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PARENT-SPECTATORSHIP IN MINOR ICE HOCKEY

by

CAROLYNNE S. WEIR

B.A., Carleton University, 2005

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial fulfilment of the  
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The reward of a thing well done is to have done it.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

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~ CW

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## ABSTRACT

Over recent years there have been isolated incidents of parental-spectator misconduct at minor hockey games that have received national media attention. To appreciate this social phenomenon in Canadian rinks, it is imperative to grasp the significance of the parent-child relationship to parent-spectatorship and the experienced emotions of parent-spectatorship. Located within a conceptual framework informed by theories of emotion (Lazarus, 1966, 1991, 1999; Weiner, 1977, 1980b, 1980a, 2006) and parent-child bond (Bowlby, 1982, 1999), this exploratory-based study delves further into the emotional experience encompassing parents' relationship with their children and the consequences it may have on spectator behaviour. Results indicate that participants encounter a multitude of emotions as a consequence of being both parent and spectator simultaneously. The present study also responds to an apparent lacuna of research currently investigating parent-spectator misconduct. In doing so it provides insights that may assist scholars and sport practitioners wishing to create safe and enjoyable environments for parents to watch their children engage in sport.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*It may have started as a simple skate-around at a nondescript hockey arena fifteen miles north of Boston, with boys of all ages and sizes working on their puck-handling skills. But by the time it ended, amid children's wails over their dying father, it had become the final, ascendant symbol of national malaise – of violence and vulgarity that have been pooling like blood around youth sports in America. One hockey father, Michael Costin, lay slumped near the vending machines by the rink, his face so disfigured that two of his children would say they barely recognized him. Another hockey father, Thomas Junta, had thrown Costin to the ground and beaten him into a coma from which he would never awaken (Nack & Munson, 2000).*

If there has been one expression of Canadian nationalism that has consistently persisted since Confederation (1867) it would be the game of ice hockey. According to Sport Canada, “ice hockey stands in a class of its own as the most popular sport in every category (participant, volunteer, attendee)” (Hockey Canada, 2006). In 2004, it attracted one-fifth of the entire adult population of Canada with over 1.5 million adult participants, 1.2 million volunteers, and over 5.1 million spectators annually (Hockey Canada, 2006). Few would refute the pervasiveness and significance of hockey to Canadian culture. Having said this, the severity of isolated incidents of spectator aggression over recent years, specifically parental-spectator aggression at minor hockey games, have tarnished ice hockey's reputation, subsequently prompting some parents to withdraw their children from participating in minor hockey (Deacon, 2001). Parents' behaviours during youth sporting events have also caused some children to drop out of youth sport all together. It has been estimated that approximately 35% of children drop out of sport each year (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004), citing adults, mostly their own parents, as having taken the joy out of the game and turning it into a negative experience (Dworkin & Larson, 2004;

Seefeldt & Ewing, 1991). Some experts cite parents' "inflated ambitions" and the violent nature of the game as causal effects of violent behaviour for the increase in parental outbursts during minor hockey games (Nack & Munson, 2000). Paradoxically, many parents oppose violence during games (as was the case of Thomas Junta and Michael Costin, where Junta attacked Costin after Costin had rebuffed him for protesting violence in the practice) still violent/aggressive behaviours persist in minor hockey arenas (Nack & Munson, 2000).

Incidents of parent-spectator misconduct have become so frequent it has been given its own name – "rink-rage" (Deacon, 2001). Fred Engh, president of the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS), an association that educates coaches and parents on the needs of young athletes, says that:

Field reports from this organization's 2,200 chapters in the U.S. reveal an alarming trend: In 1995 you could expect 5% of a crowd of parents to get out of line at a youth athletic event--i.e., to embarrass their children or be abusive toward the kids, officials and coaches. Only five years later, you can expect 15% of the crowd to cross the line. "It borders on insanity," says Engh. "Every year I see more and more ugly things" (Nack & Munson, 2000, p.88).

Perhaps most troubling is that parents generally understand that abusive behaviours in arenas are inappropriate, yet these behaviours persist (Fiore, 2003). To appreciate this social phenomenon in Canadian rinks, it is imperative to grasp the significance of the parent – child relationship. Emotions are the fundamental component to this relationship as they are to sports spectatorship, making the parent-spectator a critical site of inquiry.

To appreciate the complexities associated with the emotional framework of sport (e.g. how emotions influence behaviour and the types of emotions expressed) rigorous academic scrutiny is required. To begin, one must acknowledge the emotionally charged state of sport spectating (Coakley & Donnelly, 2004). For example, sports spectators experience anxiety, frustration, anger, hostility, sadness and depression when their team performs poorly, and elation, ecstasy, enjoyment, self-fulfilment, esteem and happiness when their team performs well (Dunquin, 2000). From these emotions sports spectators develop attachment bonds with teams and/or specific players. As Trujillo and Krizek (1994) explain, “true fans seem to have an emotional attachment...powerful senses of identity, community, continuity, narrativity, therapy, spirituality, and self-discovery” (p.321). Emotional-attachment for parent-spectators extends beyond that of non-parent sports spectators. Non-parent-spectators develop fulsome relationships with players they do not know personally, whereas parents have in addition to spectator/fan attachments, a deeply committed emotional connection to their children. Researchers studying emotions in sport spectating have been primarily interested in describing the motives of sport spectators (Wann, Schrader, Wilson, 1999), the pleasure of spectating (Duncan & Brummett, 1989; Smith, 1988), and the effects of sport fandom and sport nostalgia (Crawford, 2004). However, little research has empirically reviewed the behavioural consequences of emotions in sports spectators, let alone those behaviours expressed by parent-spectators (c.f. Wells, 2004; Ortega-Sampler, 1985).

Throughout the course of this thesis, I will be referring to three categories of crowd participants: spectator, fan, and parent-spectator. According to Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001), spectators are motivated by a desire to observe sport simply

for their appreciation of the sport, respecting all aspects of the sport and its associated athleticism. Spectators analyze performances from a fairly objective and unbiased point-of-view. In this way, spectators experience sports on multiple levels and so their reactions are latent with multidimensional emotional bases (Slepicka, 1995). Fans, however, are overtly biased when observing sports and generally support one team above all others (Wann et al., 2001). Their interest in the game/performance outcome (i.e. winning or losing) is more important than the quality of the performance. As fans invest significant amounts of time, energy, and money on one specific team/player/athlete, their personal identity coincides with their team/player/athlete preferences and the game outcome. With this said, individuals are not limited to one category of crowd participation; people may shift between being a fan or spectator depending on the sport/athlete. One form of crowd participant that remains relatively unchanged by sport or performance is that of the parent-spectator.

For the sake of clarity I will utilize the term ‘parent-spectator’ to identify parents who observe their children participate in sport. Some parent-spectators may also be fans while others may remain as spectators; however, both make vast personal investments and sacrifices to secure their child’s participation in sport. Represented appropriately by the hyphen, parent-spectators are uniquely positioned between two distinct roles, that of the spectator/fan and that of the parent. Each role demands different and sometimes conflicting behaviours. For instance, as spectators, parents observe and analyze the entire performance, but as parents they also focus on their child’s performance and well-being. For these reasons parent-spectators differ from both fans and spectators.

Wells (2004) is one of the few researchers to study the emotions of parent-spectators. Drawing upon Weiner's (1977) attribution theory of emotion, Wells studied parent-spectators' reactions to their children's team's outcome. Parent-spectators, Wells discovered, reacted when the outcome was controllable. In other words, parent-spectators are more likely to show anger emotion when a loss is preventable (i.e. the team did not play well or to their potential). While Wells' conclusions support research on spectator behaviours and enhance our understanding of spectator behaviours and their connection with emotions, they fail to differentiate parent-spectatorship from other forms of spectatorship.

The other significant contribution to the study of parent-spectator behaviours during youth sporting events comes from Ortega-Sampler (1985), 20 years prior to Wells' (2004) study. Ortega-Sampler investigated the emotional behaviours of parent-spectators by looking at parents' self-perceived feelings, expectations, and views of their own spectator behaviour in comparison to other parent-spectators. Her findings suggest that parents of children in competitive hockey teams were more likely to become highly engrossed in watching their child play and displayed more uncontrolled emotions (i.e. yelling, cheering) than those with children in recreational hockey or baseball and competitive baseball teams. These studies indicate the importance of emotion when considering parental-spectator behaviour.

Parent-spectators are a unique sub group of spectators, who, while supportive, may also be overly critical (Smith, 1988). They are unique in both the time devoted to the child and team, and the financial support needed to ensure the child's participation within the team (Smith, 1988). In fact, the child's participation is dependent upon the parent's

involvement, who, by choice or by obligation, spend an inordinate amount of time carting children to practices, games, and weekend tournaments and back again. In this way, because the child's involvement is mutually dependent upon the parent's involvement, spectating for parents may be obligatory. This is one more way in which parent-spectators differ from non-parent-spectators – child dependency and obligation.

Parental involvement in minor hockey is further confirmed by the volunteer roles parents play in minor hockey associations across the country. Associations and participating teams have grown to be reliant on parent-volunteers to help facilitate the logistical operations of hockey in Canada. Some minor hockey parents are active volunteers within their respective hockey clubs as ticket-takers, drivers, fund-raisers and as administrators and coaches (Deacon, 2001). For this reason, many sports organizations are hesitant to intervene in matters that reflect poorly onto its members, such as “rink rage”, fearing that their respective clubs will collapse without the immense support of parent volunteers. Instead, youth sport organizations admit to the problem, but deny that any of its constituents are a part of that problem (Deacon, 2001).

In this way, the emotional environment/context created by the emotional bond between parent and child, coupled with the emotional experience of spectatorship (specifically ice hockey) is a critical area of inquiry that must be addressed with the utmost sensitivity. It is the task of the present study to further explore the emotional experience of parent-spectatorship and the consequences emotions may have on behaviour, specifically behavioural misconduct. For the purposes of this thesis I will be using a definition of “unacceptable behaviour” as outlined by a local minor hockey association, which reads: “An individual is considered to be displaying unacceptable

behaviour if they are verbally or physically harassing and/or abusing a game participant (player, coach, spectator, or official)” (McNulty, 2005).

### **Objectives**

The general aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of parent-spectator misconduct in minor hockey. What influence do emotions have (if any) on parent-spectator behaviour? How might parents’ connection with their child(ren) contribute to their emotions when watching their children play ice hockey? This project focuses specifically on parent-spectators of minor hockey players living in the Ottawa region at the time of the study. The main objectives of the study are: (a) to better understand the emotions of parent-spectators; (b) to understand how these emotions effect parent-spectator behaviours during youth hockey games; (c) to uncover how the parent-child relationship, specifically the connection between parent and child, potentially contributes to parent-spectator misconduct; and (d) to identify indicators of parent-spectator misconduct, such as witnessing their child get hurt.

### **Significance of the Study**

Currently, Hockey Canada has responded to the issue of spectator misconduct at youth hockey games by putting into place a variety of programs that are essentially “zero-tolerance” policies. However the frequency and intensity of abusive and violent behaviours suggest initial steps are not bringing about desired change. As a result, these “zero tolerance” programs may not address the core issues surrounding parent-spectator misconduct. Furthermore, while incidents of parent-spectator aggression continue to increase (Fiore, 2003) little empirical research investigating the issue has been conducted.

In 2002 Hockey Canada partnered with Chevrolet Motors to develop a campaign aimed at addressing the issue of ‘rink rage.’ The campaign, entitled *Safe and Fun Hockey*, was designed to teach parents respect and responsibility as spectators of minor hockey. Furthermore it addressed the role of parents, stating that parents are to support the child emotionally, reaffirm the child’s self-confidence and worth, focus on participation not results, and finally “be positive, be understanding, be responsible!” (Hockey Canada, 2006, p.6). Parents are educated on how to express “emotions in a proper way in front of children” (Hockey Canada, 2006, p. 6), yet the initiative does not address *why* these inappropriate emotions occur. The campaign asks parents to adhere to and respect responsible behaviour guidelines with little understanding as to why behaviours that run counter to these guidelines persist. Since Hockey Canada first released their “Safe and Fun Hockey” campaign, there has been no recorded decline in incidence of parent-spectator misconduct. Providing parents with a more informed understanding as to *why* they are likely to behave inappropriately may empower them with tools to prevent it from occurring.

Examining the emotional connectedness that defines the parent-child relationship within minor hockey and the emotions felt through sport spectating, specifically ice hockey in Canada, provides an empirical foundation for which research on parental-spectator behaviour may proceed. Similarly, a more general understanding of the parent-child relationship, as well as sports spectatorship, will add to developmental social-psychology research, and offer a more discursive understanding of parent-spectatorship. The knowledge acquired through this study may lead to a better understanding of parents, spectatorship, and the emotions assumed with each. A greater understanding may

potentially assist individuals whose position is to develop methods of combating “rink rage” in arenas throughout Canada via more informed initiatives and educational programs for parents of minor hockey participants. Currently, efforts to remove parental-spectator misconduct from minor hockey have not addressed specifically the emotional component of either the game or the emotions felt by parents and how these emotions relate to the parent-spectator behaviours.

Much of the literature surrounding parent-child relationships focus on the problems associated with insufficient levels of emotional commitment (c.f., Collins & Madsen, 2003; Grolnick, 2003). Contrary to past research, the present study hopes to understand what the potential consequences are of seemingly ‘typical’ parents displaying emotional or physical (hyper) protectionist behaviours resulting from a deeply committed bond to their child. Parents are vulnerable to their own emotional attachment to their children, especially while in the emotionally charged environment of the hockey game. While the behaviours of parent-spectators may appear irrational, we may nonetheless uncover a rational answer to this misconduct.

While the present thesis investigates parent-spectator misconduct in minor ice hockey in Canada, these inappropriate behaviours are not limited to hockey nor are they limited to Canadian spectators. In fact, incidents of parent-spectator misconduct have been reported in a variety of other sports spanning across different countries, and have involved both contact and non-contact sport-spectators (Young, 2000). Crowd disorders, including parent-spectator misconduct, have been reported in many parts of the world, from Asia to Africa, New Zealand, to Central and South America (Young, 2000) and involve a wide spectrum of sports including: baseball (Dewar, 1979), basketball (Greer,

1983), lacrosse (Metcalf, 1978), cricket (Gammon, 1981), and even golf (Miller, 1993).

Indeed, crowd violence does not discriminate based on country, sport, or even gender.

Despite its perseverance, prevalence, and indiscriminate history, parent-spectator violence, and more generally crowd disorders, remain “weakly theorized, ahistorical, or outdated” (Young, 2000, p. 383). The intention of this thesis, however, is not to make comparisons but to offer insight into parent-spectator behaviours within the minor ice. In doing so, it is important to stress that research does not intend to speak speak to other parental spectator experiences in different sports or in different national contexts.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITURATURE

*"I went to a fight the other night, and a hockey game broke out."*

- Rodney Dangerfield

Incidents of spectator aggression, specifically parent-spectator aggression, have increased tremendously over the years (Foire, 2003; Russell, 2004), and while they continue to rise, limited empirical research investigating the issue has been conducted. More specifically, there has been limited research on the emotional experience of parent-spectator at youth sporting events (c.f. Ortega-Samper, 1985; Wells, 2004) and the potential negative consequences of these emotions. The task of this chapter is to consider what research has been conducted on parental-spectatorship to provide an informed understanding of emotions, the impact they have on both the parent and the spectator, and the potential consequence of they have on parent-spectator behaviours.

#### **The parent-spectator in youth sport**

Parent-spectators are a unique group of sports spectators (Smith, 1988). The parent-spectator is seen as driven, devoted, enthusiastic, and ambitious, who, while supportive, is also overly critical (Wann et al., 2001). Unlike other groups of spectators, the parent-spectator is also distinctive in both the time devoted to the child (and team), and the financial support needed to ensure the child's participation within the team (Smith, 1988). Thus, the parent-spectator uniquely contributes not only to the child's participation in sport (via financial and time contributions), but also the team's success (which may or may not be dependent upon the child's participation). The parent also has

the added emotional connection to the child which might influence their spectator behaviours when watching their child play sport. A definition of emotion as well as theoretical discussions regarding emotions is offered in the following chapter (Conceptual Framework).

Wells (2004) investigated parent-spectators and their emotional responses to their child's hockey team success or failure. Specifically, Wells explored the evaluative, cognitive, and affective responses of parent-spectators. Wells draws upon Weiner's (1977, 1980, 2006) attribution theory of emotion to understand parents' affective reactions (e.g. pride, confidence, frustration, and anger) to the team's outcome (win or loss), as well as attributions of stability and controllability to the perceived cause of the team's outcome (e.g. internal or external and stable or unstable attributions, and controllable and uncontrollable causes). Wells speculates that an easy loss (otherwise referred to as clear failure) is associated with external and unstable attributions and uncontrollable causes, which results in parent fans' affective reactions being shame, frustration, anger, and regret. For example, when asked about the game one parent fan described the performance as "Awful...players not responding to coaching. Are all over the ice, no consistency to play, keep leaving men in crease, poor fundamentals" (Wells, 2004, p. 260). According to Wells (2004) this narrative describes a clear failure. In this way, parents' emotional reactions are mediated by child and team performance outcome (e.g. cause of success or failure).

While Wells (2004) is one of few the researchers to empirically study parent-spectatorship in youth hockey, her findings do not offer anything dissimilar from other forms of spectatorship. In this way, Wells' findings may easily be transferred from

parent-spectators to other non-parent-spectators. Wells' study would benefit from a more lucid discernment of parent-spectators' emotional reactions in relation to either the child or the teams' outcomes.

Parent-spectators are uniquely positioned in the parent-spectator dynamic given that they must negotiate two, almost simultaneous contrasting roles - that of the spectator on the one hand, and that of the parent on the other. Moreover, it has been argued that these roles may be confining given the emotional investment each has independently. For example, Ortega-Samper (1985) investigated the emotional behaviours of parents at youth sporting events. To understand the differences between parents' emotional responses during youth sport and competition level (e.g. recreational or competitive), Ortega-Samper looked at parents' self-perceived feelings, expectations, and views of their own spectator behaviours in comparison to others. By investigating both baseball and ice hockey at the competitive and recreational level, Ortega-Samper distinguishes sport type and level differences between parent-spectators' emotional behaviour. Findings suggest that parent-spectators of competitive games are highly engrossed in watching their child play as opposed to recreational parent-spectator who were not as emotionally involved in watching their child play. However, parent-spectators of youth ice hockey displayed more unchecked emotions (e.g. yelling, cheering, enthusiastic clapping) than any other group. This may become particularly problematic when negative emotions (i.e. anger at the referee for making a seemingly bad call) turn into action (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Salovey, Rothman, Detweiler, & Steward, 2000).

Negative emotions are a concern in that when expressed, the individual lacks the cognitive capacity to restrain one's actions. According to Salovey and Mayer (1990) and

Salovey et al. (2000) emotions can interfere with many psychological sub-schemes (e.g. psychological, cognitive, motivational systems). For instance, anger decreases one's ability to think clearly (also known as cognitive impairment) and increase motivation to act. Thus, parent-spectators of youth ice hockey who display unchecked emotion may be more at risk for behaviour misconduct (e.g. aggressive behaviour) during games. The connection between emotion and action will later be discussed.

Further differences in the parent-spectator versus non-parent-spectators involve the motivation of attending sporting events. For instance, Wann et al. (2001) note that individuals are motivated to become sports spectators differently. Wann and colleagues describe a family motive as one possible reason for which individuals become sports spectators. The family motive states that individuals become sport spectators as a means to spend quality time with family. Thus, sporting events are seen as opportunities for family members to spend time with one another. This type of motivation is particularly common among families with small children (Wann et al., 2001). While no empirical study has reviewed the motivation of the parent-spectator, one may hypothesize that parents who attend sporting events where the participants are their child(ren) are doing so partly to spend time with their child (as cited in Fiore, 2003). Further to this point, Coakley and Donnelly (2004) indicate that "youth sports serve as sites for bringing family members together in supportive ways" (p. 130). However, the argument may be made that parent-spectatorship is not quality time spent with the child, but rather an act of obligation. For instance, the parent must drive the child to and from sporting arenas and thus spectatorship is a consequence of this obligation. Regardless of obligation, the parent is in some manner engaged in the child's participation, and while it may appear to be

forced it is nonetheless a reflection of the parents' interest in spending time with their child (as cited in Fiore, 2003). For the average sports spectator or sports fan, however, motivation to participate is primarily based on the entertainment value offered by sports spectating (Wann et al., 2001).

Thus, the parent-spectator is a unique sub-group of sport spectators. As noted, parents of youth ice hockey are more likely to display unchecked emotion (Wells, 2004) and are motivated by a desire to spend "quality time" with family (Coakley & Donnelly, 2004; Wann et al., 2001). The aforementioned emotional responses and motivation for attending youth sporting events is what is currently known about parent-spectators. Having said this, there is a need for more research exploring differences between parent-spectators and non-parent-spectators.

### **The power of context**

Understanding who we are and why we do the things requires some acknowledgement of the powerful influences of our immediate environments. According to Malcolm Gladwell (2002) author of the acclaimed book *The Tipping Point*, "the power of context is that the same thing is true for certain kinds of environments – that in ways that we don't necessarily appreciate, our inner states are the result of our outer circumstances" (p.145). Understanding context is one way to appreciate how emotions come to influence our behaviours. A now infamous study dubbed 'the Zimbardo prison experiment' delineates this understanding.

In the early 1970s, social scientist, Philip Zimbardo, along with a team of social scientists at Stanford University wanted to gain a better understanding as to why prison environments perpetually (re)create convicts rather than (re)abilitate them. Is it because

prisons are filled with criminals? Or rather, is it because prisons are placed in deplorable environments? Creating a mock prison, Zimbardo recruited a number of participants, twenty-one of them who appeared “the most normal and healthy on psychological tests” (Gladwell, 2002, p. 151). Half were randomly assigned to becoming prisoners, while the other half became guards. The entire experiment was created to accurately simulate the life a prisoner, from their arrest by the Palo Alto Police Department (which involved cuffing, fingerprinting, and charging prisoners with fictitious crimes) to their strip search, assigned prison number, and incarceration in the mock prison located in the basement of Stanford’s Psychology Department. During the experiment guards and prisoners quickly fell into their respective “roles” and soon self-identified pacifists became “hard-bitten disciplinarians”(Gladwell, 2002, p. 153). Due to the intense psychological distress felt by both prisoners and guards, Zimbardo was forced to end the experiment prematurely. Retrospective interviews of all participants routinely acknowledge the same thing: ‘I was not acting like myself.’ Without denying the complexities of personal dispositions versus relative environmental factors, Zimbardo concluded:

there are specific situations so powerful that they can overwhelm our inherent predispositions. The key word here is situations...there are certain times and places and contradictions when much of that can be swept away, that there are instances where you can take normal people from good schools and happy families and good neighbourhoods and powerfully affect their behaviour merely by changing the immediate details of their situation (Gladwell, 2002, p. 154-5).

Zimbardo's experiment reveals the undeniable influence our environments have on affecting behaviours. This becomes highly significant as we begin to study the effects of an emotionally charged environment of sporting arenas on individual behaviours.

Research has shown that the physical and social dimensions of sporting environments (e.g. hockey arena) influence our emotional responses and subsequently our behaviours (Mehrbian, 1976). The physical environment involves the size of the sport facility, the design and structure of the facility. The social environment is produced as a result of the physical environment and the sporting performance intertwining. For instance, the pace of the game, whether one's team is winning or losing, and crowd size make up the physical-social sporting environment (Mehrbian, 1976). Adding to this, Nicholson and Hoyer (2006) reveal a number of organizational and environmental factors affecting poor spectator behaviours. Environmental preoccupations that permit or encourage spectator misconduct include the size of the sporting venue and spectators proximity to players. Smaller sporting venues, where opposing team spectators are seated closely to one another, allow for more interaction between opposing team spectators. Also spectators who are positioned in close proximity to players, coaches, and referees may encourage poor parent-spectator behaviours. As Nicholson and Hoyer (2006) note, spectators who are closer to the play "feel more inclined to 'participate' in the game through their behaviour" (p.100). Organizational factors affecting spectator misconduct are: the final moments of a game (where either team has an opportunity to win); play-offs and finals (where there are increased numbers of spectators and including more spectators who have watched only a few games and have yet to grasp the rules or the game nuances, also known as *novice spectators*); and, the 'do-or-die' mentality associated with

important games. All these factors were found to exacerbate poor spectator behaviours (Nicholson & Hoyer, 2006).

The influence of the physical-social sporting environments in facilitating crowd violence is especially problematic in North America (Young, 2002). In a cross-cultural investigation onto the physical location of spectator violence, Young (2002) discovers that spectator violence in North America takes place during the course of the performance and in the sport facility (e.g. hockey arenas), whereas the majority of crowd violence in Europe occurs preceding the game and away from the sport facility (Young, 2002). This influence has resulted in definite structural changes to some minor hockey arenas across Canada where plexy glass partitions have been erected to separate two groups of sports spectators (generally home and away). It is perhaps believed that this change to the physical structure of the arena will reduce spectator misconduct. To date, no study has been offered to suggest that plexy glass partitions decreases spectator violence.

Trudel, Dionne, and Bernard (2000) studied the effects of context (i.e., if the score is close or not) on perceived penalties between four groups of subjects: parents, coaches, referees and players. Each group viewed a montage of forty play sequences and then provide analysis of each play (i.e. assign penalties). They found that when there was a high level of congruency in decisions to give penalties between parents, coaches, referees, and players; however, referees were more likely to make reference to “the game *context* [emphasis added] in justifying their decision” (Trudel et al, 2000, p. 286). Referees appeared to be influenced by several game factors when assigning penalties, among these are: (1) pressure from spectators and coaches; (2) physiological demands

(i.e. stress); (3) player-official relationship; and, (4) judgements calls (i.e. referees are not expected to call every infraction). By comparison, the referee group gave more importance to game context, thus highlighting the influence context has on the game, which indirectly may affect spectator behaviours as well.

Within specific contexts and environments certain types of behaviours are permissible, yet if performed outside of these frameworks they would be deemed inappropriate. In other words, our behaviours are often guided by socially guided standards. Robidoux and Bocksnick (2001), for example, studied parent-spectators at minor hockey games in their article aptly titled *Playing beyond the glass: How parents support violence in minor hockey*. In the article they reveal how the hockey spectator environment seemingly legitimizes spoken aggression (i.e. Nail Him! Hit Him! Kill Him!) and suggest that spoken aggression propagates on-ice violence. Despite the ferociousness of these utterances and their potential influence on on-ice play, they are nonetheless regarded as socially acceptable expressions within the context that they are spoken. This example testifies to the impact of environment on behaviours, specifically the minor hockey environment in promoting both ideologically and behaviourally aggressive ideals.

Like most other spectator sports, ice hockey is an emotionally charged experience (Coakley & Donnelly, 2004). Contributing to this emotional experience is the nature of the game and the physical environment in which it is played. First, given the inherent speed of the game and velocity of the play it is difficult for both spectator and referee to see everything on the ice. Second, most arenas have stadium seating, meaning that the seats are stacked upwards above the ice surface. In this way, spectators have a vertical

view of the ice surface. Conversely, referees are on the ice surface and see the game from a lateral perspective. Each different vantage point provides a different perspective on the game and so by nature both spectators and referees will see different and sometimes contrasting things, resulting in contrasting experiences and opinions of on-ice behaviours.

Given the influence of the physical-social sporting environments on spectators, these influences may become exacerbated when discussing parent-spectators who may be especially vulnerable to emotionally charged sporting environments. To better understand the parent-spectator experience it is important to review the emotional framework encompassing the parent-child relationship.

### **Parent-child relationship and the emotional milieu**

Unlike most other species, the parent-child relationship for humans involves investing tremendous amounts of time nurturing offspring (Grolnick, 2003). Consequently, humans are adapted for high-investment parenting in order to satisfy extended nurturing of offspring (Grolnick, 2003). Lovejoy (1981) describes different patterns of parenting in different species. He concludes that while parents are adapted for high-levels of investment, so too are their offspring in extended periods of helplessness and parental dependence which is necessary for survival; however, over the years children's levels of dependency weaken, as children become more autonomous individuals.

In discussing the mother-child and father-child relationship, Collins and Madsen (2003) note that during middle-adulthood and adolescence, relationships with parents tends to decline, and so too does the relative amount of time spent between child and parent. Despite this decline, parents are nonetheless involved in their children's lives,

albeit at a greater distance, e.g. as spectators during their children's sporting activities. What's more, during middle childhood some believe that interactions between parents and sons are marked by greater emotional expression than with daughters. Therefore, given that the present thesis reviews young adolescent boys and based on Collins and Madsen (2003) findings it may be assumed that parent-spectators at male youth sporting events are more likely to display emotion than parent-spectators at female youth sporting events.

### **Emotional consequences: Parent-spectators**

Youth sports have long been a part of Canadian culture and have provided children with numerous opportunities for positive experiences (Fiore, 2003). Children's participation in sport should likewise be a positive experience for parents as well, who have the opportunity to proudly watch their children play sports. Still, some parents have contributed to a growing problem of parental misconduct at youth sporting events, which not only take away from a child's positive experience, but also may deter children's future involvement in youth sports (Fiore, 2003). What sort of behaviours is contributing to parental-spectator misconduct?

In an anecdotal analysis of parent-spectatorship and incidents of violence, Fiore (2003) posits possible explanations for increased violence and aggression among parent-spectators of youth sport. For instance, Fiore notes that the 'win-at-all-cost coach, violent parents and poor role models in professional sports are primary causes and contributors to the upsurge of parent-spectator aggression at youth sporting events. In support of the 'win-at-all-cost' coach, Fiore recalls a quote from legendary professional football coach Vince Lombardi, who said "winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." This quote,

guised as an inspirational adage, perpetuates the ideal that sports are about winning and not about having fun. Unfortunately, Fiore notes, this mentality found in high performance sports has since trickled down into youth sport. Parents have also contributed to this winning is everything mentality, which results in children performing to please their parents rather than achieving personal goals (Fiore, 2003). The emphasis some parents place on winning may result in an inappropriate amount of pressure put onto children. Parents who put winning before their child's success or enjoyment invest more time and energy watching and sideline coaching than parents who are not focused solely on winning.

Parents become emotionally involved as a consequence of their high investment in their child's participation in sport. Instinctively parents want to protect their children when hurt or when an official makes, what the parents believe to be an 'unjust call/decision'. What results is a loss of control over emotions. According to Nack and Monson (2001), "What makes a youth-league event even more emotionally charged is that parents are watching their own children play, their own DNA" (p. 90). For example,

Last Sept. 25, at a high school soccer game in Eastlake, Ohio, George Telidis, a 40-year-old Greek immigrant and former scholarship soccer player at Cleveland State, went racing onto the field after, he says, he saw his 14-year-old son, Alex, go down twice while fighting for the ball with a 14-year-old Bosnian immigrant, Davor Jozic. Alex has braces, and Telidis says he saw his son's mouth bleeding. "You kind of lose it when you see your own son's blood," Telidis says. He belted Jozic in the mouth, splitting the boy's lip. (A teacher of Jozic's says both boys had been red-carded for the incident and were walking off the field when Telidis

struck.) Telidis was arrested for assault, to which he pleaded no contest, and was sentenced to 10 days of community service. He seems chagrined now. "I would not hit him if I could do it over," Telidis says. "I would control myself more. I did what I did to defend my son."(p. 91)

Such a response is consistent with theories of emotion that describe how emotion translates into action when blame is placed on the transgressor, such as the official or the opposing team's player (Weiner, 1977, 1992, 2006). The offence need not be limited to transgression against oneself, but may also involve objects or persons, which are emotionally connected to an individual who feels transgressed against, such as a child (Lazarus, 1991, 1999). The work of Lazarus and Weiner will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

One of the more notable occurrences of excessive parent-spectator aggression resulted in the death of a young hockey player's fathers. Nack and Munson (2000) recounts the story of two 'hockey dads', Thomas Junta and Michael Costin who got into a heated disagreement regarding the level of contact (e.g. body-checking) Costin (the coach) was allowing during a supposedly non-contact scrimmage. Junta, who approached the issue several times, complained to Costin about the rough play, and after a series of heated arguments, Junta eventually beat Costin to death. Court testimonies described Thomas Junta as a 'gentle giant' and stated that his behaviour on the day of the incident was 'uncharacteristic'. It would appear that Junta's actions were the result of a surge of emotions. Junta was both a spectator and a parent, and as previously established, each comes with its own levels of emotional attachment. Recall that spectators feel emotionally connected to teams (Goodman, 1989) and parents are emotionally connected

to their children (Grolnick, 2003). Junta's attorney provided accounts of two women who described the fights as full of 'anxiety [and] emotion.' Therefore, while Junta may have acted contrary to his character (gentle disposition), the surge of emotion resulting from both his parent and spectator status, may have limited his ability to act reasonably. The combination of being both a parent and a spectator generates what I describe as a hyper-emotional experience. For the purposes of the current thesis, the term hyper-emotional experience (or state) will be used to describe the unique emotional experience of parent-spectatorship (further elaboration onto the hyper-emotional experience will be discussed in the theory section).

### **Summary**

While cases of parental spectator aggression tend not to escalate to the same degree as the Costin versus Junta incident, they nevertheless negatively affect children's sport experiences. As incidents of parental aggression during youth sporting events continue to rise, (Fiore, 2003; Russell, 2004) children become more reluctant to participate in sport (Dworkin & Larson, 2004; Seefeldt & Ewing, 1991). Understanding the special qualities of the parent-spectator will subsequently help in determining what causes parent-spectators to become so enraged while watching their children participate in sport. As both sports spectators and parents, parent-spectators enter a hyper-emotional state, triggering hyper-emotional responses. In this hyper-emotional state, parents become more prone to extreme emotional outbursts.

In this review of literature I have attempted to demonstrate the relative dearth of research focusing on the uniqueness of the parent-spectator and their possible emotional reactions to their children's hockey games. By exploring the emotional relationship of the

parent and child I will attempt to gain greater perspective as to why parents behave aggressively during youth sporting events. Few researchers have investigated the possible relatedness of emotion and sport spectatorship, and even less have reviewed the issue with a parent-spectator population (c.f. Ortega-Samper, 1985; Wells, 2004). Therefore, given the gap in research to empirically explain such an important phenomenon, there is an obvious need to pursue this topic as an area of study.

## CHAPTER III

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

*The objective the work is to always reproduce the concrete in thought - not to generate another good theory, but to give a better-theorized account of concrete historical reality...the goal is to understand the situation you started out with better than before (Hall, 1988, pp. 69-70).*

This chapter focuses on a conceptual framework that will be used to guide discussions and observations on parent-spectator aggression in minor hockey. Particular emphasis will be placed on Lazarus (1966, 1991, 1999) and Weiner's (1977, 1980a, 1992 [1980b]) different theories of emotions, as well as Bowlby's attachment and caregiving theory, specifically Bowlby's position on the emotional bond between parent and child. In doing so, I hope to provide an understanding of parents' emotional connection to their child and how emotions may influence behaviours. First, I will review theories of emotions and briefly discuss their influence on behaviour. Second, I explore John Bowlby's (1982, 1998 [1969]) attachment and caregiving theory and discuss his important theoretical contributions on emotions and caregiving, and conclude with a brief discussion on how these theories will inform the analysis in this thesis.

#### Emotion

People are 'emotional beings' surviving in part because of the capacity to convey and understand emotions (Bowlby, 1999). For instance, humans rely heavily on emotions to sense danger, express happiness and sorrow, and warn others of feeling states. While commonly associated with such disciplines as psychology, neuroscience, and more

recently artificial intelligence, emotion is also a relevant topic for sociologists in that emotions are somehow necessary to explain basic social behaviours (Barbalet, 1998). In many ways, emotions are significant to the establishment of social relationships, institutions, and processes (Barbalet, 1998).

Researchers have toiled over the processes, appearance, and underpinnings of emotions and most significantly their connection to human behaviours. As such, the relationship between emotions and behaviours has historically, and remains today, a highly contentious issue among researchers studying emotion. While some researchers believe that emotions do not casually affect behaviours (Bell & Richards, 2001), others believe that physiological change must occur prior to emotional expression which then affects behaviour, i.e., heart rate increases; fear then arises; behaviour results (Bowlby, 1999; Lange & James, 1922). Still others believe the relationship between emotions and behaviour to be bidirectional, with emotions influencing behaviour and vice versa (Savovey & Mayer, 1990). The relative disparity in whether emotions predict behaviours illustrates the complexities of emotion. What is important to understand is that emotions and behaviours are so closely linked that neither usually occurs without the other. Nonetheless, a significant and surmounting amount of research investigating emotion has shown a causal relationship between cognition and the experience of emotion (London & Nisbett, 1974). Two influential cognitive theorists, Lazarus (1966, 1991, 1999) and Weiner (1977, 1980a, 1980b, 2006) have explored the cognitive processes of emotion and offer insight into the relationship between emotion and behaviour.

### *Emotion defined*

Attempts to define concepts are never easy (Wann et al., 2001) and the definition of emotion is no exception. This is due in part to the various fields of study investigating emotion (Vallerand, 1983). For instance, Young (1973), a leading psychologist, focused on the conscious (or subjective) experience of emotion (e.g. athletes may emote competence, anger, or happiness following a basketball game). Conversely, others have investigated the physiological changes (e.g., increased heart rate) produced by emotion. In this way, emotion is seen as a consequence of physiological changes in the body (Vallerand, 1983). Neither definition is necessarily wrong, however each definition is confined to the context under which the definition is being proposed. However, Deci (1980) offers a general definition of emotion outlining its basic components:

An emotion is a reaction to a stimulus event (either actual or imagined). It involves change in the viscera and musculature of the person, is experienced subjectively in characteristic ways, is expressed through such means as facial changes and action tendencies, and may mediate and energize subsequent behaviours. (p. 85)

Sport spectators often experience and display emotion. For example, sports spectators experience anxiety, frustration, anger, hostility, sadness and depression when their team does poorly, and elation, ecstasy, enjoyment, self-fulfilment, self-esteem and social prestige when their team does well (Dunquin, 2000). Researchers studying emotions in sport spectating have been primarily interested in describing the motives of sport spectators, the pleasure of spectating, and the effects of sport fandom and sport nostalgia (Duquin, 2000). However, few researchers have empirically reviewed the behavioural consequences of emotions of sports spectators, while even less have

investigated this phenomenon in parent-spectators (c.f. Wells, 2004; Ortega-Samper, 1985).

### *Theories of Emotion*

Emotions serve multiple functions, of which the most fundamental to our survival is their importance to communicate thoughts and feelings (Lazarus, 1991). For emotions to be used as a communicative tool, they require a cognitive understanding of different types of emotions (e.g. happiness, anger), how to express them (e.g. smile, scowl), and the purposes they can serve (e.g. convey love, scare predators) (Kofta, Weary, & Sedek, 1998). In this way, we must have some cognitive understanding of emotions in order to convey them and to understand others' emotions. Given the noted cognitive underpinnings of emotions, the present thesis will only be reviewing and discussing cognitive theories of emotion. A significant amount of research investigating emotion has shown a causal relationship between cognition and the experience of emotion (London & Nisbett, 1974). Two influential cognitive theorists Lazarus (1966, 1999) and Weiner (1977, 1980a, 1980b, 2006) have explored the cognitive processes of emotion.

First off, Lazarus (1966) believes that emotion represents a coping process that is unique to each person-situation interaction. Therefore, emotions are the result of individuals reacting to their environment. Lazarus notes that differences in emotion are the result of how one appraises the situation, which produces the arousal and the resulting emotion. The 'complex' process of emotion involves three subsystems: stimulus properties, appraiser subsystem, and emotional response. First, an individual perceives a stimulus. According to Lazarus, an individual's perception of an object is an active process, involving an interaction between both perceiver and object (including the

subjective properties of the object). Following this interaction, the appraiser subsystem allows the individual to cognitively appraise the stimuli (or object). This evaluation may either be primary (determines whether or not the stimulus is stressful) or secondary (identifies the best approach to cope with the stimulus) (Lazarus, 1999; Vallerand, 1983). If the stimulus is deemed non-threatening (not stressful) then a secondary appraisal does not occur. However, if the stimulus is threatening, and hence stressful, then a secondary appraisal occurs. Secondary appraisal presents a number of different coping strategies, which produces the third emotional subsystem, also known as the emotional response. The emotional responses can be manifested in three different ways. They can be cognitive (e.g. rationalization), expressive (e.g. facial expressions), or behavioural (e.g. punching someone or something to express anger). Sports spectators demonstrate all three forms of emotion (Dunquin, 2000). Thus, it is through the manifestation of emotional experiences that one can see the usefulness of Lazarus' theory to sport.

Lazarus' theory has many applications to sport. For example, a sport spectator is watching his or her favourite team play and the referee makes a call on the play, which in the spectator's mind was a bad call. The spectator may either (a) assess the referee's call as non-threatening or (b) assess the situation as threatening (especially if his or her team is losing). If the latter outcome occurs, the spectator then must decide how to act (or react as the case may be). The spectator may rationalize the referee's call (e.g. it was a fair call), express disappointment with the call (e.g. appear puzzled or angry), or physically act on behalf of the call (e.g. yell at the referee to show disapproval of his or her call). Up until now the reactions of sports spectators appears rational and even predictable, reacting

to a threatening situation in three different emotional responses (cognitive, expressive, & behavioural). Still, emotions may also appear irrational.

Even though the appraisal subsystem is an active cognitive process, witnessed in the individuals' ability to appraise a situation or stimuli prior to deciding to act upon it or not, emotions may nonetheless appear irrational (Lazarus, 1999). According to Lazarus there are two main reasons why emotion interferes with reason. The first may occur if an individual is distracted or misguided. For example, in cases of intense emotion one's emotions may overpower ability to reason. The second explanation offered by Lazarus (1999) states that one lacks the ability to control impulses or think before acting. The inability to control impulses may result from choosing short-term goals over long-term ones. For example, an athlete may retaliate against another athlete of the opposing team, thus favouring his or her short-term goal (e.g. release of anger). However, this retaliation may result in a suspension, thus thwarting another goal (e.g. playing in future games). Despite these momentary lapses in judgement, emotions must not be considered irrational. If erroneous judgements are made Lazarus (1999) believes that it is the result of inadequate information and judgement not emotion, which merely reflects judgement.

While many agree that Lazarus' model of emotion is a very useful theoretical framework for studying emotion and coping processes in sport, it is not without its critics. Some have argued that some ambiguity persists in the interaction between primary and secondary appraisal (Vallerand, 1983). Other issues involve that of measurement. According to some researchers, there exists some uncertainty within Lazarus' theory regarding the point at which an individual perceives a stimulus as threatening (Vallerand, 1983). Others have noted that the theory only addresses negative emotion and, therefore

is an incomplete theory. Lazarus (1999) and colleagues have attempted to incorporate positive emotions into their theory; however, the theory remains most useful in relation to negative emotions (e.g. anger).

In a similar vein, Weiner (1977) also emphasized cognitive evaluation to the analysis of emotion (Vallerand, 1983). According to Weiner's attribution theory of emotion, the subjective experience is diversified and depends on the meaning attached to the situation. Weiner believes that causal dimension attributions mediate particular mood responses to outcome (expand causal dimension attributions). According to Weiner's theory, individuals search for causes that have three dimensions: causal control, controllability, and stability. The interplay between these three dimensions impact future behaviour through the mediation of emotional reactions and future expediencies. For example, Weiner believes that in achievement situations there exists at least three sources of emotion, which include: outcome emotions (e.g. feeling good after a success); feelings associated with outcome emotions (e.g. gratitude when success is due to others); and emotion associated with self-esteem (e.g. feeling competent following a personal success). Thus, the subjective outcome leads to emotion (e.g. feeling good) and causal ascription (e.g. gratitude) results in distinct or unambiguous emotions (e.g. hostility, surprise, hurt, betrayal etc.)

Studies investigating the relationship between causal attributions and emotional reactions have been performed on a number of different populations (Wells, 2004). However, much of this literature lacks precision in measurement and involvement of the subject in meaningful scenarios (Wells, 2004). Therefore it is unclear whether Weiner's theory is really one of emotion or a theory about thoughts of emotion (Vallerand, 1983).

Additionally, others have noted that many researchers adopting Weiner's theory have 'single-mindedly' examined only the participants of sport, thus neglecting the sports spectator. Therefore, different cognitive theories of emotion presented by both Lazarus and Weiner illuminate the intricacies of the emotional experience as a cognitive process. While Lazarus presents an appraisal theory of emotion, Weiner notes the importance of causality when making inferences regarding a transgression. Both theories are useful in explaining the plausible relationship between emotions and parental spectator aggression.

#### *Anger as an emotion*

Much like the difficulties faced in defining emotion, similar difficulties arise when defining aggression. For the purpose here, I will be employing Coakley's (1998) definition of aggression, which is "behaviour that intends to destroy property or injure another person, or is grounded in a total disregard for the well-being of self and other" (p.180). Coakley's definition of aggression is useful for this particular study because it speaks specifically to the violent acts of sports spectators. Examples of spectator aggression would include: taunting players, coaches, referees, and other spectators; harassing officials; throwing things onto the field of play; refusing to move out of someone's line of sight; obscene gestures; and pushing, shoving, or striking another person (Wann et al., 2001). To better understand aggression (its antecedents and underpinnings) it would be useful to identify the emotion preceding aggression: anger.

Aggression is the consequence of anger (Lemerise & Dodge, 2000). Anger acts to regulate psychological process related to self-defence, as well as regulating social and interpersonal behaviours (Lemerise & Dodge, 2000). Oakley and Jenkins (1996) note that emotions are 'ready repertoires for action' and although they are not perfect, they are

better than doing nothing or becoming 'lost in thought.' In other words, emotions inspire us to express our feelings and thoughts. Thus, anger relays raw and uncensored feelings about an individual's relationship to environment, which serves to influence the individual's response to the situation. However, this perspective challenges Lazarus' (1966, 1991) observations of emotion. Recall that Lazarus believed that individuals actively (or consciously) react upon their emotions making one's actions in response to an emotion the result of a censored thought.

Societies have many written and unwritten rules regarding appropriate public expression of anger (and other emotions) in culturally acceptable ways. Socialization of culturally appropriate displays of anger has largely been the object of study for developmental psychologists (e.g. Eiseberg, Fabes, Nyman, Bernzweig, & Pinuelas, 1994). They suggest that anger is a socialized emotion and its contextual appropriateness is learned primarily through parental interactions with the child at a very young age (Lemerise & Dodge, 2000). This is not to suggest that learned behaviour regarding anger stops at a young age. Instead, the role and meaning of anger in a child's repertoire changes over time.

Arsenio and Fleiss (1996) were interested in children's emotions (or affect) while engaging in and observing conflicts, including aggressive conflicts. They videotaped and coded preschoolers during play. Findings suggested that conflict initiators showed more positive emotions during conflict, whereas recipients expressed more anger and sadness. However, following the conflict, the initiator became negative in emotions, suggesting that the recipient's reaction may have influenced subsequent emotional reaction. Children who initiated more conflicts were also more likely to be the target of conflict. Lastly,

anger expressed outside of conflict situations predicted both initiation of aggression and anger during aggression. Thus, those who behave more aggressively are consequently more likely to initiate aggression and become aggressive during conflicts.

### **Emotion into action: How anger translates into aggression**

When does emotion translates into action? More specifically, when do feelings of anger transgress into aggressive behaviours? Denzin (1984) adopts a phenomenological approach to understanding emotion. He notes that when emotion shifts from a private feeling to becoming a public emotional experience, individuals are more likely to behave aggressively. For instance, when an individual feels as though he or she was the target of a transgression the decision to act or not act upon the transgression (i.e. retaliate) is contingent upon whether or not the transgression occurred publicly. It is necessary, then, to understand how aggressive behaviours are mediated through emotional experiences. A part of mediation requires an understanding of how emotion (e.g. anger) turns into action (e.g. aggression). Acts of public emotional experiences (e.g. harassing a referee) will be examined in the current thesis.

What makes anger different from other negative emotional states? Lazarus (1991) suggests that anger differs from other negative emotional states (e.g. guilt, shame, sadness, fright, anxiety, envy, jealousy, disgust) because it generally involves blame (Lazarus, 1991). When an individual experiences anger in the presence of the perceived transgressor, the likely consequence is an outward expression of anger direct at the perceived transgressor (Lazarus, 1991). To blame another individual for one's anger involves more than simply holding the accused transgressor responsible for the negative outcome; it also requires a belief that he or she could have acted differently, and therefore

had control over the offending action. Thus, similar to Weiner (1977) the perceived amount of control within the transgressor becomes an important attribution when reviewing how an individual becomes angry.

Weiner (1977) has suggested that emotions represent major determinants of motives and those distinct emotions are linked to specific motives. For instance, anger motivates aggressive behaviour. Therefore, an appreciation for what emotions underlie what motives may help in understanding what motivates behaviour. According to Weiner (2006), motivation to act or not act on a subjective outcome may be due to the emotion attached to the situation. For example, whether anger turns into aggression is contingent upon the context of the situation. In review of motivation, Weiner returns to three dimensions of perceived causes of aggression made by individuals (i.e. causal control, intentionality, and responsibility) to explain the relationship between motivation and emotion. First, Weiner notes the difference between controllability and intentionality. For example, effort is seen as a controllable cause of failure, whereas intention requires motivations or goals assigned to the outcome (e.g. did not intend to harm another person). Attribution theorists have argued that a causal ascription to a controllable cause (i.e. a cause which an individual could have changed volitionally), results in attributions of personal responsibility (Caprara, Pastorelli, & Weiner, 1997; Weiner, 1977). More specifically, following a transgression (e.g. an aggressive act), individuals search for the cause of that act. If the cause is perceived as intentional and/or the person could have acted differently (causal control), then anger may be experienced. Anger may lead to retaliation and subsequent aggression. For example, a social transgression such as intentionally not showing up to a meeting, or a negligent act such as being careless and

consequently harming another person are situations where the responsibility for the transgression are within the perceived intentions of the transgressor. In other words, an emotion such as anger is likely to occur in instances where the outcome could have been avoided and where the transgressor has control over the outcome of the perceived transgression.

Blame and aggression are linked with perceptions of causal controllability (Weiner, 1992). According to appraisal theories (e.g. Weiner, 1977; 2006), responsibility for an unfavourable action or outcome (e.g. negligence, carelessness, favouritism or intentional harm) causes feelings of anger (Caprara et al., 1997). For example, parent-spectators may become angry with an opposing team's player if they believe the player intentionally harmed their child during the play. In turn, the parent-spectators may become motivated to act aggressively towards the perceived transgressor (e.g. harassing the opposing team's player). Thus, through understanding motivation one may gain a greater perspective about how emotion potentially translates into action.

To take this one step further, let us reconsider the aforementioned difference between anger and aggression among adults and children. Adults are seen as culturally socialized individuals who should know acceptable displays of aggression. The child may act aggressively as a survival strategy (e.g. grabbing an object), or because the child is too young to be expected to know how to act any differently (Lemerise & Dodge, 2000). Lazarus (1991) contends that a "demeaning offence against me and mine is the best shorthand description of the provocation to adult human anger. An offence that is deemed arbitrary, inconsiderate, or malevolent contributes to the impression that we have been demeaned" (p.222). According to Lazarus, the term 'offence' means more than simply

feeling frustrated because an individual or object intercepted one's goal; it means injury to one's identity.

Anger may therefore turn into aggressive behaviour to protect one's self esteem (Cummings, 2005) when one feels that others could have avoided the transgression (Lazarus, 1991), and/or when one perceives the transgression as intentional and thus controllable (Caprara et al., 1997; Weiner, 1977). It is important to note, however, that different cultural norms regarding aggressive behaviour are determined by age (Lemerise & Dodge, 2000). Therefore, one may make inferences regarding why spectators aggress, while similar inferences regarding parent-spectators may be more difficult given the emotional connection with the child (Grolnick, 2003). In this way, a parent may act aggressively for different reasons and under different circumstances than non-parent-spectators.

### **Parent-child relationship**

Bowlby's historical influence on the developmental literature does not directly relate to a parents' bond with their child, however he does base much of his research on evolutionary psychology (see *Attachment and Loss: Attachment*, 1969/1998). Bowlby also considers attachment bonds without limiting his findings to the child's point-of-view. The majority of his research involved systematic observations of child-parent interactions, where the child was the primary subject of inquiry. In the current thesis, the parent is the primary subject of analysis, and while discussions surrounding the parent's attachment-style (a theory initiated by Bowlby then further researched by Ainsworth) will not be the emphasis of this section, other marginal findings by Bowlby regarding emotions will be explored. It is not my aim to explore parental attachment styles, but

rather adopt Bowlby's theories of caregiving, proximity maintenance, affectional bonds, and emotions seen between two loving individuals to explore a parent's emotional connection to their child.

### *Bowlby's Theory of Attachment*

Since the late 1960's, Bowlby's (1998 [1969]) attachment theory has developed into one of the most important conceptual frameworks for understanding the importance of emotions to the development of relationships (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). His work is one of the largest contributors to furthering our understanding of relationships, especially parent-child relationships of which attachment theory is the most widely recognized and explored (Bell, 2001). Like many early social theorists, Bowlby situated his analysis of human attachment within the "environment of evolutionary adaptedness" (Bowlby, 1999, p. 59). As such, Bowlby's theory was guided by evolutionary functions that resulted from "immature organisms need for protection from predators" (Bell & Richards, 2000). Evidence of such evolutionary thinking is seen in Bowlby's systems of attachment and his theory on caregiving. Bowlby described the caregiver as an individual who is the primary source of care the child/dependent, often regarded as the parent. Caregiving is viewed as any act fulfilling the role of caregiver (Bowlby, 1998).

### *Systems of Attachment*

According to attachment literature, both attachment and caregiving are seen as behavioural control systems (Bell & Richard, 2001). The term 'behavioural control system' was adopted from ethologists who used the phrase in lieu of the word 'instinct'. As such, both systems share many of the same basic principles. For instance, both have two feedback processes, an internal working model, an activation mechanism, and

emotional signals (Bell & Richard, 2001). Bowlby developed these two systems to explain how caregiver and child worked together to provide protection. First the child asks for protection, also known as attachment control system. This system “provided such protection because it predictably resulted in increasing the proximity of vulnerable immature organisms [child] to mature organisms [caregiver] of the same species who were better able to fend off predators” (Bell & Richards, 2000, p. 69). Second, caregivers and other adults must successfully respond to the child’s request by providing protection. Bowlby refers to caregivers answering the child’s request for protection as the caregiving control system. In this respect, the caregiver’s main purpose is to provide security for the child so that the child is unharmed during their more vulnerable years of development. Despite the fact that the dependent’s (child) attachment control system requires the caregivers caregiving control system to function, the caregiving control system remains largely understudied (Bell & Richards, 2001).

While there are many different applications of the word *attachment*, Bowlby’s use of the word is limited to behaviour through which the child elicits and relies upon nurturance from a caregiver. *Caregiving*, is used to describe the requisite behaviours to meet those needs (Bell, 2001). In this way, the caregiving system is only activated by the child’s attachment behaviours, and is therefore viewed as purely reactive (Bell & Richard, 2001). The current thesis focuses on Bowlby’s theories of caregiving, and the work of Bell (2000), and Bell and Richard (2001) whose work advances Bowlby’s theory of attachment to explain caregiving and caregiver behaviour.

*Caregiving*

While attachment theory has received considerable attention from a variety of researchers from varying backgrounds and disciplines, little attention has been given to caregivers as a population of interest (Ainsworth, 1989; Bell, 2000; & Bell & Richard, 2001). For the most part, attempts to account for the “internal operations or structure of parental caregiving have been rare within the attachment tradition” (Bell, 2000). Ainsworth (1989), a collaborator and colleague of Bowlby who worked with him to advance attachment theory, admitted that very little is known about the processes involved in the development and maintenance of a bond between caregiver and child. Like many social science researchers of the past 100 years, attachment theorists have been satisfied in merely assuming caregiving (Bell & Richard, 2000; Epstein, 1988; Harding, 1991). Some researchers believe that parents (or caregivers) have a “need” to nurture (Solomon & George, 1996). Others approach caregiving as a functional requirement for species survival (Bowlby, 1999), as Bowlby notes, “When looked at in terms of evolutionary theory, the occurrence of altruistic care of young is *readily understood* [emphasis added] since it serves to promote the survival of offspring” (p 165). Consequently, this ostensible approach discredits attachment theory and the literature supporting it.

Bowlby defined the role of caregiving as “behaviour complementary to attachment behaviour and serving a complementary function, that of protecting the attached individual...This is commonly shown by a parent, or other adult, towards a child or adolescent” (Bowlby, 1982, pp. 40-41). Bowlby (1982) underscored a set of functions caregivers should provide if he or she is to become an attachment figure. First, attachment figures must maintain a degree of closeness to the dependent, set by the

dependent (also known as proximity maintenance). Humans, regardless of age, tend to seek and enjoy proximity to their caregivers in times of need and experience distress when separated from their caregiver (Bell & Richard, 2001). Second, caregivers are a source of physical and emotional support, “they facilitate distress alleviation and are a source of support and comfort” (Bell & Richard, 2001, p.73). Third, caregivers provide a secure base upon which the depended may explore and learn about environment and grow as an individual, developing their own personality and uniqueness (Bell & Richard). By accomplishing these functions, a relationship partner becomes a source of attachment security (Bell & Richard).

Through the process of caregiving, both caregiver and child form an affectional bond (Bowlby, 1982). The maintenance of an affectional bond is the primary goal of attachment and any situation that endangers the bond will result in actions designed to defend it. During these situations “all the most powerful forms of attachment behaviour become activated” (Bowlby, 1998 [1969], p. 42). The greater the danger of loss appears to be the more intense and varied are the actions elicited to prevent it. Any threat to the bond may result in a phase of acute physiological stress and emotion distress (Bowlby, 1999). When these actions are successful the bond is restored, the activities cease and the states of stress and distress are alleviated” (pp. 41-42).

### *Situation Specific*

Historically, humans needed to be close to one another in order to ensure that their offspring were protected from predators. While that need has lessened over the years Bowlby believed that proximity nonetheless influences our daily behaviours. Bowlby believes that our actions are rooted in such primitive behaviours, and so one function of

attachment behaviour engenders proximity/closeness to special companions believed by Bowlby to indirectly provide protection from predators (Bowlby, 1999).

It is difficult for a mother or father to remain close to their children at all times, especially in today's society where many parents are both working. Therefore, the parent must be selective as to the times he or she chooses to watch the child. This selection is often guided by the foreseen danger to the child. As Bowlby notes "the various forms of attachment behaviour that contribute to [attachment bonds] are active only when required. Thus, the systems mediating attachment behaviour are activated only by certain conditions" (Bowlby, 1982, p. 40). To further explain this idea, Bowlby uses the analogy of a human's homeostatic system. A homeostatic system is only capable of effective operations when the environmental conditions appropriate to its operations remain within certain limits. If they do not "the system will become overstretched and eventually fails" (Bowlby 1982, p. 41).

An example, taken from physiology, is the system responsible for keeping body temperature close to the norm. So long as the ambient temperature remains within certain upper and lower limits it operates effectively. But when ambient temperature stays either above or below these limits for sufficiently long the system is unable to achieve its goal. As a result body temperature rises or falls and the organism suffers from hyper- or hypothermia. The environmental conditions that produce these physiological states are termed stressors, the states themselves states of stress. The personal experience is one of distress (Bowlby, 1982, p.43).

Comparably, the emotion a caregiver feels when removed from their child, and visa versa, when the child is removed from the caregiver, is one of distress. A goal-corrected

feedback process monitors the caregivers' proximity to the child/dependent via the caregiving behavioural control system (Bell & Richard, 2001). As distance between the caregiver and child increases, caregiving behaviours increase. Conversely, as distance decreases, caregiver behaviours are reduced (Bell & Richard, 2001). As described in Bowlby's analogy, if a human's ambient temperature remains within certain limits it will operate effectively. The proximity between caregiver and child operates much the same. If the child and parent remain within a certain distance the system works; if not, the system fails resulting in feelings of distress.

### *Emotions*

Since 1969 Bowlby's theory has become one of the most important conceptual frameworks for understanding the process of emotion regulation (Bell, 2001). Emotions, according to Bowlby (1998 [1969]), are "feelings or affects such as loving, hating, being frightened or hungry, that are inherently connected with one or another form of action" (p. 105). They are brief organized responses, which can interfere with many psychological sub-schemes (e.g., physiological, cognitive, motivational systems) (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). For example, if an individual is angry s/he may experience physiological repercussions (e.g., increased blood pressure), cognitive impairment (e.g., inability to think clearly), and increased motivation (e.g., desire to act out aggression). As previously mentioned sport spectators also experience emotions, which develop from their emotional attachment to the team/player (Trujillo & Krizek, 1994) and the emotionally charged environment, such as the hockey arena (Mehrbian, 1976). This is particularly true of parent-spectators, who in addition to the emotional experiences of non-parent sports spectators are emotionally connected to their child.

Humans are 'emotional beings' surviving in part because of our capacity to convey emotions and understand others' emotions (Bowlby, 1999). For instance, humans are heavily reliant on emotions for helping them sense danger. In this way, humans can understand the emotions expressed by other humans that display anger and/or a desire to fight. Because of the relationship between emotions and behaviour, the notion that emotions are causative of behaviour is widely accepted (Bowlby, 1999). We often hear such colloquial phrases such as 'he hit him because he was angry' or 'she did it because she was jealous', but do we really know whether or not emotions and behaviour are directly related? Contemporary attachment theory states that the set goal of the child is so closely aligned with our commonsense understanding of the child's emotions that some authors have described attachment as an affect regulation system (see Bartholomew, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1996). Some believe this categorization to be highly optimistic (Bell & Richard, 2001). In order for affect to require regulation, affect must be a causal force, otherwise why would it need to be regulated. Bowlby and other attachment theorists (Heard & Lake, 1997) starkly oppose this position. For these authors, emotion serves as merely a signal to the current state of the behavioural control system, and not a cause of behaviour. In this way, caregivers' feelings toward the child are seen as signals from the caregiving behavioural control system and not directly responsible for behaviours in any causal way (Bell & Richard, 2001). Still others believe the relationship between emotions and existing behaviour to be bidirectional, with emotions influencing behaviour and vice versa (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The disparity in whether emotions play a causal role in predicting behaviours indicates the lack of attention this issue has received. What is being argued here is that emotions influence behaviours. The ability of

emotions to influence our behaviours has been supported by Weiner (1977) who notes that the relationship between emotions and behaviours is mediated by our motives to act. The ability for emotions to influence/motivate behaviours is consistent with Bowlby's theory of affectional bonds.

According to Bowlby, many of the most extreme emotions arise during the formation, maintenance, disruption and renewal of attachment relationships.

The formation of a bond is described as falling in love, maintaining a bond as loving someone, and losing a partner as grieving over someone. Similarly, threat of loss arouses anxiety and actual loss gives rise to sorrow; while each of these situations is likely to arouse anger (Bowlby, 1999, p. 40).

In this way, emotions precede the action that affects the affectional bond. Distress occurs after the attachment bond has been broken and love follows the creation of the affectional bond.

Bowlby's discussions of emotions are limited to attachment theory and therefore do not account for the caregivers emotions. A bond, such as an affectional bond, is a link that binds people together in a relationship (Bowlby, 1999). In this way, both caregiver and child are needed in the development of affectional bond. Thus, given that the child experiences intense emotions during the development, continuance, interference, and restoration of a bond, the caregiver must also experience intense emotions. As Bell and Richard (2001) note, "It is remarkable that, in a theoretical orientation that is designed to be applied to theory about parents and children, there are no emotions that logically precede caregiving. There is caregiving, but there is no prior caring" (p. 73).

do not account for the caregiver's emotions. A bond, such as an affectional bond, is a link that binds people together in a relationship (Bowlby, 1999). In this way, both caregiver and child are needed in the development of affectional bond. Thus, given that the child experiences intense emotions during the development, continuance, interference, and

### **Concluding Thoughts**

As one of the first social theorists to combine ethological, evolutionary, personality, developmental, and social psychological perspectives, Bowlby (1982) explored the relationship between caregiver and child, and pioneered one of the most important frameworks for understanding the emotional consequences of the parent-child relationship. The use of Bowlby's theories and specifically his theory of caregiving will contribute to our understanding of parent-spectatorship by providing empirical knowledge about the influences of parent-child relationships and the emotional framework that encompasses this relationship. As a theoretical framework, Bowlby's theories of attachment, caregiving, and emotion offer unique insight onto the present study and will undoubtedly benefit from theorizing the parent-child relationship in relation to youth sports spectatorship and the potential emotional consequences of this relationship.

Since Bowlby's first introduced caregiving as a topic of investigation, very little empirical research has been conducted on the subject (for exceptions see Bell, 2000; Bell & Richard, 2001). As previously mentioned, researchers were content in their assumptions about the caregiver. And while Bowlby too shared these same assumptions, he did forge the caregiver's behavioural control system as a means to understand parents' instinctive behaviours and motivational behaviours.

In summary, through Bowlby's theory of attachment and caregiving I will critically analyze parental spectator behaviour. According to Bowlby, the child, to a large degree, dictates the relationship with the caregiver and the ensuing affectional bond. Bowlby believes the role of the caregiver to be responsive to the child's needs and

desires, ensuring physical, emotional, and psychological security. Indeed this is the primary goal of the caregiver – security and protection of the child. In order to fulfil this goal, caregiver and child share a common desire to remain close to each other (also known as proximity maintenance). The safety of the child is important for its own survival, and to the caregiver/parent as it ensures that their genes are passed on. Some of the most intense emotions arise during the formation of affectional bonds between child and caregiver. Bowlby believes the emotions of the caregiver to be their most extreme during the formation, maintenance, destruction, and renewal of the bond. Any situation that serves to threaten the bond will result in behaviours to defend it; thus, highlighting the importance of the bond to the caregiver.

Watching their children play sports is both rewarding and challenging for many parents. On the one hand, parents are witnessing their child's growth and development, transitioning from highly dependent infants to autonomous individuals. On the other, parents also witness their child in difficult and threatening situations. The child may be threatened physically (e.g. body checked), emotionally (e.g. angry because they did not get to play), and psychologically (e.g. cut from the team). The parent, for both contractual and moral reasons is discouraged from interfering. However, not all parents remain silent and inactive when their child has been threatened. As Nack and Munson (2000) note, "the vast majority of parents still comport themselves with restraint and civility at games, but it is impossible to ignore or wave away the loud, critical, ill-mannered parent in the stands" (p.88). In line with Bowlby's theory, caregivers display emotion when the affectional bond has been threatened, some parent-spectators display their emotions in a less than favourable manner. To further our understanding of the emotional reactions of

parents, Bell and Richard (2001) transformed Bowlby's observations and theories into empirical understandings.

Bell and Richard's (2001) have revolutionized our understanding on caregiving, moving parents and the act of parenting from a 'common sense' perspective to an empirical understanding. Bowlby's work has formulated several key concepts for understanding relationships, especially parent-child relationships (Bell, 2001). Each theory is important for its contribution to relationship literature, most notably for advancing our understanding of the exceptional relationship between parent and child. The inclusion of emotion into his theory not only alludes to the importance of emotion as a concept of study, but also as an influencing factor in this parent-child relationship, whether the influence be causal or not. In sum, Bowlby's theories of caregiving and attachment explore both the parent-child relationship and the dynamic emotions that accompany this relationship, thus making the ideal framework for this study.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **METHODOLOGY**

To date, literature on parent-spectator behaviours at minor sporting events are not typically based on empirically sound research methodologies and often involve mainstream media sources – magazine and newspaper articles, radio talk shows, online discussion forums, and the television news programs. These sources are often clouded with opinion and bias, a fact that many authors accept as an inevitable truth. As a result, the topic and those involved are often misrepresented given the general public a misguided view of the incidence, degree, and reality of parent-spectator behaviours. Such distorted views may influence parents' decision to enrol their children in minor league sport. The present thesis aims to respond to the lacuna of empirical research focusing on parent-spectator (mis)conduct and attempt to put into perspective some of the mainstream media and empirical literature dealing with this issue. In doing so, I hope to encourage further empirical research on this subject.

The present chapter provides methodological details employed for this study conducted during the spring/summer season from May to June in 2007. It is important to stress that the observations and interviews were conducted during the spring/summer AAA hockey season, which is the highest level of competition for players in this age group. The fact that the season takes place during the summer, outside of the regular season, speaks to how committed these parents and players are towards hockey essentially playing two season, one during the winter, the other during the summer.

The season consisted of a number of three to four day tournaments that resembled mini-seasons over the course of the two-month period. I am adopting the term 'mini-season' as a means of conveying the similarities between weekend tournaments and winter seasons. In this way, mini-seasons are simply accelerated winter seasons, in that

they each have a preliminary ‘round robin’ phase (regular schedule) and play-offs (quarter-finals, semi-finals, and finals). Here, I will outline my research protocol, participants, method of evaluation and procedure for conducting the study and gathering participants. I will also describe the data collection procedures, the techniques use to analyze my data, and how I confirmed trustworthiness of my results.

### **Participants**

I followed three different teams from three different AAA hockey clubs at both the Atom (9-10 year old) and Pee wee (11-12 year old) divisions within Ottawa, Ontario. Participants were selected on the basis of geography and the willingness of the players’ families to participate in my research. Twenty-six participants, 12 male, 14 female were interviewed once totalling 26 interviews (See Table 1), however casual conversations that occurred prior to and after games were not counted as interviews but were instead used to guide the direction of the research. Tape-recorded interviews were conducted at various locations within the arena (often chosen by the participant) and to accommodate participants some interviews were conducted over the phone. Interviews took the form of guided conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 2000) and therefore depending on the participants availability and/or level of knowledge, interviews lasted anywhere from approximately 15 minutes to 2 hours and averaged roughly 28 minutes per interview (See Table 1). In order to minimize the effect of memory loss on questions involving recall, interviews were conducted as close to the completion of each game as possible.

Naturalistic observations were conducted on both parent-spectators of the three participating AAA Atom and Pee-wee teams, including those whom I interviewed, and parent-spectators whose children played on different AAA Atom or Pee wee division

hockey in Ottawa, Ontario aside from these three teams. In total, I attended 45 games or made roughly 45 hours of naturalist observation.

### **Techniques and Procedures**

The present study involved observation and interview methods to explore the topic of inquiry. Naturalistic observation allows researchers to examine social meanings and grasp multiple perspectives in natural social settings (Newman, 2004). In doing so, the researcher attempts to get inside the meaning system of members and then must respond to the data via analytical processes. Through naturalistic observation I was able to see multiple perspectives simultaneously. This position enabled me to notice both explicit (recognized, conscious, spoken) and tacit (less recognized, implicit, unspoken) aspects of youth hockey culture (Neuman, 2004). For instance, I was able to analyze both verbal and non-verbal (e.g. body language) acts of aggression and emotion, which provide me (the researcher) with a macro (observing the entire hockey arena, including referees, players, coaches, and parents) and micro (observing one parent-spectator) perspectives on youth hockey culture.

The games that I observed were chosen randomly from the minor hockey tournament schedules of the three teams with whom I worked with. I observed 45 games over a three-month period, however the bulk of these were spread across several weekend tournaments. This allowed me to watch multiple games in a single day. Through naturalistic observations I was able to gain greater insight into parental behaviours, including the type of behaviours displayed and circumstances that seemingly prompt aggressive or inappropriate behaviours. Naturalistic observations provided a greater

understanding of the basic systems and operations of minor hockey (i.e. rules and regulations), as well as a greater general understanding for the hockey environment.

Individual interviews were conducted in the form of a “guided conversation” (Rubin & Rubin, 2000), which allows the researcher flexibility in questioning and the ability to delve into issues brought up by the participant but not previously noted by the researcher (Yin, 2003). Therefore depending on the participants and/or dearth or excess of their responses. Interviews were guided by witnessed behaviours during hockey games with the purpose of understanding the parents’ emotions at specific moments during the hockey game (mostly situations which involved their child). For example questions such as the following were be asked: When X happened during the game, how did you feel? What were some of your thoughts? Why might you have thought that way? Interviews included a broad range of questions concerning participants’ emotions and behaviours experienced as a spectator and parent and the parent-child bond. More specifically, the guided conversations attempted to uncover (a) details of the parent-child relationship; (b) the emotional connection between parent and child; (c) how parents emotions effect behaviours when watching their children play; (d) indicators of parent-spectator misconduct, such as witnessing their child get hurt; and (e) what role parents’ emotional attachment has on parental spectator behaviour in minor hockey rinks in Canada.

Interviews took place after games where their child was playing. However, some “goalie parents” (self-titled) were interviewed even though their son did not play in the previous game. These interviews were judged to be useful in my analysis and thus were not discriminated on the basis that their son did not play. Instead “goalie parents” whose

child did not play spoke to the feelings and emotions of watching their son sit on the bench.

Observations and retrospective interviews allowed me to match observed behaviours with participants' feelings during the moments at which the behaviours occurred. Frackel and Wallen (2003) note that interviews are an important way "for a researcher to check the accuracy of—to verify or refute—the impressions he or she has gained through experience." (p.455) This is especially important for the present study as I matched observed parent-spectator behaviours to interviews with parent-spectators (pairing behaviours with explanations) to gain a more complete understanding of parent-spectators.

Ethnographic methods were used to better understand the phenomena under study and the cultural arena where this phenomena occurred. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) offer the following commentary on ethnography:

We see the term as referring primarily to a particular method or sets of methods. In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in peoples lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions—in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issue that are the focus of the research (p.1).

I studied parent-spectator behaviours in their natural environment, the hockey arena, and its surrounding area, such as the lobby and bar and I spoke directly with parent-spectators to better understand their behaviours from their point-of-view. They offered explanations and insights that aided my analysis. Still, despite many attempts to stick to the task and

conduct observations of parents and their reactions to game activities and not solely the game itself, I still found myself drifting from two different perspectives: that of the researcher and that of the spectator. To pay homage to my struggle to remain solely a researcher and not a participant I performed a narrative analysis which also depicts my experiences as a spectator.

### **Concurrent Data Collection and Analysis**

“Narrative meaning functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic unites...It is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.11). This excerpt from the book, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* by Donald Polkinghorne describes the basis for narrative analysis, which is to provide a temporal account of how purpose and meaning are defined by experience. I have provided detailed, and temporally localized accounts of my experiences while conducting field research. These accounts offer unique insights about the research environment which I later compared and contrasted to accounts of the interviewees. This allowed for a better theorized account of parent-spectator behaviours and functioned to “organize elements of awareness into meaningful episodes” (Polkinghorn, 1988, p. 1).

To add narrative meaning to data analysis and to more accurately symbolize interviewee responses, data was analyzed as it was collected so that information obtained in earlier conversations inform the remainder of the data collection, also known as the “constant comparative” method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This method involves asking questions related to concepts developed throughout the interview process and verifying statements and relationships between concepts throughout the interviews in an attempt to

develop short narratives that help guide our understanding of concepts and the relationships between them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The participants' interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed shortly after each interview. I made every attempt to transcribe all auditable information verbatim (e.g. talking, laughing, pauses); however, I recognize that there is always some degree of interpretation when transcribing. Throughout the interviews and observations I noted participants' emotions and body language. These notes were compared to the interview transcription in order to identify consistency between interview statements and observed behaviours. Observations made during the hockey game were compared to transcriptions. All transcriptions and materials (e.g. audio-tapes, notes) were locked and filed and were only out when viewed/used by either my supervisor or myself.

Transcriptions and field notes were analyzed. I looked for general themes that would help guide my analysis and construct my results. Themes found in observations included: types of parent-spectator behaviours (i.e. positive, neutral, negative); recipients of parent-spectator behaviours (i.e. child, spectators, referees, coaches, other children); events that prelude negative spectator behaviours (e.g. child gets injured by another player). These themes focus more on in-rink behaviour given that I was simply observing behaviours in their natural settings. Conversely, interviews involved themes which were introspective, these included: emotions felt as a parent, emotions felt watching their child play hockey, and emotions felt prior to, during, and after the game (i.e. prior to and preceding negative behaviours witnessed by the researcher). In this way, interviews offered insight onto 'self-contained emotional thoughts' (Barbalet, 1998), whereas observations provided documented evidence of outwardly expressed emotion in relation

to game events. By investigating the behavioural, emotional, and environmental conditions I have achieved a more holistic appreciation of parent-spectator behaviours.

### **Recruitment/Consent Procedures**

Hockey teams and participants were recruited through a variety of methods, including group e-mails, “snow-ball” sampling, and the assistance of organizational “gatekeepers,” such as the Presidents of hockey clubs and sport and recreation organizers of the sporting facilities hosting tournaments. Hockey teams were chosen based on the age group of the youth hockey players (between Atom and Peewee), willingness to participate and my ability to access the hockey facility (e.g. transportation). In all cases and in accordance with the conditions laid out by the University of Ottawa ethical guidelines, I sought written permission from the President of the participating teams. The participating clubs presidents’ were sent an information package that included: (a) a letter of information summarizing the study and asking permission to gain access to the hockey club and its facilities (Appendix A); (b) copies of the informed consent form (Appendix B); and (c) a copy of ethics approval from the University of Ottawa’s Research and Ethics Board for the study (Appendix C).

Once permission to access the participating hockey club had been obtained, a representative from the hockey club approached parents via-email and face-to-face and asked if they would like to participate in a study about parent-spectators. Any parent who expressed an interest in participating was told to approach me at a pre-set location (usually within the hockey arena) at which point I introduced myself and explained the study. If parents were still interested in participating they were given two copies of an informed consent form, which they filled out and returned to me for safe keeping,

keeping the other copy as their own personal copy. We, the participant and I, then arranged a time to meet at some point during the tournament (also known as ‘mini-season’)

### **Ensuring Trustworthiness**

I have ensured trustworthiness in a number of different ways. First, to improve the dependability of the data, the data from the naturalistic observation were compared and contrasted to the observations of parent-spectators. Any obvious differences between them were noted. For all participants, interviews and observations of their behaviours were reviewed for discrepancies and/or consistencies. Again, any obvious differences or similarities were noted. I also used a reflective journal throughout the field research process, which included my opinions, comments, and interactions with participants, thoughts on interviews, and thoughts during the transcription process as well as anything else relevant towards the field research process that I have deemed relevant. Second, I have ensured that the findings are transferable in that they provide “sufficient detail of the context of the fieldwork” (Shenton, 2004, p. 63) such that a reader may decide whether or not the environment, in this case the minor hockey environment, and its description may be transferred to other settings. In doing so, I offer rich detailed analysis thus allowing the reader to draw comparisons to their experiences in similar environments. Lastly, I achieve confirmability by way of including direct quotations to demonstrate in detail how the findings emerge from the informants and are not merely the product of my own predisposition.

### **Fieldwork Limitations**

As is often the case when doing fieldwork, gaining access to the field was quite problematic. First, it was difficult to get parents to participate in the study. This is not surprising given that parent-spectator misconduct has a long sensationalized history in minor Canadian hockey (not to suggest that the impact of this issue has not been felt in other countries, the United States being an important example), perpetuated by the mass media. In some ways, the media have demonized parent-spectators, who, are often noted as being “loud, critical, obnoxious, meddling, aggressive and ill-mannered” (Nack & Monsun, 2000, p. 90). Consequently, it is not surprising that parent-spectatorship is a contentious issue among minor hockey parents, which undoubtedly negatively influenced their decision to participate in this study and their attitudes towards me as a researcher.

The second and more disturbing challenge I faced in conducting the research was the manner in which I was received in the field. Being a young woman, my entry into the male-dominated hockey environment was difficult. It was assumed that I had little knowledge of the game, which was expressed to me on repeated occasions by male parents condescendingly ‘explaining’ to me ‘hockey basics’. Moreover, during a phone conversation with one minor hockey coach, I was addressed with a jovial, “Hey Doll”. It was very difficult to dissimulate myself and not speak out critically in this male-dominant hockey community. I felt my precarious position in the field did not afford me the opportunity to openly challenge these views and simply avoided any confrontations. These challenges, however, are not unique to female researchers, especially those who conduct field research in male-dominated sports, which tend to be the environments that are the least progressive in their views on sexual equality (Messner, 1992). More specifically, Robidoux and Bocksnick (2001) discuss the ‘silencing of the female voice’

within minor hockey. They explain how comments made by female spectators during ice hockey games are disregarded as either ill-informed opinions or hysterical females. As Robidoux and Bocksnick (2001) write: “These condescending utterances provide insight into this community’s attitudes towards women, who are generally tolerated by the men, but perceived as illegitimate in the context of hockey.” Still, despite the noted limitations, rich detailed data latent with nuance was obtained via guided conversations and field notes.

**CHAPTER V**

**THE PHYSICAL-SOCIAL MINOR HOCKEY ENVIRONEMNT AND PARENT  
SPECTATORSHIP: “OUR HANDS ARE TIED!”**

*“The power of context is that the same thing is true for certain kinds of environments – that in ways that we don’t necessarily appreciate, our inner states are the result of our outer circumstances” (Gladwell, 2002, p.145)*

**Introduction**

The excitement is palpable—the Kings, the home team, are down by one goal with three minutes left in the game. The crowd is on its feet, some spectators cheering, others looking on with panic-stricken expressions contorting their faces. The puck sails into the visiting Cyclones’ corner and two players battle for it, jostling for position. A penalty is called against the Cyclones—two minutes for checking from behind. In the interstice between the whistle blowing to signal a stop in play, and another whistle for play to resume, the Cyclones’ fans throw their hands into the air and hurl insults at the referee: “Are you blind?” “Bad call!” The Kings’ fans, however, are elated and yell encouraging advice to their team: “You can do this, boys!” “Just one goal!”

The clock freezes at two minutes and fifty seconds. The head referee makes his way over to the Cyclones’ blue line, and the players follow suit. The Cyclones win the draw, peddling the puck back into their zone before firing it down the ice into the Kings’ end. The Kings’ goalie retrieves the puck from the boards and swiftly passes it up to one of his players. The Kings take it down the ice and enter the Cyclones’ zone. One – two – three shots are fired at the Cyclones’ net but the goalie stops them all. The atmosphere is

tense yet exciting. Both teams are battling for the puck; the fans enjoy the relative uncertainty of the outcome. It is exciting for both teams' fans as both teams have a chance to win. The fans rise to their feet. The penalty expires with fifty seconds remaining on the clock. The Kings are not discouraged and neither are their fans. Horns, clappers, snappers, and other noisemakers sound off like a junior procession band. The Cyclones regain possession of the puck and begin their way towards the Kings' net. They shoot the puck - the goalie sticks out his left pad and makes the save. The puck rebounds to a Kings' player. Nine seconds left on the clock. Just as the Kings' player passes the Cyclones' blue line, he stops, winds up, and with a burst of energy releases the puck towards the net. The crowd is hushed with anticipation. It is not an especially strong shot, nor is fast or hard. But it is headed towards the net in the right direction – a top left hand corner shot, only adding to the Cyclones' fans growing trepidation. The shot hits the goalie's left shoulder pad and then bounces up high behind him and. The goalie reaches up with his glove hand to scoop up the puck up, but inadvertently tips the puck further into the net. The buzzer sounds as the puck crosses the goal line. The Kings' fans go wild with excitement; they jump up and down, high-five one another, pump their fists, while the score reads tie-game. The Kings' fans behave as though the victory is theirs.

“What a game!” One man remarks to another, “One of the most exciting games I’ve ever seen”

“Yeah,” the gentlemen beside him eagerly remarks. “These *nine year olds* can really skate!”

This reference to nine year olds snapped me back to reality. I had been watching nine year olds yet I had been swept up by the excitement and of the atmosphere and the events

of game, and I too lost sight of the fact that I was watching children engaged in play. National pride was not at stake, Olympic gold medals were not being won, but the intensity of the play and excitement of the crowd made it easy to lose perspective.

The preceding vignette attempts to illustrate the intense excitement that transpires throughout much of the year in Canadian arenas as parents watch and cheer for their children as they play ice-hockey<sup>1</sup>. But the vignette reveals also how easy it is for one to lose perspective during a game, especially when competitive outcomes are more challenging and suddenly winning and losing is on the line. Perspective can be understood as the standpoint or lens through which an environment is perceived and meanings are formulated. As a researcher studying minor hockey parents, I often found myself becoming so engrossed in what I was watching I would temporarily lose my own research perspective and find myself following the play like the rest of the people in the stands. That is one with exception; I was a researcher with no real connection to the game and the others (for the most part) were the children's parents sharing in every moment as if they were their own. At this point I began to wonder; if it was so easy for me to get caught up in the physical-social minor hockey environment (Mehrbian, 1976), what were the parents going through and what if any perspective were they managing?

Watching children play sports can be both rewarding and challenging for many parents. On the one hand, parents are able to witness their children grow and develop, transitioning from highly dependent infants to autonomous individuals. On the other, sport provides situations where parents witness their children face highly difficult and potentially threatening circumstances, where parents are left relatively helpless in the

stands struggling with their urges to protect their children, whether it is from the physical play of the sport or unfavourable decisions made by coaches or referees. These threatening situations do at times evoke emotional outbursts from parents, even from parents not predisposed to public displays of emotion or aggression (Weiner, 1992, 1997). The outbursts to which I refer are the persistent cases of parental misconduct in Canadian rinks which popular media coverage tend to characterize as maniacal acts made by out-of-control parents in the otherwise innocent setting of youth sport (Deacon, 2001). Documented acts of aggression made by parents at youth hockey games remain constant (Fiore, 2003) yet little has been done to understand why these behaviours persist, and how parents would purport themselves in such a manner that would in any other context be unthinkable. For example, yelling at a young adolescent (referee) for making an incorrect decision (call) in front of other parents and friends. If one wishes to address the issue of parental misconduct in minor hockey, a critical first step would be to consider the context in which these behaviours arise (Gladwell, 2002) and second, speak to the parents themselves about their experiences within this intense environment.

### **The Physical and Social Hockey Milieu**

In his book *Sports Ethnography*, Sands (2002), a sports ethnographer, explains, “the goal of experiential ethnography is to undergo the same cultural experiences that all cultural members do” (p. 131). It was, naturally, important for me to overcome the barriers I faced as a researcher and find ways to gain some level of acceptance within this community. Over the first two weeks, parents did get accustomed to my presence as a researcher and I began engaging with them in the various social activities that are not directly related to the game itself but are rather a consequence of the considerable amount

of time required from both child and parent to participate in hockey. For example, there are substantial periods of time before and after games (up to two hours) during which children are required to suit up, have pre and post game meetings with coaching staff and/or engage in their own socializing. During these times some parents go for a drink while waiting for their children and others simply lounge in the lobby area. These were critical moments for my own socialization with the parents and they proved to be some of the most productive experiences I encountered over the course of the fieldwork. Perhaps because of the absence of game time tensions parents had revealing conversations with me, most of which lead to positive interactions for the remainder of the season. The more time I spent with the parents in these situations, the discomfort I encountered as a young female researcher diminished, allowing me to share in parent-spectating experiences—perhaps not to the same extent Sands suggests, as the plausibility of a researcher experiencing “the same cultural experiences that all cultural members do” is a dubious proposition, but to a significant level, nonetheless. The following then is a synthesis of what I experienced during and surrounding the games in order to gain an understanding of the social-physical environment of minor hockey.

### *The Setting*

My introduction to spring summer hockey began when my minor hockey contact called me to let me know that his team was hosting a '93 – '97 tournament. Those dates refer to the birth years of the players, so in this case the tournament was held for children born between 1993 and 1997; or in other words, children between the ages of 10 and 14. In spring/summer hockey, teams are referred to by their birth year unlike the practice of the regular winter hockey season during which teams are referred to by their division title

(e.g. Atom, Peewee, Bantam). Many of the mini-seasons I attended, this tournament being one, took place at sport multiplexes. These facilities cater to a variety of sports and typically include at least one ice pad (the term pad is used to describe the ice surface), a fitness room (with cardio machines and weights), and a gym area. The multiplex I attended most often for these events had four ice pads (one international size), and one indoor soccer field.

This first research hockey event struck me with the sophistication of the facility. I found it an amazing place to host such a young players hockey tournament. There were six very large television-viewing screens mounted on pillars angled downward, and set for a variety of sports programming. Hockey programming by far drew the largest crowds. There was an unoccupied soccer field to my right, an international ice pad with stadium seating, a sports bar nestled between two ice pads, and three additional ice pads, all well designed and strategically located for maximum viewing. Each ice surface had bleachers and a galley area in the top corner of its arena. Spectators, in this case mostly male, could watch the game from high up, above the stands, where they had a 'birds-eye-view' of the action. Each ice pad was visible from the lobby area that was itself full of busyness and chatter, and was separated from the players' dressing rooms by two large heavy doors.

On my arrival my contact introduced me to a gentleman who agreed to show me around. We began by going through a section of the arena that was intended for "Authorized Personnel Only." The doors shut behind us and the first thing I noticed was how quiet it was, a stark contrast from the noisy lobby environment packed with parents and young boys that I had just left. Along the right hand side of the hallway were doors

marked A through D, which I determined were team change rooms. A long rubberized black mat provided directional arrows from those rooms to the ice surface, where the players entered the Pantheon. The passage way was specifically designed so that players accessed the arena separately from the spectators.

From that vantage point I looked first at the ice from ground level and then up to the stands – two starkly contrasting areas occupying the same space. This arena, the international ice pad, could seat approximately 500 spectators. I could feel a taste of the excitement that I am sure some of the players could feel stepping onto the ice for the first time in that remarkable venue. The air was cold and crisp—quite different from the outside air, which was comfortable and warm. The boards which surround the ice surface are branded with the names of local businesses and national corporate advertisers, such as *Powerade* and *Nike*. The corporate presence conveys an aura more typically found in a professional sport stadium, which I found somewhat unsettling in a public facility embracing recreational sport.

Across the ice from where my escort and I were standing were the players' benches, 'Home' and 'Away', separated by two penalty boxes, one for each team. Between the offenders' boxes was that of the timekeeper. On the wall above the team benches were various banners demarcating the club's accolades and achievements. To my right above the goalie there hung a massive score clock, rectangular in shape, with a number of smaller rectangles within it. Beside this imposing game clock was another, much smaller, digital clock that indicated the real time. During games spectators are presented with the juxtaposition of game time and real time where two worlds collide in this concrete landscape. In this space I have entered, what Turner and McArthur (1990)

aptly call “times out of time” (p.82) where the physical environment is in stark contrast from the world outside of this space. As I came to terms with this sense of surrealism I turned and looked over at the opposite side of the arena where the lobby could be seen through the windows that lined the back wall, which served as a type of boundary between the two worlds. The two environments, the lobby and the arena, are aesthetically and emotionally very different spaces. The lobby is typically relaxed and sociable; the arena is intense and focused. In an interview I conducted later in the season a father commented on the contrasting social-physical environments:

Oh, I must admit when I’m in the arena I’m tense, I’m thinking about the game or how are our boys going to play? The things they are going to deal with. How are they going to handle them? Are we going to do all the things we need to do? But it’s funny, if I’m actually standing outside, like through the window [in the lobby area] I’m a heck of a lot more relaxed for some reason. [laughs] And I don’t know if it’s just because I can’t hear all the noise and I can’t hear all the parents, the commotion, the players—um, I guess yeah, you know what? Looking back at it for sure I am a lot more, I’m very calm out there compared to when I walk into the actual open cold air and all the sounds and everything going kind of thing. (Doyle, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007) <sup>ii</sup>

My tour of the facility eventually ended and I took my place in the stands getting ready to begin the first phase of observational research. Groups of spectators, mostly parents, began to fill the arena. My presence was obvious as I could sense people’s reactions to this noticeable stranger sitting among them. This feeling of disconnect between myself and parents eventually faded with time aided by many casual

conversations, not always related to hockey. As I began to earn the trust of various parents I began to feel accepted as a part of their close-knit hockey community. Still, in situations where I did not know the team or the group of parents (yet), I would sit close enough to the parents but directly within the group to avoid making people feel uncomfortable. Once the game began all attention focused on the play on the ice and my presence became less of an intrusion.

The game I was watching was typical of the spring tournament schedule which is comprised of round-robin competition, where each team in a pool plays each other once. The teams are then ranked according to their record in round-robin play. Advancing to the play-offs in spring tournaments is set up so that only the first and second teams advance to the playoff rounds, making round-robin play that much more competitive. In the playoffs higher ranked teams play lower ranked teams from different pools (in what are known as 'cross-over' games). In doing so, organizers can fairly confidently ensure that teams in the weaker pool (a pool with a disproportionate amount of lesser calibre teams) do not advance further than stronger teams.

The players finally began to spill onto the ice to engage in their warm-up routines. I was struck by how intensely structured all aspects of their behaviour were, from their uniform skating and stretching exercises, to their uniforms themselves. Each team had coordinating outfits, from their helmets and hockey jerseys to their pants and socks. In many ways this was like watching a miniature version of professional hockey, where the players resembled professional players in every way but ability and size. In truth, many teams were designed to be younger versions of professional teams - using their team's name and wearing identical jerseys. The teams were quick to perform their high-tempo

warm-up with perfunctory precision and skill. While only 10 to 14 years of age, these boys manifested their talent well before their game had even started. The atmosphere of the rink soon began to match the enthusiasm on the ice and parents from both teams began cheering: “Go Matty!”; “Let’s go boys!”; “Focus!” (Field notes, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007). However, it was not until the whistle blew to signify the beginning of the game and the puck was dropped that parents really began to engage themselves in their role as parental spectators.

### *The Games*

“That was a spear, you son-of-a-bitch!” one man yelled out at the referee. “Call that, ref!” another man chimed in (Field notes, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007). Within only a few minutes of the start of the game, I was stunned by the remarks being hurled towards the ice, whether directed at the officials or the players themselves. Remarks such as these make it difficult to understand how seemingly well-meaning parents can without delay shift their views regarding safety; from telling their children to ‘play safe and have fun’ to verbally berating a young referee. Indeed, parents who comport themselves in inappropriate ways appear to be affected by the meanings of context, and as such parents are not simply watching young hockey players play hockey, but are rather watching *their children* play hockey, a detail easily appreciated by parents’ inappropriate reactions to infractions and perceived transgressions against their children.

The atmosphere inside the arena was often intense, passionate even. However, games that mattered most (i.e. play-off games) to the outcome of each mini-season were more intense and with this increase in intensity came more loud mothers and fathers. While mothers were consistently loud, fathers were selective in what and when they

yelled, yet when they did it left more of an impression. Comments were often directional in nature (i.e. “Skate! Skate! Skate!” “Get it! Get the puck!”), however there were times where seemingly innocent directional commentary had a negative tone (i.e. PASS THE PUCK!), which prompted some parents to tell other fellow parents to “cool it.”

There were however times where more extreme behaviours occurred which were in clear violation of parental codes of conduct. These incidents, however, were rare compared to more implicit forms of misconduct (i.e. yelling directional commentary). For instance, spectators are not permitted to aggress against other spectators, physically, vocally, or emotionally. Still, I did witness a physical altercation between two hockey fathers. A group of fathers had gathered around the edge of the ice pad closest to the entranceway into the arena. The play had moved to the end of the ice where the fathers were standing. The puck became loose in front of the net leaving neither team in absolute possession. A scrum resulted and players jostled for position. In a loud and assertive manner one father yelled out to the referee, “REF! HE PUNCHED HIM! CALL IT! HE PUNCHED HIM! NUMBER 15! CALL IT!” A father standing next to him mumbled softly, but still very audibly, “He deserved it.”

“Excuse me?” the father responded, “That is my son you’re talking about.”

This father appeared unfazed by this realization. He continued, “Well, your son is dirty player. He speared my son [earlier in the game]” (Field notes, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

The situation had become quite heated and I felt uncomfortable standing so close to what was transpiring, so I walked outside of the arena to the lobby area where I could still see but could not hear. Not long after I had left, the two men also exited the arena and were

once again standing a few feet from where I was. The two men stood no more than a foot from each other and continued to yell. One father pushed the other, at which point other men intervened to separate the two them. The tournament convener was called over to help rectify the situation, which he did and the fathers were removed from the sports complex and banned from the tournament (Field notes, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007). Examples of parents reacting to other parents' comments were frequent and nearly everyone I spoke with told a story of an altercation provoked by one parent making an inappropriate comment about another child.

Over the course of my fieldwork I struggled to make sense of what I was observing within the context of the games and from the information I was beginning to acquire through parent interaction and formal interviewing. My exposure to the social-physical environment of the tournaments and witnessing the parents become so intensely engaged in the environment was critical for me to appreciate how easy it is for someone to become enraptured by the events of the game. In this involved state I was able to observe spectators behave in ways that in any other context would be deemed inappropriate, prompting me to consider more closely this environment and how it might influence behaviour. In particular, I began focusing on issues of control and vulnerability: are parents required to forfeit levels of control over the children to allow them to play organized hockey? Does the vantage point of the stands engender feelings of vulnerability in parents when children are the mercy of coaches, referees and other players; how would these feelings potentially influence the extreme behaviours I was witnessing during the games themselves? As I began seeking answers to these questions parents' responses indicated that I was touching upon something extremely important. In

no way is these insights intended to serve as a defence for inappropriate behaviours. Still, it certainly offers some type of explanation for their enduring propensity.

### **Parents' Vulnerability: "Our Hands are Tied!"**

Parents play an unquestionable and undeniable role in the growth and development of a child. They are the premier caregivers and the primary people responsible for their children's safety, well-being and development (Bowlby, 1999). In fact, some researchers have gone so far as to describe the nurturing behaviours of parents as a "need" (Barbalet, 1998; Bowlby, 1982; Solomon & George, 1996) rather than an obligation or desire. However, there are situations where a parent must forfeit control over their child's safety, success, and development—a task not easily done by all parents. In hockey contexts coaches become responsible for the growth and development of a child in sport. They can provide or deprive him or her of the opportunity to succeed (e.g. playing time); referees enforce rules that need to be followed to ensure fairness and to avoid injury; trainers mend injuries and look after the child when a parent cannot; and opposing team players may potentially injure a child. Consequently, many parents may feel disconnected and isolated from the process. As one parent astutely remarked, "You have no control. You have to learn to let things go...and this isn't always easy thing to do." (Rebecca, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007). It is fair to conclude that parents are vulnerable to the decisions of coaches, managers, trainers, referees and other players on the ice? Through a better understanding of this vulnerable parent-spectator, we may be able to better comprehend behavioural patterns and (mis)conduct which plagues minor hockey arenas across Canada and elsewhere.

According to Malcolm Gladwell, author of the acclaimed book *The Tipping Point*, there are situations so powerful that they can overwhelm people's inherent dispositions (2002). The parent-spectator position within minor hockey is a prime example. The following reinforces these points as we consider more closely critical factors that contribute to parent-spectator vulnerability.

### *Trust*

Many parents I spoke with discussed the importance role of the coach in creating positive hockey experiences for both parent and children. A coach who creates opportunities for a player (i.e. allotment of ice time, the opportunity to play with better players than himself or herself, playing at important times during the game, such as power plays and penalty kills) is considered to be a 'good coach'. By contrast, a coach who limits a child's opportunity to develop and succeed is deemed a 'bad coach'. Needless to say, coaches play an important role in creating positive hockey experiences for young players, both in opportunities afforded to the child and time spent with the child. One exchange I had with a male parent is illustrative of the type of trust parents place on coaches:

McGrath: As a parent, not that coaches are babysitters, but you are basically saying 'Okay, here you go, Jim, you can have a bunch of time with my son where he is going to learn from you and your actions so I hope you do a good job.'

Weir: That is a really good point because you have to have so much trust in the coach, so you can understand then why some parents get aggressive towards coaches. [He interrupts me to agree]

McGrath: Absolutely! I can certainly understand it. If Matty got short-shifted, I don't know what I would do, but I wouldn't be happy, right, but I don't know what I would do. (McGrath, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007)

This exchange reveals not only the trust the father gives to the coach, but the conditions in which that trust is given. In other words, what alternatives does the father have in this situation other than simply not having the child participate on team? The father's comments reveal as much about issues of trust as they do about the predicament parents face when trust either cannot be earned or is broken by the coach. One need only look to the situation that occurred January 27, 2005 to see the consequences of such a predicament. In this case a 47-year-old father was charged with assault after he learned that his son had been benched by the coach for missing practices. The father immediately headed to the bench and reached over the glass partition during the hockey game and began choking his 8-year-old son's coach (City News, 2006, September, 28).

The desperate actions of this particular father illustrate how difficult it is for parents to witness their children receive 'perceived' mistreatment at the hands of some authority figure. This parent clearly did not trust the coach, nor did he trust that he was acting in the best interests of his child. Without this trust, the parent will be in constant duress because of the levels of trust required in registered children in organized sport. In order for parents to register children into minor hockey, they are in effect trusting coaches, trainers and referees to correctly perform their duties they have been entrusted to perform, including ensuring the safety and well-being of their children. In hockey there are many potentially threatening situations due to physical structure (hard ice surface, sharp skates, big sticks) and nature of the play (hitting). It is not surprising then that

some parents find it difficult surrendering control over their children and entrusting coaches, official and peers with their children's wellbeing in this unstable environment. Inevitably the trust the parents can have in coaches, and in others within the minor hockey matrix, will play a key role in their and ultimately their children's hockey experiences. But what happens when this trust is challenged? Do other parents feel the urge to physically intervene to protect their children? Does the fact that parents are contractually bound from entering the ice surface at any point in time during games (Hockey Canada, 2006) increase the level of anxiety parents feel if something is perceived to go wrong? Without doubt parents are vulnerable to the actions taken by coaches, referees, and trainers during ice time situations, which is recorded in the following interviews:

A lot of times you have to keep telling yourself, 'No let the coaches and the managers deal with that.' There is usually a trainer on every team so as a parent you have to hold it back and not [motions crossing over the imaginary line]. (Mark, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

It's not my place to be on the ice...so you have to rely on other parents to use their sense of judgement to make sure that your kid is safe on the ice....it takes a lot of trust in the coaches and in the managers... When they are on the ice there is nothing we can do until they are off the ice. So during that time [when your son is injured and until he is off the ice] you are trusting your son and his wellbeing to the coaches and trainers. (Darren, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

That was very stressful for me but I have to put confidence in the trainer, I mean they are well trained, they take courses, and you hope to God that they know what they are doing. (Fiona, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007)

I yelled at the ref when safety is compromised and I did, and I don't know if you caught me yelling that game but the only thing I yelled out was 'elbows to the head.' So I do catch myself yelling at the ref when safety is—it's only if safety is an issue, if it's an offside who cares, I didn't, it was probably pretty close. I'm not a ref and, yeah, the refs do make mistakes and it's just a game, but the safety thing I have a problem with. Refs, it's their obligation to make sure the kids are safe, that should be their number one obligation, to make sure that they can prevent something from getting out of hand. (Cohen, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

I've seen parents sit there as their child has been hit from behind and she is in literal panic. This happened in one of our games in the winter and I've never, thank God, been in that situation. He has been hurt before but never seriously, so I've never experienced that [panic]. But it is a powerless feeling and there is nothing you can do. You have to follow the rules the etiquette of hockey; you can't go on the ice, you can't do anything about it, your child is lying there thriving in pain and you can't do anything about it. (O'Leary, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007)

As evidenced above, watching their children engage in such intense situations is extremely difficult for parents because of the innate instinct to protect their children (Bowlby, 1999; Ainsworth, 1989; Bell, 2000; Bell & Richard, 2001). Resisting their

parental proclivity can be one of the most challenging experiences for parent-spectators, as evidenced by the many discussions with parents who often noted that one spouse refused to watch games because they felt it was too difficult to do so.

To take this one step further, sport is filled with uncontrollable outcomes, whether it is in terms of individual performance or satisfaction, which adds to the vulnerability parents face since there is often little they can do to rectify the situation. Moreover, much like any other organization, minor hockey is riddled with politics and informal power structures that parents must contend with on a daily basis. One father's summation of the situation as "Our hands are tied" (Doyle, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007), speaks volumes about the limited capacity he feels he has to affect his own child's hockey experiences. Often in competitive hockey, players must try out for certain positions, and if they make a certain position on a team, they have, in essence, made the team. This father explained to me that his son had tried out the position of "forward" and made that position on a highly competitive team. Right from outset of the season his son was shuffled among several different positions until it was settled that he would play defence—not the position which his son had won the right to play.

This upset him, his wife, and most of all, his son. According to this father, many parents on the team were upset with the coach for a number of reasons, but feared that approaching the issue would result in either having his son cut from the team, or being labelled a 'troublemaker' and that the coach would take retribution. The dad explained:

The attitude is that they are afraid because they are afraid that their kid won't make the team next year, there is this constant fear that parents don't say anything because they don't want to rock the boat, but you'll always have a parent who

doesn't care and you know will say what they want to say, but generally most of the [team name]. (Doyle, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

This hockey father and his wife believe that if they approach the issue diplomatically that perhaps the coach would take their concerns seriously and they addressed the issue with the coach at a player evaluation meeting. However, after being assured that his son would resume his forward position, the reality was that he never did. The only option left was to remove the child from the team which would have, at least according to the father, been devastating as the son would have been held back from playing with the rest of his friends. Interesting, the father pointed out to me that another hockey father was in a similar situation to himself opted to confront the coach after a game, resulting in a "big outburst in the hallway" between the coach and the father (Doyle, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007). In the end this 'other' father was banned from entering the hockey arena for the remainder of the season. He sympathized with the father and believed that the father was "provoked to a point where he lost it" (Doyle, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007). In both situations, the parents felt compelled to speak on behalf of their child, both leading to different means of dealing with the situation by the parents and both leading to dramatically different outcomes.

### *Safety First*

As noted, parents cannot guarantee the safety of their children on the ice. Consequently, sporting environments can be emotionally challenging for parents, who, cannot easily intervene when the safety of their child has been put at risk. Many parents I spoke with stated that safety was their number one concern and therefore it is not by chance that it is also the issue that evokes the greatest reactions from minor hockey parent-spectators. In contact hockey parents must trust that coaches have taught the

players the proper techniques to hit and receive hits; they must also trust that referees will control the game by making the correct calls, parents are also at the mercy of other players who may unintentionally or intentionally injure their child. As indicated by a minor hockey parent:

I don't want him to get hurt – really – I mean a lot of the times where there is a lot of, when it starts getting out of hand and the ref's, their just [letting things go], like he is one of the smaller kids on the team so I just, I just worry. (O'Leary, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007)

Instances that evoke the greatest reactions are those which not only involve some form of bodychecking or physical contact, but is also performed incorrectly or illegally. The intensity of reactions in this context is governed by the physical contact performed under these terms. As a hockey father stated:

I think they [parents] are most vocal when in contact hockey, when its not an acceptable hit. For example, hitting from behind or hitting to the head is a major penalty because you are not suppose to do that and the risk of injury is great so when they see that that happens I think that's when parents become more upset because its not allowed...and that's when they'll become a little more intense and they want to make sure the proper call has been made by the referee. (Malcolm, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007)

Not surprisingly, parents protect their children from danger in every conceivable way, whether providing the best equipment or routinely reminding their children to 'play safe.' These reminders serve parents' interests as well, who appeared visibly soothed after reminding their children about safety and its importance. During conversations with

parents it appeared as though they had recognized their vulnerable position and had prepared themselves with rehearsed rationalizations to calm themselves, evidenced by the following hockey mothers:

Your adrenaline is really pumping, but I know there in good hands with the guys [coaches and trainers] that are on the bench so that mom doesn't really have to step in and sometimes that is very hard to do. (Meghan, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007)

Its [witnessing your child get hurt] very stressful for me but I have to put my confidence in the trainer, I mean they are well trained, they take courses, and you hope to god they know what they are doing. We've been very lucky with the trainers that are, you know, competent. So I'm not as, I mean, its stressful. (Fiona, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007)

Other rehearsed rationalized thoughts included, "Most of the coaches are parents too, so I trust that they know what I'm going through [when my child is hurt]" (Alexis, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007) and "They've been taught the proper techniques [on how to give and receive hits] so I don't have to worry too much" (Bill, 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007) and "We buy him the best equipment. He has the best helmet money can buy, so we feel better knowing that" (McGrath, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007) and "I have probably watched well in excess of 2000 games and I've only seen the ambulance come out twice...so when you look at it from that angle the probability of a person, of your kid, or any kid getting hurt is remote." (Mike, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007). After parents had expressed thoughts (such as the ones previously listed), their demeanour was much the same as those who reminded their children to 'play safe'. They appeared soothed and satisfied with their responses. These self-soothing thoughts merely

reflect their decidedly anxious experiences as parent-spectators and their concern for the well-being of their children.

### *Physical Distance*

Over the past few decades surmounting research has shown that the physical and social dimensions of sporting environments (e.g. hockey arenas) influence our emotional responses and subsequently our behaviours (Mehrbian, 1976; Nicholson & Hoyer, 2005). Understanding who we are and why we do the things we do requires some acknowledgement of the powerful influences of our immediate environments and appreciating context is one way to appreciate how emotions come to influence our behaviours (Weiner, 2006). These behaviours may in some cases run directly opposite to our inherent dispositions. This is especially true in sporting environments. Many parents I spoke with mentioned that people's, mostly parents', personalities were different inside the hockey environment than outside this environment. The differences were mostly negative inside the hockey arena as one hockey father astutely describes:

You talk to those people [the parent-spectators who engage in misconduct] 99% of the time off the ice they are so nice they are so calm. I'm thinking of one [parent] in particular in the winter league, um, I had many discussions with him off the ice and he is very calm and all that and all of a sudden when he's sitting in the arena and when he starts yelling and getting upset it's like 'WHOA.' It's like you think 'that can't be the same guy I just talked to in the hallway before the game or even after the game'...It's like Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde kinda thing. (Doyle, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

Certain situations such as the hockey environment, provide an opportunity for people to become so emotionally riled that they may (re)act in ways in which they may not otherwise (re)act.

Without denying the complexities of personal dispositions versus relative environmental factors, there are situations that are so influential that they may override our inherent disposition (Gladwell, 2002). An infamous study called the 'Zimbardo Prison Experiment' was designed to assess the power of social forces on subsequent behaviour within a simulated prison environment (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973). The impact of the simulated prison environment onto behaviours was so great that the study was forced to terminate early because the participants were suffering from high emotional duress (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973).

The key word here is situations...there are certain times and places and contradictions when much of that [inherent disposition] can be swept away, that there are instances where you can take normal people from good schools and happy families and good neighbourhoods and powerfully affect their behaviour merely by changing the immediate details of their situation (Gladwell, 2002, pp. 154-5).

There exist specific contexts and environments where certain types of behaviours that performed outside of those contexts and environments would be deemed inappropriate. In this way, our behaviours are often guided by socially guided standards. Robidoux and Bocksnick (2001), for example, studied parent-spectators at minor hockey games in their article aptly titled *Playing beyond the glass: How parents support violence in minor hockey*; they reveal how the hockey spectator environment seemingly legitimizes spoken

aggression (i.e. Nail Him! Hit Him! Kill Him!) and suggest that spoken aggression propagates on-ice violence. Despite the ferociousness of these utterances and their potential influence on on-ice play, they are nonetheless regarded as socially acceptable expressions within the context that they are spoken. This example testifies to the impact of environment on behaviours, specifically the minor hockey environment in promoting both ideologically and behaviourally aggressive ideals.

Like most other spectator sports, ice hockey is an emotionally charged experience (Coakley & Donnelly, 2004). Contributing to this emotional experience is the nature of the game and the physical environment in which it is played. First, given the inherent speed of the game and velocity of the play it is difficult for both spectator and referee to see everything on the ice, as perceptively noted by the following parent-spectator:

Everything happens so fast that people don't have time to digest it...you hear comments because it's so fast the refs sometimes they make a mistake but they really can't just back up on it because someone else in the stands has seen that mistake and because everything is so fast; that's why you have a lot of parents yelling at the refs 'You made the wrong call.' Even people in the stands will not get it because it's so fast they didn't even see it. (Mike, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

By applying Weiner's (1977) theory of emotion, it can be assumed that parent-spectators often direct comments toward referees because they are the on-ice authority in the game; they can create and deprive players and teams of opportunities to succeed. As such, emotions and behaviours are directed toward the referee. Nicholson and Hoye (2005) attest to the importance of refereeing as an instigator for parent-spectator misconduct. They found that a perceived poor decision by a referee would result in inappropriate

spectator conduct. Second, most arenas have stadium seating, meaning that the seats are stacked upwards above the ice surface. In this way, parents have a 'bird's-eye-view' of the ice surface. Conversely, referees are on the ice surface and see the game from a much different perspective than spectators. Each different vantage point allows for a different perspective on the game and so by nature both spectators and referees will see different and sometimes contrasting things, resulting in contrasting experiences and opinions of on-ice behaviours.

The physical structure of the sporting environment removes parents from imposing any control over the game. This is especially true of hockey arenas where a 14-foot wall composed of glass and fibreglass separates spectator from player. As noted earlier, players enter the ice through a sectioned off corridor often located below the stands, away from any form of parent contact. As much as the players are physically removed from spectators, parent-spectators are similarly removed from their children. The distance between parent and child created by the physical structure of the ice-hockey arena can be a challenging experience for parents, especially in situations where their child's safety has been threatened. For instance, if your child has been injured, you cannot enter onto the ice surface for safety reasons (e.g. you might fall). Parents have little control over the physical minor hockey environment and therefore feel compromised as a consequence of their surroundings. The social hockey environment further contributes to parent-spectators vulnerability in minor ice-hockey arenas.

### **Conclusion**

The social-physical environmental implications associated with parents' vulnerable position have a negative impact on young players, parents, society and the

continued integrity of the sport. As shown above, we are living in an increasingly protective era and the anxiety of parents whose “hands are tied” is palpable at the arena during a game. Their inability to suppress human instinct/compassion, i.e., to help their children, save him from an aggressive hit from behind or an abusive/aggressive controlling coach has resulted in parental aggression toward coaches, referees and other parents.

Knowing how vulnerable parents are within the context of minor hockey spectatorship due to the context of the intensive socio-physical environment of minor hockey, further investigation is required into the emotional relationship parents have with their children, providing perhaps the strongest impetus for parental aggressive response to perceived transgressions their children face within the context of the game. The following chapter discusses the emotional experiences of parent-spectators and the potential impact of emotions on behavioural outcomes.

## CHAPTER VI

### SKATING ON THIN ICE: PARENT-SPECTATOR EMOTIONS IN MINOR HOCKEY

#### Introduction

Mike: I think what it is, hockey is a very very fast emotional game - very emotional and um, I mean you see it on the ice with the players reacting with each other and it's very similar to somebody in the stands when they get very emotional about the game. They have to, once they look back on it and they realize, a lot of parents realize they have probably stepped over the bounds when they have got out of control, but it's because it's the emotions driving them - that is exactly what it is.

Weir: So you think it's a loss of control then?

Mike: I think it's a control issue absolutely. (Mike, June, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007)

In the previous chapter I situated parental spectator behaviour within its own unique socio-physical environment. The vulnerable position parents find themselves in, with little control over their children's well being during game situations, is an important first step in coming to understand the propensity of parental misconduct during youth hockey games. But to fully appreciate the dynamics of parental spectating, it is necessary to pursue further this issue of vulnerability and the emotional states of parents during game situations. By considering the complexities of sport and sport spectatorship, along with the deep emotional bonds parents have with their children, the extreme and often

problematic responses made by parents during games become not only conceivable, but arguably inevitable.

Sport spectatorship has often been referred to as an “emotionally charged state” (Coakley & Donnelly, 2004, p.207) and/or an “emotional condition” (Elias & Dunning, 1986, p. 249). At the professional level, sports spectators are encouraged to show emotion, approbation, and partisanship in an open and free-playing manner (Kennedy, 2001) with such spectator involvement techniques as ‘the wave,’ distributing noise makers to spectators prior to games, and rewards to the section of the sporting arena that makes the most noise. In fact, the importance of fan and spectator involvement at sporting events is so essential that some have argued that sporting environments would seem deadened if not for the communal expression of emotion (Kennedy, 2001). As Dennis Kennedy (2001) astutely remarks, “Spectator sports provides a carnivalesque outlet for emotional conduct otherwise unavailable” (p.280). For example, sports spectators experience anxiety, frustration, anger, hostility, sadness and depression when their team performs poorly, and elation, ecstasy, enjoyment, esteem, and happiness when their team performs well (Dunquin, 2000). From these emotions sports spectators develop attachment bonds with teams and/or specific players. As Trujillo and Krizek (1994) explain, “true fans seem to have an emotional attachment...powerful senses of identity, community, continuity, narrativity, therapy, spirituality, and self-discovery.” (p. 321) What I intend to argue here is that emotional-attachment for parent-spectators extends well beyond that of non-parent sports spectators. Generic sport fans may develop fulsome relationships with players they do not know personally, but parents have in addition to spectator attachments, a deeply committed emotional connection to their child(ren)

(Bowlby, 1966). Understanding the emotional underpinnings of the parent-child relationship becomes a necessity to further exploring parent spectatorship.

Much of the literature surrounding parent-child relationships focuses on the problems associated with insufficient levels of emotional commitment (c.f., Grolnick, 2003; Collins & Madsen, 2003). Contrary to past literature, the present article addresses the possible consequences of seemingly normalized parent-child emotional relations who display emotional or physical (hyper) protectionist behaviours resulting from a deeply committed bond to their child. Parents are vulnerable to their own emotional attachment to their children, especially while in the emotionally charged environment of the hockey game. As noted by Nack and Monson (2000) in *Sports Illustrated* magazine: “What makes a youth-league event even more emotionally charged is that parents are watching their own children play, their own DNA body paint and tattoos, and everyone knows that blood is thicker and more volatile than beer” (p. 90). While the behaviours of parent-spectators tend to be understood as irrational, the emotional experiences of parental spectatorship may indicate that they are more rational than previously thought.

Researchers studying emotions in sport spectatorship have been primarily interested in describing the motives of sport spectators, the pleasure of spectating, and the effects of sport fandom and sport nostalgia; however, little research has empirically reviewed the behavioural consequences of emotions in sports spectators, while even less has investigated this phenomenon in parent-spectators (c.f. Wells, 2004; Ortega-Sampler, 1985). Not surprisingly, it has been suggested that research must “move beyond the description of sport fan motivations and segmentation typologies, and instead examine deeper aspects of behaviour culminating in the evaluation of alternative conceptual

frameworks” (Funk, Mahony, Havitz, 2003, p.201). It is the task of the present article to review how parent-spectator behaviours are influenced by their emotional experiences within the minor hockey environment.

This paper focuses on parent-spectators of minor hockey associations and their unique emotional position as both parents and spectators. Appreciating the emotional bond between parent and child and the emotional experience of being an ice-hockey spectator in Canada, I suggest that parent-spectators undergo a hyper-emotional experience as a result of the preoccupations commonly associated with *both* spectatorship and parents. Adding to the emotional experience of parent-spectators is the nature of the game, its speed and aggression, and ice hockey’s pervasive position and seeming importance to Canadian culture. Through this understanding, I suggest that the hyper-emotional experience of parent-spectators contributes to parent-spectator misconduct in minor hockey arenas across Canada. Perhaps Bruce B. Svare, the director of the National Institute for Sports Reform and a psychologist at the University of Albany in New York, states it best by saying: “It may sound shocking, but I am shocked, frankly, that these things [parent-spectator violence] don’t happen more often. The emotional and financial investment parents have made in their child’s athletics, coupled with the irrational intensification of youth sports, has sent a lot of parents completely over the edge” (Nack & Monson, 2000, p.91).

To assist in analyzing parental behaviour, I first draw from two relevant theories of emotion offered by Lazarus (1966, 1991, & 1999) and Weiner (1977, 1980a, 1980b, 2006) and apply these frameworks to Bowlby’s theory of caregiving and its emotional relevance to parenting. Secondly, I explore parent-spectator emotions based on my own

ethnographic field research of youth hockey conducted in spring/summer 2007 which include testimonials on the impact of emotion on parent-spectator behaviours. I will demonstrate how the emotional experience is intensified due to the social-physical ice-hockey environment and parent-spectators' emotional connection to their children. Through this combined theoretical and ethnographic approach important insights are made about what I have come to term as the 'hyper-emotional experience' of parental sport spectatorship.

### **Responding to Emotion**

People are 'emotional beings' surviving in part because of their capacity to convey and understand emotions (Bowlby, 1999). For instance, humans are heavily reliant on emotions for helping them sense danger, express happiness and sorrow, and warn others of feeling states. While commonly associated with such disciplines as psychology, neuroscience, and more recently artificial intelligence, emotion has also become a relevant topic for sociologists in that emotions are useful for explaining basic social behaviours (Barbalet, 1998). In many ways, emotions are significant to the establishment of social relationships, institutions, and processes (Barbalet, 1998).

Theorists have toiled over the processes, appearance, and underpinnings of emotions, and most significantly their connection to human behaviours. As such, the relationship between emotions and behaviours has historically, and remains today, a highly contentious issue. While some researchers believe that emotions do not causally affect behaviours (Bell & Richards, 2001), others believe that physiological change occurs prior to emotional expression which then affects behaviour, i.e., increase in heart rate, increase in, fear, followed by some behaviour results (Bowlby, 1999; Lange &

James, 1922). Still others believe the relationship between emotions and behaviour to be bidirectional, with emotions influencing behaviour and vice versa (Savovey & Mayer, 1990). Without wishing to resolve the debate, these competing views point to the interrelatedness of emotion and behaviour, to the extent that one does not occur without the other. What I am more interested in, however, is the potential causal relationship between cognition and the experience of emotion (London & Nisbett, 1974). Two influential cognitive theorists, Lazarus (1966, 1991, & 1999) and Weiner (1977, 1980a, 1980b, & 2006) have explored the cognitive processes of emotion and offer insight into the relationship between emotion and behaviour.

To start it would be useful to turn to Lazarus (1991) and consider his concept of “core relational themes”. For Lazarus core relational themes help define the function of emotion and extort conditions associated with emotion. Lazarus offers a taxonomy of core relational themes of which three are of particular importance here. These include: a transgression against oneself or loved ones produces anger; an immediate, concrete, and overwhelming physical danger causes fear; and, when one experiences an irrevocable loss one experiences sadness (Lazarus, 1991). All three of these themes describe emotion as a coping process that is unique to each person-situation interaction (Lazarus 1966). In other words, emotions are the result of individuals reacting to their environment. Lazarus notes that differences in emotion are the result of how one appraises the situation, which produces the arousal, and the resulting emotion. If the individual appraises the situation as stressful, and therefore threatening (Lazarus, 1999; Vallerand, 1983), then the individual must decide how to cope. It is during this period when the individual must cope that emotion surfaces. These emotional responses can be manifested in three

different ways; they can be cognitive (e.g. rationalization), expressive (e.g. facial expressions), or behavioural (e.g. punching someone or something to express anger). Sport spectators demonstrate all three forms of emotion (Dunquin, 2000). Thus, it is through the manifestation of emotional experiences that one can see the usefulness of Lazarus' theory to sport.

For example, a sport spectator watching their favourite team play and the referee makes a call, which in the spectator's mind was a bad call. The spectator may either (a) assess the referee's call as non-threatening or (b) assess the situation as threatening (especially if their team is losing). If the latter outcome occurs, the spectator then must decide how to (re)act. The spectator may rationalize the referee's call (e.g. it was a fair call), express disappointment with the call (e.g. appear puzzled or angry), or physically act in response (e.g. yell at the referee to show disapproval of his or her call).

What must be drawn from Lazarus's appraisal system is that emotions are expressed through an active cognitive (Lazarus 1999). This is not to suggest that there are not conditions for this cognitive process to be disrupted or impaired. Lazarus identifies two possible scenarios where impairment might occur. The first is if an individual is distracted or misguided. For example, in cases of intense emotion, one's emotions may overpower one's ability to reason. The second would be if an individual lacks the ability to control impulses or think before acting to properly appraise a situation. The inability to control impulses may result from choosing short-term goals (e.g. the release of anger) over long-term ones (e.g. reputation). Despite these momentary lapses in judgement, emotions must not be considered irrational. If erroneous judgements

are made Lazarus believes that it is the result of inadequate information and not emotion, which is merely a reflection of judgement (Lazarus, 1999).

Another important cognitive theorist who offers important insight into the relationship between emotion and behaviour is Weiner (1977). Weiner's primary contribution is his "attribution theory of emotion" which recognizes the importance meaning formation has on experience and subsequent responses. According to Weiner experience is subjective and depends on the meanings individuals attach to the situation. How one might emotionally respond to a situation depends on how meaningfully attached they are to the experience. In the case of sport, parents are typically highly attached to the situation, in large part because of the conditions under which the game is played (i.e. physically competitive, outside of the immediate protection of the parent, and governed by officials who vary significantly in expertise/proficiency). But how individuals might respond is again as diverse as the meanings people can construe for any particular situation. This might explain the seemingly odd occurrence of one parent frantically yelling towards the ice and other parents relatively calm or simply annoyed at the other parent's outburst, which was documented at different points throughout the fieldwork.

Weiner (1977, 2006) suggests that transgressions against oneself or one's family are the best shorthand description of provocation to adult human anger. As noted, parent-spectators differ from other sub-groups of spectatorship in that they are observing their own children perform. Depending on the physical nature of the sport, parents may therefore be watching their child in physically threatening situations, as is the case for ice hockey (starting at the Atom level for the present article's population), which increases opportunity for physical transgressions. It follows then that witnessing transgressions

against their child ignites parents' anger. In line with this analysis, many parents with whom I spoke felt that the most intense emotions arose when their child's safety had been threatened and that inappropriate behaviours (i.e. yelling or threatening to harm the referee, coach, or other spectators) were a consequence of these emotions.

Cognitive theories of emotion presented by both Lazarus and Weiner illuminate the intricacies of the emotional experience and the potential impact of emotions on behaviours. While Lazarus' theory focuses on the appraisal systems of emotion, Weiner notes the importance of causality when making inferences regarding a situation or wrongdoing. Both theories are useful in explaining the plausible relationship between emotions and parental-spectator aggression, yet, to fully understand the position of the parent-spectator it is important to review the role of emotion in parent-child relationships. Specifically, Bowlby's theory has become a significant theoretical understanding of emotion and the parent-child relationship (Bell, 2001).

#### *The Emotional Bond Between Parent and Child*

Emotions, according to Bowlby (1998 [1969]), are "feelings or affects such as loving, hating, being frightened or hungry, that are inherently connected with one or another form of action" (p. 105). They are brief, organized responses which can interfere with many psychological sub-schemes (e.g., physiological, cognitive, motivational systems) (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). For example, if an individual is angry they may experience physiological repercussions (e.g., increased blood pressure), cognitive impairment (e.g., inability to think clearly), and increased motivation (e.g., desire to act out aggression). As previously mentioned, sport spectators also experience emotions, which develop from their emotional attachment to the team/player (Trujillo & Krizek,

1994) and the emotionally charged environment, such as the hockey arena (Mehrbian, 1976). This is particularly true of parent-spectators, who in addition to the emotional experiences of non-parent sport spectators, are emotionally connected to their child.

Since the late 1960's, Bowlby's attachment theory has developed into one of the most important conceptual frameworks for understanding the importance of emotions to the development of relationships (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). His work is one of the largest contributors to furthering understanding of relationships, especially parent-child relationships of which attachment theory is the most widely recognized and explored (Bell, 2001). Like many early social theorists, Bowlby situated his analysis of human attachment within the "environment of evolutionary adaptedness" (Bowlby, 1999, p. 59). As such, Bowlby's theory was guided by evolutionary functions that resulted from "immature organisms' need for protection from predators" (Bell & Richards, 2000). Evidence of such evolutionary thinking is seen in Bowlby's systems of attachment and his theory on caregiving. Particularly relevant to the present article is Bowlby's work on caregiving. Bowlby referred to parents as 'caregivers'; in doing so, he acknowledges that the biological parent may not be the primary 'caregivers' to the child (e.g. adopted children) and describes the 'caregiver' as the individual who is the primary source of care for the child (Bowlby, 1999). For purposes of consistency I will be referring to the 'caregiver' as 'parent' while retaining the meaning offered with Bowlby's term 'caregiving'.

Through the process of parenting, both parent and child form an affectional bond (Bowlby, 1999). The maintenance of an affectional bond is the primary goal of attachment (Bowlby, 1999) and any situation that endangers the bond will result in

actions designed to defend it. During these situations “all the most powerful forms of attachment behaviour become activated” (Bowlby, 1999, p. 42). The greater the danger of loss appears to be, the more intense and varied are the actions elicited to prevent it. Any threat to the bond may result in a phase of acute physiological stress and emotional distress (Bowlby, 1999). When these actions are successful, the bond is restored, the activities cease and the states of stress and distress are alleviated.

Bowlby believes the child, to a large degree, dictates the relationship with the parent and the ensuing affectional bond. Bowlby considers the role of the parent to be responsive to the child’s needs and desires, ensuring physical, emotional, and psychological security. Indeed, this is the primary goal of the parent—security and protection of the child. In order to fulfil this goal, parent and child share a common desire to remain close to each other (also known as proximity maintenance). The safety of the child is important, for its own survival, and to the parent as it ensures that his/her genes are passed on to future generations. Bowlby believes the emotions of the parent to be the most extreme during the formation, maintenance, destruction, and renewal of the bond. Any situation that serves to threaten the bond will result in behaviours to defend it, thus, highlighting the importance of the bond to the parent.

Watching their children play sports is both rewarding and challenging for many parents. On the one hand, parents are witnessing their child’s growth and development, transitioning from highly dependent infants to autonomous individuals. On the other, parents also witness their child in difficult and threatening situations. The child may be threatened physically (e.g. body checked), emotionally (e.g. angry because they did not get to play), and psychologically (e.g. cut from the team). Emotional attachment theory

would suggest that parents would be compelled to respond to remediate the compromised position of the child, yet within the framework of organized sport, such an intervention is not easily negotiated. Parents who register their children in organized sport must abide by the rules of the sport and the decisions that are made by sporting officials, even if they are not favourable to the child in question. For Bowlby, parents would be acting unnaturally in this situation, refraining from intervening to protect their children. The sporting environment is therefore in disaccord with natural parental instincts, and parents either learn to respond to this compromised position as debilitated parents, or intervene in some capacity and face the consequences for their action. Not surprising there are some parental responses that are more acceptable than other, and thus the response to these actions vary. As Nack and Munson (2000) note, “the vast majority of parents still comport themselves with restraint and civility at games, but it is impossible to ignore or wave away the loud, critical, ill-mannered parent in the stands” (p.88). In line with Bowlby’s theory, parents display emotion when the affectional bond has been threatened, and some parent-spectators display their emotions in a less than favourable manner.

Bowlby’s work has formulated several key concepts for understanding relationships, especially parent-child relationships (Bell, 2001). Each theory is important for its contribution to relationship literature, most notably for advancing our understanding of the exceptional relationship between parent and child. The inclusion of emotion into his theory not only alludes to the importance of emotion as a concept of study, but also as an influencing factor in this parent-child relationship, whether the influence be causal or not.

Experiencing and expressing emotions are an integral part of life, yet emotions themselves are complex and not yet fully understood. Lazarus (1999) and Weiner (2006) offer useful and meaningful theories as to the workings of emotions on behaviours, through which we may better understand the emotions of parent-spectators. Bowlby's theories of parenting and attachment bonds explore both the parent-child relationship and the dynamic emotions that accompany this relationship. Taken together, the works of Lazarus, Weiner, and Bowlby outline a possible course of action to understanding parent-spectator behaviours.

### **Emotional Connections and Consequences**

It's really just emotional. People get wound up...they get out of control.

(Mike, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007)

Represented appropriately by the hyphen, parent-spectators are uniquely positioned between two distinct roles, that of the spectator and that of the parent. Each role demands different and sometimes conflicting behaviours. For instance, as *spectators*, parents observe and analyze the game and individual/team performances. As *parents*, they witness their children perform and interact in the context of the game. Each perspective prompts multiple associations and subsequent emotions, but it is likely as parents that the deepest emotional responses are manufactured; a strong parent-child bond guides these emotional responses.

Over the course of my fieldwork many parents described to me a sense of connection to their child while their child was on the ice. One mother said that she tries to communicate with her child by sending him "good vibes" (Joanne, 2007) and rings a loud

cowbell whenever her son does something well or when she feels he needs encouragement. Another mother whose son played goalie would run down to her son's net along the boards and yell encouraging thoughts to her son if he was performing poorly. She explained that she stopped this behaviour at the request of the coach but still feels the urge to be with her son when he lets in a goal. While each parent expressed their spectating experiences and behaviours differently, they almost all described a type of emotional symbiosis, whereby their emotions intensified along with their children's. As a result, they felt intensely empathetic feelings to their children during key moments of the game. For instance, parents said that prior to the game's commencement they would experience nervousness for their children, as articulated by the following parents: "You feel bad for your kid. I don't feel bad or whatever, or I don't care, you feel bad for how they are going to feel" (Doug, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007) and, "I get nervous for him because I know that he is nervous going into the game, so I just get a little be nervous" (Mary, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007). One mother reported that her connection with her son is so strong that she is scared to feel nervous before a game fearing that her son will sense her nervousness and in turn becomes nervous himself. Another mother notes that when her son is hurt she feels some of that pain. In this way, parents' emotions are guided by their connection to their child and the perceived emotional responses of their children.

From my discussion with the parents it was clear that many of them felt a shift of emotion when their children stepped onto the ice compared to when they were resting on the bench. Parents felt nervous, stressed out, anxious, more alert and tense when their child was playing and felt more relaxed when he was not. In hockey, players are on the ice for roughly two-minute increments, so these emotional fluctuations are frequent

throughout a game. One father described this experience as a “roller-coaster ride” (Doug, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007). Within these intervals, however, parents experience a diverse range of emotional responses, primarily in relation to the degrees of risk the child faces during each shift. In other words, emotional responses tend to intensify when the child’s safety is jeopardized. One mother explained that, when parents feels their child is any way experiencing some form of danger, “you get a lot more loud, vocal, you get more stirred up, more [pause] more emotional. You become more involved” (Joanne, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007). Taking this one step further, I asked parents to describe how they felt when their child was injured. Responses were relatively similar, as parents expressed the intense desire to offer protection for their children, despite knowing the situation was well beyond their control:

When he goes down and hits the ice I’m a bit jolted. It feels like it’s stabbing me - you know? You are very protective. (Rebecca, May, 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

Um, my first reaction is ‘Is he okay?’ You know, especially when you see them go into the boards head first or shoulder first, or skates first or something the first question is ‘Is he okay?’ especially if they don’t get up; you are almost ready to climb over the glass and you know, jump in yourself. (Darren, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

Weir: How do you feel when your son gets injured? Like in that last game

Joanne: I was getting emotional in that particular game because in spring hockey there is no body contact allowed...So you get very caught up in [it] and say ‘Hey!

That is my son you're doing that too!'...you want the safety of the kids that's the primary goal. (Joanne, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

Oh, I'm worried for sure...I'd be like 'Agh' [motions hands to head and a worried expression on her face]. I feel sick [when he is hurt]. (Mary, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007).

He has been hurt a couple of times and its almost as traumatic for me as it is for him [laughs] (Fiona, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007).

Perhaps it is this absence of control that perturbs parents most as they consistently indicated points of physical risk—such as a child receiving a body check into the boards—as scenarios that caused the highest levels of anxiety for them as parent-spectators.

The sensations the parents were describing is consistent with Bowlby's theory of affectional bond. If the child's safety is threatened, then it follows that the bond between parent and child must also be threatened. According to Bowlby, moments where the bond has been threatened can evoke the most intense emotional reactions (Bowlby, 1999). In response to these threatening and often violent situations on the ice, parents consistently reacted without hesitation. Some spectators yelled at the referee, at the player who caused the altercation, or simply yelled out their general displeasure with utterances, such as "Bullshit," "Come on," or "What the fuck?" (Field notes, May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007).

Recent research on spectator aggression has yielded a number of interesting findings concerning the influences of individual differences on violent spectator behaviours, such as impulsivity (Arms & Russell, 1997; Russell & Arms, 1998),

sensation seeking (Mustonen, Arms, & Russell, 1996) and fan identification (Dimmock & Grove, 2005). Fan identification is a term used to describe the level that one feels psychologically connected to a team (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Dimmock and Grove (2005) investigated whether fan identification influenced behavioural control during games. They found that highly identified spectators (those who felt highly psychologically connected to a team) felt less in control of their behaviours at games. Similar research on fan identification notes that highly identified spectators experience greater levels of arousal and anxiety when watching their team compete (Wann, Schrader, & Adamson, 1998). If we assume that parent-spectators are highly psychologically connected to their children and, in some cases, by default their children's hockey team, then the aforementioned findings regarding highly identified spectators must principally apply to parent-spectators as well.

During my fieldwork I was able to observe parent-spectators behave in ways that supported this deduction. The majority of parent-spectators expressed feeling highly aroused and anxious when watching their child play hockey. When I asked parent-spectators how they felt when their son was playing during typical playing conditions, they described these moments as follows: "you become more attentive," (Mark, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007); "more alert" (Charlie, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007); "your intensity tends to grow a little bit" (Bill, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007); "a little stressed out" (Malcolm, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007); "definitely more anxious" (Doug, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007); "more tense" (Fiona, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007); and "very very nervous" (Anne, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007); and, "heightened degree of awareness" (Bill, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007). In situations of heightened excitement, or moments of higher risk (emotional,

physical, etc.) emotions were even more intense. One hockey father explicitly established the connection between children's safety and parent-spectator emotions by saying:

I think safety is the main factor like when you know emotions run high and you know there is more stick work it seems like there is more slashing and cross-checking and checking from behind you know stuff like that so, normally that stuff doesn't happen as much but when the heat of the moment gets going that's when I get watching the most...there seems to be a clear link between obviously the emotions and the reactions that run through the parents in the stands towards the play and what's going on on the ice. (Malcolm, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007)

Interestingly this father's comments echo Weiner's (2006) and Lazarus's (1999) theories about emotion influencing behaviour. The father describes how parents respond emotionally to their children playing hockey and how these responses subsequently affect their behaviours as well. According to Lazarus (1999) if an individual lacks the capacity to harness their emotions or if an individual is distracted or misguided, for example, in cases of intense emotion, one's emotions may overpower one's ability to reason correctly, consequently this may result in inappropriate behaviours. Consequently, the intense emotional experience endured by parent-spectators at minor hockey events affects their ability to reason correctly. As a result, they make poor choices regarding appropriate behaviours during minor hockey sporting competitions as witnessed by parents frequent use of inappropriate language (i.e. "That was a bullshit call") (Field notes, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007).

The meanings attached to situations may also contribute to inappropriate parental behaviours at minor hockey events. According to Weiner (2006) individuals (re)act

based on the meaning attached to a situation. These meanings are different for each person and therefore are highly subjective. For example at one game, when one player forcefully hit another player of the opposite team, the reaction of most, but not all, parents was concern for the child who was hit. I overheard parents' hushed voices saying "Oh no! I hope he is okay," and "He knocked his clock out. I hope he's alright." Still, one mother yelled out to the player who delivered the hit: "Great hit, Tommy! Nice one!" meanwhile the child remained lying on the ice in apparent pain. She then screamed to the child lying on the ice: "Get up and play real hockey you big chicken!" Other parents gawked at the impropriety of her comments and the tension between this mother and other parents was easily discerned. I was later informed that the player who delivered the hit was this woman's son. The previous example shows how the same incident (i.e. child getting hit) may be interpreted differently depending on the meaning attached to the situation. In this incident one mother acted aggressively while others were concerned for the boy who was hit. This is one way of understanding why some parents comport themselves in inappropriate ways during youth sporting events, namely minor ice hockey, and others do not. In this way, emotions are the product of meaning and when taken together form behavioural responses.

#### *Crazy Parents or just...Parents?*

Is it fair to say that parental misconduct at youth sporting arenas is merely the result of parents, being, well, parents? Lazarus (1999) argues that the best provocation for anger is an "offence against me or mine" (p.91). This sentiment was articulated by many parents, including Malcolm, who said, "I'm sure that the only time people do cross the line is when their own kid is involved" (June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007). Transgressions, therefore, are

more personally meaningful when they are against individuals we love. In response to the question ‘what is driving parental misconduct during youth hockey?’ one mother touched on preoccupations of both Weiner’s (1992 [1980b]) and Bowlby’s (1982) theories when she said

I think it’s more of a protection thing and you know your maternal instinct is ‘protect your children’ so you go back to the core basis of what that is ‘that’s my child’ and yeah, you know, I know he’s playing a competitive sport and there is body contact sport but there is a point at where we have been trained as parents too [to protect your child]...It’s love! It’s protection (Joanne, 2007)

Over the course of my field research I encountered a number of parents who believed that inappropriate parent-spectator behaviours are sometimes a reflection of parents merely protecting their children, “whether that’s from exposure to things that aren’t nice to people, you want to buy them good equipment” (McGrath, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007) and who, moreover, believed these protectionist behaviours to be innate. Early social researchers would agree (Barbalet, 1998). Ensuring the development and protection of one’s child has been defined as a need (Barbalet, 1998). For instance, Bowlby (1982, 1999) has shown that “the human capacity for social relations [nurturing] is derived from biologically based needs” (as cited in Barbalet, 1998, p. 141). Consequently, “violations [of needs] provoke emotions, most notably anger” (Barbalet, 1998, p. 142). The deprivation of a human need, such as nurturing, and the ensuing emotions, such as anger, might explain why the emotional responses of some parents during youth sporting events appear volatile, as one mother remarked [spoken with a sense of caution]:

My stomach goes into knots when I hear people screaming their head off, you know, and they are so intense that you know that they have *no idea what* [emphasis as reflected in interview] they are going to do next. (Mary, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007)

This quote shows how the precarious behaviours of some parents during minor hockey are evident even to other parent-spectators, as expressed by Mary, if not to those who are engaging in highly inappropriate ways. As noted, Doyle, who commented on his own behaviours as a hockey parent-spectator, remarked:

It's amazing how it, it's like a doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde kinda thing, it really is and I do find myself like that too and there have been games in the past where I think 'Jeeze, I wonder what I look like?' and I think 'I must have looked a little embarrassing [laughs]. (Doyle, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007).

This is what is most concerning about some parent-spectators in minor hockey—their volatility and inability to reason—which creates an experience that they themselves cannot fully understand (as indicated by Doyle's hindsight review of his behaviours as a spectator). Perhaps Doyle cannot censor his behaviours as they happen because they are innate and thus not something of which he is cognizant at the time. These inappropriate parent-spectator behaviours that are driven by the need to protect or nurture their children are perhaps more prevalent where the children's safety is threatened, as when their child is playing hockey. As Bowlby explains, "the various forms of attachment behaviour that contributes to [attachment bonds] are active only when required. Thus, the systems mediating attachment behaviour are activated only by certain conditions" (Bowlby, 1999, p. 40) (See Figure 1). Having said this, one might argue that the minor hockey arena may

be a site of provocation for parents who are unable to act upon their parental needs and consequently may indirectly increase their emotions and emotional responses.

The volatility shown by some parent-spectators during my field research may also be explained in part by minor hockey's social-physical environment. In the previous chapter I discussed the vulnerable position of parent-spectators who are socially and physically removed from their children's hockey experience. As noted earlier, parents are placed in a highly emotionally charged environment appropriated by the physical structure of the sporting facilities (i.e. large fibreglass barriers blocking spectators/parents from players/children; the intense, loud, and cold arena; the busyness of the lobby area), the physical distance between parent and child during a game, the social dynamics of minor ice hockey (i.e. the necessary parental trust of coaching staff, trainers, and referees), and the inclusion of institutionalized violence as a part of minor ice hockey. I argue that this vulnerable position imposed on parent-spectators of minor hockey creates ample opportunity for parents to feel threatened as a consequence of their deep emotional bond to their children. As mentioned here, parents have empathetic feelings towards their children, resembling an emotional symbiosis. Parents experienced similar emotions that they perceived their children as feeling, i.e. nervous, sad, hurt, angry; thus, intensifying the emotional experience for parent-spectators.

In the present chapter I discuss parents' emotions while watching their children play hockey, their need to nurture and protect their children, and the emotional and behavioural consequences each may have. Parent-spectators experience a plethora of emotions when watching their children play a single minor hockey game, so much so that the experience has been described as a "roller coaster ride" (Doug, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007) with

parents experiencing extreme highs (i.e. witnessing their child score a goal) and extreme lows (i.e. witnessing their child get hurt). These highs and lows are marked by extreme emotional responses which may have behavioural consequences (Lazarus, 1991, 1999; Weiner, 1977, 1980a). Parent-spectator emotions are also guided by their love for their children and their need to protect their children from harm. Furthermore, while parent-spectators appreciate the physical nature of the sport and the potential harm their children may endure as hockey participants, sometimes the need for parental proclivity takes precedence over the rules and guidelines of appropriate spectator behaviours as required by the district hockey associations codes of conduct.

### **Conclusion**

Examining the emotional connectedness that defines the parent-child relationship within minor hockey and the emotions felt through sport spectating, specifically ice hockey in Canada, provides an empirical foundation upon which research on parental-spectator behaviour may proceed. Similarly, a more general understanding of the parent-child relationship, as well as sport spectatorship, adds to developmental social-psychology and sociological research, and offers a more discursive understanding of parent-spectatorship. The knowledge acquired through this chapter helps to better appreciate parents, spectatorship, and the emotions assumed with each. A greater understanding may potentially assist individuals whose position is to develop methods of combating what has been dubbed 'rink rage' in arenas throughout Canada via more informed initiatives and educational programs for parents of minor hockey participants.

To conclude, I have presented the intense emotional experiences of parent-spectators within the minor hockey arena. I have attempted to show precursors to some of

these emotions by stating issues related to safety as outlined by parents. In the previous chapter, I have shown that parent-spectators experience a sensation of vulnerability—created by the physical and social minor hockey environment. Taken together, both the heightened emotions and position of vulnerability results in an intense emotional experience which drives parent-spectators to behave in inappropriate ways as a consequence of their unique emotional experience. While theoretical in nature, this chapter nonetheless exposes the complexities of emotions and their influence on inappropriate behaviours during youth hockey events and within the minor hockey community as a whole.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

As incidents of parental aggression during youth sporting events continue to rise (Fiore, 2003; Russell, 2004), children become more reluctant to participate in sport (Dworkin & Larson, 2004; Seefeldt & Ewing, 1991), thus highlighting the need for a better understanding of the special qualities of the parent-spectator, and determining what causes parent-spectators to become so enraged while watching their children participate in sport. Still, few researchers (Coakley & Donnelly, 2004; Fiore, 2003; Hedstrom & Gould, 2004; Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2001; Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997) have investigated the issue, while even fewer have researched its emotional component (c.f. Ortega-Samper, 1985; Wells, 2004). The lack of attention might be understandable if parent-spectator misconduct were a relatively rare occurrence, but this is not the case.

In this thesis I have demonstrated the intricacies of parent-spectatorship, more precisely their emotional experiences as both spectators and parents (without parsing the two), and the vulnerable position that undoubtedly contributes to their highly emotional experiences. Popular beliefs regarding parent-spectator misconduct are that hockey parents are ‘crazy’, that they believe their children are going to become the next NHL star, that they are living out their own dream of becoming an NHLer through their children’s experiences. In fact, a booklet put out for hockey parents by the Safe and Fun Hockey campaign (developed by Hockey Canada and Chevrolet) lists five “common problem areas for hockey parents”, which include:

- (1) Misguided Enthusiasm (Parents sometimes overemphasize outcomes such as winning or losing);

- (2) Inducing Guilt (since parents spend thousands of dollars and countless hours on youth hockey participation, it is very easy for children to notice the sacrifices and feel tremendous guilt and pressure to do well);
- (3) Living Vicariously through Our Children (parents sometimes push their children to make up for their own past frustrations and limitations);
- (4) Glimmer of Gold (For too many parents, gold medals and rich contracts become the main focus); and
- (5) Losing Perspective (parents sometimes lose sight of what is important for children and themselves) (Hockey Canada, p. 5).

My experiences within the minor hockey community did not replicate any of these “common problem areas” as defined by Hockey Canada. This is not to suggest that parents with whom I spoke did not mention either the media’s (mis)representations of parent-spectator misconduct or Hockey Canada’s “common problem areas”: they did. But, when challenged to recount a time when a fellow parent-spectator spoke in ways that would suggest that they believed their child to be “the second coming” (Doug, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007), they recoiled. Instead, parents spoke of the challenges they faced as parent-spectators, of renouncing their positions as parents during “hockey time,” of the worry and concern that their child has been/will be treated fairly and that he is developing as a player and, more broadly, as an individual by “developing his self-confidence” (Alexis, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007) and self-esteem. Lastly, underscoring all these thoughts and feelings, parents spoke of the gamut of emotions they feel during a single hockey game. This is not to excuse the inappropriate behaviours of some hockey parents, nor is it to suggest that some parent-spectators do not participate in the “common problem areas” as outlined by

Hockey Canada; however, in this thesis I hope to have conveyed the simple truth that parent-spectators are parents primarily, a fact few have acknowledged. Their emotions, and subsequently their behaviours, are informed by their roles as parents—their need to nurture and protect their children (Bowlby, 1982).

Glib solutions such as the “Relax its Just a Game” campaign, which uses sarcasm to address a very serious issue, are not likely to produce meaningful reform. A more effective approach would be to inform parents of their parental tendencies so that they may better mentally equip themselves prior to entering the hockey arena. Moreover, researchers should strive to answer to following questions: How much control should the coach have over the children’s hockey development? How can minor hockey associations involve parents so that they feel more in control of their children’s hockey development? What are the physical and psychological effects to parent-spectators who are restrained from acting upon their parental instincts? And, does hockey need to adapt to a safer environment to sustain the integrity of the sport, the health of the players and the well-being of the parents, coaches, referees and players? Answers may provide the intelligence to more accurately address (if and) why the social-physical environment is suffering and would be an integral step in being able to find appropriate solutions.

To conclude, parent-spectator misconduct is often regarded as an irrational form of behaviour, which according to one mother is the result of parents who “leave their brains at the door” (Rebecca, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007); however, understanding parents instinctive response to protect and care for their children and the intensely emotional experience of parent-spectatorship one may change their perspective on parents’ ‘inappropriate’ behaviours from irrational to rational—while still not appropriate.

## CHAPTER VIII

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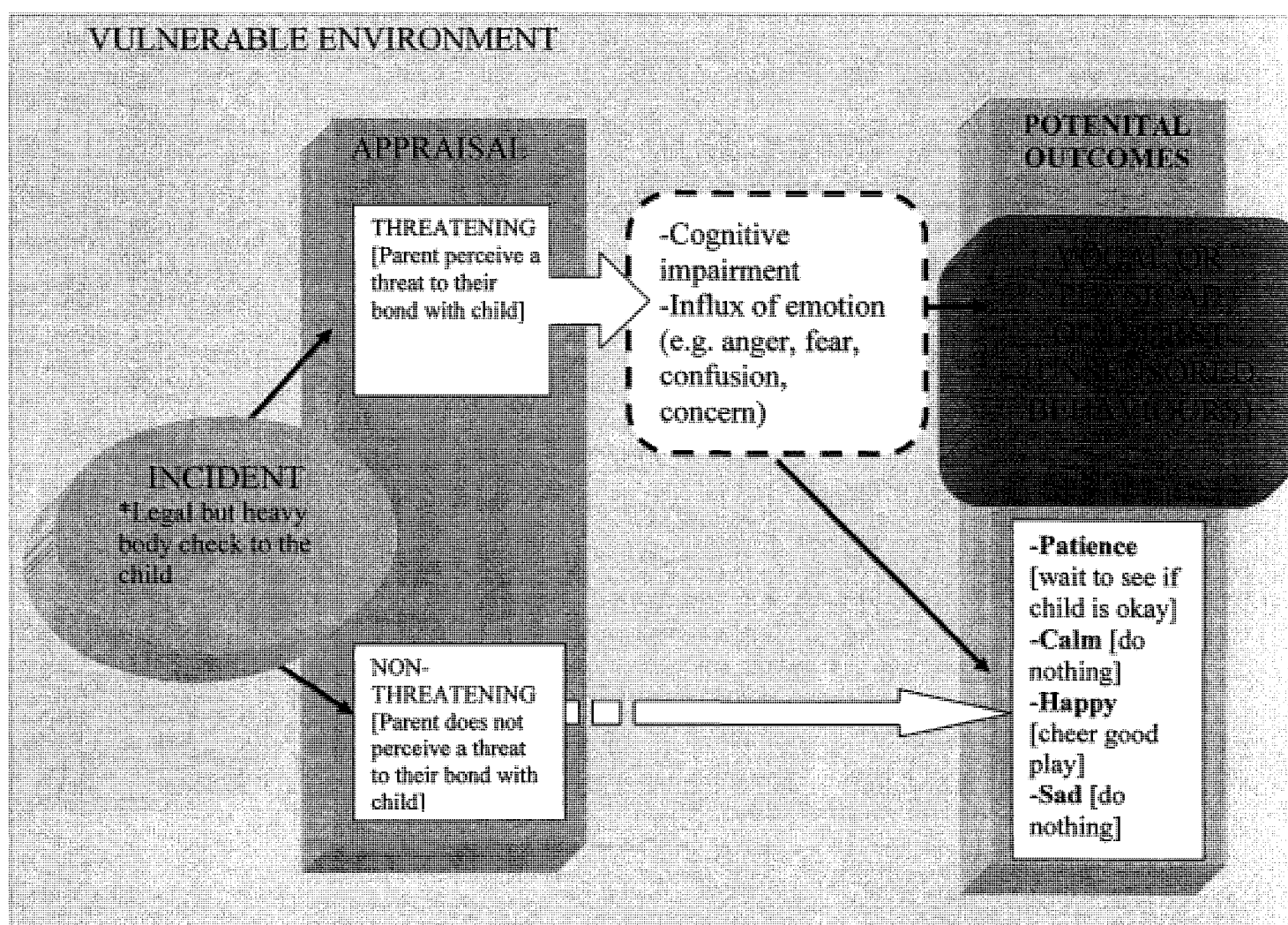
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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>i</sup> To be referred to as hockey for the remainder of the thesis.

<sup>ii</sup> From this point forward pseudonyms are used to conceal the identity of the participants.

**FIGURE**



*Figure 1. Parent-Spectator Emotional Response Model based Lazarus (1966, 1991, 1999), Weiner (1977, 1980a, 1980b, 1992, 2006) and Bowlby (1982, 1998) theoretical frameworks.*

**TABLE**

| Name          | Sex             | Duration (min)        | Location                                                     | Details                                                 |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Mark          | M               | 15:34                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Atom AAA; Forward                       |
| Doug          | M               | 20:19                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Atom AAA; Goalie                        |
| Charlie       | M               | 20:56                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Atom AAA; Forward                       |
| Bill          | M               | 25:10                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Major Peewee AAA:Forward                      |
| Boo           | F               | 16:13                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Major Peewee AAA:Forward                      |
| Stephen       | F               | 18:02                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Major Peewee AAA:Goalie                       |
| Joanne        | F               | 20:14                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Atom AAA; Goalie                        |
| Steve         | M               | 17:16                 | on-site/in person                                            | Grandson plays Major Peewee AAA                         |
| Rebecca       | F               | 17:46                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Atom AAA; Forward                       |
| McGrath       | M               | 14:22                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Atom AAA; Forward                       |
| Darren        | M               | 14:54                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Atom                                    |
| Meghan        | F               | 29:06                 | on-site/in person                                            | 2 Sons play, 1 Major Peewee AAA, 1 Minor Atom AAA       |
| Alexis        | F               | 48:00                 | off-site/phone                                               | Son plays Major Atom AAA                                |
| Cohen         | F               | 39:58                 | off-site/phone                                               | Son plays Major Peewee AAA:Forward                      |
| Mike          | M               | 28:15                 | off-site/phone                                               | coach/parent; Son plays Minor Atom AAA                  |
| Fiona         | F               | 28:07                 | off-site/phone                                               | 2 Sons play, 1 Major Atom Peewee AAA                    |
| Anne          | F               | 15:25                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Peewee; Goalie                          |
| Mary          | F               | 14:50                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Peewee; Forward                         |
| Pinocchio     | F               | 15:48                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Peewee; Defence                         |
| Frank         | M               | 35:01                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Peewee; Forward                         |
| O'Leary       | F               | 25:33                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Peewee; Forward                         |
| Peter         | M               | 132:18                | off-site/phone                                               | Son plays Major Peewee AAA:Forward; Tournament convener |
| Doyle         | M               | 66:52                 | off-site/phone                                               | Son plays Major Peewee AAA:Forward                      |
| Snyder        | F               | 20:02                 | off-site/phone                                               | 3 Sons play, one plays AAA Major Atom                   |
| Gordie        | F               | 22:04                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Major Atom AAA                                |
| Malcolm       | M               | 18:01                 | on-site/in person                                            | Son plays Minor Peewee AAA                              |
| <b>Totals</b> | <b>12 Males</b> | <b>736.06 minutes</b> | <b>14 Females 28:31 minutes, average length of interview</b> |                                                         |

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Table 1. Interviewee details including pseudonyms used in body of thesis, sex, interview length, interview site, and other details.

**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION FROM HOCKEY CLUB  
(University of Ottawa Letterhead)

Dear Sir/Madam:

My name is Carolynne Weir and I am a Masters student at the University of Ottawa working under the supervision of Professor Michael Robidoux. I am conducting a study of parental involvement at youth hockey games. Specifically, I am researching parent-spectator behaviours at the Atom boys (A and B) level. It is my understanding that your organization offers programs at this level and it is my desire to work with these teams and their respective parents.

The general aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of parent-spectator behaviours in minor hockey. I also hope to gain an appreciation for potential influence that parenthood (including responsibilities and priorities) have on parent-spectator behaviours. Through this study I intend to observe parent-spectator behaviour to:

- A. explore parent-spectator behaviours in minor hockey
- B. explore potential relationships between parental/spectator behaviour and parent-child bonds; and
- C. provide insight into the basis for parental misconduct in youth hockey contexts.

The co-investigator (Ms. Carolynne Weir) will be responsible for observational fieldwork and conducting personal tape recorded interviews with parents. Through naturalistic observations I will provide vivid accounts of what is experienced in the hockey arena. Aside from watching hockey I hope to speak with parent-spectators by way of tape-recorded interviews to learn more about parental involvement at youth hockey games, and about my observations.

Prior to any fieldwork I hope to meet you to discuss the possibility of doing my research with your organization. If this initiative appears to be of interest I would then like to meet and discuss this with both the management and coaches of the participation teams. Upon consent from yourself, team management and coaches, I would also like to meet with parents of both Atom boys teams (levels A and B) to inform them of my objectives and to request their participation in this research. During this time I will answer any questions the parents might have regarding the project. I will also provide my contact information if they wish to contact me privately. It is my aim to make everyone involved feel as comfortable as possible and any measure needed to ensure such goals are met will be my first priority.

It is important to note that all participants of this research will be guaranteed complete anonymity and confidentiality and any information collected will not be shared directly with anyone else in the hockey organization. The findings for this research will be shared via public lectures and published documents. A copy of the report will be made available to the public, including KMHA, at their request. All research will be conducted according to the Health Science and Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa. If you have any questions at any point, please contact me or Michael Robidoux or the Office of Research Services, University of Ottawa [Phone: (613) 562-5387 or by e-mail at [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca)].

Sincerely,

|                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Carolynne S. Weir<br/>MA Candidate, School of Human Kinetics<br/>University of Ottawa<br/>125 University St.<br/>Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5</p> | <p>Michael A. Robidoux, Ph.D.<br/>Associate Professor, School of Human Kinetics<br/>University of Ottawa<br/>125 University St.<br/>Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5<br/><a href="mailto:robidoux@uottawa.ca">robidoux@uottawa.ca</a><br/>(613) 562-5800 ext. 4261; fax (613) 562-5149</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**APPENDIX B**

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT  
(University of Ottawa Letterhead)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Sir/Madam:

My name is Carolynne Weir and I am a Masters student at the University of Ottawa working under the supervision of Professor Michael Robidoux. I am conducting a study of parental involvement at youth hockey games. The general aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of parent-spectator behaviours in minor hockey. I also hope to gain an appreciation for potential influence that parenthood (responsibilities and priorities) have on parent-spectator behaviours. Through this study I intend to observe parent-spectator behaviour to:

- A. explore parent-spectator behaviours in minor hockey
- B. explore potential relationships between parental/spectator behaviour and parent-child bonds; and
- C. provide insight into the basis for parental misconduct in youth hockey contexts.

I, the co-investigator, will be responsible for observational fieldwork and conducting personal tape recorded interviews with parents. Through naturalistic observations I will provide vivid accounts of what is experienced in the hockey arena.

The intention here is to gain a deeper understanding of parent-spectator behaviours to create policies that will ensure safe and positive environments for youth hockey. Aside from watching hockey I intend to speak with parent-spectators. By committing to becoming a participant in this study you should expect the following:

- I. Multiple (2-3) tape-recorded interviews. All interviews will be conducted at the interviewees' soonest available time and in an area where confidentiality can be ensured.
- II. Interview questions will be related to the objectives A, B, C (noted above) and will be linked to naturalistic observations
- III. All interviews will be conducted in English;
- IV. Each interview may last, but is not restricted to, 1 hour;
- V. You may terminate your participation at any time during the study and your contribution by way of interview will be destroyed at your request.

If you would be willing to participate in this study you have the option to remain anonymous and can terminate your involvement in the study at any time. To further ensure the confidentiality and protection of participants, pseudonyms will be used when identifying ice rinks. All material will remain confidential with only Professor Michael Robidoux and myself having access to it, or yourself at any time. Any information collected will not be shared directly with anyone else in the hockey organization. It will be destroyed after a period of five years. Reports or published findings emanating from such a study normally would not contain specific reference to opinions attributed to particular interviewees. However, if it has been agreed otherwise, those involved will be afforded the opportunity to review and approve relevant material.

If you have any questions at any point, please contact me, or Michael Robidoux or the Office of Research Services, University of Ottawa [Phone: (613) 562-5387 or by e-mail at [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca)]. Please note that there are two copies of this consent form, one of which is to be kept by the research participant.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ consent to participate in the study entitled, "Parent-spectator behaviours in Minor Atom boys hockey."

I consent to being tape recorded during the interview(s).  
circle)

Yes    No    (please

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

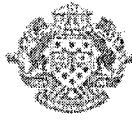
**Co-investigator Contact Information:**

Carolynne S. Weir, MA candidate, School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa,  
Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5,

**Principal Researcher Contact Information:**

Michael A. Robidoux, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, School of Human Kinetics, University of  
Ottawa, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, 613-562-5800 ext. 4261, fax 613-562-5149,  
[robidoux@uottawa.ca](mailto:robidoux@uottawa.ca)

**APPENDIX C**



# Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa

Service de subventions de recherche et d'éthologie Research Grants and Ethics Services

February 26, 2007

Michael A. Robidoux  
School of Human Kinetics  
University of Ottawa  
125 University  
Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

Carolynne Weir  
125 University  
Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

**Object: Parent-Spectator Behaviours in Minor Atom Boys Hockey (file H 01-07-06)**

Dear Doctor Robidoux and Ms. Weir,

You will find enclosed the Health Sciences and Science REB ethical clearance for the abovementioned study.

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms may not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must also promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

This certificate of ethical clearance is valid until February 26, 2008. Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer in February 2008 to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:

[http://web9.uottawa.ca/services/rgessrd/ethics/application\\_dwn.asp](http://web9.uottawa.ca/services/rgessrd/ethics/application_dwn.asp)

A copy of this approval will be sent to research services, if necessary.

If you have any questions, you may contact the undersigned at the number 562-5387.

Sincerely yours,

Dorothyann Curran  
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research  
For Dr. Daniel Lagarec, Chair of the Health Sciences and Science REB

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