into account, in my view, these types of negative comments seemed to be in the majority during hockey games. At times, these negative comments were simply whispered between breaths as an impulsive reaction, but other times they were deliberately expressed in order to be heard by the players, referees, and/or occasionally the coaching staff. When comments from the

stands may not always have been audible from ice level or the team's bench, parents' body language and demeanour (e.g., shaking their heads, raising their arms, turning their backs to the game) projected their frustration and/or anger clearly. In fact, communication between two or more people is possible through the use of significant symbols, which can be either words and/or gestures that call forth the same meaning for others as they do for themselves (Hewitt, 2007; Mead, 1934). Symbolic interactionists would further characterize the fundamental nature of communication not through the transfer of information, but rather the influence that the behaviour of one person has on another (Hewitt, 2007). As such, undoubtedly, players on the team were continuously modifying their on-ice behaviours based on their interpretations of their parents' acts and gestures from the stands.

In a study examining the nature and target of parents' verbal behaviours during youth sporting events, Kidman, McKenzie, and McKenzie (1999) reported that while most parental comments were generally positive (47.2%), there was still a high percentage (34.5%) of negative comments. Positive comments consisted of reinforcing or motivating type of remarks, whereas negative comments included correcting, scolding, contradicting, and witticism. Although the amount and categorization of comments were not recorded in the present study, the nature of parents' comments offers similarities with Kidman and colleagues' study. It should be noted however that while their study provides an overview of the types of verbal behaviours, the present study also considered the context in which these behaviours were observed (e.g., game situations, before or after practices). In a more recent study, Bowker and colleagues (2009) examined the verbal behaviours of spectators (i.e., parents) at youth hockey games by using a naturalistic observation design. More specifically, they coded comments of spectators based on type (positive, negative, corrective, neutral) and

target (officials, players, other spectators) as well as how comments may have varied as a function of spectator gender, level of competition, age of competitors, and player gender. It was found that the majority of comments were generally positive and directed towards the players on the ice. With an average of 105 comments per game, researchers reported that on average five of those comments were negative and typically directed towards the on-ice officials. The present study revealed a much greater prevalence of negative comments, which were generally voiced by fathers on the team. This is inconsistent with Bowker and colleagues' study, who found that females' (mothers') comments were generally more negative, intense, and aggressive in nature.

During a discussion on the conduct of players towards officials in the NHL, fathers boasted that the way officials are treated is shameful and should not be tolerated. They agreed that it is about respecting authority, as you would a police officer on the street who is trying to make people obey rules and conform to boundaries. Clearly, this conversation projected endless inconsistencies with their own behaviours. One father, a reoccurring "yeller" in the stands, advocated that NHL players lack personal control and need to be held responsible for inappropriate behaviours toward the officials. Ironically, it appeared as though these fathers were genuinely worried about the essence of authority in professional sport, an entertainment business. They were concerned at the treatment of NHL authority figures on the ice (i.e., professionally trained grown-up men) and the message it portrays to young hockey players. Despite their own inappropriate behaviours at local arenas, parents believed that NHL officials are undeservingly disrespected. Yet, are officials working youth hockey games not worthy of the same respect? Parents did not seem too worried about how

they disrespected them, implicitly creating a belief that young officials are at the mercy of unruly parents.

According to researchers, bullying behaviour occurs in various social environments, whereby individuals or groups of people seek to dominate and control other people (Lines, 2008) through various verbal and physical behaviours, such as physical attacks, intimidation, rudeness, name-calling, and threats (Guerin & Hennessy, 2002). While many definitions on bullying have been formed, most of them entail an abuse of or perceived imbalance of power between individuals and/or groups of people (Barton, 2006; Lines, 2008). In the present study, various incidences, perceivably comparable to bullying, occurred throughout the season whereby parents attempted to exercise their power over others, such as the on-ice officials. During games, common negative parental behaviours consisted of shouting, cursing, criticizing, taunting, and mocking officials. At the very extreme, one father angrily followed a referee into his dressing room after a tournament game and angrily confronted him.

Clearly, some of these behaviours allude to bullying, whereby parents use power and intimidation to belittle and essentially influence (usually young) officials. If one uses ‘workplace bullying’, which includes undermining a person’s ability (or skills) in front of others and/or disrupting a person’s ability to work (Randall, 2001) as a comparative frame to understand behaviour, many obvious parallels were observed within the competitive youth hockey environment. Parents frequently yelled at officials, disputed their calls, and questioned their abilities, over and over again, game after game, even though their lack of knowledge of the rules of the game resonated through their comments and arguments. Yet somehow parents were under the impression that they knew more than the officials, and

therefore attempted to control the game or at the very least, the officials. In fact, some parents even believed that they are responsible for ‘evaluating’ the officials’ overall competence, implying that they have a right to express their satisfaction (or lack thereof). But is it really through intimidation, humiliation, and/or name-calling that an official will refine his or her skills and feel confident in his or her abilities?

Hockey Canada (2010) states that the organization loses approximately ten thousand officials each year due to “abuse”. Based on what was observed in the present study, it is no wonder that officials want to leave the game. In fact, how some officials choose to remain involved and continue to experience such abuse is difficult to grasp. While some of the parents in the present study continuously complained about the officiating and the lack of qualified officials, they seemed oblivious that they were, ultimately, a cause of the problem. As qualified and experienced officials walk away, new recruits, with little experience, must now, in addition to fully understanding the rules of the game, learn to develop tough skin. It is worth noting that most officials at the ‘Peewee AA’ level are (typically) Level II-certified; their certification process consisted of 16 hours of mandatory clinics, a minimum of 70% on a written examination, and a practical on-ice evaluation. The only age requirement is that Level II officials must be at least 16 years of age. Consequently, parents in the present study, especially fathers, incessantly bullied officials, who may not have been much older than 17 or 18 years of age. Regardless of the officials’ age, as stated by one parent, yelling obscenities, publicly criticizing, and/or ridiculing on-ice decisions are completely unacceptable, and epitomize poor examples to the young players on the ice. Clearly, these types of behaviours also raise the question as to the potential intergenerational transmission of the disregard for authority vested in officials.

Conflicting Parental Behaviours

Parents have a powerful influence on the behaviours of their children (Denzin, 1992; Musolf, 1996; Smith, 2003). LaVoi and Babkes Stellino (2008) conducted a study in order to examine the influence of parents on athletes' good and bad sport behaviours. More specifically, the purpose was to explore the perceptions of 259 young male hockey players on the parent-created sport climate and its relation to their self-reported sport behaviours. As a result, it was found that parents have an important influence on the behaviours of their children in sport, whereby the way in which children interpret their parents' beliefs and behaviours ultimately dictates whether they will engage in good and/or poor sport behaviours. In a study examining predictors of poor sportpersonship behaviours of young athletes, Shields and colleagues (2007) found that coach and spectators' behaviours had the strongest relationship with athlete behaviour. Results also demonstrated that poor sportpersonship behaviours predominantly occurred in sports such as football and hockey, which the researchers suggest may be linked to the physical contact of the game itself. It was also reported that situations involving parents yelling angrily at officials were common incidents during youth sporting events. Their findings suggest that these types of reactions during games are not sport-specific. Rather, they are reoccurring scenarios within the youth sport world, which the researchers highlight is the danger that lies within the youth sport environment: When parental behaviours deviate from positive norms, it implicitly sends the wrong message to children.

According to the parents in the present study and as observed throughout the season, player behaviours deemed as 'good' consisted of positive interactions with teammates, opponents, and officials, as well as respect for the rules of the game. Conversely, parents

identified ‘bad’ behaviours as a lack of appreciation for the rules of the game and a lack of respect towards authority and others. Parents on the team expressed how important their role is in terms of promoting and emphasizing sportspersonship as well as integrity on and off the ice. To do so, they must act as role models, teach fair play skills, monitor on-ice play (e.g., number and types of penalties), as well as deal immediately with undesirable behaviours if and when they occur.

While parents in the present study expected their children to behave in the manner that they deemed “acceptable”, much of their own observed behaviours displayed incongruence. Therefore, accepted, expected, and observed behaviours varied depending on who the actor and audience were. While parents essentially wanted their children to behave properly and show respect (e.g., to their coaches, teammates, officials, and rules of the game), their own behaviours were less than stellar. In fact, many contradictions were presented throughout the season in relation to what parents alleged was acceptable and how they themselves behaved. As an example, parents sometimes yelled remarks such as “now that’s unacceptable. That shouldn’t happen and it shouldn’t be allowed” after a player retaliated after the whistle and was assessed a penalty. Yet, it seems unfair to blame a 12 year old boy for his aggressive behaviour and/or lack of discipline when parents are continuously promoting aggressive physical presence on the ice, encouraging hard body checks, supporting a leniency in written rules, and yelling at the officials.

In Wiersma and Fifer’s study (2008), which explored the positive and negative aspects of parental involvement, it was reported that parents tended to behave (inappropriately) out of instinct in order to protect their child from harm, unfair treatment, and/or embarrassment. In other words, parents naturally felt the need to impulsively rescue

their children by attempting to control the situations that surround them. The present study has similar findings in that it was common for parents to overreact when situations involved their own child. However, while parents may have reacted at times as an impulse to protect their child, most times parents yelled and criticized the on-ice officials for calls related to the rules of the game (e.g., icing, offside, face-off locations) whereby the focus is on game advantage and not on protecting one's child. Voices of many parents were repeatedly heard on where a face-off should be taken, how the player cleared the zone, or whether the player could have played the puck. These situations are frequent game scenarios which do not involve danger or harm to any player. As such, this leads one to question if parental behaviours at arenas are predominantly related to parents' instincts to protect their child or parents' competitive desires to win hockey games.

Findings herein are consistent with previous research in that parents dismiss their attitudes as problematic but explain that it is part of the game (Omli & LaVoi, 2009). In their study, which focused on understanding the influence of angry parent behaviours on children, Omli and LaVoi surveyed coaches, athletes, and parents in order to determine sideline behaviours of youth soccer parents. It was reported that yelling at the referees and coaching from the sidelines were the most predominant parental behaviours and typically, parents yelled and/or criticized their own children from the sidelines, rather than those of teammates. Omli and LaVoi suggested that parents consider these behaviours as being part of the game, without fully considering their impact on children's performances and overall sporting experiences.

In the present study, some parents appeared to be oblivious about their own behaviours; either they are in complete denial or refuse to assume any responsibility. For

example, the fact that one father saw no problem in forcing his son to play injured or for another father to imply that “nothing happened” when he confronted officials after a tournament game and police were called in (all of which was caught on videotape), suggests that some parents find reason to accept their behaviour by down playing actual occurrences, redirecting blame, setting unrealistic expectations, and/or justifying impulsive reactions. How anyone could think that this was “part of the game” or that their behaviours were in the best interest of the children is unfathomable.

Interested in the social processes by which particular behaviours come to be understood, symbolic interactionists have made significant contributions to the study of deviance (Herman-Kinney, 2003). According to Becker (1963), deviance is “not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an ‘offender’” (p. 9). However, a person who is judged to be deviant may oppose such an accord and share a different perspective (Herman-Kinney, 2003). In fact, a person “may not accept the rule by which [he] is being judged and may not regard those who judge his as either competent or legitimately entitled to do so” (Becker, 1963, p. 2-3). In the present study, while it did appear that some parents may not clearly understand the consequences of their behaviours, others adamantly believe that their behaviours were their own business. Parental behaviours clearly posed many issues and concerns amongst members of the team. While some parents acknowledged that, at times, they may have reacted impulsively and/or inappropriately, other parents rebuffed the idea that their behaviours were problematic, even though fellow parents identified them as such. The concept of ‘deviant disavowal’ refers to an individual or group’s rejection of the label being pinned on them (Lawson & Garrod, 2001), and therefore claim to be ‘normal’. In order to preserve their identity within the group,

they refute responsibility for their actions and redirect blame elsewhere. Considering the amount of money being invested in their sons' hockey, a handful of the parents in the present study strongly felt that the way they choose to 'parent' in hockey was ultimately their decision. These parents also truly believed that because they invest so much money and time into their son's hockey participation, they have a right to act as they please. Nevertheless, their conduct in public places is at their discretion, which was at times visibly observable throughout the season.

According to Meân and Kassing (2007), parents may be seeking the glory and pride from their children's sport because they believe that it reflects their parenting abilities. In their study, data were collected during 44 youth sport events in order to examine identity and spectator/fan communication during youth sport competitions. They reported that conflicting and overlapping identities (of coaches, parents, spectators/fans) and prevailing ideologies of winning, success, competition, and parenting exist within the youth sport setting. This notion that children's athletic success – or the misrepresentation of success which revolves around victories, trophies, medals, rankings, and scholarships (Gould, 2009) – somehow reflects parenting skills remains a dominant discourse in youth sport. In the present study, these notions of competition and winning seemed to mean more to the parents than it did to the young hockey players themselves. Although the team's losing streak did not allow for many (or any) superstars on the team, it was clear parents held 'their head a little higher' in the lobby after tournament games where their son was named the game's most valuable player or when their son scored the winning goal.

According to Smoll and Cumming (2006), it is not uncommon for parents to over-identify with their children, whereby parents experience the children's triumphs and

disappointments as if they themselves had experienced them. Similarly, Hellstedt (1987) explained how parents who set unrealistic expectations are often upset, disappointed, and/or embarrassed when their child performs poorly. Consistent with previous research, findings of the present study demonstrated how parents tended to take their son's performance personally. Parents enjoyed being in the spotlight when their son performed well, but a poor performance compelled them to either make excuses for their son's mistake (e.g., nagging injury, flu symptoms) or apologize and take some of the blame. For a mother to publicly apologize to the group of parents for a mistake her son made on the ice is one example of many that highlights how parents have become so absorbed and emotionally involved in their son's sporting participation. In fact, the underlying desires and motives of some of the parents on the team were at times shocking to me. How a father can walk away from the arena halfway through a game because he is upset by his son's performance or how a father could call his son an "idiot" for making a bad pass, clearly indicates that parents have completely forgotten the essence of youth sport.

Hellstedt (1987) stated that parents may have a need that is satisfied through their child's sport participation or believe that the child's sport will lead to further educational or career-oriented opportunities. In the present study, while most parents agreed that the chances of their sons getting drafted into the 'Major Junior' level (which eventually streamlines into the NHL for very few talented players) are close to nil, they still have hopes that their sons may receive a scholarship and compete on a university team. Throughout the season, parents frequently made reference to their financial contributions, time commitment, and inherent responsibilities, as though their sons now owed them something in return, highlighting how some parents implicitly consider their involvement in competitive youth

hockey as a type of investment. As such, parents believed that if their sons continued to play hockey at an elite level and/or received partial or full athletic scholarships, the dividends of their implicit investments would be somehow more worthwhile. This presumed investment was also evident in the belief parents shared in relation to the volunteer coaches' responsibilities and obligations.

Parental versus Coaching Rights

Youth sports are predominantly run by adult volunteers (Messner, 2009), most of whom become involved because they have a child on the team (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). In the present study, parents were relieved and excited at the onset of the season to learn that two coaches, who did not have children on the team, had agreed to volunteer. As stated by Arnold (2002), however, when teams start losing, they typically point fingers directly towards the coaching staff, which was consistent within the team. Two months into the season, the losing streak began and parents blamed the coaches for the downfall. Reasons were varied yet contradictory. For example, many parents thought that the coaches should have been with this team three years ago because of their strong emphasis on skill development, while other parents thought they would have been more beneficial three years from now as their approach was too technical for such young boys.

In a study conducted by Hellstedt (1987) on the coach-parent-athlete triad, results demonstrated that it is important that coaches educate parents and maintain open communication. Hellstedt cautioned, however, that youth sport coaches will rarely win battles with parents deemed as "over-involved", creating situations that volunteer coaches are often unprepared to handle. In Wiersma and Sherman's (2005) study, youth coaches reported having to deal with constant concerns and problems from parents, including misguided

intensity, emphasis on winning, politics, diplomacy, and lack of knowledge of the game. In the present study, from the onset of the season, the coaches remained at a distance and limited their interactions with parents in order to potentially reduce negative parental incidences. Yet, this avoidance of socializing with parents resulted in parents questioning the coaching staff's interpersonal skills. Disappointed by the lack of parent-coach communication, parents strongly believed that they have a right to partake in the team's decision making process, which should not solely be up to the coaching staff. Considering the financial investment they were making, parents advocated that there is a definite need to be better informed on various topics, such as team development and progress, as well as coaching plans and objectives. In fact, they felt it is their right as parents to receive an evaluation of their child's progress and/or areas for improvement, raising the debate about what parents are entitled to as the primary providers of their son's hockey participation.

For their part, the two non-parent volunteer coaches in the present study explained that their passion revolves around the game and teaching children, which is why they are willing to sacrifice a large part of their personal time to a group of young players with whom they have no attachment or obligation. Avoiding parents allowed them to focus on coaching (e.g., game plans, on-ice strategies, practice designs) rather than deal with parents' constant suggestions, ideas, and demands. Clearly, this raises the issue of who is entitled to what and by whom, creating a tension that likely exists not only in hockey, but youth sport in general.

From the parents' perspective, it is understandable for them to foresee a more implicated role considering that they have high expectations for their "investment". From the coaches' standpoint, however, they are already contributing endless hours, dedicated energy, and continuous effort for their pure love of the game. As a volunteer position, it is hard to

request any more from such individuals, especially when it relates to dealing with unruly parents who seem to be involved in competitive youth hockey for all the wrong reasons. Given the recent media coverage on parental rage at youth sporting events, it is easy to sympathize with volunteer coaches. Can we blame them for putting up their guard and wanting to keep their distance from overzealous parents?

Within SI, selectivity is significant to human conduct. William James (1905) explained:

Millions of items of the outward order are present to my senses, which never properly enter into my experience. Why? Because they have no interest for me. My experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind (p. 402).

As human beings, our various senses allow us to retain important features of our environment while ignoring others (Meltzer, 2003). Hence, within the competitive youth hockey environment, our interests, needs, and past experiences shape our perceptions of the situations we encounter. Needless to say, players, parents, and coaches share different views and see the world differently according to their own selective attention of what is important and what is not.

Implementation of Parental Codes of Conduct

Recent research suggests that youth programs are playing a more proactive role when it comes to addressing issues of negative parental influences (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). Some of these strategies include developing and enforcing codes of conduct, appointing sideline volunteer monitors, creating fine systems for poor behaviours, limiting parental interactions with children, as well as restricting parental attendance (Omli & LaVoi, 2009). Although these implementations seem promising, their effectiveness and benefits have yet to be evaluated.

In 2002, Hockey Canada launched its first campaign designed to raise awareness about the ongoing problem posed by adults at youth hockey games (Hockey Canada, 2010). In the present study, parents admitted that while the Hockey Canada campaigns were insightful and eye-opening, they probably did not reach the people they were intended for. Most parents agreed that the campaigns, as well as more recent initiatives (e.g., codes of conduct, posters) showed promise, however, their value is questionable considering there is no enforcement of their implementation. Acknowledging that parents do not see or choose not to see the repercussions of their behaviours, one mother explained that “[the kids] pay the price and some parents don’t get it”. Another mother stated that the underlying meanings within the commercials were revealing and affected her on a personal level. She explained that a fine line exists between spectatorship and unacceptability, which is why the message that “it’s just a game” is a reminder she often uses when she gets caught up in the competitive hockey culture. Through reflexivity, human beings have the ability to control and/or modify action by responding to themselves and to their own actions (Mead, 1934; Meltzer, 2003). In fact, it is a conscious minded process that empowers individuals to self-evaluate, self-criticize, self-motivate, and self-control, and “enables the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself” (Mead, 1934, p. 38). In the present study, many parents admitted to undergoing a reflective process throughout their hockey involvement. Their perspectives have changed over time, which has affected their views on the culture of hockey and their own personal conduct within the environment. Through self-reflection, some of the parents on the team have used particular situations as learning experiences and future opportunities. Other parents, however, remained adamant that they would not change anything about their behaviour.

At the onset of the season, parents and players alike signed a mandatory association code of conduct, which listed acceptable behaviours both on and off the ice. These forms were distributed and signed at the first team parent meeting but it was clear that parents neglected to realize the importance and significance of these codes. In fact, parents joked between one another about who should and should not sign the form, and whether they should get someone to forge it for them. Although every player and one parent per family were required to sign the form, parents acknowledged that it is simply a routine procedure that has no meaning to them because there are no further accountability measures in place once the form is handed in. Even though the implementation of the code of conduct was a well intended initiative, parents were free to do as they please without any consequences once they (blindly) signed the form. One mother questioned whose responsibility it is to follow-up: the local association, the provincial organization, or Hockey Canada.

This situation leads to numerous tensions in relation to who is responsible for ensuring a positive experience for all. It seems nearly impossible to do in youth hockey considering the large number of participants: league and team administrators are already volunteering endless hours, coaching staffs are focused on the development of their athletes, and other parents feel intimidated and fearful of telling fellow parents to tone it down. Parents in the present study acknowledged that they “should do something” to rectify situations when other parents are creating scenes (e.g., yelling at referees, criticizing players), but admitted that they have never followed through because they did not have “the guts to say anything” or they do not feel like it is their place to tell others how to behave. When they have spoken up, the outcome was not positively received. For example, when one mother told another father to stop cursing (“that’s bullshit”) at the referee because there were young

children around, he glared at her, stepped down a few rows in the bleachers, and continued to swear. Consequently, rather than create conflict, parents typically moved seats or removed themselves from the setting (e.g., watched the game from the lobby) when such situations arose. Parents actually admitted to selectively choosing their seats in the stands before games in order to avoid sitting beside individuals who typically create negative energy. But is this really how it should be?

In sum, Wiersma and Fifer (2008) reported that parents typically share a clear understanding of their role within the youth sport environment, and would therefore not benefit from further education on how they should behave at such events. Although initiatives may help eliminate or reduce unruly parents, chances are the same individuals are likely to behave similarly in other environments (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). In the present study, throughout the season, the youth hockey environment, especially during games, sometimes mirrored a hostile environment among parents, whereby policies were neglected and accountability disregarded. Unfortunately, while it may only have taken a handful of individuals to change the atmosphere and make it a lot less enjoyable for the majority of the group, it is arguable that other parents stood in their shadow, feeling seemingly powerless to do anything about it. The fact that none of the parents repeatedly stood up for their own rights to enjoy their sons' game without having to listen to swearing, shouting, name-calling, and so forth, implicitly suggests that they are also responsible in maintaining this overall poor parental reputation that exists in youth hockey. Rather than sit back and blame the creation of a distorted culture, why is it that they cannot bring themselves to stand up and act on it? In essence, why are parents tolerating such displays of poor parental role modeling if they truly

oppose them? Moreover, what is needed to help them stand together, strong and determined, to promote change, even if it is only one competitive youth hockey team at a time?

In line with Mead and Blumer, the hockey culture is one that is created, sustained, and validated by selves and others, as individuals learn what it entails to be part of a greater social system. As stated by Katovich and Maines (2003) in relation to society, the competitive youth hockey environment is an ongoing and continuous process that requires all involved members to define and maintain its status, as they themselves maintain their own and other agreed-upon identities. While society does in fact represent symbolic interaction, it is also a symbolic interaction with purpose, direction, memory and people committed to its endurance and existence. Evidently, parents need to be held accountable for their behaviours as much as they need to be responsible for sustaining (and passively participating in) this cultural creation.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Research in various domains (e.g., school, music, sport) has demonstrated that parents' involvement and support highly influence the quality and form of their child's success (Côté, 1999; Davidson et al., 1996; Englund et al., 2004; Sichivitsa, 2007; Taylor et al., 2004). In recent years however, the portrayal of parents in youth sport has essentially been labelled in more of a negative than positive light (Harwood & Knight, 2009b). Although a growing body of research on youth sport has focused on parents, limited research has focused on the perceptions of parents themselves in relation to their involvement in youth sport (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

The present study used an in-depth qualitative approach to gain a more comprehensive and intimate understanding of the involvement of parents within a competitive youth hockey team throughout a full season timeline. The time that I spent in the setting shed light on how parents create and negotiate their roles within the competitive youth hockey culture, and how they perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression that permeate the environment. According to Heinzmann (2002), for significant progress to occur within the sport world, it is critical that parents examine their own beliefs and attitudes regarding what they believe youth sports should be all about, which includes their involvement, as well as their perceptions of the hockey culture.

Through the lens of symbolic interactionism (SI), an extensive exploration of parental involvement in competitive youth hockey allowed for a better understanding of the intensity and complexity of the situations parents encounter through their son's participation in the sport. According to Blumer (1969), the first premise of SI advocates that we act toward

physical objects and other individuals in our environment based on the meanings we have for them. The second premise stipulates that how we define and give meaning to these things derives from or arises out of the social interaction that we have with others (Blumer, 1969). Finally, the third and final premise of SI indicates that these meanings are continuously handled, modified, and interpreted through our dealings with things we encounter (Blumer, 1969). Using SI as the main perspective to guide this study emphasized a profound focus on human behaviour and social life in order to discover and interpret how meaning and culture are continuously created and re-created within the competitive youth hockey environment, as well as how people make sense of their own sport related experiences (Coakley, 2004). As such, observing the behaviours of parents, players, and coaches in real time and in the context in which they occurred provided opportunities to appreciate the intricate dynamics that underpin the roles of parents and their perceptions of aggression in hockey. This multifaceted approach resulted in several findings of interest, some of which supported previous research, while others offered new perspectives.

Summary of Key Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and reflect on the key findings of the present study as well as to discuss practical implications of these findings and suggestions for future research. In order to discuss the overall findings of the present study, the two research questions are used to guide, organize, and highlight the main themes that emerged from the data: (a) roles of parents in youth hockey, and (b) perceptions of parents on aggression in hockey.

Roles of Parents in Youth Hockey

The first research question that helped guide the present study was: “How do parents negotiate their role within the competitive youth hockey environment?” In the present study, parents assumed many roles, from facilitator to motivator, and even coach, while providing financial, emotional, and physical support (Hoyle & Leff, 1997). For the most part, parents modified their roles based on the situations that occurred throughout the season as well as the beliefs instilled within the environment. Ultimately, these assumptions influenced the nature of parents’ involvement, roles, and behaviours.

From the onset of the season, it was evident that the competitive youth hockey commitment required an undivided dedication, which is why parents referred to it as a “lifestyle” rather than simply an extracurricular activity. Weeknights were typically spent rushing to and from arenas for practices and games, while weekends often faded away with numerous hockey-related events, including tournaments. Through a gendered division of labour, mothers and fathers performed traditional roles (Messner, 2009; Thompson, 1999); Mothers tended to be responsible for managing and ensuring the balance of family, school, and hockey, while fathers had a more direct involvement (e.g., coaching, attendance at games, practices, and tournaments). Furthermore, parents were also expected to volunteer for a role within the team, such as treasurer, ice scheduler, photographer, tournament coordinator, amongst others. While these roles seemed to be divided amongst both mothers and fathers, it was evident that fathers took on responsibilities directly related to the game itself (e.g., coaching, timekeeping, scorekeeping) where an in-depth knowledge of the game is required, resulting in some mothers choosing to be involved in other ways. It is possible that this gendered parental division of labour may well shift within future youth hockey

generations as more mothers grow up as hockey players themselves, perhaps opening the door to greater opportunities and increased confidence within their child's hockey participation.

Needless to say, the involvement and roles of parents in youth hockey are often directly related to how parents view the situations they encounter, how they interact within the social environment, and how they choose to give meaning to the situations that surround them. Although some parents believed that the demands of hockey are exaggerated and at times impractical, they acknowledged that their perceptions have changed over time. After numerous seasons, parents have adjusted and accepted the reality of the competitive culture. Rather than blame the youth hockey setting, they advocated that if people want less of a commitment, they should be playing at the recreational level. In fact, many parents held high standards for the competitive level of 'AA', believing, at times, that competition precedes the fundamentals of youth sport. Consequently, the belief that competitive youth hockey "is what it is" was easily reflected in the intensity of the hockey schedule, the extensive financial demands, the expectations of strong performances, and the implicit perceived investment of parents.

According to researchers, parents tend to over-identify with their children, therefore experiencing their children's situations as their own (Smoll & Cumming, 2006) or setting unrealistic expectations, often leaving them feeling upset and frustrated (Hellstedt, 1987). Consistent with previous research, similar scenarios were noticeable throughout the season. For example, parents apologized for their son's on-ice mistakes, publicly criticized the team's lack of success, and continuously displayed their disappointment after poor performances. These reactions exemplify how parents within the competitive youth hockey

environment are no longer adhering to Hockey Canada's (2010) mission statement. In fact, the findings of the present study suggest that an ongoing conflicting tension exists within the competitive youth hockey environment, whereby an obsessive, adult-oriented culture has been created and maintained where the focus lies on winning and competition. Although most parents were essentially a positive influence on their child's sport participation, it appeared as though a handful of parents chose to behave in questionable ways. These parents downplayed the severity of their behaviours and dismissed their attitudes as problematic because they truly believed that "it's part of the game". Yet, parental behaviours that deviate from positive norms are implicitly sending the wrong message to children.

Perceptions of Parents on Aggression in Hockey

The second research question that was addressed in this study was: "How do parents perceive and deal with aggression in youth hockey?" Clearly, aggression is a complex and multi-dimensional topic within the youth sport world (Young, 2000), and hockey is one social context in which institutionalized types of aggression are promoted, not only at the professional levels, but at the youth levels as well (Smith, 2003; Vaz, 1982). Although aggression in hockey has been a concern for many years, little research has focused on the perceptions of parents in relation to issues of aggression within their child's sport.

In the present study, even though parents were opposed to retaliation or overly forceful acts by their sons, they encouraged body checking and emphasized physical presence on the ice. In fact, parents actually wished their sons would be more aggressive during games. However, in my experience and consistent with the present study, aggression and assertion are terms that are used interchangeably. Essentially, it became clear that there is confusion in terminology, as assertion is what parents seemed to seek in their sons. They

crave high intensity, grittiness, competitiveness, and controlled emotions, rather than aggressive behaviours where there is an intent to cause harm.

Nevertheless, parents' behaviours, both verbal and non-verbal, frequently promoted and praised the use of body checking. Parents communicated these attitudes not only by what they said (e.g., "pop him", "hit him"), but also by what they did (e.g., applaud hits, promote body checking). Although some mothers complained about the integration of aggression and/or body checking, they surrendered their opinions to the pressure of the culture in that they had to learn to accept it as being an important feature of the game. For their part, the players themselves seemed conflicted about body checking and its integration within the game. Even though players admitted to at times being scared of giving and/or receiving hits, they felt the need to state that it is a big part of the game. In effect, an assumption has been ingrained within the competitive youth hockey environment whereby 'real hockey players' use body checking to their advantage by crushing opponents and fearlessly standing up to oncoming checks. Throughout the season, it became evident that this belief was most often transmitted to young hockey players through their parents and coaches. As such, physical play was encouraged for what it explicitly symbolizes in terms of portraying desired competitive character, winning hockey games, as well as characterizing young players' masculinity. As suggested by Light (2007), people learn and are influenced by dominant and intertwined discourses of hegemonic masculinity through their involvement in sport. In fact, it was evident throughout the season that the competitive youth hockey culture supports and maintains hegemonic influences which portray the image of hockey as male-oriented and reinforce values of traditional masculinity.

Finally, parental perceptions of aggression within the youth hockey environment are highly influenced by social interactions, whereby meanings are continuously created, defined, and accepted through the socialization process. The perspective on how the game should be played is projected covertly (positive emphasis and reactions of big hits) and overtly (through the media). According to Messner (2002), it is important to consider how sport and its ideologies are presented in the media in order to understand the social environments in which sport is practised and perceived. Clearly, the media can serve as an influential mechanism in portraying beliefs on how hockey should be played as well as promoting assumed valued behaviours (Allain, 2008; Coakley, 2004; Messner, 2002); however, as cautioned by Kerr (2005), it is unrealistic to solely blame the media for the behaviours exhibited in sport. In fact, in the present study, parents admitted to cheering on NHL fights and using NHL players as teaching models for their sons. Undoubtedly, it is both parents and coaches alike, who continue to attempt to mimic the professional league. The expectations of how the game should be played have been infused by adults, to no fault of the young players themselves.

The findings of the present study suggest that parents need to be held accountable for their actions without always projecting blame elsewhere. Parents blamed on-ice officials for players' inappropriate behaviours. They blamed opponents for their sons' retaliation penalties. They blamed their sons' on-ice frustrations on losing streaks. They blamed the NHL for setting the wrong example to young hockey hopefuls, and the list continues. Yet, it must be acknowledged that young hockey players learn these behaviours from their environment and will continue to revert to these behaviours until they are taught differently. Considering that parents are powerful influential agents of their children's behaviours

(Denzin, 1992; Musolf, 1996; Smith, 2003), parents have a responsibility for teaching, role modelling, and exemplifying acceptable behaviours within the environment. Such a transformation of values and perspectives will not come easily or without systemic support from the youth hockey system.

Practical Implications

The present study sheds preliminary light on key issues related to the involvement of parents in youth hockey by highlighting the important roles parents play in facilitating positive experiences and the management of aggression within the competitive youth hockey. As such, it increases our current knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of parents and other partners involved in the world of youth hockey, which may provide a platform for advancing research in this area. In order to make any positive changes to the youth hockey environment, the system and its many stakeholders must embrace change. This study is important in providing researchers, parents, coaches, administrators, and organizations with a greater appreciation of the involvement of parents in the competitive youth hockey culture in general and a greater understanding of the challenges they encounter with regards to issues of aggression within the environment.

As suggested by Visek and Watson (2005), prevention initiatives should focus on hockey's youngest players so that the legitimacy of aggressive behaviours is curtailed and is no longer deemed as acceptable and "part of the game". In fact, the findings of the present study suggest that parents' beliefs play an important role in legitimating inappropriate and/or aggressive on-ice behaviours, whereby players' behaviours are repeatedly promoted, praised, and encouraged by parents. Knowing more about this phenomenon speaks directly to our ability to address the growing issues surrounding poor parental behaviours at youth hockey

games. Consequently, it allows us to deal with the situation more effectively in hopes of cultivating an attitude and an approach that respects the competitive nature of the environment yet remains within the boundaries of Hockey Canada's mission statement, which is to "lead, develop, and promote positive hockey experiences".

In the same respect, it would be important to take this one step further and educate the parents. In the present study, it was the parents who often pushed and encouraged their sons to play aggressively and "do what you have to do". Hence, it is the perceptions of parents that are influential and of utmost importance. Consequently, the findings of this study draw attention to the need to educate parents about the goals of organized youth hockey, with hopes of improving the role they play in their child's development in sport and life. It is important that the focus be geared toward children's overall sport enjoyment while minimizing parental behaviours that contribute to negative sport experiences. In sum, to the extent that these findings reflect in some measure the realities of other competitive youth hockey teams, it is evident that change needs to occur. The findings of this study suggest that common ideologies, cultural expectations, and implicit practices must be challenged and questioned in order to further enhance and enable positive experiences for all those involved within the competitive youth hockey environment. Ultimately, such reflection and accountability could potentially impact the lives of thousands of children and adults who are somehow tied to the debacle that has been unfortunately created.

Recommendations for Future Research

The involvement of parents in sport, and more specifically in hockey, is certainly a salient area for research. Based on the present findings, several future directions and strategies could potentially be explored in more detail. This includes investigating various

sample populations, such as different age groups (e.g., 'Atom' to 'Midget'), levels of calibre (e.g., house league to 'AAA'), as well as gender-specific teams (e.g., boys and girls' hockey). Beyond that, there is also a need to further examine the interactions between parents and children before, during, and after games in order to gain a better understanding of how verbal and non-verbal behaviours influence sporting experiences of both parents and children. This would also enable a greater understanding of the impact parental behaviours have on parent-child relationships. In the same manner, gender differences (mothers and fathers) and family structures (single and two-parent homes) should be considered.

From a methodological standpoint, as suggested by Meân and Kassing (2007), there would certainly be value in conducting a longitudinal study observing the same group of parents over time. For example, it would be helpful to follow a handful of parents from an 'Atom AA' team throughout their son's hockey career. Such a design would provide opportunities to observe how parental perceptions change over time in relation to their involvement in hockey, including roles, challenges, and cultural stressors. It would also allow for further exploration of parents' coping mechanisms with regards to the introduction of body checking into the game as well as the integration and acceptance of aggression in youth hockey. Furthermore, in order to better understand parental behaviours, using video and/or stimulated recall as a means of collecting data would allow parents to view themselves in action and provide opportunities for personal reflection, with hopes of learning how to control their emotions.

Finally further research should investigate the various parent education programs set forward by diverse youth sport associations. The findings of this study highlight the need for educational and organizational initiatives to be designed to enhance the positive experiences

by all those involved in youth hockey, yet suggests that initial initiatives need to be further addressed and evaluated. Although many initiatives have been created and implemented, their effectiveness remains unknown. Having them in place is a promising step forward, yet it is also only the first step of many that are needed. As stated by Eitzen (2006), we are responsible for creating the organization of youth sport that now exists, which therefore implies that we are also responsible for changing it as well.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR COACHES

Dear (insert head coach name),

We are conducting a PhD research project in order to investigate the evolution of hockey parents' involvement in youth hockey. More specifically, the purpose will be: (a) to explore how hockey parents/guardians create their role within the competitive youth hockey culture, and (b) to explore how parents/guardians perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the hockey environment.

Several incidents of parental violence at minor hockey games have recently received national media attention (Robidoux & Bocksnick, in press). There are numerous cases of parents banned, fined, and even arrested for inappropriate behaviours at youth sporting events (Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010). Although these cases are random and infrequent, there are many examples that demonstrate how aggression and violence have become a part of youth sport (Bergin & Habusta, 2004). In essence, there is a definite need for research in the area of parental behaviours in youth sport. The findings of the current research will increase our understanding of the roles and responsibilities of parents and bring awareness and education to hockey parents with hopes of improving the role they play in their child's development in sport and life. The findings could also potentially impact the lives of many children and adults who are somehow tied to the debacle that has been unfortunately created. However, there is no better time to change than in the present.

In order to gather the required data, the researcher will use two procedures. The first one, termed participant observation, will be used throughout the upcoming hockey season during sanctioned hockey games, team practices, road trips, tournaments, parent meetings, and other hockey-related functions. Participant observation consists of combining observations, interviews, and informal conversations with members of the team. It is anticipated that interviews and conversations will last anywhere from a few minutes to an hour, depending on the topic being discussed and the number of participants involved. The second procedure will consist of conducting an in-depth interview with the head coach midway through the season at a predetermined location. The interview may last anywhere between one to two hours and will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In accordance with the Faculty of Education ethical procedures, all of the information gathered will remain confidential. The data will be kept in a secure manner and will be destroyed five years after publication of the findings. The participants will be identified by the use of pseudonyms so that their name does not appear anywhere and alterations of minor context details in the publishing of findings will help ensure full anonymity. The final report will be written in such a way as to conceal the identity of all participants.

Should you wish to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form at which point you will be eligible to engage in participant observation with the researcher. Note that there is no risk, harm, or discomfort involved in the process. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time or, during an interview, and you have the right to refuse to answer questions without prejudice.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, but your responses would be extremely helpful and greatly appreciated. Please note that all documents are available in French and may be provided upon request.

Kim Thompson, PhD Candidate
Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, Thesis Supervisor
University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Dear Parents of the 'Peewee AA' (insert team name),

We are conducting a PhD research project in order to investigate the involvement of parents/guardians in youth hockey. More specifically, the purpose is: (a) to explore how parents/guardians create their role within the competitive youth hockey culture, and (b) to explore how parents/guardians perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the hockey environment.

According to researchers, parents and coaches are the most influential people in the sporting career of athletes (Côté, 1999; Durand-Bush, 2000). Parents are key predictors to positive youth sport experiences and are likely to have a considerable impact on the development of their athletic child (Wood & Abernethy, 1991). Because there is limited knowledge in this area of study, the importance of examining the perceptions of parents cannot be understated.

In order to gather the required data, the researcher will use a procedure, termed participant observation, throughout the upcoming hockey season during sanctioned hockey games, team practices, road trips, tournaments, parent meetings, and other hockey-related functions. Participant observation consists of using observations, interviews, and informal conversations with members of the team. It is anticipated that interviews and conversations will last anywhere from a few minutes to an hour, depending on the topic being discussed and the number of participants involved.

Note that all of the information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and names will not appear in any publications. The data will be kept in a secure manner and will be destroyed ten years after publication of the findings.

Should you wish to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form at which point you will be eligible to engage in participant observation with the researcher. Note that there is no risk, harm, or discomfort involved in the process. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time and you have the right to refuse to answer questions without prejudice. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, your contribution (i.e., data) will be destroyed at your request.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, but your responses would be extremely helpful and greatly appreciated. Please note that all documents are available in French and may be provided upon request.

Kim Thompson, PhD Candidate
Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, Thesis Supervisor
University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada



APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM FOR COACHES

On and off the ice: What hockey means to young players and their parents or guardians from a symbolic interactionism perspective

I am invited to participate in the research study conducted by doctoral student Kim Thompson under the supervision of Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, both in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the involvement of parents/guardians in youth hockey. More specifically, the purpose is: (a) to explore how parents/guardians create their role within the competitive youth hockey culture, and (b) to explore how parents/guardians perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the hockey environment.

I am aware that for the purpose of this study, two data collection procedures will be used throughout the upcoming hockey season. The first procedure consists of engaging in participant observation. To do so, the researcher will collect data during sanctioned hockey games, team practices, road trips, tournaments, parent/guardian meetings, and other hockey-related functions, through observations and informal conversations with members of the team, myself included. Conversations may last anywhere from a few minutes to half an hour, depending on the topic being discussed and the number of participants involved. The second procedure will consist of participating in an in-depth interview with the researcher in November at a predetermined location based on my convenience and availability. The interview may last anywhere between one to two hours and will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. I will have the opportunity to review my transcript in order to authenticate that the information accurately reflects my perceptions.

I understand that there are no risks, harm, or discomfort involved in the process and no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. I am aware of my right to withdraw from the project at any time or, during an interview, and my right to refuse to answer questions without prejudice. Should I choose to withdraw from the study, my contribution (i.e., data) will be destroyed at my request.

In addition, I understand that the results will be kept strictly confidential and that my name will not appear in any publications. More specifically, I will be identified by the use of a pseudonym so that my name does not appear anywhere and alterations of minor context details in the publishing of findings will help ensure full anonymity. The final report will be written in such a way as to conceal my identity and I am entitled to a summary report after the completion of the study. Finally, I understand that the data will be kept in a secure manner and will be destroyed ten years after publication of the findings.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, at (613) 562-5841 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

I, _____, consent to participate in this research project and I understand that my participation is voluntary. I am aware that all of the documents are available in French and may be provided upon request.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

Signature of the participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the researcher: _____

Date: _____

Kim Thompson, PhD Candidate
University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, Thesis Supervisor
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS (PART 1)

On and off the ice: What hockey means to young players and their parents or guardians from a symbolic interactionism perspective

I am invited to participate in the research study conducted by doctoral student Kim Thompson under the supervision of Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, both in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the involvement of parents/guardians in youth hockey. More specifically, the purpose is: (a) to explore how parents/guardians create their role within the competitive youth hockey culture, and (b) to explore how parents/guardians perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the hockey environment.

I am aware that for the purpose of this study, I will engage in a research procedure, termed participant observation, throughout the upcoming hockey season. As such, during sanctioned hockey games, team practices, road trips, tournaments, parent/guardian meetings, and other hockey-related functions, the researcher will collect data through observations and informal conversations with members of the team, myself included. Conversations may last anywhere from a few minutes to half an hour, depending on the topic being discussed and the number of participants involved.

I understand that there are no risks, harm, or discomfort involved in the process and no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. I am aware of my right to withdraw from the project at any time and my right to refuse to answer questions without prejudice. Should I choose to withdraw from the study, my contribution (i.e., data) will be destroyed at my request.

In addition, I understand that the results will be kept strictly confidential and that my name will not appear in any publications. More specifically, I will be identified by the use of a pseudonym so that my name does not appear anywhere and alterations of minor context details in the publishing of findings will help ensure full anonymity. The final report will be written in such a way as to conceal my identity and I am entitled to a summary report after the completion of the study. Finally, I understand that the data will be kept in a secure manner and will be destroyed ten years after publication of the findings.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, at (613) 562-5841 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

I, _____, consent to participate in this research project and I understand that my participation is voluntary. I am aware that all of the documents are available in French and may be provided upon request.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

Signature of the participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the researcher: _____

Date: _____

Kim Thompson, PhD Candidate
University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, Thesis Supervisor
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

APPENDIX E: ASSENT FORM FOR PLAYERS (PART 1)

On and off the ice: What hockey means to young players and their parents or guardians from a symbolic interactionism perspective

I am invited to participate in the research study conducted by university student Kim Thompson under the supervision of Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, both in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the involvement of parents/guardians in youth hockey. More specifically, the purpose is: (a) to explore how parents/guardians create their role within the competitive youth hockey culture, and (b) to explore how parents/guardians perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the hockey environment.

I am aware that for the purpose of this study, I will participate in a research technique, termed participant observation. This means that during the upcoming hockey season, the researcher will collect data through observations and conversations with members of the team, myself included. Conversations may last anywhere from a few minutes to half an hour, depending on what is being discussed and how many people are involved. The researcher will attend our hockey games, team practices, road trips, tournaments, parent/guardian meetings, and other hockey-related functions.

I understand that there are no risks, harm, or discomfort involved in the process and there is no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time and I can refuse to answer questions without prejudice. If I choose to withdraw from the study, the information I may have previously shared will be destroyed at my request.

In addition, I know that the results will be kept strictly confidential and that my name will not appear in any publications. I will be identified by the use of a fictitious name so that my name does not appear anywhere and changes to minor context details in the publishing of findings will help ensure full anonymity. The final report will be written in such a way as to conceal my identity and I am entitled to a summary report once the study is completed. Finally, I understand that the data will be kept in a secure manner and will be destroyed ten years after publication of the findings.

If I have any questions about the study, I can contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, at (613) 562-5841 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

I, _____, consent to participate in this research project and I understand that my participation is voluntary. I am aware that all of the documents are available in French and may be provided upon request.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

Signature of the participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the parent or guardian: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the researcher: _____

Date: _____

Kim Thompson, PhD Candidate
University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada



Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, Thesis Supervisor
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORMS FOR PARENTS (PART 2)

On and off the ice: What hockey means to young players and their parents or guardians from a symbolic interactionism perspective

I am invited to participate in the research study conducted by doctoral student Kim Thompson under the supervision of Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, both in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the involvement of parents/guardians in youth hockey. More specifically, the purpose is: (a) to explore how parents/guardians create their role within the competitive youth hockey culture, and (b) to explore how parents/guardians perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the hockey environment.

I am aware that for the purpose of this study, in addition to taking part in the participant observation research procedure, I will also participate in three in-depth interviews with the researcher, which will be conducted at three different times throughout the second half of the season (once every few weeks). The interviews may last anywhere between one to two hours and will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews will be held at a location that is convenient for me. I will have the opportunity to review each my transcripts in order to authenticate that the information accurately reflects my perceptions.

I understand that there are no risks, harm, or discomfort involved in the process and no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. I am aware of my right to withdraw from the project at any time or, during an interview, and my right to refuse to answer questions without prejudice. Should I choose to withdraw from the study, my contribution (i.e., data) will be destroyed at my request.

In addition, I understand that the results will be kept strictly confidential and that my name will not appear in any publications. More specifically, I will be identified by the use of a pseudonym so that my name does not appear anywhere and alterations of minor context details in the publishing of findings will help ensure full anonymity. The final report will be written in such a way as to conceal my identity and I am entitled to a summary report after the completion of the study. Finally, I understand that the data will be kept in a secure manner and will be destroyed ten years after publication of the findings.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, at (613) 562-5841 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

I, _____, consent to participate in this research project and I understand that my participation is voluntary. I am aware that all of the documents are available in French and may be provided upon request.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

Signature of the participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the researcher: _____

Date: _____

Kim Thompson, PhD Candidate
University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, Thesis Supervisor
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

APPENDIX G: ASSENT FORMS FOR PLAYERS (PART 2)

On and off the ice: What hockey means to young players and their parents or guardians from a symbolic interactionism perspective

I am invited to participate in the research study conducted by university student Kim Thompson under the supervision of Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, both in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the involvement of parents/guardians in youth hockey. More specifically, the purpose is: (a) to explore how parents/guardians create their role within the competitive youth hockey culture, and (b) to explore how parents/guardians perceive and deal with prevailing issues of aggression within the hockey environment.

I am aware that for the purpose of this study, in addition to taking part in the “participant observation” research technique, I will also participate in one interview with the researcher during the month of January. The interview may last anywhere between one to two hours and will be audio-recorded and transcribed word for word. The interview will be held at a location that is convenient for me and my parents/guardians. I will have the opportunity to read my interview transcript in order to make sure that the information accurately reflects my perceptions.

I understand that there are no risks, harm, or discomfort involved in the process and there is no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time and I can refuse to answer questions without prejudice. If I choose to withdraw from the study, the information I may have previously shared will be destroyed at my request.

In addition, I know that the results will be kept strictly confidential and that my name will not appear in any publications. I will be identified by the use of a fictitious name so that my name does not appear anywhere and changes to minor context details in the publishing of findings will help ensure full anonymity. The final report will be written in such a way as to conceal my identity and I am entitled to a summary report once the study is completed. Finally, I understand that the data will be kept in a secure manner and will be destroyed ten years after publication of the findings.

If I have any questions about the study, I can contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, at (613) 562-5841 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

I, _____, consent to participate in this research project and I understand that my participation is voluntary. I am aware that all of the documents are available in French and may be provided upon request.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

Signature of the participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the parent or guardian: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the researcher: _____

Date: _____

Kim Thompson, PhD Candidate
University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway, Thesis Supervisor
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education

Event	Aug		Sep		Oct		Nov		Dec		Jan		Feb		Mar	
	#	Min	#	Min	#	Min	#	Min	#	Min	#	Min	#	Min	#	Min
Tryouts	5	195	2	110	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Practices	0	0	5	370	6	595	3	205	5	400	4	285	6	340	0	0
Games	0	0	0	0	4	355	4	565	4	405	9	1265	6	1065	0	0
Exhibitions	0	0	1	95	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Meetings	0	0	2	90	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tournaments	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1290	1	320	0	0	1	1400	0	0
Dryland	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	155	0	0	2	170	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	270	0	0	0	0	1	90
Total	5	195	10	665	10	950	10	2215	12	1395	15	1720	13	2805	1	90

Note. # = The number of events the researcher attended.

Min = The length of time (in minutes) the researcher spent at each event.

APPENDIX I: INFORMAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Identify three values that you believe hockey instills in your son.
2. What are your expectations regarding your son's hockey career? (Define what a successful hockey career for your son would entail.)
3. Describe your role and responsibilities as a hockey parent.
4. Describe challenges you encountered this season in relation to your son's hockey?
5. Describe parental misconduct.
 - i. Were there any times this season where you felt you behaved inappropriately? If so, what happened?

APPENDIX J: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE (COACHES)

1. Tell me about yourself and your athletic background.
 - i. What was the highest level of competition you reached as an athlete?
 - ii. How would you describe your current physical activity participation?
2. Describe your hockey coaching career timeline thus far.
 - i. How long have you been coaching hockey?
 - ii. How did you become involved in coaching hockey?
 - iii. At what levels have you coached throughout the years?
3. Describe your coaching philosophy.
 - i. Has your coaching philosophy and/or role changed over the years?
 - ii. What three values do you think hockey instills in young players and why?
 - iii. In terms of promoting fair play and sportspersonship, what is your role as a coach?
4. Describe your parent-coach relationships.
 - i. How do you describe the parents' level of involvement on your team?
 - ii. How do parents influence your role as a coach?
 - iii. How do you define parental misconduct?
 - iv. According to you, what are some reasons parents behave inappropriately?
 - v. Have you experienced negative parental situations as a coach? If so, what happened?
5. Describe your coaching beliefs in relation to aggression and violence in hockey.
 - i. Do you agree that hockey is too aggressive or violent? Why is that?
 - ii. Are there things in hockey that should not be allowed? If so, what?
 - iii. What factors (situational) do you feel increase aggressive behaviours of players and parents?
6. Describe your conduct in relation to aggression and violence in hockey.
 - i. Do you integrate (implicitly or explicitly) aggression and/or violence into your game plans? Explain.
 - ii. Have you or your team ever been penalized for these types of behaviours? If so, for what and how was the situation handled?
 - iii. Do you use language that promotes aggression and violence as a means to increase your team's motivation and intensity? If so, why and when?

Note:

- Additional questions may have been constructed throughout the interview.
- For clarification purposes, the term hockey referred to youth hockey.

APPENDIX K: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE (PARENTS)

Interview #1 - Initiation to Hockey and Parental Involvement

1. Tell me about yourself and your personal athletic background.
 - i. What was the highest level of competition you reached as an athlete?
 - ii. How would you describe your current physical activity participation?
2. Describe your son's hockey career timeline thus far.
 - i. How long has your son been playing hockey?
 - ii. How was your son introduced to hockey?
 - iii. At what levels has your son competed throughout the years?
 - iv. Does your son compete in other sports? If so, which ones and at what levels?
3. Describe your role and responsibilities as a hockey parent.
 - i. Have you ever been involved in your son's hockey participation, other than as a parent? If so, what was your role?
 - ii. Do your role and responsibilities differ from the ones of your spouse? If so, why?
4. Overall, describe your interactions with your son, as it relates to his hockey participation.
 - i. Do you and your son engage in "hockey-talks"? If so, where and when do they occur?
 - ii. During games and/or practices, do you and your son communicate (verbally or non-verbally)? If so, when and for what purposes?
 - iii. How do you feel after a poor performance from your son?
 - iv. How do you establish a great performance from a poor one?
5. Define what a successful hockey career for your son would entail.
 - i. What are your expectations regarding your son's hockey career?
6. Explain the role hockey plays in your family's current lifestyle.
 - i. In what ways do you think your son's hockey participation impacts you as an individual?
 - ii. How do you think hockey impacts your relationship with your son?
 - iii. How do you think hockey impacts your relationship with your spouse?

Interview #2 – Hockey Culture and Perceptions of Aggression

1. Identify three values that you believe hockey instils in your son.
 - i. According to you, why do you think your son participates in hockey?
 - ii. Has your son ever shown disinterest in the sport? If so, when and why?

2. Describe your perception of the hockey culture.
 - i. How do you define aggression in hockey?
 - ii. How do you define violence in hockey?
 - iii. Is there a role for aggression and/or violence in hockey?
 - iv. Do you think there is such a thing as “good” aggression in hockey? “Bad” aggression?
 - v. Are there things in hockey that should not be allowed? If so, what?
 - vi. How do you feel about the competitive nature of the sport?

3. Describe your perception of recent incidences of “hockey parent rage” in the media.
 - i. How do you define parental misconduct?
 - ii. According to you, what are some reasons parents behave inappropriately?
 - iii. What factors (situational) do you feel increase aggressive behaviours of players?
 - iv. What factors (situational) do you feel increase aggressive behaviours of parents?
 - ii. Have you experienced negative parental situations on previous teams? If so, what happened?

4. Describe your parental role in relation to aggression and violence in hockey.
 - i. Do you integrate (implicitly or explicitly) aggression and/or violence into your discussions with your son? Explain.
 - ii. Do you use language that promotes aggression and violence as a means to increase your son’s motivation and intensity? If so, why and when?
 - iii. Have you ever behaved in an inappropriate manner? If so, what happened?
 - iv. In terms of promoting fair play and sportspersonship, what is your role as a parent?

Interview #3 – Reflections on the Season

Now that the season is winding down, we will take time to reflect on the season as whole, in terms of your son's overall hockey participation, as well as your own personal involvement.

1. Describe how you think the season went in terms of:
 - i. The team's performance
 - ii. Your son's performance
 - iii. Your son's overall growth (on and off the ice)
2. Describe your parental involvement this season.
 - i. What were your primary responsibilities this season as a "hockey parent"
 - ii. How would you describe your parent-athlete relationship?
 - a. Did your son do anything that may have disappointed you?
 - b. Do you recall moments this season, where you were proud of your son (for behaviour on or off the ice). If so, what happened?
 - iii. How would you describe your parent-coach relationship?
 - a. Did the coaching staff do things that you disagreed with?
 - b. Identify three strengths and three weaknesses of the coaching staff.
 - iv. Were there any times this season where you felt you behaved inappropriately? If so, what happened?
 - v. Were there any times this season where you felt frustrated or angry? If so, when and what were these times.
3. Describe personal challenges you encountered this season in relation to your son's hockey?
 - i. What steps did you take to overcome them?
 - ii. Were any of your values or beliefs tested this season (in relation to hockey)? If so, in what way?
4. Describe any challenges that your son may have faced over the course of the season.
 - i. How did you help your son cope with these challenges?
5. Describe the plan for the next few months (now till August) in relation to your son's hockey participation.
 - i. What are your expectations this summer in terms of your son's training?

APPENDIX L: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE (PLAYERS)

1. Tell me about yourself in terms of your hockey background.
 - i. How long have you been playing hockey?
 - ii. From what you remember, how did you start playing hockey?
 - iii. Do you play any other sports? If so, which ones?
2. Identify three things that you feel you have learned through hockey.
 - i. What is it about hockey that you like the most? Name three things.
 - ii. Was there ever a time when you did not want to play hockey? If so, when and why?
3. Describe your best hockey moment ever.
 - i. How do you know when you have a great game?
 - ii. What are some distractions that may affect your performance?
 - iii. Do the people in the stands affect your performance? If so, how and why?
4. Describe your parents' involvement in your hockey career.
 - i. How do you describe your Mom's involvement in your hockey?
 - a. Could you give me examples of things that she does that you like?
 - b. Could you give me examples of things that she does that you do not like?
 - ii. How do you describe your Dad's involvement in your hockey?
 - a. Could you give me examples of things that he does that you like?
 - b. Could you give me examples of things that he does that you do not like?
5. Describe how you feel about playing hockey with body checking?
 - i. How did you learn to body check? If so, how?
 - ii. Do you sometimes get scared of getting hurt during hockey? If so, when and why?
 - iii. Do you think hockey is sometimes too aggressive or violent? If so, when and why?
 - iv. Are there things in hockey that should not be allowed? If so, what?
6. Describe what type of player you are on and off the ice.
 - i. Do you sometimes push opponents, "trash-talk" to them, or engage in other similar behaviours? If so, why?
 - ii. What do your parents say when you do those thing?
 - iii. Have you ever been penalized for those behaviours? If so, how did you feel?

Note:

- Additional questions may have been constructed throughout the interview.
- For clarification purposes, the term hockey referred to youth hockey.